Strategies for Assessing Triple Nexus Initiatives and Integrating Peace Aspects – Insights from Niger

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The Triple Nexus approach represents a paradigm shift in how international organizations, including UNICEF, address complex crises that span humanitarian, development, and peace dimensions. UNICEF must navigate the delicate balance between adhering to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence, and humanity while engaging in development and peace-building activities that may require aligning with government policies and engaging in politically sensitive contexts. There is a significant challenge in developing metrics and methodologies to measure the synergies and outcomes of the Triple Nexus approach effectively. This includes quantifying how initiatives contribute to peace interacting with humanitarian and development outcomes. UNICEF's approach in Niger, implementing food security policies to respond to humanitarian needs while simultaneously operating as a development program, holds the potential to positively impact peace in the region, thus aligning with the Triple Nexus framework.

1. Introduction

The growing prominence of the Triple Nexus concept in international development and humanitarian circles reflects the acknowledgment of the increasing intricacy of global crises, which extend beyond mere humanitarian issues to encompass developmental and peace-related aspects.

Traditional, compartmentalized approaches have proven inadequate in addressing the root causes of these crises and promoting sustainable resilience. Consequently, the Triple Nexus approach has emerged as a strategic framework designed to enhance the effectiveness and longevity of interventions by bridging the gaps between

humanitarian, developmental, and peacebuilding efforts. These crises traverse the entirety of the disaster management cycle, from risk mitigation and preparedness to response and recovery phases.

The idea of Triple Nexus gained traction after the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, leading to further policy dialogues among donors,

NGOs, and various stakeholders within the global community (Baroncelli 2023). The Triple Nexus approach was formally endorsed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2019 (OECD 2022). This endorsement signalled a commitment among international actors to enhance collaboration, align objectives, and synchronize actions across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding realms. The approach advocates for recognizing and capitalizing on the interconnectedness between various efforts, with the goal of interventions not only addressing immediate needs but also contributing to enduring development progress and peacebuilding initiatives.

The Triple Nexus embodies an integrated approach aimed at harmonizing humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding endeavours to tackle complex and protracted crises comprehensively. Acknowledging the interlinked nature of challenges in crisis or conflict-affected areas, this approach emphasizes that isolated interventions may not only prove ineffective but could potentially worsen the situation.

By breaking down the barriers between humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions, the Triple Nexus seeks to foster synergies and maximize impact. Representing a

fundamental shift in approach, the Triple Nexus challenges international organizations, governments, and NGOs to move away from siloed operations towards more unified, cooperative, and context-sensitive strategies for addressing crises.

In Niger, where humanitarian, developmental, and peacebuilding challenges are deeply intertwined, there is a clear imperative for adopting a Triple Nexus approach. UNICEF's food security initiatives in Niger serve as a compelling case study for evaluating the potential of a Triple Nexus intervention. By providing immediate responses to malnutrition through emergency food aid and healthcare services and complementing these efforts with long-term investments in community resilience programs, UNICEF aims not only to meet immediate needs but also to cultivate sustainable solutions to poverty and conflict. The evaluation of this initiative will scrutinize its alignment with the objectives of the Triple Nexus approach, assessing how effectively it integrates humanitarian, developmental, and peacebuilding elements to achieve comprehensive and sustainable outcomes in Niger. Ultimately, the goal is to determine whether UNICEF's intervention against malnutrition demonstrates Triple Nexus potential by effectively addressing all three dimensions - humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding - while simultaneously addressing food security challenges in Niger holistically.

2. Navigating Nutrition Challenges in Niger: A Triple Nexus Approach

Niger presents a critical case study for examining the Triple Nexus approach in action. Niger is confronted with a prolonged crisis that encompasses a wide range of humanitarian, developmental, and peacebuilding challenges. The country faces a multi-faceted crisis, including extreme poverty, food insecurity exacerbated by climate threats, and the need for peacebuilding in the face of violence and instability. In 2023, Niger's extreme poverty increased to a total of 12 million people (44%) (World Bank 2023).

