NORTHWEST SYRIA

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Delivery of Aid for International and Local NGOs in Northwest Syria- Assessing Opportunities and Challenges for Aid Localisation Arising from COVID-19

THESIS REPORT

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June 2021

Cover Image: Dana Sub-district, Idleb Governorate
Source: REACH, 2019

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Date	07.07.2021
Course	Bachelor's Thesis International Development Management
Component	Writing a thesis report (1/3)
Course Code	VID4ITVE

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"My motivation to work is the resilience of the Syrian people which is just phenomenal. I don't know how people can endure so much suffering and so much pain and still continue, but they do!"

ABSTRACT

International NGOs face increasing challenges in delivering aid to the humanitarian crisis in opposition-controlled Northwest Syria. Violence against aid workers, administrative roadblocks such as limited cross-border access, sanctions and financial restrictions, and aid diversion by armed groups disrupted the effective delivery of humanitarian services and shrank humanitarian space (Roepstorff, 2020). The international community was criticising that "needs are growing beyond the capacity to address them" (Dixon et al., 2016).
The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionally affected people in NWS. With a multiplication of needs, response efforts for humanitarian agencies demanded increased capacities and collaboration with local organisations.

Although confronted by security risks and similar access challenges, local organisations delivered 75% of humanitarian assistance in 2018 , yet they received less than 1% of direct funding (Hall and Todman, 2021). With aid localisation, the international humanitarian community recognised the role of local responders in international policy agreements, such as the Grand Bargain. However, localisation commitments of equal partnerships, direct funding at 25%, and local leadership goals found limited implementation (Vega, 2020; Dixon et al., 2016).

With the momentum of the pandemic and subsequent mobility restrictions and preventative measures, aid localisation regained attention, and voices demanding more local ownership become louder (Fenton et al. 2019, p.43) But evidence was missing what reasons were behind failing commitments. Evidence was also missing how COVID-19 impacted the social interactions between actors.

This paper filled the void and analysed factors that shaped the interactions between international and Syrian aid organisations and compared their responses to the most challenging aspects from literature. The research was conducted over four months from August 2020 to November 2020 and interviewed eight participants from international, Syrian and one donor organisation, involved in the response to Northwest Syria.

By analysing findings, results demonstrated that the main factors that challenged these interactions were related to the agencies' partnerships, coordination and funding (Dixon et. al, 2016; personal interviews, 2020). Sub-contracting arrangements dominated the nature of partnerships between international and Syrian organisations. Those were often determined by strict donor compliances, which impacted local actors' scope of influence. Strict compliances appeared as a by-product of the high-risk environment. Mutual trust issues regarding principled humanitarian action posed a critical factor to equal partnerships. The high transaction costs of funding going through many layers was criticised as a reason for less effective aid. Capacity enhancement was little funded and a major obstacle to greater contribution of local actors. The humanitarian coordination among partners was dominated by international management with the absence of local leadership roles in coordination mechanisms (Personal interviews, 2020).

Overall, the implementation of localisation committments lagged in practice. With COVID-19, findings pointed towards little systematic change while highlighting a few operational changes in the enhanced digital infrastructure, exclusive online communications, quick and creative programmatic adaptations, and flexible COVID-19 funding. Under the aspect of localisation, the most optimistic outcomes referred to the overall recognition and the need to increase local decision-making as well as the access to pooled funds, the call for local proposals, and the increased local-to-local cooperation.

The research concluded that although the effects of the pandemic on the interactions between international and local organisations were felt minor and need further evidence-based research, this report discovered that challenges were of systemic nature. They go beyond the interactions of international and local organisations and involve the will of higher levels such as institutional donors and governments. They further underlied global conceptions of culture and context, humanitarian and political objectives, and dynamics of power.

Findings suggest that drivers for change are multifaceted and need to occur on different levels. Therefore, the researcher suggests the following recommendations to the international community:

- Institutional donors and policymakers need to adapt inclusive approaches in decision-making considering localisation markers. Risk-sharing channels need to be adequately reflected in agreements that absorb risks of working in a constant emergency.

- Inclusive partnerships must translate into action for the relationships between international and local Syrian organisations. Those are based on mutual trust and transparency in working processes. Complementary activities rather than competition avoid the duplication of work. INGOs must advocate for local capacities at donor level. Local actors must acknowledge each other's strengths and mutually benefit from them.

Key Words: *COVID-19 and localisation, humanitarian access, inclusive partnerships, direct funding, local ownership, local-local cooperation, Grand Bargain*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CARE NL	CARE Netherlands
CBPF	Country-based Pooled Funds
CHA	Center for Humanitarian Action
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DIFID	Department for International Development
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
EU	European Union
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GB	Grand Bargain
HAD	The Humanitarian Academy for Development
HPF	Humanitarian Pooled Fund
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks (now: The New Humanitarian)
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
L/NNGO	Local and National NGOs
KUNO	Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NWS	Northwest Syria
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAMS	Syrian American Medical Society
SIRF	The Syria International NGO Regional Forum
UIA	Union of International Associations
UN	United Nations
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VHL	Van Hall Larenstein University

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

COVID-19

This study refers to the health consequences of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on people and their livelihoods and considers secondary effects in their context specific environment. In Northwest Syria, secondary effects relate to the health infrastructure and the Syrian economy.

In addition, the project considers COVID-19 related measures, such as global mobility restrictions: closed borders, physical distancing, online communication and preventative measures such as protective masks. (Own elaboration, 2020).

International NGOs

International non-governmental organisations (INGOs), such as CARE Netherlands, engage into addressing the needs of the most vulnerable by implementing humanitarian actions aimed under the humanitarian principles of 'humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence'. INGOs are characterised by their assistance in more than one country. In addition, they must hold registration in their home country (UIA, 2021; Schmalenbach, 2019).

Local NGOs/ local actors

Local actors, as part of local NGOs, are defined as "community members and groups, local and national NGOs implementing humanitarian action within one country. They include all forms of civil society organisations and community-based organisations" (Schmalenbach, 2019).

** note: this study project uses the term "local NGOs", "local actors" and "Syrian NGOs" simultaneously, since terminology and definitions vary in academia and according to context (Els et al., 2016) This research focussed on Syrian-led NGOs with registration, primarily in Turkey and Jordan and, sometimes other "Western" countries.

The Delivery of Aid

The delivery of aid is defined as humanitarian assistance implemented by the collaborative effort of INGOs and local NGOs in dominant sectors including health, protection, WASH, Food and Agriculture, NFIs and Nutrition. (DRA, 2019)The type of delivery for the response to NWS refers either direct implementation, cross-border or cross-line assistance (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2016).

