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**Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Plan International aid workers perception of the
Nguenyiel refugee camp in Ethiopia**

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Marie Claire Beatrice Boscher

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Supervisors and members of the examining Committee:

Dr Rodrigo Mena Fluhmann

Dr. Zeynep Kaşlı

The Hague, The Netherlands

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Disclaimer:

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Inquiries:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460
e: info@iss.nl
w: www.iss.nl
fb: <http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl>
twitter: [@issnl](https://twitter.com/issnl)

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

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Abstract

This research aims to highlight the way aid workers make sense of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, particularly in contexts of protracted refugee encampment. It constitutes an exploratory case study centered on Plan International and its program located in the Nguenyiel refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia. As it looks at Plan International staff's perception, this research is based on an interpretative paradigm and qualitative methodology, including nine semi-structured interviews. This paper reveals that Plan International aid workers do not have a clear common understanding of what the HDP Nexus means and entails, yet they all agree on the fact that complex needs cannot be addressed by one sector. In order to analyze aid workers' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities regarding the triple nexus implementation by Plan International, especially in Gambella, this study looks at the macro, internal, and civil spaces of the organization.

Relevance to Development Studies

The triple nexus is being advocated by many international aid frameworks as a response to complex protracted crises. It appears relevant to explore the dynamics and interactions in the aid-sectors from an organizational perspective. To that end, this research paper sheds light on a specific case that might provide a helpful insight to the way it is being perceived and understood by those implementing it.

Key Words

Humanitarian - development - peace - nexus - encampment

Chapter 1.

Introduction

At the occasion of the 2022 World Refugee Day, Nyabhan Puot shared her experience as a 12-year-old girl living in Nguenyiel camp in Ethiopia:

“I am the best in class. Last year, I came third. Two other students beat me, but I am working hard to be on top. [...] When the conflict broke out in our village [South Sudan], we left our home, my mom and my brothers. That was back in 2017. Since then, I am here in Nguenyiel. I am happy that I am able to attend school here. My message to the world is to let children stay in school!” (Bizuwork, 2022).

Nyabhan Puot is a refugee, defined under international law, as a person that “*is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion*” (UNHCR, 1951, p.3). She is part of the 65 percent of children who live in the Nguenyiel camp (UNHCR, 2023a). This camp opened in 2016 in response to the forced displacement of South Sudanese following the conflict escalation in the country (UNHCR, 2022a). The Nguenyiel camp hosts the largest number of refugees in Gambella (Ibid.). The latter is an Ethiopian region bordering South Sudan, hosting more than 360,000 refugees from its neighboring country (UNHCR, 2022a). Overall, South Sudanese represent 44 percent of the refugees present in Ethiopia, and most of them, like *Nhyabhan Puot*, have lived in exile from more than 5 years (UNHCR, 2023b; Vemuru et al., 2020). As such, South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia are categorized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as protracted refugees (UNHCR, 2020).

The word ‘protracted’ implies a period “*lasting a long time or made to last longer than necessary*” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). The international community did not agree on a shared definition of protracted crises, but it can be understood as affecting a country for more than five consecutive years (UNHCR, 2020; Development Initiatives, 2019). The past decades have seen an increase in protracted crises related to conflict or climate-related disasters (OCHA, 2022a). These protracted crises of large magnitude and duration tend to exacerbate forced displacement (Spiegel, 2017). Indeed, the number of forcibly displaced people has doubled over the last 10 years, including refugees that are by 67 percent in protracted situations (OCHA, 2022, p. 15; World Bank, 2023). Around the world, refugees live mostly in cities (UNHCR, 2018). Yet, in Ethiopia, 85 percent of

refugees live in camps (UNHCR, 2023c, p.1). Hence, the use of the term protracted refugee encampment.

1.1. Problematization

The UNHCR defines refugee camps as “*temporary facilities built to provide immediate protection and assistance to people who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, persecution, or violence*” (UNHCR, 2023d). It represents one side of the camp paradigm debate among academics and practitioners. The UNHCR agrees with the conception of the camp as a humanitarian space of exception, which eases the provision of humanitarian services to people in need through bureaucratic and centralized processes (Agamben, 2008; Agier, 2002; Turner, 2015; Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010). This perception presents the camp as a temporary apolitical space ensuring simultaneously the safety of its inhabitants and the security of the host population (Feldman, 2014).

Contradicting views insist on the political and emotional nature of camps (Feldman, 2014). Indeed, the camp can be understood as a space of detention (Brankamp, 2019), or a site of resistance based on an alternative citizenship, or Campzenship (Rygiel, 2011; Sigona, 2015). Camps are also presented as particular cities in which refugees use their agency to explore different livelihood strategies, such getting a higher education or becoming an entrepreneur (Jansen, 2011; Ilcan & Rygiel, 2015). This urban turn is sometimes seen as contributing to long-term encampment (Oka, 2011; Picker, Pasquetti, 2015, Opi, 2021).

Protracted encampment constitutes a challenge to the UNHCR understanding of the camp as an exceptional and temporary solution to forced displacement (Milner, 2014; UNHCR, 2022b). Similarly, the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (CGR) pushes for alternatives to camps (UNHCR, 2018, p.20). The latter constitutes a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, asserting the commitment of the international community to operationalize the principles of humanity, international solidarity, and responsibility-sharing to improve the situation of refugees (Ibid., p.2). It argues for a context-specific mix of actions, including the implementation of the 2003 ‘Framework for durable solutions for refugees and persons of concern’ (Ibid., p.34). The latter establishes three main solutions: local integration, resettlement, and voluntary repatriation (UNHCR, 2003). Local integration can be understood as the long-term settlement of refugees within the country where they found refuge and their gradual integration and participation into the host

community (Ibid.). Resettlement refers to the integration of a refugee into a third country while voluntary repatriation refers to the return of refugees to their country of origin (Ibid.)

Therefore, it shows that alternatives to camps already exist, but still fail to be effectively implemented. Indeed, “*the practice of long-term refugee encampment still constitutes a dominant paradigm within the international refugee aid regime*” (Chkam, 2016, p.89). There are several reasons for this lack of compliance with the CGR.

First, alternatives to camps are limited by the attitude of States and the fragmented governance of refugees (Ibid., Betts, 2011). Despite the expanding role of the UNHCR over the last decades, the governance of refugees remains subjected to states’ interests (Betts, 2011; Barnett, 2002; Loescher, 2001). Currently, there is “*no binding obligation on states to share the costs associated with the provision of asylum*” (Betts, Milner, 2019, p.1). If states express their willingness to ensure a fair repartition of responsibility, through international agreements like the GCR, their actions speak differently. Around 69 percent of refugees and asylum seekers are hosted in countries neighboring their country of origin, and about 74 percent of them are hosted in low- and middle-income countries (UNHCR, 2022c, p.2). Hence, the responsibility to protect refugees mostly falls on low and middle-income neighboring countries. States appear to be speaking the same language of refugee protection on the international stage while their actions translate the prioritization of other domestic interests (Betts, Milner, p.7). Indeed, the wealthiest states increasingly engage with the governance of refugees in a way that ensures their containment within their region of origin, and, thus, avoids them crossing their borders (Ibid., p.7; Chkam, 2016, p.89). As low- and middle-income neighboring countries do not have the capacity or willingness to take care of most refugees, the UNHCR and humanitarian agencies tend to fill the refugee governance gap by administrating camps (Slaughter, Crisp, 2013).

Therefore, humanitarian organizations hold a certain responsibility in the maintenance of camps. They usually justify their actions, not as a choice, but as a necessity to save lives and ensure the protection of refugees (Chkam, 2016, p.96). Even if humanitarian actors have the best intentions toward refugees and blame the conditions imposed by states, it does not change the fact they are caught in a position between care and control by ensuring the functioning of refugee camps (Harrell-Bond, 2022; Hyndman, 2007; Minca, 2015). This humanitarian authority within camps is based on provisional legitimacy because the presence of humanitarians indicates the failure of the state to protect refugees, and INGOs do not perceive themselves as refugees’ sovereign (Feldman,

2014). Hence, Feldman's (2014) conceptualization of the camp as simultaneously a political, emotional, and humanitarian space (2014, p.245). These different aspects of the camp are not mutually exclusive. In this sense, the provision of relief assistance in a centralized manner within the camp by humanitarian actors has political potential and influences refugees' life conditions, capacities, and opportunities (Ibid.).

Refugees in protracted situations have complex needs, and their response requires the meaningful engagement of humanitarian, development, peacebuilding actors as well as political entities shaping refugee policies (Milner, 2014). However, these actors do not collaborate much altogether as the funding structure of international aid is strongly divided (GPPI, 2011; Poole, Culbert, 2019). Funds are channeled through different streams whether they target development, humanitarian objectives, or peace objectives (Ibid.). For instance, development donors do not finance programs in refugee camps because they perceive the latter as temporary settlements, and it does not fit their requirements (Chkam, 2016). It shows that camps represent an anomaly to the aid funding system based on a humanitarian-development divide (Ibid.). Thus, long-term encampment can also be seen as a consequence of the siloed funding structure of international aid.

Hence, the need for an approach that breaks down these silos. Because of this matter, several international frameworks, such as the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), suggest for the integration the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, or Triple Nexus, approach in aid programs (Dijkzeul and Addis, 2022; UNHCR, 2018).

The latter opposes the idea that needs are compartmentalized, especially in case of protracted crises (Hövelmann, 2020). The HDP Nexus approach aims to break down the siloed way of working to simultaneously address emergency and long-term needs (USAID, 2021). It is an integrated and comprehensive approach that is centered on reducing needs more effectively through the collaboration and coordination of aid activities and sectors in a non-linear and context-specific manner (Sanchez-Garcia, 2023; Mena, Hilhorst, 2021). Thus, this approach is sometimes advocated as limiting the impact of protracted crises and forced displacement. Indeed, the UNHCR and UNDP commissioned a research paper exploring the relevance of "*joint responses to large-scale protracted displacement in low- and middle-income countries?*", based on country-level HDP Nexus interventions (Roberts, 2020, p.7).

Yet, “*resolving displacement involves addressing needs and governance gaps across the nexus*” (Nguya, Siddiqi, 2020). There is a growing literature about its definition and the opportunities and challenges its operationalization represents in relation to different stakeholders, such as donors and civil society organizations (Poole, Culbert, 2019; Oxfam, 2019; Care, 2018; Voice, 2020). Indeed, there is no clear agreement in the literature on what the triple nexus entails, leading to different ways of implementing it (Dijkzeul and Addis, 2022). As it is a context-specific approach, the meaning and operationalization of this HDP Nexus approach can look different in every environment (Ibid.). Hence, the HDP nexus literature is built on case studies, which highlight good practices and recommendations in the concerned context (Brown, Mena, 2021; Van Sluijs, Masoliver, 2022). The lessons-learned aim to inspire nexus programming in locations facing similar constraints. If there is an increasing literature linking forced displacement and the HDP Nexus approach, it remains limited and it does not always focus on refugees (Nguya, Siddiqi, 2020; Roberts, 2020; Leiderer, Roxin, 2023). Furthermore, this existing literature is centered on the roles and views of states and UN agencies (Ibid.).

This research paper aims to contribute to the literature on the HDP Nexus approach in context of forced displacement, focusing on an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO). As detailed later, Plan International was selected as the main case study of this research paper.

1.2. Research Question and sub-questions

With the objective to highlight aid workers’ perceptions of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in relation to context of protracted refugee encampment, I propose the following research question and sub-questions.

Research question: How does Plan International’s staff understand and make sense of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus approach in the context of a program located in Nguenyiel refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia?

Sub-questions:

- How does Plan International staff understand the Humanitarian-Development-Peace approach in general?
- What do aid workers identify as general challenges and opportunities to Plan International implementation of the triple nexus?
- What do Plan International aid workers perceive as context-specific challenges and opportunities to the operationalization of the triple Nexus in Gambella and Nguenyiel refugee camp?