The country faces challenges like frequent food insecurity crises due to climate threats. The food assistance initiative in Niger, aimed at addressing acute malnutrition and embedded in a broader development program, illustrates the practical challenges and opportunities of implementing the Triple Nexus approach.

The Triple Nexus approach is critically important for the nutrition sector, which depends on comprehensive interventions across various sectors and dimensions. This approach facilitates the integration of humanitarian and development efforts to enhance nutrition in areas facing instability, signifying a shift towards an all-encompassing strategy that meets both immediate and long-term nutritional needs. The 'Twin Track Approach' merges humanitarian and development actions to build resilience in food security, combining quick hunger relief measures with strategies for sustainable growth. This method emphasizes the need to confront immediate and anticipated food security issues in fragile settings, in alignment with the Triple Nexus (Pingali et al. 2005). Stakeholders are encouraged to adopt a flexible stance, moving past conventional roles to address the root causes of malnutrition and find a balance between quick interventions and enduring solutions. A comprehensive strategy that juxtaposes prompt relief with lasting developmental goals is essential for effectively managing food security in crises (Reddy and Geeta 2020). Moreover, the Triple Nexus approach advocates for a harmonious strategy to cater to immediate food requirements while fostering long-term resilience (Hayes and Fawcett 2023).

In Niger, nutrition has played a pivotal role in advancing the Humanitarian-Development Nexus, transitioning from addressing immediate humanitarian needs to longer-term development strategies This shift acknowledges nutrition as a fundamental development issue, facilitating the implementation of more tailored programs and moving from external humanitarian aid to national programs.

To establish an effective Triple Nexus, it is crucial to cultivate shared engagement and dedication from not just international bodies but also national authorities and local communities. The absence of

accountability for outcomes and a lack of openness about obstacles and setbacks can erode trust and diminish involvement in Triple Nexus initiatives. Ensuring the resilience and security of food infrastructure is vital for delivering effective aid in areas of instability, necessitating a tailored and holistic strategy to lessen the adverse effects of insecurity on food crisis responses in Niger. Moreover, the involvement of communities is fundamental to these efforts, guaranteeing that interventions are tailored to specific contexts and meet the genuine needs of the populace. By involving communities in planning and executing projects, a greater sense of ownership and long-term viability is promoted (Anisimova 2023).

The rise in global hunger is primarily attributed to climate change and violent conflicts, leading to worldwide food systems facing challenges in producing and distributing enough food to meet equitable nutritional needs without harming the environment. This shortfall not only fuels conflicts, as hunger can instigate and intensify violence, but also underscores the increasing global acknowledgment of the critical role food systems play in maintaining peace and security. Shifting from militarized approaches to tackling the foundational issues of failing food systems and their implications on food insecurity and conflicts is essential. This necessitates a collective effort across scientific, policy, and strategic security domains, employing the Triple Nexus strategy for the systemic transformation of food systems (Läderach et al. 2021). The complex interplay between food security and violent conflict, emphasizing the need for policy and institutional setups that support food security during crises and bolster food system resilience in peaceful times, is crucial for poverty alleviation, economic growth, stability, and the fostering of peace (Taher 2020). Addressing food security with a peace and conflict lens advocates for an integrated approach that merges humanitarian, developmental, and peace-building efforts to mitigate the dual nature of food insecurity as both a consequence and a cause of conflict (Gordon et al. 2016). The implementation of nutrition programs that contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion is vital, with community engagement

playing a key role in ensuring these interventions are tailored to the specific needs and contexts, thus fostering ownership and sustainability. A shift towards integrating food and peace suggests a need for heightened awareness and research in the nexus of nutrition and peacebuilding, filling the current gap in frameworks that explore food within the context of peace (Ann et al. 2022). The situation in Niger, where conflict events have escalated and impacted food security, highlights the urgency for a more cohesive strategy that unites efforts across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding domains to address the intertwined challenges of food insecurity and conflict (Tschukert et al. 2023).