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Localisation

Under its latest reference, the international policy document the "Grand Bargain" (GB), localisation is defined as "more support and finding tools to local and national responders, to making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary" (IFRC, 2018). The Grand Bargain makes commitments to localisation in four key areas: Partnerships, Capacity Strengthening, Coordination and Financing, where the following three (Partnerships, Coordination, Funding) have been adopted as most crucial aspects in defining for this research's objective.

Partnerships

Partnerships in humanitarian action exist between international, national and local organisations working together towards a mutual goal. That mutual goal is meeting the immediate needs of crisis-affected people in a timely, relevant, efficient, coherent and sustainable way (Harrison, 2020).

In their 2015 paper, Howe, Stites, & Chudacoff described three main modalities for implementing programs and projects for UN agencies, INGOs and Syrian NGOs: Direct implementation, subcontracting, and partnerships with distinctions often difficult to make (Els et. Al, 2016)

As a pillar of localisation, the GB commitment sees successful partnerships in "removing barriers to Partnerships and in incorporating capacity strengthening into partnership agreements" (IFRC, 2018).

Coordination

The coordination of the humanitarian response among international and local aid organisations is defined as "primary coordination mechanisms during an emergency response" which are UN-led humanitarian coordination mechanisms, in particular clusters established by the host government or local authority. Those are especially important for the cross-border delivery from Turkey- NWS. In addition, NGO-specific formal and informal coordination forums contribute to coordinating the response (CARE, 2021).

The GB localisation commitment addresses coordination under the "support and complement of local mechanisms" as well as to "involve local actors in international mechanisms" (IFRC, 2018).

Funding

Funding can be defined as "the amount of material and logistical aid going to humanitarian aid organisations to respond to crises and disasters" (Malteser International, 2018)

The current humanitarian finance system sees funding flow through various routes from the primary donor through intermediaries to the final implementer (World Vision, 2021). Thus, the GB localisation "financing" commitment aims to give "25% of funding as direct as possible, the use of more pooled funds and to measure direct and indirect funding for local actors" (IFRC, 2018).

INTRODUCTION
Chapter 1

Complex humanitarian emergencies appear as a critical feature of today's conflict landscape and demonstrate a challenging environment for the humanitarian aid community to respond to. Trending characteristics of such complex emergencies mark the protraction of its duration and the various involvements of state and non-state groups with increased foreign involvement. The disruption or fallout of political, economic, and social services provoke persistent large-scale humanitarian needs. Often, needs appear in a vacuum of failing governmental institutions to respond to. (Concern Worldwide, 2021). For the last two decades of the 21st century, those unresolved needs demonstrated a driving factor for urban migration. Approximately 1% of the world's population is now displaced or refugees. (UNHCR, 2019) With additional shocks and stresses, such as from flooding to pandemics, people's resilience is deteriorating, especially in already fragile contexts (Béné, 2020).

An example delivered the Syrian crisis, which moved into its tenth year in 2021. As of 2020, The European Commission Joint Research Centre's INFORM Severity Index ranked Syria as "the most severe humanitarian crisis" (UNOCHA, 2021). The conflict produced about 5.6 million Syrian refugees, another 6.2 million people were displaced within the country. According to the World Food Programme, 12.4 million people – nearly 60% of the population – were facing food shortages (European Commission, 2021).

When countries and populations suffer from destruction of this magnitude, humanitarian organisations takes on a role of central importance. Amid these crises, humanitarian actors engaged in the process of relieving suffering, stabilising livelihoods, and working towards rehabilitation and reconstruction. This process is usually dominated by the "formal" humanitarian system, including actors such as the UN, several Western donors, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and large Western INGOs, like CARE NL (Dixon et al., 2016).

However, growing criticism arose for the formal system to lack efficiency and sustainability. "Needs are growing beyond the capacity to address them", as so in the Syrian case (Dixon et al., 2016).
Reasons were attributed to shrinking humanitarian space: political restrictions resulted in access challenges, insecurity forced organisations to operate remotely, principled humanitarian aid was endangered; in NWS, this found expression in sanctions, vetoed cross-border resolutions, the diversion of aid by non-state groups and location preferences in delivering assistance (Barnett and Walker, 2016; Roerpstorff et al., 2020).
With COVID-19 and its enacted measures such as mobility restrictions, flight suspensions, physical-distancing measures, and self-isolation, 97% of organisations active in the Syrian response reported an impact on the delivery of services which accelerated ongoing response efforts (UNHCR, 2020).

In this light, the international community recognised the role of local actors as first-hand responders as crucial, yet, their equal recognition in international agreements seemed absent (Barbelet et al., 2020). The need for a more inclusive and sustainable aid system was already articulated with the "localisation" argument, a significant outcome from 2016 World Humanitarain Summit and the subsequent Grand Bargain. This policy document was an agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action (IASC, 2018). Appearing in "workstream 2", the concept of localisation granted more significant support to locally-driven humanitarian action in the form of 25% direct funding, local ownership, and higher decision-making power for local actors (IFRC, no date).

However, despite giving rise to such initiatives, the reality held a disempowering approach. The goal of 25% direct funding to organisations by 2020 was not reached. Although carrying out 75% of humanitarian actions, only 0.3% of direct funding went to local NGOs in the Syrian response (Els et al., 2016) Instead of equal power, local actors were sub-contracted and served as "silent implementers for their international counterparts in fulfilling their agendas" (Dixon et al., 2016). What gave reason to these occasions? CARE NL and other international aid organisations were interested which motives accounted for failures of the committments which pose a threat to an effective and sustainable aid system. It became apparent that evidence lagged which factors shaped the current interactions of local and international actors. Also, it became evident that especially the views of local actors were often missing in these debates (Dixon et al. 2016).

With the momentum created by the pandemic and its uncertain impact on the delivery of aid, the international community shed light on aspects that defined the humanitarian collaboration and relationships among international and local responders in NWS to ensure effective aid delivery. Based on that, there was a need to understand if and to what extent the pandemic impacted these dynamics. It also became apparent that data on the current state of the localisation agenda lags in practice. The Syrian cause, in particular the response to the Northwest, provided an interesting case for exploring the claim and investigating the role of international and local responders within the broader humanitarian system, triggered by the event of COVID-19.

The following document provides an analysis along 8 chapters:
Chapter **1** gives an **Introduction** to the research with the setting of NWS, pointing to preliminary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The **Research Design** in chapter **2** establishes the foundation for analysis by including the commissioner's research interest, the research objectives and questions. A conceputal framework shapes the content for chapter **3,** the **Theoretical Background**. It investigates into aspects that shape and challenge the Syrian and the international response. The concept of localisation, as deemed relevant for analysing actor's mutual relationship, is explored. Chapter **4** explains the use of desk-based study and semi structured interviews as part of the **Methdology.** Most significant **Results** of the interviews can be found in chapter **5**. The **Discussion** compares primary findings with literature findings found in Chapter **6** which point to most impacted aspects in the relationships for INGOs and LNGOs triggered by the pandemic. Chapter **7** draws the **Conclusion** of the research, followed by **Recommendations** of chapter **8** to instutional donors and policy makers, INGOs and LNGOs. **References** and **Appendices** were included.