1.3. Justification and relevance of the research

As mentioned above, the literature connecting the HDP nexus approach to migration, especially refugee long-term encampment, is quite recent and limited (Ibid.). Thus, it appears difficult to determine the extent to which the HDP nexus approach impacts the life conditions and prospects of refugees. Similarly, it is worth questioning whether the HDP Nexus approach maintains the camp paradigm or pushes for alternative pathways. Presenting the HDP Nexus approach as a solution to long-term encampment would assume that the camp paradigm is a problem that can only be resolved through the aid sectors. It would also assume that the HDP nexus approach is operationalized in the first place and that there is a consensus upon what constitutes a ‘good’ implementation, and what are refugees’ acceptable life conditions and prospects. In the absence of such agreements, it leaves room for personal interpretation.

Because of their different interests and roles, various stakeholders participating in the same context are likely to hold distinct perceptions of the Triple Nexus approach. For instance, when looking at the same aid program, the donor’s position might vary from the implementing organization and the program participants (Voice, 2020; Oxfam, 2019; USAID, 2021). Even within the same aid organization, the understanding of the HDP Nexus might differ on an individual basis. When an organization does not hold an official approach toward the HDP nexus, personal interpretation can play a significant role in programming Nexus interventions (Ibid.). In such cases, aid workers’ understanding is likely to be influenced by their expertise, daily work activities and environment, as well as life experiences.

Therefore, this study does not try to establish the impact of the HDP nexus approach on forced displacement. It is rather a background study centered on the perspective of aid workers on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus approach, within Plan International. The latter is an INGO present in 81 countries, with both development and humanitarian mandates (Plan International, 2023). Because of its dual mission, Plan International holds a privileged position when it comes to bridging the divide between the humanitarian and development sectors (Oxfam, 2019). Oxfam argues that multi-mandated organizations are used to “*balance tensions and opportunities around humanitarian, development, and campaigning approaches*” (Ibid., p.20). As the HDP Nexus is a context-specific approach and focuses on long-term encampment, the research is associated with a particular Plan International program in Nguenyiel refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia.

The latter has been decided as the studied context because of Plan International long-term and significant presence in this location. Indeed, the INGO has been working in the area since 2014, and its Ethiopian branch has been appointed by the UNHCR and the Government of Ethiopia as the lead thematic partner for protection and education actions in Nguenyiel. This is due to PIE consecutive implementation of ECHO-funded protection and education programs in camps in Gambella since 2014. Despite adjustments from one program to another, several actors have remained the same. It is the case of the donor, namely Directorate General of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), as well as the implementing partner, Plan International Ethiopia (PIE) and the lead partner, Plan International Netherlands (NLNO).

Overall, this research is of academic relevance as it informs future research on the challenges and opportunities of the implementation of the HPD Nexus approach in protracted refugee encampment settings, particularly in Gambella, Ethiopia. It provides insights on how aid workers from an INGO understand and perceive the implementation of this approach in a general and context-specific manner. In addition, this research is practically relevant to Plan International as it gives perspectives on the integration of nexus thinking in the staff’s mindset and practice. It also reflects on the organization's triple nexus position and suggests recommendations that can inspire future nexus programming and advocacy campaigns.

1.4. Background to the proposed study

Before diving into aid workers’ perception of the HDP Nexus, it requires understanding the political environment to which this context-specific approach is related to within this research.

Hence, this study briefly mentions the political dynamics and frameworks impacting refugees living in Nguenyiel camp.

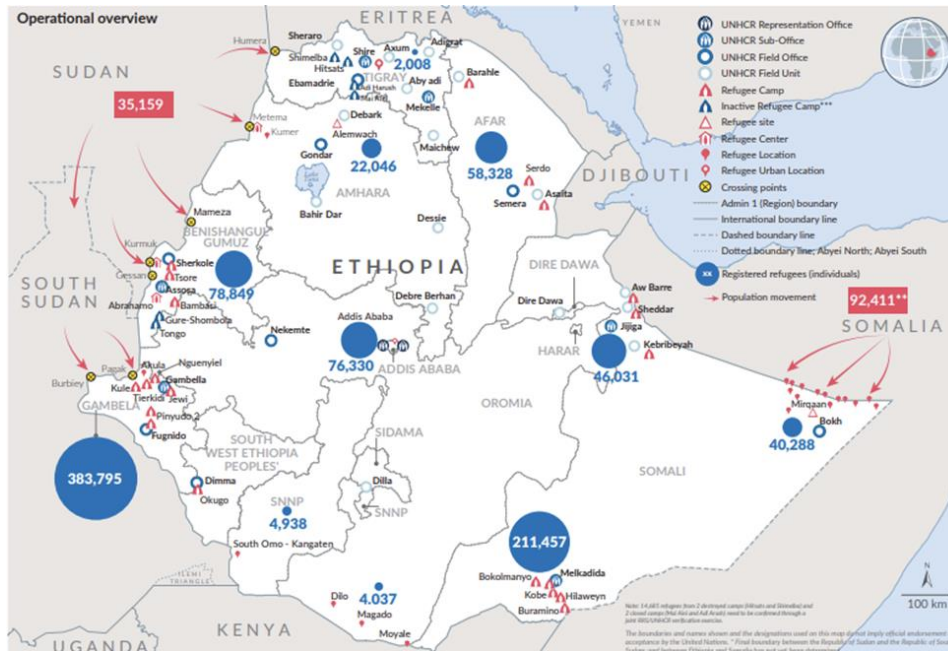
1.4.1 Ethiopian refugee policies

To start with, the recent Ethiopian refugee policies favors their integration in the host community (Hagos, 2021). For instance, in 2019, the Ethiopian parliament passed the ‘Refugee Proclamation’, to ensure a right-based approach to refugee assistance (ILO, 2019). It is a continuation of the nine pledges made by the Ethiopian government during the 2016 Leaders’ Summit at the Global Refugee Forum (Ibid.). These commitments refer to several themes, such as education, livelihood, documentation, or local integration. For instance, one pledge allows for “*local integration for those protracted refugees who have lived for 20 years or more in Ethiopia*” while aiming at the facilitation of refugees' access to economic opportunities and primary, secondary, and tertiary education (UNHCR, 2019, p.13).

The commitments were complemented the same year by the Ethiopian ‘Country Refugee Response Plan’(CRRP). The latter is in line with the 2016 ‘New York declaration on Refugees and Migrants’, the 2018 ‘Global Compact of refugees’ (GCR), and the Ethiopian ‘Humanitarian Response Plan’ (HRP). The CRRP aims at “*reinforcing [refugees] peaceful coexistence and social cohesion with host communities*” (UNHCR, 2023e, p.9). It guides the refugee response by setting up a platform, with financial and structural requirements, easing partnership (UNHCR, 2023d, p.1). The latter is led by both the UNHCR and the Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) of the Ethiopian government (Ibid.). These two institutions jointly manage refugee camps, but it is the UNHCR that coordinates the action of the fifty-seven humanitarian and development organizations that participate in the Ethiopian CRRP (UNHCR, 2023e, p.17). Plan International is a partner organization of the Ethiopian CRRP.

Hence, national migration policies favor refugees’ local integration over their encampment (Hagos, 2021).

1.4.2 Geopolitical situation in Gambella, Ethiopia



Annex 1: UNHCR overview of refugees and asylum seekers in Ethiopia, august 2023

Yet, 85% of refugees in Ethiopia live in camps (UNHCR, 2023a, p.1). They originate mostly from neighboring countries, such as South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan (UNHCR, 2023b). Most of them are protracted refugees, sometimes for more than 20 years (Hagos, 2021; Veramu et al., 2020). As visible in Annex 1, Gambella, the Ethiopian region bordering South Sudan, hosts the largest number of refugees, particularly in the Nguenyiyiel camp (UNHCR, 2023b; UNHCR, 2023c).

It illustrates that the Refugee Proclamation and the CRRP's objectives are hardly reached in this region (Abebe, 2018). In practice, the camp paradigm is favored over local integration in Gambella because of tensions among the two main ethnic groups in the region, namely the Anywaa (or Anuak) and the Nuer (Hagos, 2021). South Sudanese refugees are mostly Nuer while the host community is mostly Anuak (Ibid.). Historically, the relations among them have not always been conflictual, but “*the displacement and the protracted presence of refugees have profoundly altered the social and political context of the region*” (Ibid., p.1; Vemuru et al., 2020). The Anuak-Nuer relations were relatively peaceful before the shift of the refugee management from community-led to centralized encampment in the late 1970s, the significant displacement of South Sudanese to Gambella in the 1980s, and the organization of the political system along the ethnic divide in the 1990s (Hagos, 2021, p.2). As the integration of Nuer refugees in this region is highly politicized, protracted encampment is the dominant practice in Gambella (Ibid.). While the host population resent refugees

for their unique access to aid organizations services delivery that they judge better than the national ones, refugees regret their exclusion from political participation and the local job market, exposing them to aid dependency (Ibid.; Abede, 2018).

Chapter 2.

Conceptual framework

To answer the research question in relation to the context described above, this study will provide an overview of the academic literature debating the definition and the implementation of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. First, this conceptual framework will mention the triple nexus roots and meanings within the literature. Then, this conceptual framework will explore challenges and opportunities to nexus programming in relation to actors and processes surrounding humanitarian and development INGOs, particularly in protracted refugee settings.

Following the analytical categories suggested by Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke (2020) for the study of triple nexus programs in humanitarian crises, this paper is organized and research its main question according to a differentiation between the macro, internal, and civil spaces of an aid organization. This approach will be further explained in the data analysis section of the methodology below. For this study, the organizational macro space alludes to the siloed aid systems in relation to UN agencies, donors and their funding streams, and government's policies whereas the internal space of humanitarian and development INGOs refers to organizational structures, mandates, strategies, processes, and programs' locations and activities. Finally, this research associates the civil space of INGOs with regional and local governments and communities. In this study, the civil space relates to Gambella's protracted crisis and camp settings, as further explained in the background section.

2.1. Origin and meaning of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus

To start with, this study explores the literature about the origins and the meaning of the Triple Nexus. First, it refers to the so-called 'nexus thinking', its roots and link with the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, followed by exploration of the different interpretation of peace.

2.1.1. Nexus thinking

Nexus thinking can be understood as an attempt to build bridges at the interconnection of various domains. The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, or Triple Nexus, corresponds to an attempt at Nexus thinking between the development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian sectors. It aims to reach a collective outcome to these three aid domains: reducing needs more effectively (Sanchez Garcia, 2022). The triple nexus envisions an integrated response to protracted crises by coordinating aid activities to target multi-dimensional needs in a non-linear and context-specific manner (Ibid.; Mena, Hilhorst, 2021). It means that the needs of crisis-affected people are complex, especially in protracted settings, requiring the coordination of multi-dimensional activities while being relevant to the particularities of the location. In this sense, the triple nexus is an approach being simultaneously context-specific and holistic addressing both emergency and long-term needs (USAID, 2021).

This approach gained momentum after the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), resulting in the ‘New Way of Working’ which calls for sectorial collaboration in support of collective outcomes to respond to the immediate and long-term needs of vulnerable populations (Dijkzeul and Addis, 2022,). If one of the objectives of the ‘New Way of Working’ was to fill the humanitarian-development divide, it was quickly acknowledged that these objectives cannot be properly reached in a violent and unstable environment, leading to the introduction of ‘Peace’ as a central component of this debate (Ibid., Mena, 2024). If the triple Nexus is currently the mainstreamed nexus thinking approach in aid sectors, it stems from an extended humanitarian-development nexus literature since the 1980s (Hanatani et al., 2018). The double nexus literature started with the introduction of the ‘Linking Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development’ (LRRD) framework, which advocates for a linear chronological transition between humanitarian action and development activities (Ibid.). It represents the ‘continuum’ part of the debate that is opposed to the ‘contiguuum’ perspective focusing on the simultaneous existence of development and humanitarian action (Ibid.). The understanding of the humanitarian-development nexus has been debated over the years. It is visible in the various approaches developed by international organizations and donors (Ibid.). For instance, the European Union has introduced the LRRD framework, Early Recovery has been introduced by UNDP, and the Resilience approach is translated in the language of the EU, USAID, UK, and UN agencies (Ibid.). However, each of them tends to be strictly applied by the

institutions that elaborated them (Ibid). Similarly, the HDP Nexus approach is promoted by “*major donor governments, the EU and the UN*” while the United-States government still favors the Resilience framework (USAID, 202, p.5).