3. UNICEF's Integrated Approach to Nutrition in Niger

In Niger, UNICEF's strategy combines humanitarian assistance with development projects to enhance emergency preparedness and nutritional access, aiming to promote social cohesion, build local skills, and achieve lasting solutions. Facing the challenges of drought, the collaboration between the Nigerien government, UNICEF, and various NGOs has led to the expansion of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) treatment services, incorporating them into the national healthcare system (UNICEF 2020). A notable milestone is the integration of the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM), including staff and therapeutic products, into the national budget, marking a significant shift in approach (Global Nutrition Cluster 2021). Despite these efforts, the sustainability of the SAM program is at risk due to dependency on external funding and the absence of strategies targeting the underlying causes of malnutrition, limiting its effectiveness.

UNICEF has been instrumental in developing the National Nutrition Security Policy (2016-2025) to enhance nutritional security and integrate nutrition initiatives into Niger's broader development and resilience agenda. The policy encourages a collaborative approach among stakeholders, including government bodies, donors, and NGOs, to combat malnutrition. The policy provides a framework that bridges humanitarian efforts and development, by organizing malnutrition treatment and prevention within a unified, multisectoral structure (Global Nutrition Cluster 2021). The implementation of initiatives and their broad

multisectoral vision for nutrition are constrained by limited coverage, dependency on the thematic priorities of individual donors and ministries, and minimal resources and capacities allocated for local service development and nutrition investments. The effective dissemination and execution of interventions rely on the presence and experience of civil society organizations, which are often supported by short-term, unstable funding. The

escalation of insecurity and conflicts in Niger, coupled with diminishing humanitarian funding for nutrition and food aid, may catalyse this transition, promoting a multisectoral vision of the nexus that focuses on maintaining essential services in disaster- and conflict-affected areas, which encourages the coordination of short, medium-, and long-term interventions (Global Nutrition Cluster 2021). Despite these advancements, awareness, and understanding of the nexus, particularly regarding nutrition, remain limited among various actors, and the concept can still be unclear.

To improve nutrition treatment within national health facilities, there is an urgent need for significant and ongoing investment to expand their capacity. Currently, the provision of SAM services heavily relies on international NGOs, with limited local nutritional expertise Addressing this gap requires a concerted effort to enhance the capacity of local NGOs through targeted training and mentorship programs. Furthermore, the establishment of a new Ministry for Disaster Response offers a strategic opportunity for UNICEF to help integrate nutrition preparedness and response measures more effectively within the national framework (UNICEF 2020).

4. Integrating Peacebuilding into UNICEF's Mission

Integrating the peace dimension into UNICEF's work presents complexities due to its core focus on children's rights and well-being. Peacebuilding endeavors often entail collaboration with non-traditional partners and navigating political sensitivities, which may compromise the organization's neutrality.

Positive peace encompasses the establishment of structures and institutions that bolster societal resilience and peace, such as robust education systems and inclusive governance (Bond 2014; Turan 2016). On the other hand, negative peace evaluates initiatives based on their effectiveness in reducing violence or the fear thereof, including how humanitarian and development efforts mitigate conflicts and tensions (Galtung 2013).

Hybrid peacebuilding underscores the collaboration between international and local actors to foster peace emphasizing leveraging the strengths and insights of both entities to develop a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development and lasting peace (Mac Ginty 2010). Hybrid peacebuilding within the Triple Nexus framework provides a strategic blueprint for merging humanitarian aid, development projects, and peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected regions. It emphasizes synergy between local and international actors, advocating for a combined effort to achieve enduring peace and sustainable development outcomes.