Idlib Governorate in Northwest Syria, as of June 2021

Image 1: A map of Syria highlighting Idlib Governorate. Source: Google maps, 2021

1.1.Research Location

Northwest Syria, the area, referring to Idlib governorate, draws much (Western) attention due to its protracted political and humanitarian situation. The international community agreed that needs have consistently been most acute in contested and opposition-held areas of Syria due to the breakdown of Governmental Syria services and intense warfare (Alkema et al., 2017). The volatile environment and ongoing hostilities provoked large-scale displacement. The last significant wave between December 2019 and March 2020 moved almost 1 million people to the Northwest. By 2020, 67% of the population in NWS was estimated to be displaced (UNHCR, 2020). While this area was already at capacity before the last displacement, the new influx posed more pressure on already fragile conditions. (USAID, 2021)

Image 2: Informal camps that have spread across northwest Syria, near the border with Turkey. Source: Google Maps, 2021

The pandemic threatened people's resilience in the northwest disproportionally. Researchers argued that "its impact cannot be seen in a vacuum but must be seen in the context of a decade of health crises, a destroyed health system, and a vulnerable population" (Fallon and Qaddour, 2021). Due to given circumstances, these factors qualified this location for an evidence-based study.

1.1.1. Effects of COVID-19 on Northwest Syria

"I have never bought a mask – I can barely buy bread" **(Syrian Interviewee, MSF Report, 2020)**

The statement above made by a displaced Syrian illustrates the gravity of pre-existing conditions and needs and the lack of means for protection against the virus. March 2021 signified one year since the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Syria. In the northwest, cases were reported to have quadrupled between November and December 2020. The infections with COVID-19 were primarily high for the millions of IDPs in camps. They represented 10.5% of all confirmed cases in NW (OCHA, WHO, 2021). The true scope of the COVID-19 outbreak in Syria was suggested to be unknown due to limited testing capacity, underreporting, and the lack of access to healthcare (Fallon and Qaddour, 2021). Information further revealed that COVID-19 remained widespread because people were reluctant to seek testing and treatment due to stigmatisation and concerns about the loss of livelihoods (USAID, 2021). Image 2 shows the high number of camps which have spread informally in mountainous areas along the border with Turkey, and were therefore prone to floods. Camps were overcrowed and lacked proper water and sanitation systems. Across northern Syria, experts warned that the destruction of water and sanitation systems was a challenging factor for people in densely populated camps to comply with preventive measures for COVID-19. Also, measures such as social distancing seemed nearly impossible (Kanfash and Macharis, 2020).

1.1.2. Health System

The broken health system made the COVID-19 response increasingly difficult (Fallon, Qaddour 2021). Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, more than 70 percent of health workers have fled the country. There were more than 595 documented attacks on health facilities. As a result, only half of the country's hospitals remained fully functional (BBC, 2021). Even before the COVID-19 crisis, scholars like Abbara et al. (2020) described the health infrastructure situation as fatal. The scale of health emergencies with people infected by polio, cholera and diabetes unable to receive treatment became even more critical with COVID-19. Reports indicated that there were only 153 ventilators, 148 beds in intensive care units, and one testing facility throughout the whole northwest for a population of millions (Save the Children; OCHA 2020).

With the decentralisation of the health system, local health directorates were taking the leading role in the health response in non-government-held areas. Experts argued that without resources or protection, the decentralisation caused major gaps in coordination and information sharing, including the absence of disease surveillance systems vital for early-warning alerts for outbreaks such as COVID-19. With plans to implement a cross-border vaccination campaign, experts feared that Syria lacked the necessary equipment and reliable electricity to handle and store coronavirus vaccines properly. Critically addressed were also growing misinformation and stigma associated with COVID-19 to implement an effective vaccination campaign (Abbara et al., 2020).

1.1.3. Economy

At the point of research, Syria's economic situation had already been negatively affected by COVID-19 measures and effects. Households experienced challenges in accessing food, primarily due to the high cost of food items. Food prices varied significantly in parallel with the fluctuation of the Turkish Lira against the US dollar (REACH, 2020). For example, the Syrian Pound devaluated by almost 100 % between April and May 2020 (Kanfash, 2020). As a consequence of the continued economic downturn and increased market complexity, more households were further pushed into food insecurity (REACH, 2020).
Experts raised alarm that COVID-19 would provoke further income loss, price increases, and forced businesses to close. Daily waged labour, which was the most commonly reported source of income for households, was already disrupted in over one-third of communities in NWS. According to a UN survey, as of 2020 36% of community focal points said that living conditions for their communities already worsened since the start of the pandemic (UNOCHA, 2020).

1.1.4. Initial Effects of COVID-19 Preventative Measures on Humanitarian Operations

With the humanitarian community providing life-saving assistance, a rapid impact survey assessed that 97% of humanitarian activities to Northwest Syria were initially affected by preventive measures related to COVID-19 in March 2020, while 60% of organisations reported funding concerns. In addition, many organisations were forced to suspend their activities. For example, in southern Idlib and northern Hama, services were relocated to safer locations to the north. Staff furthermore articulated risks related to travel restrictions. The fear of looting of the closed facilities was another occurring sentiment (UNOCHA, 2020).

At the moment of writing, the pandemic already drew crucial consequences for the country and its people. A critical increase in humanitarian needs for food, water, sanitation, and hygienic items in a landscape of insufficient health infrastructure and a weak economy provoked upscaled response efforts. Experts raised alarm over long-term consequences the virus would have, such as new displacement, the continuing lack of access to education, and a further deteriorating economy which would significantly threaten people's livelihoods and increase the number of food insecure people (KUNO, 2020).

RESEARCH DESIGN
Chapter 2

This chapter defines the research objectives and research questions, based on the commissioner's aim of discovering COVID-19 impacts on their practices and relationships with partners. Therefore, this section explains CARE NL's role in the Northwest Syrian humanitarian response which reasons their benefits of this research. Following, the problem definition, the research objectives, research questions, sub-research questions were formulated. On this basis, the researcher designed a conceptual framework which brought out main concepts and terms, reviewed under chapter 3 Theoretical Background.

2.1 The Commissioner CARE Netherlands

CARE Netherlands was sought the commissioning organisation of this report because of their membership at KUNO -an initiative which consists of ten NGOs and five Dutch knowledge institutes from the Dutch humanitarian sector- and their involvment in the NWS crisis response (KUNO, 2021). KUNO's goal is to strengthen the humanitarian sector in the Netherlands by bringing together available humanitarian knowledge and connect the Dutch humanitarian field to knowledge from abroad (KUNO, 2021). With critical developments of the pandemic, KUNO and partners were particularly interested in the ways humanitarians addressed the restrictions and challenges posed by COVID-19 and also, if, and to what extent COVID-19 has impacted the relationships of international and local organisations and donors in the delivery of aid, considering the localisation agenda (VHL, 2020).