The recent years have seen a growing Triple Nexus literature, but there is no agreement on what it is, especially its peace component, nor on its scope of action and the extent of its impact, implying the lack of clear policies or overarching institutions establishing a clear implementation guideline on how to link the three pillars (Djikzeul and Addis, 2022).

2.1.2. The meaning of Peace

Peace is the domain of the nexus that is least understood and integrated in aid programs, especially in the humanitarian sector (Barakat, Milton, 2020, p.152). This stems mostly from the fact there is confusion around the meaning of peace (Hövelmann, 2020). Peace includes both activities considered as ‘soft’ like peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and diplomatic efforts, and ‘hard’ activities such as peacekeeping, security, and stabilization (Barakat, Milton, 2020). Yet, peace tends to be associated with militarized security and a negative conception of peace (Sanchez Garcia, 2023). According to Galtung (1985) conceptualization, negative peace constitutes the absence of direct manifestations of violence while positive peace also focuses on the root causes of conflict and social injustice by considering “*the attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies*” (IEP, 2020 p.4; Galtung, Fischer, 2013). For instance, Lederach and Mansfield (2010), proponents of positive peace, argue for a peacebuilding approach insisting on the role of humanitarian and development actors in peace processes.

Despite the existence of such an approach, humanitarian and development INGOs engagement with peace remains limited (Sanchez Garcia, 2023). Hence, the knowledge gap surrounding the triple nexus, especially the peace component, already constitutes in itself a challenge to its operationalization (Djikzeul and Addis, 2022; Hövelmann, 2020). Yet, academic literature identifies other elements constraining or facilitating the implementation by an aid organization of the triple nexus approach.

2.2. Challenges and opportunities to the triple nexus implementation

This chapter is about the challenges and opportunities to the triple nexus implementation, and it is organized according to the macro, internal, and civil spaces of an aid INGO.

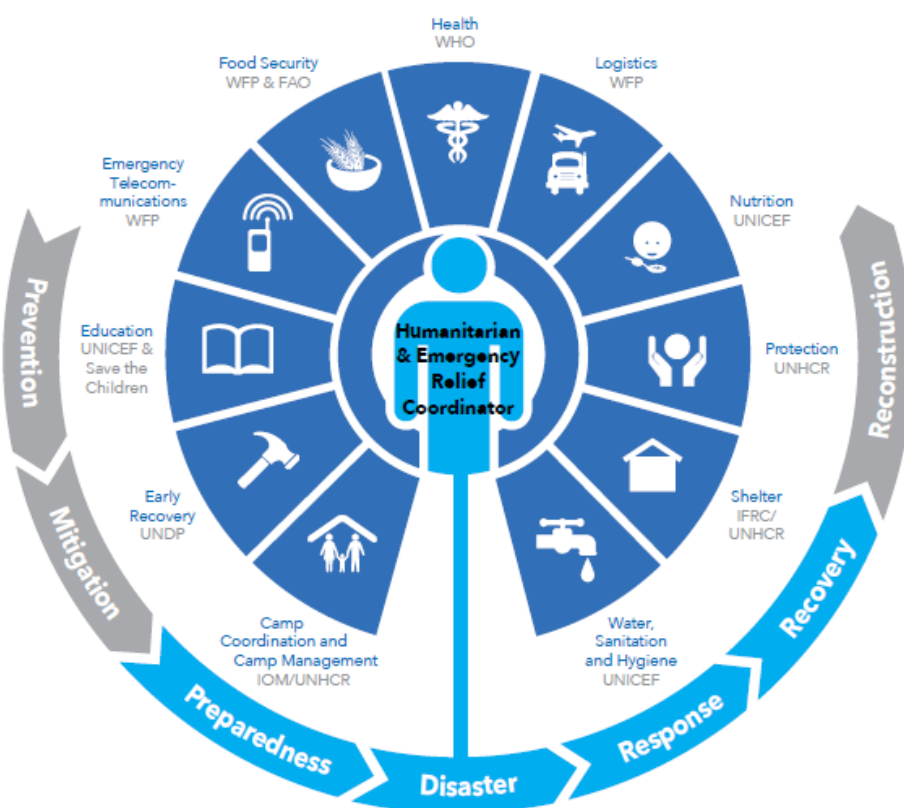
2.2.1. Macro-space

First, this research paper focuses on the challenges concerning the macro space of an aid organization. They relate to its engagement with national or international actors and frameworks able to influence its activities (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020). Thus, this macro-space refers to the UN system, international organizations, like the European Union or other INGOs, as well as governments, and policies.

The 2016 WHS recognized that the siloed and overburdened aid systems are unable to meet people's complex needs (Oxfam, 2019; Hövelmann, 2020). There is no institution governing the coordination of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors and in the absence of such an entity, the implementation of the triple Nexus rests on fractured governance systems (Spiegel, 2017; Mena, Hilhorst, 2021).

First, the humanitarian system aims to respond to acute emergencies and involves a large variety of actors, such as governments, UN agencies, as well as international, multilateral, bilateral, national, and local organizations (Spiegel, 2017, p.1). As such, it is composed of a multiplicity of actors with different interests which increases management costs, and tends to reduce efficiency (ALNAP, p.2017). The humanitarian system has been criticized for the past decade for becoming bureaucratic and its tendency to “*favor process over outcome*” (Spiegel, 2017, p.4). Since 2005, its operations have been organized according to the cluster approach (IASC, 2015, p.4). The latter aims to ensure the accountability of the humanitarian response to crisis affected people by improving the collaboration between UN agencies and NGOs based on a clear division of their roles and responsibilities (Ibid.). Clusters are formed around themes, like education, protection, health, or camp coordination, and their managerial structure is established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (Ibid.). OCHA, the UN agency ensuring the functioning of the humanitarian system, facilitates inter-cluster coordination (OCHA website). The role of crisis-affected state is central, as it has the right to refuse the implementation of cluster approach within

its territory, and the government co-leads each cluster with an NGO or UN agency (Ibid.). Depending on the contextual needs, different clusters are involved.



Annex 4. ‘The cluster approach’ (IASC, 2015, p.2).

For humanitarian interventions targeting refugees, the cluster approach is applied through the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) in agreement of the concerned state (Ibid.). This framework ensures the fulfillment of the UNHCR mandate to protect and assist refugees whether they live in camps, rural or urban areas (UNHCR, 2019b). It notably plans the administration of a refugee camp by a state entity and the management of aid organizations by the UNHCR, which oversees the protection and delivery of services to refugees through thematic sectors led by selected NGOs or UN agencies (Ibid.) Moreover, the RCM in line with the CRRP in concerned countries is compatible with humanitarian, development and the refugee systems (UNHCR, 2023g).

Each system is a complex nexus of interrelated stakeholders affecting the conduct of actions in a specific field and who have overlapping goals that they prioritize differently (ALNAP, 2018). While the humanitarian system is centralized and technocratic, and peacebuilding and “*development actors have no set institutional mechanism or ‘centre of gravity’ for coordination between themselves*” (OXFAM,

2019, p.20). The refugee system remains subjected to nation-states interests (Betts, 2011; Barnett, 2002). Thus, these different mandates and processes of these systems limit the coordination of their interventions. For instance, siloed systems do not ease the transition from development to humanitarian action, called “inverted nexus”, as previous development work tends to be neglected when setting up the humanitarian system (Mena, Hilhorst, 2021).

Yet, working across systems is increasingly required as needs are increasingly complex due to the rise of number and scope of protracted crises (ALNAP, 2018; Spiegel, 2017). However, aid and refugee systems are unable to respond to needs that go beyond their mandates (Ibid.). Hence, they represent challenges to the triple Nexus implementation. In contexts of protracted displacement, such challenges fuels tensions between the host population and displaced people (Roberts, 2020). On the one hand, displaced people can be refused access to formal employment and public services based on decisions made by the government representing the host population (Ibid.). On the other hand, humanitarian services attributed to the displaced population can be of better quality than the national ones, but the transition to development activities tend to be prevented by the political, economic, and legal contextual reasons (Ibid.).

Hence, the calls for a reform of the siloed aid systems to ease the collaboration across sectors (Fullwood-Thomas, 2019, CARE, 2018).

As donors contribute to the maintenance of siloed systems, they are identified as a central obstacle to the triple nexus implementation (Ibid.; Thomas, 2019). Indeed, the separated ways of working are partially due to donors’ different processes and entities (Steets, Preysing, Shapiro, 2011). To start with, donors associate humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programs with different requirements in terms of program proposals and reporting (Ibid.). While funding for humanitarian programs is short-term and directed to acute crisis areas, development programs attract multi-year funding and are present in relatively stable zones (Ibid.). In addition, peacebuilding organizations struggle to mobilize funds, as its involvement with government could be seen as taking a side and its harder to evaluate the impact of its program (Poole, Culbert, 2019). Therefore, humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding organizations are competing for fundings channeled through different streams (Mena, 2024)

However, the growing needs due to the increasing emergence and protraction of crises related to conflict, climate, or socioeconomic circumstances, tend to be addressed by humanitarian

assistance (Urquart, et al., 2023, p.12). The funding channeled through the humanitarian stream increased by a quarter between 2021 and 2022 while the proportion of aid funding directed to development and peace programs has been gradually reduced (Ibid., p.13; OECD, 2022, p.40). Spiegel (2017) judges these numerous humanitarian programs “wasteful” as they rarely last more than a year and do not include an effective exit strategy, ensuring the handover of program activities and their long-term impact (2017, p.6). Most aid fundings are directed to 10 countries, and the situation in Ukraine attracted the largest share of them in 2022 (Urquart, et al., 2023, p.15). Hence, funding streams limit comprehensive aid responses to crises, including the implementation of the HDP Nexus approach.

It is partially due to donors’ different processes and entities (Steets, Preysing, Shapiro, 2011). Indeed, donors tend to have an institutional separation between humanitarian and development departments to favor a division of labor limiting costs due to their competing mandates and resources (Ibid., p.39). For instance, the European Union finances external aid interventions through different Directorate-Generals (DGs). While DG ECHO funded humanitarian programs, DG INTPA funds development ones (European Commission, 2022). Because of their different mandates and requirements, these structures have limited possibilities for the overlap or flexibility of their activities (Ibid.).

To mitigate the effects of the siloed aid funding system, alternative funding procedures, and practices have been promoted by donors, and civil society organizations (Hatani et al., 2018). INGOs have advocated for adaptive multi-year funding, allowing the transition and the overlap between humanitarian, development, and peace activities, as well as the inclusion crisis modifiers allowing flexibility in the budget allocation (VOICE, p.50; OXFAM, CARE, 2018). Some donors acknowledged these recommendations (INTPA, 2022). For instance, ECHO committed to increase “*by at least 30% the portfolio of multi-year funding by the end of 2023, compared to 2021*” (IASC, 2023, p.2). Yet, there is no reform breaking down the funding silos, but donors rather focus on one aspect of the humanitarian-development disconnect based on trade-offs (Steets, Preysing, Shapiro, 2011, p.55). In this sense, they choose to focus on either budget lines facilitating the transition between sectoral activities, supporting local capacity building, or the coordination of partner organizations across the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors (Ibid.). In practice, institutional donors favor their interests which creates a “*gap between funding behaviors and [their rhetoric asserting their] policy commitments to*

the nexus” (Alcayna, 2019, p.33). As institutional donors have strict requirements and do not clearly challenge the funding streams maintaining siloed aid systems, private donors are sometimes considered as providing nexus opportunities (Spiegel, 2017). Hence, there is a need for clarification of the role of donors in the HDP Nexus approach (OECD,2022, p.41; Poole, Culbert, 2019, p.8).

2.2.2. Internal space

Yet, the macro level of an aid organization is not the only source of challenges and opportunities to the triple nexus implementation. Indeed, this approach can be integrated through the internal space of an aid organization based on its structure, programs, specific frameworks, and tools (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020). It corresponds to the space where the organization has the most power to make changes (Ibid.).