UNICEF's efforts to contribute to peace are part of a broader UN and member-state initiative, where the concept of peace may differ. In Niger, the focus on 'stabilization', 'counterterrorism', and 'preventing/countering violent extremism' strategies might emphasize political and military goals over children's rights and needs, potentially conflicting with UNICEF's objectives. Such approaches, especially concerning Internal Displaced People (IDPs) returns, risk further marginalizing communities based on religion, ethnicity, or livelihood, which contradicts UNICEF's mission (UNICEF Regional Office West Africa 2022). Moreover, UNICEF's involvement in these strategies could affect its reputation among local communities and conflict parties, posing risks to its staff and partners and threatening its ability to reach and assist children in need.

Assessing the impact of UNICEF's National Nutrition Security Policy, introduced in 2016, on Niger's conflict levels involves a critical examination of the policy's contribution to nutritional security and its potential relationship with societal stability and conflict reduction. The Global Peace Index (GPI),

which evaluates a country's level of peacefulness by the absence of violence or fear thereof, serves as a metric for this analysis. With Niger's GPI escalating from 2.148 in 2016 to 2.625 in 2023, there is an indicated decline in the country's peace, signifying that challenges to peace have intensified over these years (Institute for Economics & Peace 2023). A

higher GPI score reflects more violence, pointing to deteriorating peace conditions in Niger and underscoring the complexity of achieving peace through nutritional security initiatives alone.
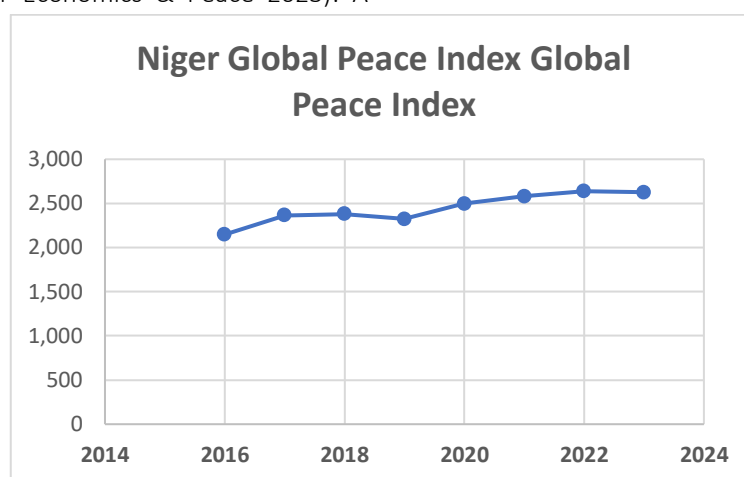

Figure 1: Niger Global Peace Index 2016-2023

Source: 1: Country Economy (2023).

Analyzing the impact of UNICEF's National Nutrition Security Policy on food insecurity in Niger reveals a nuanced picture. The population has been classified into five levels of food security: none, stressed, crisis, emergency, and catastrophe. A noticeable uptick in the numbers falling under the 'crisis' and 'emergency' categories was observed in 2022 and 2023, signaling escalating food security concerns (Food Security Information Network 2022). Despite a significant decrease in acute food insecurity impacting over a million people between 2022 and August 2023 (European Commission 2023), attributing this positive shift solely to the policy proves difficult due to the complex interplay of factors influencing food security, including efforts from various entities.

This period of improvement, while promising, does not definitively correlate to the National Nutrition Security Policy, given the complexity and array of contributors to food security outcomes. The diversity in the effectiveness of interventions—shaped by specific contexts and execution methods—further complicates direct attribution to

this policy alone. Furthermore, projections from June 2023 to January 2024 indicate persistent challenges (FEWS NET 2024) with continued conflicts near borders adversely affecting agricultural productivity and market access, thereby exacerbating food shortages and elevating staple food prices. Despite localized improvements in food security, the broader scenario in Niger remains grave, underscoring the need for sustained and comprehensive efforts.