With representation of other INGOs active in the cause, it was crucial to facilitate an understanding of CARE NL's way of working and their perspective to the research location. The following paragraph aims to give an overview.

CARE Netherlands is one of the fourteen members of the international confederation CARE International, one of the world's largest international humanitarian and development organisations. The vision of CARE is "to alleviate poverty and help people have a dignified life and equal opportunities" (CARE, 2021). CARE USA manages most country offices of CARE, but each country office decides on its strategic plan. However, funding for delivering assistance comes through intermediary members such as CARE NL (Al Husein, 2020).
CARE NL's mandate in response to the Northwest Syrian emergency is to raise funds from governmental and institutional donors, such as from the Dutch government, and advocate and communicate the beneficiaries' needs to the public. CARE's overall response to the Northwest encompasses the support for food security and the re-establishment of livelihood options (CARE, 2020). Services include reproductive, primary care, maternal health, shelter, clean water, and proper sanitation. CARE also helps rebuild livelihoods, develops resilience programs, and provides families with early recovery support, including agricultural production, livestock programs, cash for work, microfinance, and concerted protection programming, including gender-based violence, case management, and psychosocial programming.

CARE NL works closely with CARE Turkey and its local partners inside NWS and across borders to deliver aid to the people in NWS (Al Husein, 2020). Many local partners, responding to Northwest, have offices in Turkey and sub-offices inside Syria. Due to the geographical advantage that CARE NL holds in reach to (European) donors, CARE Turkey and partners communicate needs from the field to CARE NL which reports to donors. CARE NL supports country offices in Turkey by contract management to fulfill donor compliances. However, this way of working as a so-called 'intermediary' organisation comes with working from a distance. In light of decreasing funding and "shrinking humanitarian space," CARE NL is dependent on effective collaboration and communication with donors and implementing partners. In times of COVID-19 and enacted measures, this becomes an even more critical factor, as needs are growing and fast-decision-making must be ensured. The remote operations to a fast-changing environment derive the need to understand the COVID-19 pandemic on daily interactions between organisations with voices from the field.

CARE NL sees the ongoing localisation debate, exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19, as a way to (re-)assess current mechanisms in the collaborative effort of international and local organisations. Since time is often a limited asset, this report aimed to address the given needs by CARE NL. The research problem and the subsequent way of analysis, the problem, the objective and the research questions were defined based on these needs.

2.2. Problem Definition

With the state of the pandemic and the unknown consequences on the delivery of aid and interactions between organisations in Northwest Syria, CARE Netherlands was interested in understanding the impact of corona-related measures and subsequent effects on humanitarian actions and the subsequent crisis response to ensure the effective and timely aid supply to the humanitarian crisis in northwest Syria during COVID-19 times and beyond.

2.3. Research Objectives

Therefore, this paper aimed to fill the void by addressing actors' everyday interactions and identifying underlying factors that shape the responses. The lack of data around the current interactions of actors, especially the contribution of local actors in delivering aid, derived the significance of study.

Since the effects of COVID-19 on humanitarian actors and actions of CARE NL and partners cannot be seen in a vacuum, findings and recommendations of this project go beyond and address the wider humanitarian community, including international and local humanitarian practitioners, donors, and policymakers active in response to Northwest Syria.

Recommendations- for further actions that foster the successful collaborative effort in a sustainable aid system- are based on examined opportunities and challenges for the discussions around aid localisation, especially arising from the pandemic.

This results in two main objectives:

INTERIM OBJECTIVES
To contribute to improved humanitarian actions based on the analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of aid between international and local organisations in Northwest Syria.

FINAL OBJECTIVE
To provide information on opportunities and challenges for the localisation of aid arising from the pandemic in Northwest Syria. On the basis of this, to make recommendations to the humanitarian community on how to progress on the localisation agenda.

To address these objectives, the following research questions are proposed:

2.4. Research Questions

Main Research Questions:*

1) How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the delivery of humanitarian aid for INGOs and local organisations in Northwest Syria?

And:

2) What opportunities and challenges on the localisation of aid in Northwest Syria arose from the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-Research Questions:*

1) Which aspects were most challenging for the delivery of aid for INGOs and LNGOs before COVID-19 and which aspects were most challenging for the delivery of aid for INGOs and LNGOs during COVID-19?

2) How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the partnership for INGOs and LNGOs?

3) How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the coordination for INGOs and LNGOs?

4) How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact the funding for INGOs and LNGOs?

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*Note: Over the course this research, main- and sub-research questions were modified by the researcher, in agreement with the former internal supervisor. Firstly, since localisation remained a theoretical concept, rather than a fact, it was taken out of the main RQ and added as another part of the main RQ, finding expression in assessing "opportunities and challenges for the localisation of aid".
Secondly, SRQs were defined by aspects of the Grand Bargain localisation committments and the Seven Dimensions for Localisation Framework. Thirdly, to assess how the pandemic impacted the delivery of aid for organisations, the previous way of collaboration needed to be researched. This justified the added part in SR1.
Source: Appendix 3) Research Proposal