One first difficulty to the implementation of the triple Nexus is the different mandates of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding organizations (Hövelmann, 2020). If these aid sectors all intend to support people in need, the nature of the needs they target varies. While the mandate of humanitarian organizations is centered on alleviating suffering in emergencies, development and peacebuilding organizations aim for a sustainable transformation of the structure of a society, by improving living conditions or fostering justice, peace and stability (Steets, Preysing, Shapiro, 2011; Gerstbauer, 2009). It implies that humanitarian action focuses on the delivery of services to individuals while development and peacebuilding work target a defined social group or society (Ibid.).

In this sense, multi-mandated NGOs are regarded as privileged as they have the capacity to implement a wider range of activities, associated to different mandates (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020). Yet, multi-mandated INGOs refer to their disconnected entities “*both horizontally between departments and vertically between headquarters/technical units and the in-country teams*” (USAID., 2021, p.28). The separation between humanitarian and development teams implies different management structures and the fact that they do not work much together (Ibid.). The division of labor per sector is a practical decision to gain efficiency as humanitarian and development workers have different ways of working, based on different funding streams, procedures, timelines and program locations (Ibid., Djikzeul and Addis, 2022). Indeed, development programs tend to last longer than

humanitarian ones (Steets, Preysing, Shapiro, 2011, p.8). Humanitarian programs rarely exceed a year and are result-based while development interventions are framed as transformative and last longer (Poole, Culbert, 2019, p.41). These different timelines and goals do not ease the collaboration between humanitarian and development actors and activities, especially when their programs target different locations. Humanitarian interventions usually take place in crisis affected countries while development programs target more ‘stable’ areas. (OXFAM, 2019, p.15). It shows that the combination of two types of assistance is “*far from being a zero-sum game*” as it can hide a moral dilemma in balancing between mandates and needs (OXFAM, 2019, p.41; Slim, 1997; Spiegel, 2017).

As such, the humanitarian-development divide opposes two discursive and institutional segments that are hardly juxtaposed (Lie, 2020). The humanitarian discourse is based on its four core principles embedded in International Law and present in international frameworks, like the United Nations system (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016). First, the principle of humanity corresponds to the willingness to reduce human suffering no matter its origin and to protect people’s well-being (Ibid., p.8). To be able to enforce the first principle, it is complemented by those of neutrality, independence, and impartiality. The principle of neutrality forbids humanitarians to take sides in any conflict (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016, p.8). Then, the principle of impartiality ensures a provision of aid based on needs rather than on discriminatory characteristics, such as nationality, race, gender, class, religion, or political beliefs, while the principle of independence requires humanitarian actors to be autonomous from outside forces, which favor interests other than the protection of those in need (Ibid.). Historically, humanitarian organizations have based their legitimacy on these four principles by presenting themselves as “*void of the territorial or political context in which they operate*” (DeChaine, 2002, p.363).

As such, humanitarian principles constitute the milestones of humanitarian language and ethics, the humanitarian discourse does not ease the HDP Nexus operationalization (Slim, 1997). Humanitarian organizations, like MSF (Pederson, 2016) and ICRC (2020), argued that the HDP Nexus would put the principles of neutrality and independence at risk. Indeed, development and peacebuilding actors usually collaborate with national and sub-national governmental entities, and humanitarians fear instrumentalization of its programs if they engage with them (Djikzeul and Addis, 2022; Barakat and Milton, 2020, p.156). In this context, instrumentalization corresponds to the use of humanitarian language to legitimize an action that has another purpose than the provision

of assistance to people in need (Barnett, 2012). There have been instances of instrumentalization of development and humanitarian assistance, through securitization (Wood, 2005; Rieff, 1998). The latter can be defined as “*a political ‘speech act’ that publicly accepts a declaration of a vital threat that requires extraordinary actions*” (Buzan et al., 1998; Waever, 1993). Discourses of securitization creates a sense of urgency in which priorities need to be rearranged momentarily in the name of security. This is why some humanitarian and development organizations refrain from integrating peace, calling on their lack of expertise and a lack of mandate for it (Pedersen, 2007; Barakat and Milton, 2020).

Nevertheless, there have been incentives to opt for flexible interpretations of humanitarian principles to ease the triple nexus implementation (Dubois, 2020; Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010). It motivates certain organizations, like CARE and OXFAM, call for the integration of a conflict sensitivity approach allowing in-dept real time and peacebuilding activities at the community-level, and adaptive programming (Kittaneh, Stolk, 2018; Fanning, Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). They identify the latter as good practices facilitating Nexus programming while advocating for a reform of the aid systems (Ibid.).

Therefore, humanitarian and development organizations can facilitate their operationalization of the triple nexus approach by adapting their structures, programs, and expertise (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020).

2.2.3. Civil space

INGOs can also orient their efforts towards their civil space by building on the resilience of the communities they aim to serve (Ibid.; Brown, Donini, Knox Clarke, 2014). Nexus thinking is often associated with the resilience framework (USAID, 2021). The latter is present across HDP Nexus domains and requires shifting aid workers’ perception of crisis affected people from ‘beneficiaries’ and ‘victims’ to ‘first responders’ (Hilhorst, 2018, p.6). Unlike classical humanitarianism which intends to provide lifesaving activities efficiently to crisis affected people, resilience humanitarianism goes beyond meeting urgent needs and focuses on people’s capacities and agency in the face of hardships (Ibid.). Previous responses to proacted crises have demonstrated the efficient and culturally appropriate response of local aid workers that tend to access the field more easily than international staff (Barakat and Milton, 2020; McGoldrick, 2016).

Hence, the local is sometimes presented as the “*natural place for working across silos as crisis affected populations tend not to operate with the same distinctions between sectors that structure the international aid apparatus*” (Barakat, Milton, 2020, p.149). This explains the calls for community-centered, or locally led, aid intervention across the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors. For instance, certain academics have criticized the humanitarian system as being Western-centric, top-down, centralized, bureaucratic (Barakat and Milton, 2020; Spiegel, 2017). They push for the integration of existing local capacities and community-based decision-making in the humanitarian field, following the 2018 Grand Bargain objectives. The latter corresponds to an international agreement between the main humanitarian donors and NGOS, aiming to deliver tailored assistance to people in need in the most cost-efficient way (IASC, 2023). It understands localization as “*providing greater funding and support for leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders*” (Ibid., p.1). The Grand Bargain follows the WHS’ target to directly transfer 25% of humanitarian aid to local stakeholders by 2020 (Barakat and Milton, 2020, p.149). Yet, between 2017 and 2022, humanitarian fundings directly channeled to national and local NGOs decreased from 2.9 to 1.2% of the overall humanitarian assistance (Urquhart et al., 2023, p.73). This minimal proportion shows that most funds go through an intermediary organization or UN agency (Ibid., p.16). If localization is present across all pillars of the HDP nexus, but the meaning of local is understood differently (Barakat and Milton, 2020). There is a tendency of humanitarian and development donors and INGOs to focus on national organizations rather than community-led ones, as opposed to peacebuilding organizations (Ibid.).

Therefore, humanitarian and development INGOs involvement with their civil space and work with the local communities seems limited.

Chapter 3.

Methodology

3.1. Interpretative paradigm

As it is concerned with aid workers’ understandings of the HDP Nexus approach and how they make sense of it considering the challenges and opportunities this approach presents, this

research uses an interpretative paradigm. It aims to understand how the studied individuals make sense of the world around them (Guba, Lincoln, 1994). A paradigm consists of a set of beliefs and assumptions guiding how the research problem is framed and addressed, and is composed of the ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods of a research study (Ibid.; Hennink et al., 2020).

First, the ontology of research is concerned with the nature of reality (Saunders et al., 2009). This interpretative research uses a relativist ontology, as it considers that each individual has a subjective perception of reality (Guba, Lincoln, 1994). In this sense, human beings individually construct their multiple realities (Crotty, 1998).

Epistemology relates to the process used by researchers to establish what is real (Ibid.). It ensures the validity of the knowledge produced by following the “rules for knowing” (O’Leary, 2017, p.5). Unlike the Western-centric positivist paradigm that identifies the ‘real’ based on measures and fulfillment of specific requirements, this research aims to uncover reality through interpretation (Davis, 2012). Indeed, the interpretative paradigm “*accommodates multiple perspectives and versions of truths*” (Thanh, Thanh, 2015, p.25). It appears coherent to use interpretative epistemology as it allows the researcher to have a comprehensive understanding of the situation at the juncture of the participants and researcher’ views and experiences (Ibid., Klein, Meyers, 1998).

As for the methodology, it is informed by the epistemological and ontological approach. The methodology chosen depends on the objective of the research (Al-Ababneh, 2020, p.84). As this research paper aims to highlight aid workers’ perceptions of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, the research design is rather exploratory. An exploratory study “*focuses on investigating what is happening, asking questions, seeking new insights, assessing phenomena in a new light, as well as generating ideas and hypothesis for future research*” (Al-Ababneh, 2020, p.84). This research paper does not generate a new hypothesis or test an established one. It aims to provide a background that inspires hypothesis formation for future research. Moreover, the methodology corresponds to “*the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome.*” (Crotty, 1998, p.3). It implies that the methodology refers to the research design, influencing the choice of methods (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Researchers using interpretivist paradigm tend to prefer qualitative methods with small samples because it allows them to “*understand in depth the relationship of human beings to their environment*” (McQueen, 2002, p.17). This research is no

exception. As presented in more details below, it intends to collect primary data through in-dept semi-structured interviews of key informants, selected through a snowballing sampling technique in relation to a case. This information is triangulated with a thematic analysis of secondary data, such as organization strategy report, program proposals and evaluations, need assessments, official websites, policy documents, as well as past research on the HDP Nexus.

3.2. Case-study

This research paper focuses on the case of the humanitarian-development organization Plan International and its program implementation in Nguenyiel refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia.

It aspires to be a preliminary stage exploratory case study (Yin, 2018). Exploratory case studies can bring attention to new variables (O’Leary, 2017, p.216). As mentioned above, this research paper does not aim to generate or test a hypothesis, but to provide background information for future research. Indeed, a case study method allows an in-depth and detailed analysis of various dynamics and viewpoints within an organization. However, before the selection of the suitable case, it requires to establish key characteristics constituting the boundaries of what the research aims to explore (O’Leary, 2017, p.216).

This paper is concerned with aid workers’ perception of the HDP Nexus, especially in a context of forcibly displaced people long-term encampment. Since a case study requires a deep and detailed understanding of a context and the experience of the subjects of study, it seems relevant and practical to limit the study to a particular aid organization and its activities in a specific location. One central requirement of the case is that it is an organization with a program targeting forcibly displaced people in situation of long-term encampment. Moreover, a case study requires that the researcher have sufficient access to information on the studied context and a relationship with the informants based on trust (Ibid.).