The data indicates a modest improvement in food security in Niger between 2022 and August 2023, suggesting that initiatives focused on food security, such as UNICEF's policy and other interventions, may be yielding positive results despite ongoing conflict challenges. This improvement amidst escalating conflict levels suggests that the correlation between conflict and food security may not be strictly linear. It implies that well-executed humanitarian and development programs have the potential to mitigate food insecurity even in conflict-affected environments, showcasing the

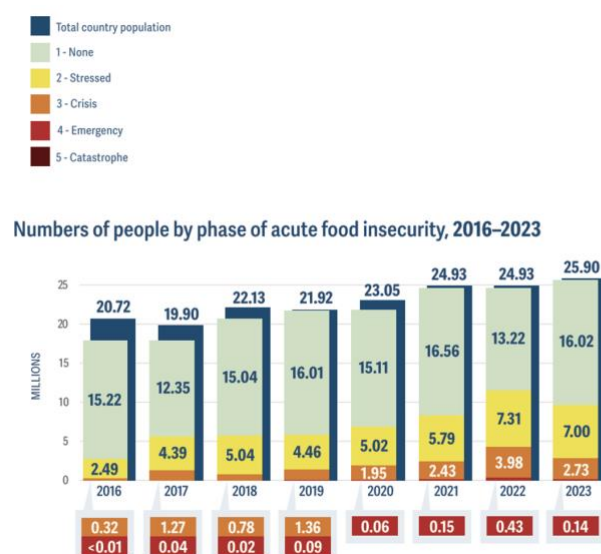resilience of such interventions in adverse conditions.

Figure 2: Niger Numbers of People by Phase of Acute Food Insecurity 2016-2023

Source: 2: Food Security Information Network (2022)

5. Quantifying the Triple Nexus Approach's Impact

Quantifying the impact of the Triple Nexus approach, which integrates humanitarian, development, and peace dimensions, necessitates identifying specific outcomes (dependent variables) and the interventions or contextual factors (independent variables) that influence them.

At a micro level, desired outcomes may include enhancements in health and education, achieved through targeted assistance, educational initiatives, and efforts toward local peace. The meso level encompasses regional outcomes like policy shifts and sectoral advancements in health and agriculture, driven by initiatives in regional governance, infrastructure investment, and peace negotiations. On a national or international scale, outcomes could involve improvements in national food security and peace metrics, influenced by overarching policies, international support, and global collaborations.

The Triple Nexus Triangulation model (Howe 2019) serves as a strategic framework to bolster cooperation across humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding in regions beset by fragility and crisis. This model underscores the necessity of fostering synergies across these dimensions, where actions in one domain augment and support outcomes in others, ensuring that efforts are 'nexus-sensitive' and do not undermine objectives in any dimension. It advocates for a dynamic process of triangulation, adjusting interventions to maximize positive synergies and minimize adverse impacts across the Triple Nexus. This methodological approach hinges on comprehending the interdependencies and potential effects of various actions, steering the design of interventions towards a holistic understanding of their wider ecosystem impacts. The aim is to craft solutions that are coherent, integrated, and geared towards the collective objectives of humanitarian aid, development, and peace, with a focus on achieving lasting results in fragile settings.

In applying this framework to Niger, a multi-sectoral strategy is employed to address malnutrition against the backdrop of rapid population growth, poverty, and recurrent food crises, accentuated by climate threats. UNICEF's strategy in Niger exemplifies this approach by intertwining humanitarian, development, and peace-building efforts to combat malnutrition through immediate

and long-term resilience and sustainable practices. Despite facing challenges such as dependence on external funding and ensuring the longevity and inclusiveness of interventions, this approach underlines the importance of flexible, united efforts from various stakeholders to tackle the structural drivers of malnutrition and contribute to sustainable development and peace.