2.5. Conceptual Framework

To identify the methodology for this study, a conceptual framework was a major tool of help. Based on the initial research questions asked: (1) "How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the delivery of humanitarian aid for INGOs and local organisations in Northwest Syria?" and (2) "What opportunities and challenges on the localisation of aid in Northwest Syria arose from the COVID-19 pandemic?" the following chapter reviewed the literature on identified terms and concepts to ground the phenomena and identify the relationships of most essential concepts used in this research (McGaghie et al. 2001). The conceptual framework identified nine main terms and key concepts on which the researcher conducted desk-based research.
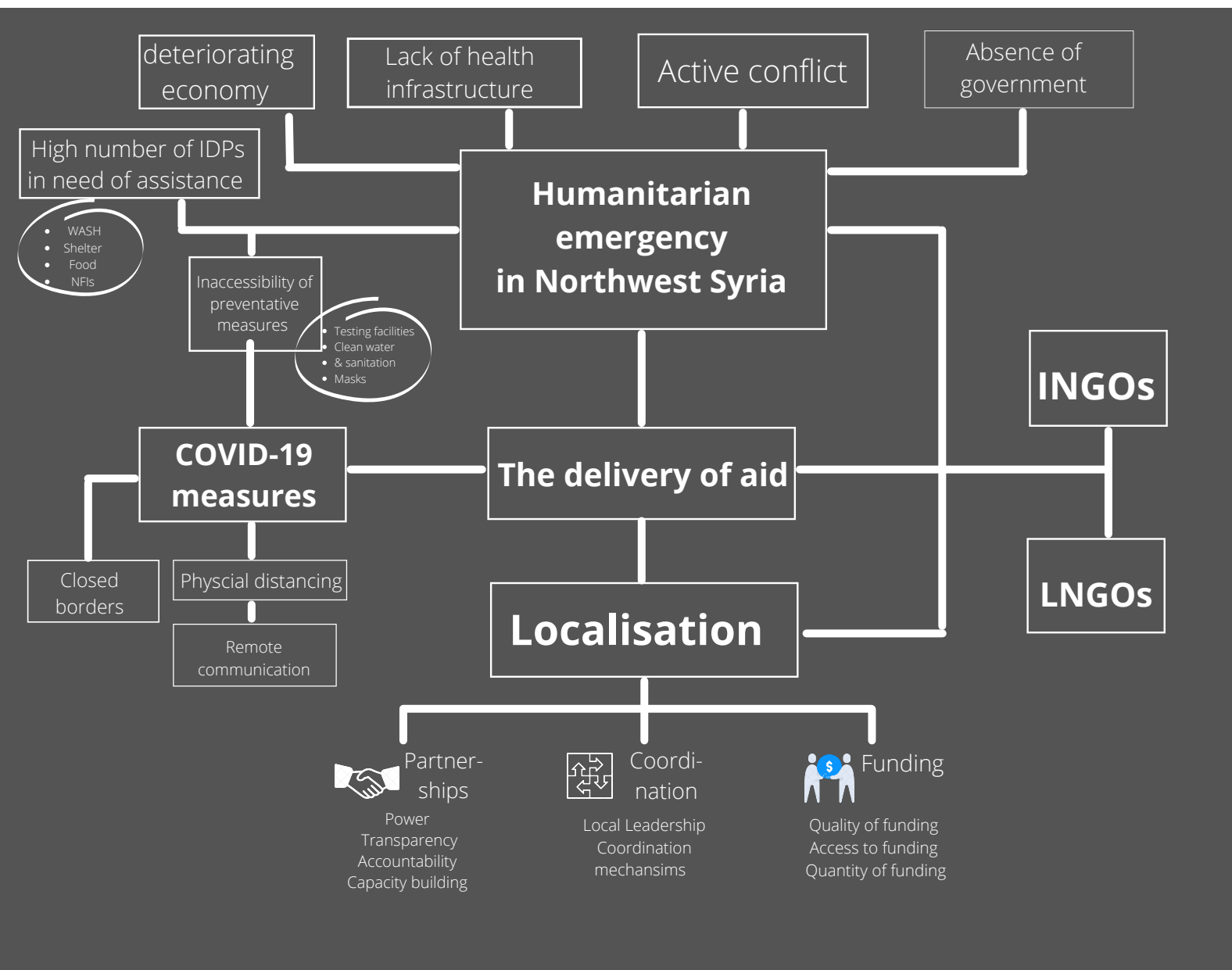
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework, own elaboration , 2020

Firstly, the researcher looked at the external environment (Northwest Syria) to determine most influential factors that shape the conditions for INGOs and LNGOs to deliver aid. From academic sources, factors such as active conflict, the absence of government, the lack of health infrastructure, the deteriorating economy appeared to be the main reasons that resulted in a high number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in need of assistance, mainly for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); shelter; food; and non-food items (NFIs). A comprehensive review of the Syrian context and its results in a **humanitarian emergency in Northwest Syria** follows this chapter.

Secondly, the **delivery of aid** was defined by looking at data that describes the operations of **INGOs** and **LNGOs.** The aim was to give background information and characteristics of both their responses before looking at factors that shaped their mutual effort to deliver aid to people in northwest Syria. Thirdly, the literature review identified that most discussed aspects among scholars that challenged the cooperation lied in aspects of **partnerships, coordination and funding.**

While the overall objective was to report opportunities and challenges of aid **localisation,** the researcher lastly looked at sources defining and describing the term localisation. Based on its latest reference in the policy document of the Grand Bargain (GB) and the framework of "Seven Dimensions of Localisation" (see next chapter for detailed explanation), the researcher chose the three themes (**Partnerships, Coordination, Funding)** as a reference and marker of localisation, to compared it with the results of the investigation of these three themes in the study case of the Syrian response. Thus, the researcher aimed at comparing the "real state" with the "ideal state" corresponding to the Syrian response and the identified localisation markers. Consequently, the three themes were chosen as sub-research questions 2-4.

The variable of **COVID-19 measures** derived the need to conduct further study and shaped the methodological approach. Initial aspects attributed to the term when overseeing literature answered to closed borders, physical distancing, remote communication were found as starting points for further investigation and primary data collection.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
Chapter 3

The literature review established a theoretical and conceptual basis for addressing the research questions and summarized previous research on the research topic, following identified terms and their relationships, as indicated in the conceptual framework.

This section contains two parts: the first explored literature around the Syrian conflict which brought out arguments for the challenging environment for aid actors. All findings cited by scholars like Dixon et al. (2016), Roerpstorff et al. (2020), Svoboda and Pantuliano (2015) supported the research and proved that pre-existing factors impacted the ongoing effort of international and local aid agencies in their response to people in need in NWS which resulted in various reasons for access challenges.

Literature around the social interactions of international and local organisations produced the most frequent and significant findings around partnerships, coordination and funding.

Part two investigates the context of aid localisation. It points to its roots in the Grand Bargain agreement, links to unambiguity in the concept, identified by Van Brabant and Walker (2017) and refers to the "Seven Dimensions for Localisation," a tool created by the START Network (2017) to attribute indicators to localisation. Findings supported the researcher in determining the type of methodology for this research.

3.1. The Syrian Crisis

What started as a peaceful uprising against the government of Syria has lasted ten years and drew devastating consequences for a country and its people. More than 500.000 people died or went missing. More than 55% of the Syrian population has been displaced since 2011. Entire neighbourhoods and infrastructure across the country were destroyed (BBC, 2021). Scholars labelled Syria as "the most complex conflict of this century" (McGoldrick, 2016). Although the focus of this paper was not on the political landscape, it needed to be understood how ten years of conflict have shaped the living conditions for many people and the humanitarian system. A better overview aimed to point out the complexity of the "political emergency" and its consequences in looking at recent historical developments. (Dixon et al., 2016).

Before the conflict began, Syrians were concerned about high unemployment, corruption, and a lack of political freedom under President Bashar al-Assad. In March 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in the southern city of Deraa, inspired by uprisings of the so-called "Arab Spring" in neighbouring countries against authoritarian regimes. When the Syrian government used violent forces to suppress civilian's demonstrations, the demand for the president's resignation spread nationwide. The unrest spread quickly and turned into violent clashes between the regime and opposition supporters. Soon, many rebel groups joined the conflict. Foreign powers began to take sides, sending money, weaponry, and fighters. The government's key supporters have been Russia and Iran, while Turkey, Western powers, and several Gulf Arab states have backed the opposition to varying degrees over the past decade. Extremist jihadist organisations with their aims, such as the Islamic State (IS) group and al-Qaeda, became involved. Syria's Kurds, who wanted the right to self-government, added another dimension to the conflict (BBC, 2021).