3.2.1. Case selection

Considering the characteristics depicted above, Plan International program in Gambella refugee camp was selected as the most suitable for this research for multiple reasons. To start with, this

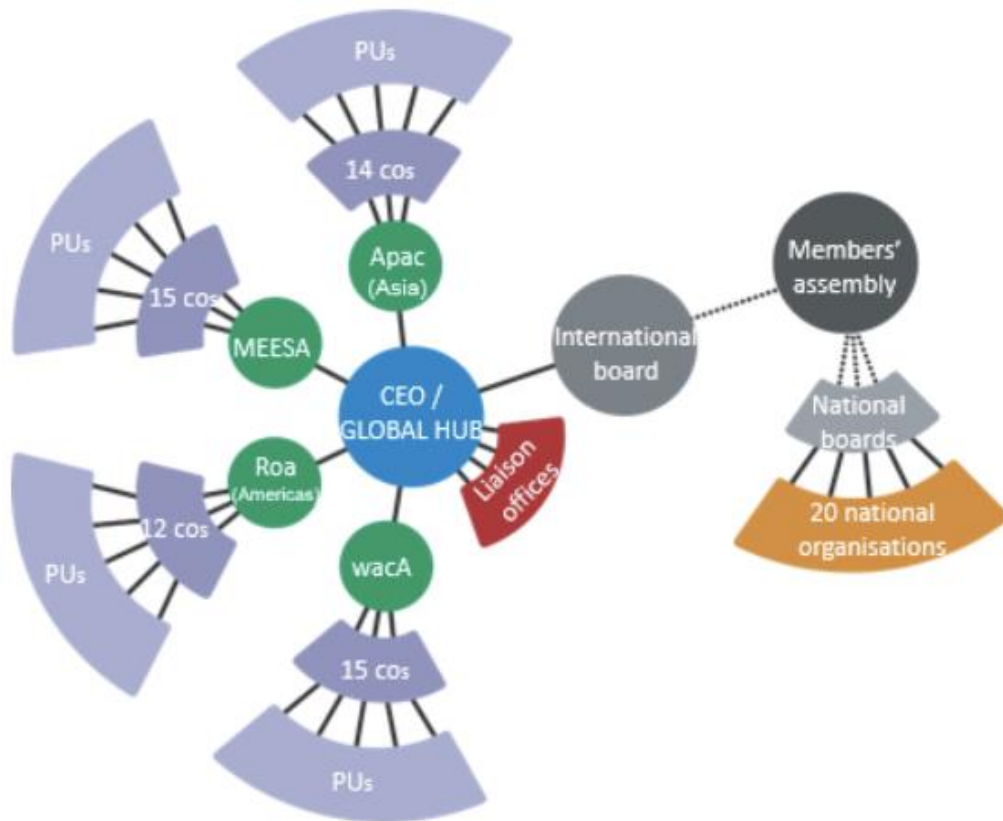
program started in June 2022, and is the result of a collaboration between Plan International Netherlands (NLNO) and Plan International Ethiopia (PIE). It is implemented by PIE but managed by NLNO, which is the contract holder. It means that NLNO is responsible in front of the donor, ECHO. It consists of a rearrangement and combination of two previously distinct programs, following a request from the donor. Indeed, ECHO has financed PIE education and protection programs since 2014. This new intervention promotes access to primary education and protection assistance for conflict-affected populations in Tigray, Amhara, Afar and Benishangul, and refugees in the camps of Nguennyiel, Tsore and Alemwach. It focuses on several Ethiopian regions and can be divided in two main interventions. On the one hand, the first operation targets populations affected by conflicts in Tigray, Amhara, Afar, as well as internally displaced people (IDPS) and their host communities in the Mekedel zone of Benishangul. The program activities are implemented by a consortium of partners, with different timelines. This consortium is composed of Plan International, Actionaid, World Vision, and imagine1day. On the other hand, the second intervention of the program is implemented by PIE alone. It aims to provide protection and primary education to refugees located in the camps of Nguennyiel in Gambella, Tsore in Benishangul, and Alemwach in Amhara.

This case was selected for several reasons. To start with, I gained access to an aid organization staff and documents. Indeed, I became an intern at Plan International Netherlands (NLNO) during the research process. My main task consisted in reviewing Plan International Nexus strategy and its translation into the organization's programs. Because of this role, I participated in the NLNO Nexus working group, but I also took part in weekly meetings of both the humanitarian and the Knowledge, Learning and Innovation (KLI) teams. By reading program proposals, I hesitated between this program and other Plan international ones, called 'Leaders of Peace' and 'Healthy Village'. After discussing with my research supervisors and NLNO colleagues, it appeared that the Plan International program implementation in the Nguennyiel refugee camp fitted this research case selection criteria. Indeed, the two other programs were governed through consortiums, involving a multiplicity of partners, which would have complexified the analysis. As mentioned above, Plan International has been implementing educational and protection programs for 9 years in the selected location, suggesting a certain level of familiarity and involvement of Plan International aid workers with the studied context.

3.3. Selection of participants: key informants and snowballing technique

For the selection of research participants adequately informed about the triple nexus and the studied context in Gambella, it is vital to briefly understand the structure of the Plan International federation in the first place. Before selecting the key informants, it first requires understanding the structure of Plan International. This study is analyzed and organized around the distinction between the macro, internal, and civil spaces of the organization, as conceptualized by Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke (2020). As the internal space of Plan International is concerned with its structure, it appears important to specify the different entities and layers of the organization (Ibid.).

3.3.1. The structure of Plan International



Annex 2. Plan International operating model (Plan International, 2023).

As in Annex 2, Plan International structure is composed of program units (PUs), managed by the concerned country offices (COs), which report to the regional hubs. Together with the liaison

offices, the regional offices directly respond to the Global Hub (GH), present in the United Kingdom. Unlike other offices, the National organizations (NOs) are legally separated from the GH. However, they abide by the same purpose and Global strategy (Plan International, 2023).

Regarding the studied program, it is implemented by the Gambella program units, which is managed by the Ethiopian country office (PIE). It reports to the WACA regional office and the Global Hub. However, it is through the Dutch national office (NLNO) that the program activities are aligned with the donor requirements.

3.3.2. Identification and selection of key informants

Key informants are “*individuals whose role or experiences result in them having relevant information or knowledge they are willing to share with a researcher*” (O’Leary, 2017, p.212). Considering this research is centered on Plan International aid workers’ perception of the HDP Nexus approach in the context of Plan International program in the Nguenyiel refugee camp, the key informants should be individual who are able to influence or reflect on the integration of such approach in this specific location.

Therefore, this research is centered on the perception of aid workers, who design, fundraise, implement, and monitor the program in PIE and NLNO as well as by those who work on the integration of an HDP nexus approach in PIE, NLNO, and GH strategies. Following O’Leary (2017) categorization, the informants can be divided between the ‘insiders’, being familiar with the situation in Nguennyiel camp, and the staff that is highly experienced on Plan International Nexus approach (2017, p213). It gives an overview of the attitudes towards the HDP Nexus influencing Plan international programming and the perceived challenges and opportunities nexus thinking represents in the Nguennyiel refugee camp. The repartition of the 9 research participants per Plan International offices, departments, and Nexus working groups is visible on Table 1.

The potential research participants were first contacted by email, sometimes following a preliminary introduction by one of my gatekeepers. Indeed, three NLNO informants accepted to serve as referrals following the snowball sampling technique (O’Leary, 2017, p.211). The latter is a non-random sampling strategy which consists in interviewees referring me to other aid workers they perceived relevant participants to the study (Ibid.).

Interviewees' code names	Offices within the Plan Federation	Location of the groups working on the integration of the HDP Nexus	Departments
Eva	NLNO ¹		Humanitarian team
Julie	NLNO		Humanitarian team
Ahmed	PIE ²		Humanitarian department
Hassen	PIE		Humanitarian department
Michael	PIE	GH ³	Humanitarian department
Luke	NLNO	NLNO	Knowledge, Learning, Innovation team
Jacob	NLNO	NLNO and GH	Institutional fundraising team
Antonio	Mozambique office	GH	Board of Direction
Nelli	Swedish office	GH	Humanitarian team

¹ NLNO corresponds to Plan International Netherlands Office.

² PIE corresponds to Plan International Ethiopia.

³³ GH corresponds to Global Hub.

3.4. Methods of data collection and analysis

Key informants were invited to participate in semi-structured one-to-one interviews, allowing for the collection of in-depth qualitative data (O’leary, 2017, p.240). It means that I prepared a set of questions, but I was flexible about the order in which I asked them to allow the natural evolution of the conversation. This method enabled me to explore unplanned but relevant topics that might emerge during the discussion. As such, the interviewees had the space to explain their understandings and views of the HPD Nexus approach, in relation to Nguennyiel refugee camp. The primary data collected during the interviews was triangulated with secondary data collected through text analysis of triple nexus academic literature, policy documents and Plan International reports.

The qualitative interviews happened according to the following process. First, I contacted the key informants by email, sometime supported by a gatekeeper. The email explained my research project, including the topics potentially covered during the interview and my intentions. Moreover, an informed consent form was attached to the email. It checked whether each participant was comfortable with audio or video recordings. If the person agreed to participate, the interviews happened either in person in a private room at NLNO office, or online through Microsoft Teams. Before conducting each interview, I introduced myself, my research project, and ensured the oral consent of participants. When consented, the discussions were audio recorded with my mobile phone when they happened in person while they were video recorded through Microsoft Teams when online.

I uploaded the recordings to the cloud storage of my university account. Then, I used the audio transcription function of Microsoft Teams or Microsoft Word to transcribe the interviews. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and 30 minutes. To analyze the primary data, I proceeded to read the transcript and listened to some parts of the interviews when I needed to check if the transcription was accurate. I completed the transcripts with the written notes I took during the discussion. As I was processing the information, I coded the interviews manually identifying recurrent themes through deduction and induction (O’Leary, 2017, p.330). Indeed, I expected some themes based on my engagement with the Nexus literature and my observations of organizational dynamics during my internship. However, interviewees shared information I did not

foresee which induced the creation of different themes. For instance, when analyzing how discussants understand the triple nexus in general, I noticed the recurrence of characteristics that I coded through the following words: holistic, sustainability, transition, community-centered, context-specific, flexibility, approach/thinking, politics, and peace. Similarly, I identified common patterns in interviewees' perceptions of challenges and opportunities surrounding Plan International's implementation of the triple nexus. The main challenges that were brought up were the funding streams of the siloed aid system and the formal structure of the organization. Furthermore, interviewees referred to Plan International's strategies, processes, and programs, as well as governmental policies and collaboration with partner organizations. Furthermore, I noted opportunities suggested to tackle these challenges. Overall, I struggled to organize these research findings as they are associated with both processes and actors that are internal or external to Plan International. Hence, I went back to the HDP Nexus literature and triangulated these findings with Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke (2020) conceptualization of an aid organization's scope of action to operationalize the triple nexus into three spaces:

*“**Internal space:** organisational structures, capacities, programmes and other organisational issues; **Civil space:** community-based organizations and NGOs/local government/local private sector; **Macro space:** national government/UN/military”* (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke 2020, p.25).

However, the use of this approach needs to be adapted to this study. Indeed, the informants barely mentioned the civil space as described above. There were references to Plan International's partners in Gambella, but no distinctions were made between local, national, and international organizations, agencies, and enterprises. Yet, the analysis of context-specific challenges and opportunities to nexus programming highlighted the role of refugee and host population communities as well as the regional government. Hence, the latter constitutes what this research means by the civil space of Plan International.

Consequently, these research findings and conceptual framework are organized based on a distinction between an aid organization's macro, internal, and civil spaces.

3.5. Positionality and ethical considerations

In this research, I benefited from a situation of privilege. Indeed, my role as an intern for Plan International Netherlands (NLNO) provided me with unique access to aid workers who work within the Plan International federation. I recognize that being a French middle-class white woman pursuing a master's degree in the Netherlands eased my access for such position. Even though I am a migrant and an international student to the same level than my classmate, my European citizenship facilitates the job-hunting process in the Netherlands. I also felt this difference of treatment when I lived in El Paso, Texas, at the border between Mexico and the United-States. Because of the way I look or speak in English, I was sometimes valued in circumstances where my Mexican friends were looked down upon. These experiences made me reflect on my own migration story, and the privileges that stem from the French colonial past. At the same time, I felt very frustrated with the growing anti-migration sentiment in my country, and the dehumanizing law enforcement measures towards migrants in Calais. This motivated me to pursue an MA in Development Studies, with a specialization in 'Governance of Migration and Diversity' at ISS. Throughout this degree, I learned about comprehensive frameworks and approaches, in both the migration and humanitarian studies, aiming for collective action in the face of complex needs, such as the 2018 Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) or the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Yet, at the same time, I kept reading about the increase of protracted crises, related to conflict or hazards, leading to a growing number of forcibly displaced people (OCHA, 2022, p.15). It made me question the level of implementation and efficiency of such comprehensive responses. I was initially interested in researching the impact of the operationalization of the HDP Nexus approach in an area hosting forcibly displaced people. However, it appeared difficult to establish as the HDP Nexus literature is recent, and there are significant gaps regarding its definition and implementation. Thus, I decided to center my research on the perception of the HDP Nexus by stakeholders involved in aid programs. I noticed that the literature I was reading was coming mostly from institutional donors, like the EU, UN agencies and INGOs. Thus, I shifted my attention to bottom-up approaches to the HDP Nexus, by focusing on the perception of crises-affected people and locally led aid organizations. However, it presented some constraints in terms of ethics, and access to literature and to the potential research participants.