While UNICEF's impact on peacebuilding in Niger might lean more towards theoretical speculation, the overarching strategy presents a 'Double Nexus Positive' scenario with peace as a component sensitive to the interplay between humanitarian and development actions. The model, therefore, suggests that even if not directly aligned with the Triple Nexus approach, initiatives should be evaluated for their indirect impacts on other dimensions, acknowledging their potential to contribute to broader nexus goals. This perspective invites a holistic view of interventions, aiming to enhance community resilience, address structural malnutrition causes, and support inclusive efforts for various groups, albeit with a critical eye on sustainability and local empowerment.
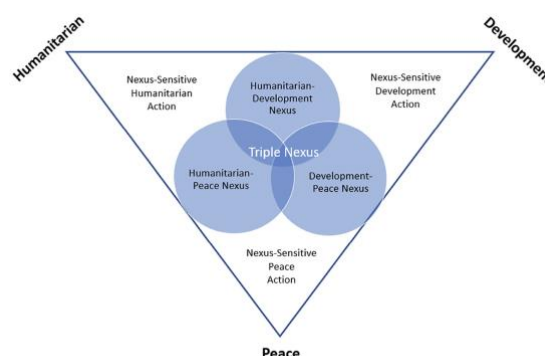

Fig. 1. The triple nexus framework.

Figure 3: The Triple Nexus Triangulation Model

Source 3: Howe (2019)

6. Conclusion

To advance the Triple Nexus for nutrition in Niger, a targeted and collaborative strategy has yielded progress, particularly evident in the transition of the SAM/IMAM program. This achievement is attributed to the effective utilization of the expertise and sustained community presence of civil society organizations, bolstered by support from the UN and humanitarian-focused donors. This model offers valuable insights for refining common areas of focus and objectives for nutrition within the Nexus, advocating for step-by-step implementation and inclusive stakeholder involvement.

The National Nutrition Security Policy plays a pivotal role in driving forward the Triple Nexus agenda, requiring tangible outcomes and a more precise direction. Given Niger's susceptibility to disasters, integrating disaster preparedness across interventions is imperative for proactive response and reducing humanitarian needs.

In the face of resource limitations, collaborative efforts to enhance each actor's distinct strengths, resources, and experiences are essential. Active participation in the Nexus process, accompanied by access to defined resources and capacity-building initiatives, will propel collective advancement. The clarity in objectives redefined roles, and an inclusive strategy is crucial for garnering political and financial support and sustaining motivation among stakeholders.

Furthermore, sharing guidance on the Triple Nexus, including best practices, facilitating knowledge exchanges, and continuous dissemination of evidence from prevention programs while addressing identified gaps, are recommended. Conducting a prioritization exercise with appropriate technical support, aligned with identified needs, and crafting a new action plan for the National Nutrition Policy with transparent prioritization criteria are advisable steps.

Engagement with humanitarian, civil society, and local actors to bolster system resilience and extend essential service coverage to remote areas is paramount. This involves preparing for and promptly responding to crises through local actors and national policies to mitigate crisis impacts and reduce humanitarian needs. Annual monitoring of nutrition investments and increased donor engagement from the outset to identify funding

opportunities and advocate for flexibility and synergy are also critical measures.

Promoting global and national knowledge sharing to support prioritization exercises, encouraging exchange of experiences, and mobilizing technical assistance are further recommended actions. Regular updates on previous recommendations and championing the Triple Nexus in the nutrition sector through strategic objectives, action plans, and accountability mechanisms will reinforce the initiative. Prioritizing joint action plans and ensuring representation of local organizations are fundamental for a comprehensive approach to nutrition in Niger.

Lastly, global policies that phase out fossil fuels and dramatically phase down CO_2 emissions in countries must be developmental and morally just. These policy actions need to be formulated and implemented in collaboration with developing countries as equal partners. Developed economies have a moral responsibility to contribute to a concerted global effort that is in tune with the growth aspirations of developing economies and that forestalls a global climate rupture, without 'kicking away' the ladder of development.

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Christina Plesner Volkdal is a PhD Fellow at Copenhagen Business School, affiliated with the Department of Management, Society, and Communication. Her research centers on the Triple Nexus, an innovative intervention approach that bridges humanitarian operations, development programs, and peacebuilding efforts. With a background in the UN, particularly in humanitarian coordination, and an approach as a participant observer, she leverages first-hand experiences to offer profound insights, enriching her contributions to the field.

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