As a result, Syria remained a country with different areas, shifting in control. Although the government regained control of Syria's biggest cities, large parts of the country were still held by non-state armed groups which are visualised in image 4, on the next page. As cited, the "last remaining opposition stronghold" was the north-western province of Idlib and parts of northern Hama and western Aleppo. The region was dominated by the jihadist affiliated Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) but was also home to mainstream rebel factions (BBC, 2021).

Humanitarian Crisis
Consequently, the conflict produced a "humanitarian crisis": more than half of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million fled their homes. Half of the population was internally displaced, many of them living in camps, while another 5.6 million were registered as refugees abroad (BBC, 2021; Hall and Todman, 2021). Neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, which were hosting 93% of them, struggled to cope with one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history. One million Syrian refugee children were born in exile. Two-thirds of the population required humanitarian assistance, and needs continue to rise. In one year, an additional 4.5 million Syrians became food insecure, meaning that 60 percent of the population struggled to access a basic meal. In northwest Syria, people lived on the equivalent of 0.68 USD a day which was reported to fall under the scale to measure poverty (Hall and Todman, 2021). Image 4 reflects the high amount of Syrians in need of assistance dispersed among neighbouring countries. With 3 mio people in need in NWS, the pie chart shows that needs in northwest were highest from 2019-2021, considering territorial size.
In addition, entire neighbourhoods and vital infrastructure across the country remained in ruins after a decade of conflict. A UN satellite analysis suggested that more than 35,000 structures were damaged or destroyed in Aleppo city alone before the government recaptured it in late 2016. Despite their protected status, 595 attacks on 350 separate medical facilities were documented by Physicians for Human Rights as of March 2020. Such attacks left only half of the country's hospitals fully functional. Much of Syria's rich cultural heritage was also destroyed. All six of the country's Unesco World Heritage sites were damaged significantly, for example, a large part of the ancient city of Palmyra (BBC, 2021)

Failing peace negotiations
Several peace initiatives were launched throughout the conflict, including the latest major effort in October 2019 in Geneva with the convening of the Syrian Constitutional Committee to draft a new constitution for Syria under the auspices of the United Nations. Attempts remained unsuccessful so far, entering the tenth year of a chronic conflict in 2021. In March 2020, Russia and Turkey brokered a ceasefire to halt a push by the government to retake Idlib, which was of uncertain lasting (BBC, 2021).

How the political developments across Syria have impacted the delivery of aid for Syrian and international NGOs is reviewed in the following section.

As of March 2020
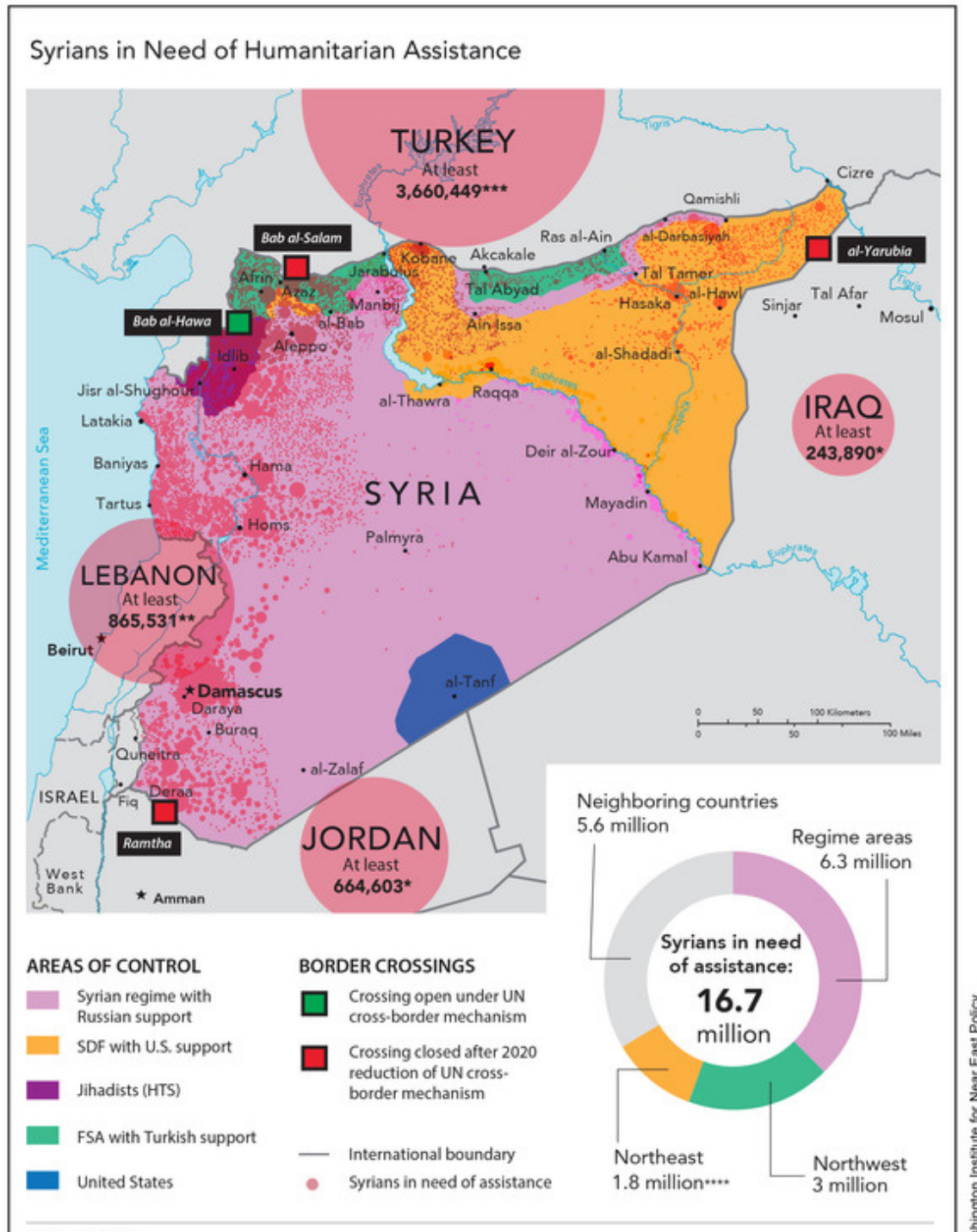
Image 3: A map of Syria portraying the different areas of control, open and closed border crossings and the number of Syrians in need outside and within Syria.
Source: The Washington Institute, 2020

3.2 The Local Response to Northwest Syria

The COVID-19 pandemic shed light again on local actors. While the views of locals were often missing in international debates and agreements, authors like Slim and Trombetta (2014), Bosman (2012), and Dixon et al. (2016) delivered crucial information on the organisation of the local response to Northwest Syria. The produced literature review showed unambiguity among scholars and researchers relating to the evolution and definition of local actors in Syria. This marked a crucial aspect for analysis and will come back at a later stage of this paper.