In August 2023, I became an intern at Plan International Netherlands (NLNO). My main task consisted in reviewing Plan International Nexus strategy and its translation in NLNO programs, by setting up HDP Nexus criteria. When I participated in the NLNO Nexus working group, I

noticed that there were differences in my colleagues' understanding and involvement with the HDP Nexus. By discussing with my research supervisors and NLNO colleagues, I figured that I could focus my research on aid workers' perspectives, in relation to one of Plan International programs targeting forcibly displaced people. As I was reading organizational reports, the implementation of the ECHO-funded project in Nguennyiel refugee camp stroke my attention as Plan International Ethiopia had a long-standing collaboration with NLNO and ECHO in the area. I mentioned it to the NLNO colleagues working closely with Plan International Ethiopian office, and they accepted to serve as a 'gatekeeper' to contact Ethiopian colleagues involved in the studied program, and members of the GH Nexus working group.

The fact that I have a dual identity regarding Plan International creates an ethical dilemma. Indeed, I am simultaneously a researcher collecting data on Plan International aid workers, but I am also an intern at the Dutch office of the organization. In this sense, I am not an external party, but an insider. On the one hand, being an intern represents an asset because I could easily build mutual trust with research participants, access organizational documents, and observe institutional dynamics. On the other hand, I could not fully prevent the risk that research participants accept to be interviewed because of institutional or peer pressure. Moreover, I felt that certain interviewees perceived me as a 'Nexus expert'. Indeed, my internship task relates to the operationalization of NLNO Nexus strategy, and I am focusing my research on it. I had to remind them that their perception is valuable and legitimate. It shows that my multiple identities had the potential to create biases and an imbalance of power between my research participants and me.

This is why I refrained from using participatory observation. Indeed, I was able to observe NLNO colleagues' informal discussions about the HDP Nexus. However, I was present in the space of discussion as an intern, and I was perceived as such. Thus, it appeared unethical to report on NLNO aid workers' attitudes in a context where I was not perceived as an observing researcher and with people I often interacted with (O'Leary, 2017, p.253). I wanted to make sure that the findings of this research do no harm to people's career and the trust they have placed in me.

3.6. Limitations

To ensure the confidentiality of my research participants, I anonymized them by using code names and limiting their description to the Plan international office, departments, and potentially nexus working group, in which they work.

Despite their disparate familiarity with the studied program and Plan International HDP Nexus strategy, all the interviewees have been identified as influencing the integration of a Nexus approach in the studied program. Nevertheless, I was not able to contact aid workers based in Gamballa's program unit as I was never referred to them through the snowball sampling technique (O'Leary, 2017). As I have never been to Ethiopia and do not have prior contact there, the selection of discussants strongly relied on the support of my 'gatekeepers'. Therefore, this research does not reflect the perception of Plan International working daily in the Nguenyiel refugee camp, nor does it test the Humanitarian-Development-Nexus approach as a solution to long-term encampment in Gambella.

Furthermore, the integration of the peace component of the triple nexus as well as the civil space remains limited in both the literature and the findings. Thus, peace is not mentioned as much as humanitarian and development work, and the triple nexus literature appears more donor and INGO-centric than focused on local stakeholders and communities.

Chapter 4.

Findings: Plan International aid workers' perception of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus in general and in the context of Nguenyiel refugee camp in Ethiopia

This chapter analyzes the data collected through the semi-structured interviews of key informants by triangulating it to existing nexus literature and regarding the macro, internal, and civil spaces of Plan International (Südhoff, Hövelmann, Steinke, 2020). As explained in the methodology section, the research participants are Plan International aid workers who are either working on the studied program in the Ethiopian (PIE) and Dutch (NLNO) offices, or on the integration of an HDP nexus approach in PIE, NLNO, and Global Hub (GH) strategies. Before delving into what they perceive as

challenges and opportunities to the triple nexus implementation in Gambella, this chapter discusses how these participants generally understand the HDP Nexus.

4.1. General understanding of the triple nexus

The interviews showed that Plan International aid workers do not have a shared definition of the triple Nexus. As such, this research paper confirms the existing literature on the knowledge gap surrounding the HDP Nexus (Dijkzeul and Addis, 2022). As expressed by Michael⁴, there is currently no document diffused throughout the Plan International federation with a clear position on what the triple nexus means and is operationalized. Yet, groups are working on it in both the Dutch and the Global offices. In the absence of a clearly defined organizational approach, aid workers rely on their personal interpretation of what the HDP Nexus entails.

First, Luke⁵ insisted on the HDP Nexus being an approach, as opposed to a framework, a pillar, or a solution. In his view, a framework is something limiting that needs to be clearly defined while an approach is overarching everything and does not have to be defined. He conceptualizes Nexus as “*a cement foundation of a project that allows more stability. Nexus is a filler, or glue between three parts, or pillars with rough edges*”. It means that the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors are three puzzle pieces, taking different shapes in different program locations, that the Nexus approach puts together to form a unit by filling the gap between them. Similarly, Jacob⁶ identifies flexibility as the core component of the Nexus approach. They both agree on the need to shift Plan International's focus from defining to operationalizing the Nexus, through good practices, such as conflict sensitivity and adaptive frameworks. This view does not seem to valorize comprehensive and contextualized definitions of the triple nexus but rather perceives the latter as an approach centered on the programmatic integration of the triple nexus elements rather than a focus on its conceptualization (Hovelmann, 2020). Luke even questions Plan International staff's role in defining Nexus which he sees as an endless academic debate, while Jacob describes the earliest Nexus document, coming from international organizations and UN agencies, as “*theoretical attempts to bridge a gap between sectors, column, or clusters*”, which now need to be translated in “*a practical way of working [to] thrive for efficiency*”. These views confirm the literature attribution of the origin of the triple nexus to

⁴ Based in the Ethiopia office (PIE) and member of the Global Nexus working group.

⁵ Based in the Dutch Office (NLNO) and member of the Dutch Nexus working group.

⁶ Based at NLNO and member of both the Dutch and Global Nexus working groups.

the “*major donor governments, the EU and the UN*” and the lack of an agreed definition of the triple nexus (USAID., 202, p.5; Djikzeul and Addis, 2022). Similarly, Michael mentions the difficulty in defining Nexus that “*goes beyond the understanding that [aid workers] currently have*” and insists on its practical aspect through the implementation of the HDP Nexus protocol (*refer to the following chapter*). Thus, Jacob, Luke, and Michael's understanding of the triple nexus aligns with the Grand Bargain objective to reduce people’s needs more effectively in every context (Sanchez Garcia, 2022; IASC; 2023). Yet, this shift towards the local appears to concern only the implementation of the HPD Nexus, not its definition.

Michael, Luke, and Jacob understandings of the Triple Nexus are centered on the role of the internal space of the organization while Julie⁷, recognizes the interest of also engaging with Plan International civil and macro spaces (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020). She disagrees with Barakat and Milton (2020) that “*the local is the natural place for working across silos*” (2020, p.149), even though she insists on the need for community-centered interventions, the central role of COs, and the fact that people targeted by assistance programs do not differentiate aid sectors. In her view, Nexus programming is a collective effort involving = donors, NGOs like Plan International, and local stakeholders. However, Julie believes that ideally, Nexus interventions prepare the concerned community to take over aid programs on their own. It validates the triple nexus’ connection to the localization and resilience agendas in the literature (Ibid.; USAID, 2021). This relates to the resilience humanitarianism valorization of crisis-affected people’s agency to prepare them for future emergencies (Hilhorst, 2018). Julie refers to aid workers' tendency to “*lose track that they serve the community as they get lost in the aid system*” and Michael insists on the fact that Plan International staff “*work for affected people*”. The latter believe the nexus approach can help to refocus humanitarian aid on the community as it goes beyond short-term interventions. Hence, it confirms the failure of the fractured aid systems to be people centered (Hövelmann, 2020; Spiegel, 2017). Julie and Michael's perceptions confirm the critics of the humanitarian system as favoring the process and losing sight of its outcome, namely alleviating people’s needs (Spiegel, 2017, p.4). Moreover, Julie regrets that the localization agenda tends to be limited to funding local organizations while the inclusion of the affected population in the decision-making would increase their engagement and, thus, the long-term impact of the intervention. This view validates existing knowledge about the confusion of international donors on what constitutes local stakeholders, and their tendency to focus on national

⁷ Based in NLNO

organizations rather than community-led ones (Barakat and Milton, 2020). Yet, Julie omits to mention that national NGOs only directly receive a minimal share of aid funding (Development Initiatives, 2023).

Furthermore, Julie's view of the integration of the triple nexus in a program design allows the continuation of its activities even when the intervention ends. She validates Spiegel's (2017) perception of the importance of having an exit strategy, ensuring the handover of activities, by another organization or the government, if not by the community. Hence, her view of the sustainability of an aid program is centered on the handover of a program, as opposed to Eva⁸, who recognizes the sustainable impact of the triple Nexus by its ambition to “*work on three things simultaneously, because everything is linked together*”. Here, Eva refers to the holistic aspect of the triple nexus, but she also insists on the need to balance it with the particularities of the program location. This paradox between the holistic and context-specific aspects is mentioned in the existing literature (Barakat, Milton, 2020; USAID, 2021). Eva stresses that Plan International should also pay attention to the impact of each of its programs on the others. She believes that working across the Nexus requires making informed decisions to protect the organization's reputation and access. She mentioned the risk of Plan International's advocacy development-framed activities in certain areas to harm its humanitarian intervention in another. In her sense, the more Plan International positions itself in a debate, the less neutral it appears, which can affect the position of humanitarian staff elsewhere and endanger them. This view relates to classical humanitarianism and its strict interpretation of humanitarian principles to prevent the instrumentalization and securitization of aid programs (Pederson, 2016; Donini, 2013; Buzan et al., 1998). As expressed by Eva:

[H]umanitarian and development activities can complement each other but also compete. As this is not a zero-sum game, Plan International has to balance its dual mandates.

This perception joins the literature about the ethical dilemma and competing incentives of multi-mandated organizations, that simultaneously facilitate and complexify its HDP Nexus operationalization (OXFAM, 2019, p.41; Slim, 1997; Spiegel, 2017).

Antonio⁹ has a different conception of Nexus' contribution to sustainability. Indeed, he presents the HDP Nexus approach as “*the right one for now*”, implying its limited duration. His

⁸ Based in NLNO

⁹ Member of the Global Nexus working group

rationale is that Plan International's mission of advancing children's rights and equality for girls requires an intervention with long-term thinking aiming to address the root causes of crises, that he associates with development work. In this sense, the integration of the HDP Nexus in the design of humanitarian projects would facilitate the transition from humanitarian to development work. It means that the Nexus approach will allow a limited period of overlap of humanitarian and development activities until only development work is necessary. It shows that the humanitarian-development Nexus literature is ingrained in Antonio's understanding of nexus, including the LRRD framework which advocates for a linear chronological transition between humanitarian action and development activities (Hanatani et al., 2018). The interviewees all associated the triple Nexus as facilitating the transition from one aid sector to another, but Antonio and Ahmed¹⁰ imply that this transition should ideally move from humanitarian to development aid. This perception ignores the inverted nexus, easing the transition from development to humanitarian action (Mena, Hilhorst, 2021).

If research participants have different interpretations of the sustainability aspect of the triple nexus, they all agree on the differentiated integration of the peace pillar. Jacob confirms Barakat and Milton's (2020) description of peace as the "least understood" (2020, p.152) when he refers to the integration of peace in Plan International programs as the hardest part of the Nexus. If Antonio presents peace as an added value facilitating the transition from humanitarian to development activities, Michael and Jacob insist on Plan International's potential to contribute to peacebuilding at the community level. Michael argues that a well-designed nexus approach allows "*the peaceful coexistence existing among a community of people, who are secured and whose dignity is respected*". This is a view shared by Jacob as he disagrees with Plan International aid workers arguing that:

[P]eacebuilding is not their job. They make it easy for themselves by discarding the role that they have in the community. [...] When it comes to Plan International's gender transformative programs, it requires bringing people to talk around the same table. This building of homogeneous communities is peacebuilding.