From Syrian Civil Society to Humanitarian Aid Organisations
Dixon et al. (2016; 2017) reported that before 2011, civil society in Syria was characterised by the regime's authoritarian control, with only a few non-politicised organisations allowed to provide assistance. Those who ran initiatives mainly occurred in the form of charities (Alzoubi, 2015). Some other organisations and networks worked underground or took the form of cultural organisations. In the wake of the protests in 2011, groups of activists spontaneously originated and organised themselves to provide humanitarian relief services. Active charities supported them however, the newly formed groups lagged associative experience. Alzoubi (2015) argued that an NGO sector didn't exist before 2011 but was born during the conflict. Before the crisis, Syrians rarely used the term "civil society organisations" because it was considered a "Western way of culturally invading the country." Instead, the government preferred the term "community-based organisations", which was linked to their interference in operations and partial ownership.
With the crisis, scholars identified that many activists from Pacifist movements started to create various forms of NGOs in reaction to various issues, primarily for health care provision and the documentation on human rights violations.
While the opposition failed to establish a body that could fill the vacuum that resulted from the withdrawal of Syrian government agencies, Syrian NGOs delivered aid to the communities in opposition-controlled areas (Svodoa and Pantuliano, 2015).
Dixon et al. (2016; 2017) noted the rapid development and the professionalisation of these organisations over the last decade. "Syrian organizations have emerged to play key roles in providing humanitarian assistance, in addition to filling service and governance gaps." According to Dixon et al. (2016), several Syrian organisations grew highly organised structures with clearly defined divisions, multiple international partners, and funding streams with resources to address the needs of people in large parts of Syria. In parallel, more informal bodies existed, represented by community-based organisations who carried out smaller-scale projects in their area and scope of expertise, with frequent humanitarian assistance; however, these organisations may have not even identified as NGOs.
Although the international community acknowledged the potential of Syrian organisations, the protraction of the crisis and declining support made it increasingly difficult for Syrian organisations to sustain (Dixon et al., 2016; 2017). The following section identified major challenges for their operations.

3.2.1. Operational Challenges of the Local Response

Alzoubi (2015) identified four major challenges for Syrian NGOs:
Firstly, due to their considerable new establishment in response to the crisis, she argued that organisations had little organisational experience in terms of professional training, including essential expertise in finance, human resources, and supply chain management. Secondly, they faced legal constraints because they could not register in Syria. Instead, they had to register in Europe, the U.S., Canada, or neighbouring countries, which required knowledge of these countries' legal frameworks. Financial transactions, including simple money transfers, were complicated due to the sanctions imposed on Syria. As a result, many organisations were forced to change their names and remove the word "Syria" from their titles. Thirdly, these organisations had little knowledge of the role and nature of civil society and the importance of remaining unbiased towards any political group. Many had firm political terminology in their mission statements that contradicted the essential nature of civil society. This, at times, led many of these organisations to play a harmful political role. Fourthly, these organisations had to face a challenging security environment involving negotiating with several extremist groups on both sides. Many organisations failed to negotiate access and service provision terms with these groups, while others lost staff in the ongoing fighting (Alzoubi, 2015).

Since 2012, this has led to increased collaboration and interdependence between local, national, and international humanitarian actors. Scholars argued that this was possibly helped by the fact that pre-conflict Syria was a middle-income country with high levels of education as well as the rapid development of sizeable Syrian diaspora aid groups which were able to financially support the Syrian response (Dixon et al., 2016; Els et al. 2016).

3.2 Access Challenges of the International Response to Syria

Reviews on the literature found that Syria was one of the most challenging places in the world for international humanitarian organisations to deliver aid (Balkhi, 2021; McGoldrick, 2016; Hall and Todman, 2021). Scholars reached a consensus that INGOs working on the response to Syria have been confronted with rising challenges since the beginning of their engagement in 2012, particularly found in access. Humanitarian access was defined as "the ability of humanitarian aid to reach the most vulnerable and for the most vulnerable to reach humanitarian aid" (Kurtzer, 2020). The denial of access was argued to take on forms such as violence and insecurity, administrative obstacles, sanctions, and financial restrictions (Roerpstorff et al., 2020). These barriers to access hindered humanitarians' ability to serve people according to need "in a cost-efficient and principled manner" (Hall and Todman, 2021).

Violence and Insecurity

The Center for Strategic and International Studies found that between 2014 and 2017, more than 660 attacks on aid workers occurred worldwide (Kurtzer, 2020). According to reports, Syria was ranked the deadliest place to be an aid worker in 2020 (CARE, 2020). Kurtzer (2020) remarked that insecurity also affected the infrastructure, which was vital for humanitarian assistance. Roads, highways, and bridges were often the target of political or strategic control through blockades or checkpoints. Even when access was granted, delivering aid cross-borders and cross line was found to cause delays of several days due to checkpoints, roadblocks, and differently controlled areas. It was argued that violence and insecurity posed severe physical and psychological risks to aid workers, restrict movement, and limit access to critical infrastructures like hospitals and schools. Concern was raised that violence and insecurity was one of the most severe concerns of humanitarian access in Syria (Kurtzer, 2020).

Bureaucratic Obstacles

McGoldrick (2016) identified that conflict-affected states applied their own understanding of humanitarian assistance by "restricting it to emergency relief and imposing administrative obstacles to hinder aid to contested parts of the country." For example, the Syrian regime maintained a policy that limited the number of international agencies operating in Syria, only allowing them to work in areas under its control. The regime also refused to authorise aid organisations and agencies planning to cross from Damascus into non-government-controlled territory (Balkhi, 2021). Alternatively, INGOs which aimed to deliver aid to opposition-controlled areas used offices in neighbouring countries as a base for operations: Turkey for the North and West; Iraq for the North East; Lebanon for central parts of the country; and Jordan for south and central areas (Slim and Trombetta, 2014; HPG, 2015; Witthall, 2014).