Luke explains this attitude by the lack of expertise in peacebuilding of Plan International as well as the length of peacebuilding programs and their political aspect. Despite humanitarian and development organizations' fear of instrumentalization, Luke does not think that humanitarian and development organizations should refrain from engaging in peace activities but consider the conflict

¹⁰ Based in Plan Ethiopia

sensitivity framework as an entry point for Plan International. Antonio highlights the relevance of conflict sensitivity to designing a program, appropriate to the context, as it unveils the root causes of the specific problem. He described the latter as:

[A]n awareness of the potential impact of your intervention in the project location based on an in-depth context analysis. It allows you to determine if you have room for including peacebuilding activities or collaborating with peacebuilding partners.

Antonio, Nelli¹¹, Luke, Micheal, and Jacob are all part of groups working on Plan International's approach to the triple Nexus. They agree with Care and Oxfam's position to implement conflict sensitivity in all programs and peacebuilding activities at the community level when the implementing context allows (Kittaneh, Stolk, 2018; Fanning, Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). Yet, they refute Plan International's involvement in conflict resolution. This is in line with the triple nexus literature which does not favor negative approaches to peace (Barakat, Milton, 2020; Galtung, Fischer, 2013). Jacob thinks that Plan International's peace ambitions should be limited. It means that the organization should have a clear policy about where it draws the line on its peace involvement. He refers to NLNO's partnership with the peacebuilding organization, Pax, in an existing program in South Sudan, called 'Leaders of Peace'. Jacob perceives the South Sudanese context as allowing Plan International's advocacy programs for peace or gender equality, as opposed to other countries.

In the absence of a shared Plan International definition, aid workers' understandings of the Triple Nexus coincide or differ depending on the importance they attached to different aspects of this approach. Yet, all Plan International staff members interviewed implied the idea that "*one complex challenge cannot be solved by one sector*", as expressed by Ahmed. Hence, they all stressed the need for more coordination and linkages among aid domains. Their understanding of the triple nexus is likely to inform the way they perceive its implementation.

4.2. Challenges and opportunities to the HDP Nexus implementation

¹¹ Member of the Global Nexus working group.

In this section, the research focuses on what aid workers perceive as constraints or favorable conditions to the integration of the triple nexus approach within Plan International, especially its education and protection program in Gambella.

4.2.1. Macro-space

First, it focuses on the macro-space of Plan International, which for this study refers to the organization's interaction with donors, the aid systems, and the national government (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020, p. 25).

As described in the background section, the Nguenyiel camp is under the scope of action of the Ethiopian CRRP and the 2019 Refugee Proclamation both favoring refugees' local integration into the host population (Hagos, 2021). The first policy aims to foster social cohesion between these two groups while the second intends to facilitate refugees' access to economic opportunities and primary, secondary, and tertiary education (UNHCR, 2023e; UNHCR, 2019). Yet, in Gambella, these frameworks are *“not so much applied in practice”*. There are several reasons for the lack of compliance with these national refugee policies.

To start with, Hassen identifies *“the funding gaps as the main problem no matter the structure of the program”*. He implies that refugee complex needs cannot be properly addressed by Nexus programming if not supported by the donors. This view validates the literature, in which aid workers designate donors as a central obstacle to the triple nexus implementation (Thomas, 2019). Hassen mentions the government's lack of funding and its prioritization of nationals facing high unemployment rates. Michael even identifies the increasing lack of job opportunities as aggravating or leading to protracted conflicts in Africa, and both Ahmed and Eva believe that funding has been diverted from Gambella with the recent escalation of conflict in the Northern part of the country and Ukraine. This is confirmed by a report showing the concentration of 2022 aid in 10 countries, including the greatest share in Ukraine (Development Initiatives, 2023, p.15). As expressed by Luke, the *“aid is slowly moving from Gambella because donors are focusing on hotter and newer conflicts in different areas”*. It highlights the existing literature insisting on humanitarian aid concentration in acute and urgent needs' settings, as opposed to development programs targeting non-conflictual zones, and on the representation of refugee camps as an anomaly to the aid funding system based on the humanitarian-development divide (Fanning, Fullwood-Thomas, 2019; Chkam, 2016). Indeed,

Hassen describes “*development aid [as] out of the camp [as opposed to] humanitarian aid as inside the camp*”. He believes that this is due to donor requirements imposing different timeframes, targets, and performances. For instance, Luke thinks that donors do not provide services to the host communities in Gambella because they are under the primary responsibility of the Ethiopian government. Thus, a long-term aid intervention could be interpreted as a failure of the state to protect both its citizens and refugees, and development donors do not fund programs in Gambella as it does not meet their requirements of a non-conflictual society (Chkam, 2016; Roberts, 2020; Hagos, 2021). It shows that donors’ choice of their target is a political decision.

This political aspect of aid is mentioned by Jacob when referring to the redirection over the last decade of the Dutch government aid from former colonies, like Indonesia, to countries from the Sahel and the Middle East. He explains this shift by the fact the latter regions are where most migrants who recently moved to the Netherlands originate, and there is an assumption that development will motivate inhabitants to “*stay [in their region of origin] instead of coming [to the Netherlands]*”, following the push-pull theory of migration (Dorigo, Tobler, 1983). Jacob questions this rationale, visible in the Dutch Ministry interventions (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). He perceives it as:

[A] very cynical way of looking at aid, that does not seriously look at what is happening in the targeted context but is centered on the political infusion of the idea [the government] wants to achieve.

It shows that aid provision aligns with government policies and objectives. If the HDP Nexus literature mentions the risk of the instrumentalization of humanitarian assistance by governments and other forms of aid, it does not insist on the role of donors in instrumentalization (Guinote, 2019). This is why Antonio insists on the importance of donor mapping. It involves listing potential donors and identifying their strategic priorities and before working with any of them. If there is a common ground over some priorities, the Plan International staff concerned engages with the eligible donor. It demonstrates the organization's expertise and the benefit of including a Nexus approach in the programming in a way that fits the donor priorities. Therefore, Antonio believes that mapping both Plan International's potential donors and partners mapping constitutes an opportunity for the triple nexus operationalization. If partner mapping is mentioned in the existing nexus literature, it does not expend on donor scoping (Thomas, 2019; Fanning, Fullwood-Thomas, 2019).

In addition, Michael regrets the growing donors' tendency to finance "fragmented short-term intervention, especially in humanitarian response programs". He mentioned that most Plan International Ethiopia projects, such as the ones in Gambella, are humanitarian-based and are one year or below. This is supported by Ahmed, who determines that "80 percent of [Plan International Ethiopia's] portfolio concerns emergency response". It relates to the literature criticizing the prioritization of short humanitarian interventions over other forms of assistance or multi-year funding (Development Initiatives, 2023; Spiegel, 2017). Hassen even presents Plan International Ethiopia's development programs as "downgraded by emergency needs", and Michael considers difficult the implementation of the HDP Nexus approach in such short programs.

The existing research attributes the predominance of short-term humanitarian funding to donors' processes and entities, including their division between humanitarian and development departments (Steets, Preysing, Shapiro, 2011). This is the case of the donor of the Plan International studied program in Gambella. The latter, ECHO, is funding humanitarian projects while DG INTPA finances development programs (European Commission, 2022). These DGs are described by Eva as "two funding channels, with different requirements and deadlines". Julie explains it by the fact the European Union is "divided into compartments with different mandates". In her view, ECHO and INTPA call for the HDP Nexus approach on paper, but it is not translated in their practice constrained by their strict mandates. Hence, the connection with Alcayna's (2019) conceptualization of the gap between donors' discourse and policies and their funding behaviors (2019, p.33).

Furthermore, Eva describes the studied program as "a combination of two older ECHO-funded programs". It means that the locations and the activities of the current program were established, following a request from ECHO to associate two programs it used to finance. It shows the centrality of the donor, which "decides for basically everything, or it looks like it", as noted by Eva. Jacob finds a certain irony in the fact that "the nexus debate comes from the institutional donors that expect the international civil society to make it happen" while maintaining the funding silos. It shows his frustration with the donor's lack of flexibility of donors, which is in his view illustrated by ECHO and INTA buildings in Brussels that look like "kingdoms, or military bases". This is a sentiment shared by Julie, who says that "donors clearly don't compromise". Luke refers to donors' tendency to change the program location when a conflict occurs instead of adapting to the changing context. Jacob also regrets donors' tendency to "close their eyes and show little concern for the crisis in the implementation area". In his view, it would be fairer to the people in the first location to include lifesaving activities, even in the context

of a development-based program. Jacob and Luke connect with the literature advocating for flexible funding and frameworks, through the use of crisis modifiers and conflict sensitivity (Alcayna, 2019). A great deal of institutional donors' funding are earmarked, which implies donors' control over the choice of country and activities. Hence, Luke argues that *“programs should be need-based rather than centered on the priorities of the donors”*.

Thus, the operationalization of the HDP Nexus approach is challenged by institutional donors' separated funding streams between the humanitarian and development sectors. It leads Eva to consider *“private donors, with fewer requirements, as nexus opportunities”*. Jacob explains that most funds directed to Plan International Netherlands (NLNO) are coming from the European Union and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs today but that it was not always the case. He refers to the absence of institutional fundraising in NLNO before the mid-1990s. At the time, the organization only had private donors and higher incomes. However, it was decided to diversify the sources of funding to limit the risk of instrumentalization of aid. Antonio also refers to the need to be careful with corporate donors as it might present ethical challenges if these donors are associated with an extractive industry or the violation of human rights.

Despite these considerations, Eva and Jacob both consider, in line with Spiegel (2017), private donors as an avenue to explore the integration of the HDP Nexus approach. In Jacob's view, private donors give more flexibility to aid organizations because *“they are less centered on politics, have fewer requirements, less knowledge of the implementation context and NGOs ways of working than institutional donors”*. Yet, Eva mentioned the existence of difficulties in partnering with the private sector due to the structure of Plan International.

4.2.2. Internal space

The structure of the organization refers to its internal space, also composed of Plan International's programs, processes, including strategies (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020).

Plan International's structure reflects the institutional donors' funding streams, as described by Jacob. Research participants all mentioned that the Dutch, Ethiopian, and Global offices are all managed through sectoral divisions, with the humanitarian on one side and the development one on the other. Ahmed explained that in the Ethiopian office in Addis Ababa, the *“humanitarian team has little engagement with the development one”* as they are separated across floors. The influence of

institutional donors on the structure of the organization is even visible in the job titles of Ahmed and Hassen, including 'ECHO'. As such, Eva perceives this structure as a testimony of the evolution and "the survival of the organization". For instance, Plan International Netherlands has historically been a development organization, in which a humanitarian team was created and grew bigger until it became its own department, as explained by Jacob. Julie believes that the humanitarian team was never fully integrated in the organization, and Eva admits that she has "*more contact with colleagues from country offices I work with than the development colleagues*". Based on USAID's (2021) perception of multi-mandated INGOs as disconnected horizontally between sectoral departments and vertically between offices, Eva implies that there is a greater distance horizontally between humanitarian and development teams than virtually between staff from the same sector but between offices.

Yet, several options to reduce multi-mandated organizations' structural challenges to the HDP Nexus exist. First, Jacob mentions other Plan International's National Offices, which are testing a new managerial structure based on regions rather than sectors. As this new management structure is not currently adopted in the Dutch and Ethiopian offices, NLNO staff have attempted to bridge its different ways of working by engaging with a private donor. NLNO staff perceived the latter as a nexus opportunity. However, there were unexpected difficulties due to the structure and processes of the organization. If the limited number of requirements imposed by private corporations create a "*free space for Nexus, it also suddenly brings together people that never work together*". Yet, humanitarian and development-based staff involved in the project have limited opportunities to meet, limiting cross-sectoral collaboration. Eva has explained that each employee's workload is determined by working hours per project and that it is difficult to share working hours between people from different departments. Indeed, this nexus proposal tends to "*shift around between the development and humanitarian teams*", as noted by Eva. In her view, there is confusion, and sometimes competition, over which team has ownership of the program and the allocation of working hours. Therefore, the cooperation and collaboration among humanitarian and development staff can be limited by the structure of an organization and its internal processes.

Ironically, both the Dutch and the Global Hub offices' groups exploring Plan International's operationalization of the HDP Nexus approach, have been facing structural and process limitations. Nelli refers to the GH Nexus working group as composed of staff from the global, national, regional, and country offices, who have split into two main teams. As explained by Michael, the first team focuses on developing a Nexus framework, establishing Plan International's Nexus approach

and ways of working, while the second team aims to develop Nexus' training. The first team developed a draft framework sharing triple nexus good practices easing inter-sectoral programming, coordination, and financing throughout the project cycle (Plan International, 2022). Michael who is part of the first team also developed the HDP Nexus protocol focusing on the experience of Ethiopian practitioners and proposing steps and management structures to follow to ease the HDP Nexus approach operationalization in Ethiopia (Plan International Ethiopia, 2022). Both the draft and the protocol were submitted in 2022 to the Global Hub humanitarian team, but it is not yet circulated throughout the federation because *“both framework and training teams have to be finished with their parts”*, as expressed by Michael. The interviewees who are part of the framework team all expressed confusion regarding the contribution of the training team, and the lack of follow-up of the Global Hub humanitarian department, managing the Nexus working group. Jacob refers to the changing structure of Global Hub, *“with the departure of GH Nexus focal point, as a reason of the evaporation of the GH Nexus working group”*. Hence, targeted efforts to ease the triple Nexus implementation have themselves been limited by the internal processes and the structure of Plan International.

This is why Eva advocates for Plan International integration of the HDP Nexus approach through program activities rather than processes. In her view, Plan International employees *“already work more Nexus than they think”* in terms of thematic activities, because in terms of processes, *“everything is arranged so that you do things separately”*. She believes aid workers do not realize it, as they don't really take the time to reflect on it as they are caught up in their daily activities. This is a feeling shared by Antonio when he states that *“Plan International has been doing the Nexus approach without knowing it, especially in the peacebuilding aspect through social cohesion”*. Luke tempers this idea by referring to Plan International's commitment to the triple nexus as relatively limited. However, they both agree on the context-dependent operationalization of nexus elements into Plan International programs, including peace ones such as conflict sensitivity, or local-level peacebuilding. In this sense, it corresponds to what Hovelmann (2020) describes as a *“pragmatic incorporation and programmatic operationalization of the triple nexus”* (2020, p.3).

In addition, Jacob feels that Plan International is caught in a position where they must rephrase their activities in such a way that it meets the donor's expectation to be able to integrate a Triple Nexus approach. It means that every activity is framed as lifesaving when it concerns an

ECHO proposal. Jacob regrets the necessity to come to terms with such “*tricks*” to be able to implement a Nexus approach and questions the difference between humanitarian and development activities. This is illustrated by Luke's categorization between stereotypical humanitarian interventions, such as food security and shelter, and ‘second branch’ ones, such as education, protection, and mental healthcare. For instance, Eva wonders how lifesaving is primary education in Gambella and Luke implies it corresponds to second-branch activities having a greater potential for long-term impact. Hence, their highlight of the difficulty of drawing the line between humanitarian and development activities contradicts the nexus literature insisting on the opposing characteristics of the two sectors (Lie, 2020; Dijkzeul, Addis, 2022). Because of its dual mandates and priorities, Plan International already engages with ‘second branch’ activities and Luke perceives the organization as “*well placed to do Nexus*”.

The internal space is the one which Plan International has the most leverage over (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020). Yet, its current structure remains subjected to silos induced by institutional donors’ funding streams, and aid workers appear lost when getting out of the processes sustaining it. Hence, it can seem easier to focus on the integration of elements, facilitating the triple nexus operationalization, within program activities. However, the triple nexus is a context-specific approach requiring adaptation to the particularities of each program location (Barakat, Milton, 2020).

4.3. Civil Space

Before starting an aid intervention in a specific area, Plan International must be aware of its potential to harm, and impact, positively or negatively, the social, economic, environmental, and political context. Nelli refers to this practice as conflict sensitivity. To determine needs and capacities under such circumstances, the organization must engage with its civil space. In the studied context, the latter is limited to the organization’s interactions with the regional government as well as refugees and the host communities.

To start with, all research participants working on the design, monitoring, and evaluation of the program in Gambella mentioned the tension between the host population and the refugees as preventing local integration. As explained by Ahmed, the important arrival of refugees changed the

balance in the repartition of ethnic groups in Gambella, where the host communities are mostly Anuak, and the South Sudanese refugees are mostly Nuer. The literature confirms the complex relationship between the two groups, but it explains that it has not always been conflictual and that the camp paradigm was not dominant in Gambella before the 1970s (Hagos, 2021). Indeed, in the 1960s, Nuer refugees' integration into the host population depended on decisions made by the traditional Anuak leader in charge of the village where the refugees asked for protection (Ibid., p.6). Due to social and political changes, this locally-led refugee management system was gradually replaced by encampment policies by the Ethiopian government (Ibid., p.9). Yet, refugee encampment does not seem adapted to the ever-changing repartition of ethnic groups in Gambella, which Michael describes as "*a volatile area at the South Sudanese border*". He refers to the recent increase of Sudanese refugees, who cross sometimes South Sudan to reach Gambella, where they are not welcomed by the existing refugee community in the camps. Michael reported tensions between the newly arrived Sudanese refugees, notably because of ethnic differences, as well as with the host population that perceives them as "*another burden*". Given the rapid and recent evolution of the situation, there is not yet much literature confirming the impact of the growing number of Sudanese refugees.

Nevertheless, both aid workers and literature identify resource competition between refugees and the host population as maintaining the camp paradigm (Hagos, 2021). As pointed out by Eva, Plan International's successive educational programs in Gambella's refugee camps are renowned in the region, creating resentment in the host community that feels that "*refugees are better off*" than them. She referred to the testimony of a young girl from the host community dreaming about being a refugee. According to Ahmed, this resource gap and politicization of the ethnic divide as well as the significant increase of refugees in Gambella contribute to the presentation of the region as unstable and insecure by the regional government. Hence, the maintenance of the camp paradigm in Gambella is partially justified by this securitization discourse, namely *a political 'speech act' that publicly accepts a declaration of a vital threat that requires extraordinary actions*?" (Buzan et al., 1998; Waever, 1993). In this sense, the regional government management of refugees in Gambella does not follow a national framework, like the CRRP or the 2019 Refugee Proclamation's, in favor of local integration (UNHCR, 2023e; UNHCR, 2019). Indeed, refugees are not allowed to work outside the camps, making them aid dependent, and ECHO requirements only include primary education, as expressed by Julie.

Hassen believes that the local integration of refugees in Gambella is “*unlikely if the budget reduction remains because the Ethiopian government is indebted and cannot manage all refugees*”. Eva refers to the diversion of UN funding from Gambella camps as making Plan International for some time the only provider of primary education in the Nguenyiel camp, through the Refugee Coordination Model managed by both the UNHCR and the RSS. Moreover, Julie referred to ECHO’s lack of intention to renew the program that just ended in Nguenyiel, In this sense, the lack of international financial support will rather motivate the Ethiopian government to push refugees for repatriation rather than local integration (Roberts, 2020).

Therefore, research participants regret the program’s lack of sustainability. To start with, Julie refers to its failure to provide lasting work and academic opportunities for youth, as refugees have no access to the workplace and secondary education. She explains that this lack of prospects sometimes makes young refugees feel hopeless, exposing them to practices, such as drug consumption and looting. These behaviors are perceived negatively by the older generation of refugees who refer to the youth as “*idols*”, as expressed by Julie. Moreover, Luke regrets that despite Plan International’s long-term involvement in the camp, its program is still limited to the delivery of humanitarian services “*keeping refugees alive instead of meeting their needs*”. Moreover, Luke presents the lack of inclusion of secondary education in the program as “*a wasted opportunity*” caused by the politics of donors and governments.

Julie believes that integrating the HDP Nexus approach would provide refugees with hope and empowerment. She argues that the introduction of suitable education activities in the camp could participate in the development and peace processes of refugees’ country of origin when they repatriate, by sharing the knowledge acquired through the Plan International intervention in the camp. Hence, Julie implies that the introduction of Nexus can contribute to peace and development aid not only at the community level but also across borders. This perception challenges Jacob's idea that Plan International peacebuilding efforts remain confined to the community level. She considers that refugees' options for resettlement and local integration are limited, and that repatriation is their ideal long-term solution. Yet, Ahmed believes that repatriation cannot happen so easily. In his view, durable solutions are a political decision, and repatriation necessitates collaboration between concerned states, as well as the insurance of a safe environment with economic prospects for returnees.

Therefore, Plan International's engagement with refugee and host communities through its civil space presents contextual challenges and opportunities to the triple nexus implementation.

5. Conclusion

Through an interpretative and qualitative methodology, this research paper aims to show how aid workers make sense of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus regarding a context of protracted refugee encampment. It constitutes an exploratory case study centered on the organization Plan International and its program in Nguenyiel refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia. The following summary of the results reflects Plan International aid workers' understanding of the triple nexus as well as the perceived challenges and opportunities associated with its implementation. The analysis is organized according to the different scopes of action of Plan International, through Südhoff, Hövelmann, Steinke, (2020) differentiation of the macro, internal, and civil spaces of the organization.

To start with, Plan International research participants have heterogeneous understandings of the triple Nexus. In the absence of a general and contextualized HDP Nexus definition within the federation, their views are centered on different aspects of the nexus, that they sometimes interpret differently. Some aid workers even called on shifting the focus from definition to pragmatically incorporation of the nexus approach in every program, through the integration of elements, like conflict sensitivity or crisis modifiers. In this sense, the lack of clarity around the meaning of Nexus is not always perceived as a challenge to its implementation.

Yet, Plan International staff foresee several constraints around the operationalization of the Triple Nexus. Through its macro space, the organization interacts with institutional donors, such as governments or the EU, that are identified as central obstacles to the triple nexus because of their siloed funding streams. It means that aid funds tend to be transferred through separate humanitarian or development channels. Recent trends show that institutional donors tend to mostly finance short-term programs in urgent crisis settings through the humanitarian stream. Consequently, aid is slowly diverted from protracted crisis areas, such as Gambella, facing a funding gap. Donor silos are reflected in the structure and ways of working of the Dutch, Ethiopian, and Global offices, which have separated humanitarian and development teams. The structure is part of the internal space of the organization (Südhoff, Hövelmann, and Steinke, 2020). The latter is where aid workers have the

most power to facilitate the triple nexus implementation because they can shape procedures, program locations, and activities (Ibid.). For instance, discussants mentioned the possibility of engaging with private donors. Yet, in practice, aid workers are confused when getting out of the siloed ways of working because the processes of the organization are built around them. Hence, it can seem easier to focus on the integration of elements, facilitating the triple nexus operationalization, within program activities rather than changing organizational processes.

Nevertheless, the triple nexus as a context-specific approach requires adaptation to the particularities of each program location (Barakat, Milton, 2020). Gambella is characterized by ethnic divisions and resource competition between the refugees and the host population (Hagos, 2021). It fueled tensions between the two groups preventing compliance with national refugee policies in favor of local integration, such as the CRRP and the 2019 Refugee Promulgation (Ibid.). It implies that conflictual dynamics between refugees and host communities favor the dominance of the camp paradigm in the region, and Plan International participates in its maintenance through its engagement with the cluster.

Aid workers expressed frustration with the lack of sustainability of successive short-term humanitarian programs in the Nguenyiel refugee camp that do not respond to refugees' and host populations' long-term complex needs. If the programs ensure refugee children access to protection and primary education, it does not directly improve their long-term prospects. Because of regional policies and donors' requirements, the organization cannot increase refugees' access to the workplace or higher education, nor can it create development programs benefiting the host communities. However, some aid workers argued that there is no hard line between what constitutes development and humanitarian activities, and that education and protection can be considered as part of both. Hence, Plan International staff can shape, within its internal space, the form and content of its programs in such a way that balances the incentives of stakeholders in both the organization's macro and civil space. As long as such effort is centered on reducing people's needs effectively, it can be considered as an avenue facilitating the triple nexus operationalization (Sanchez Garcia, 2022).

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