Daher and Moret (2020) identified three modalities used for the humanitarian response in Syria: regular programming, cross-line aid, and cross-border assistance. However, in these modalities, authors argued, the work of humanitarian organisations was delayed and complicated by bureaucratic hurdles such as increased difficulty in obtaining residence and work permits, travel bans, and extensive bureaucratic requirements for importing materials and relief supplies. The IMPACT Civil Society Research and Development e.V. organisation raised concern that Turkey's deepening authoritarian and repressive atmosphere against Syrian NGOs and the latest financial crisis in Lebanon since October 2019 posed challenges for humanitarian NGOs and INGOs' activities and their financial operations. The consequence led to the closures of some NGOs (Daher and Moret 2020).

Cross-Border and Cross-Line Aid

Doubts were raised by Kurtzer and Todman (2020) that aid was abused as a political tool through the cross-border resolution. In their views, restricting humanitarian agencies' cross-border access to northwest Syria as the country faced the COVID-19 pandemic would be a catastrophe for Syria and the international community. The Syrian government restricted international humanitarian access to opposition-controlled areas of Syria as part of its efforts to regain control of the entire country (Todman, 2020). In response, the UN Security Council adopted measures over recent years to guarantee the supply of humanitarian assistance in areas not controlled by the Syrian government. Several Security Council Resolutions authorised cross-border and cross-line operations with or without the permission of the Syrian government (Kurtzer and Todman, 2020). However, Russia and China vetoed the resolutions to crossings from Jordan and Iraq, thus limiting it to only Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa crossings in Turkey. It was also only renewed for six months instead of one year (Save the Children, 2020). Consensus among scholars was reached that fatal consequences were expected in light of the pandemic and increasing needs.

Three of the four main crossings used by aid agencies in Syria have already been closed. Vector map from: Vecteezy.com

Image 4: A map of open and closed border crossings with Syria and its neighbouring country, as of 2020. For NWS, Bab- al Hawa remains the single open crossing allowing aid from Turkey.
Source: devex, 2020

The literature made critical remarks on the efficiency of the cross-border mechanisms leading to an overall decrease in the number of beneficiaries reached through cross-line deliveries. Daher and Moret (2020) discussed that every action required time-consuming permissions: sending staff to the field, an agency must put in a request, days in advance, listing the names of the travellers, their nationalities, passport numbers and titles, and the licence plate number of every vehicle. Insecurity and increasing pressures on humanitarian actors to work in and across areas of control under different armed groups added to contributing to gaps and delays in humanitarian assistance. The targeting of cross-border supply was seen as another worrying factor in the delivery of aid.

Image 5: A convoy delivering aid was hit by an air strike in the western outskirts of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo on September 20, 2016.
Source: CSIS, 2021

Sanctions

In reviewed academia, the issue of sanctions was found as an influencing factor for the humanitarian response.The United States and other Western states imposed sanctions on Syria and have proscribed several Syrian actors as terrorist groups. Although some Western states included humanitarian exemptions in sanctions and promised to issue additional waivers for humanitarian operations, NGOs had to navigate a complex legal environment to continue operating in many parts of Syria (Roerpstorff et al., 2020; Hall and Todman, 2021).

"The unintended consequences of counter-terrorism national security policies...[raise] the cost for the NGOs that are working humanitarian issues, it's putting them at a risk of liability under the U.S. law" (Feltman, 2020).

Syria was under U.S. sanctions since 1979, after it was placed on a U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism "because of its continuing policies in supporting terrorism, its former occupation of Lebanon, and undermining U.S. and international efforts to stabilize Iraq."

Following the beginning of the Syrian uprising in mid-March 2011, the U.S. and E.U. imposed new sanctions against Syria known as counter-terrorism strategies. In 2019, The Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act was passed, which allowed the U.S. government to punish any government or private entity seen to help the Syrian Government and groups and entities linked to it or contribute to the reconstruction of Syria. The sectoral sanctions targeted various economic sectors such as oil, electricity, information technology, and banking (Daher and Moret, 2020). Scholars agreed that sanctions and counter-terrorism measures considerably impacted humanitarian action (Daher and Moret 2020; Kurtzer 2020). For example, humanitarian actors needed to negotiate or cooperate with non-state armed groups to access the affected area. However, many of these groups were proscribed terrorist organisations. As a result, interactions with them can be sanctioned or prosecuted under counter-terrorism legislation. Literature indicated that this limited scope for principled aid hindered or criminalised humanitarian organisations' work (Roerpstorff et al., 2020).

Financial Restrictions and De-Risking

According to scholars like Daher and Moret (2020), Roerpstorff et al. (2020), Kurtzer (2019), and Hall and Todman (2021), sanctions caused financial restrictions and obstacles which created enduring challenges for NGOs. Obstacles were related to anti-money laundering laws and measures to prevent the financing of terrorism (Daher and Moret 2020; Roerpstorff et al., 2020). This caused banks to implement more risk-averse financial policies, known as "de-risking." For example, to comply with guidelines from counterterrorism regulations, banks took measures that prevented humanitarian organisations from opening bank accounts or transferring money to and in certain countries. A negative consequence laid in the transport of large sums of physical currency to operational areas, which exposed humanitarian organisations to high-security risks. For example, Syria Relief and Development, a U.S.-based Syrian-American organization, had 11 bank accounts closed between 2015 and 2020 due to de-risking and was forced to spend tens of thousands of dollars on legal fees to find a bank (Hall and Todman, 2021). Also, these bureaucratic hurdles sometimes delayed aid programs so long that they are no longer relevant. Local organisations were forced to rely on the hawala system, an informal channel of transferring funds through service providers known as "hawaladars". These networks did not have a clear regulatory basis, and many Western banks were unwilling to work through them (Hall and Todman, 2021).

Another obstacle was the highly complex and constantly evolving regulations which were said to increase the demand of donors to conduct security checks on partner organisations on the ground, contracted partners, suppliers, and aid recipients. Roepstorff et al. (2020) criticised that the screening of aid recipients was challenging to implement and highly problematic in terms of principled aid. Regulations around the existence of different lists of designated terrorist organisations was found to vary according to legislation at the international, regional and domestic levels, which even saw the provision of training or material support as an act of "criminal prosecution." Kurtzer (2019) criticised this fuelled the feelings of uncertainty by organisations in knowing which actions are still legitimate and which ones already violate counterterrorism legislation. As a result, organisations implement stricter restrictions upon themselves than legally necessary".

Literature findings revealed persistent and complex challenges to the effective delivery of aid for the international humanitarian organisations working on the Syrian crisis.

3.4. The Collaborative Response

The following paragraph looks at aspects that shape the collaborative response by INGOs and LNGOs delivering aid to NWS. The most prominent features were found and classified under sub-chapters of partnerships, coordination, and funding. Findings proved that aspects in the collaboration were of social nature (Els et al. 2016) which justified the qualitative research approach.

3.4.1. Partnerships

A vast amount of literature answered to the theme around partnerships in response to the Syrian crisis. Scholars identified that remote management appeared to be the dominant approach in the Syrian case. Research from 2016 found that of 46 organisations interviewed, over half of the Syrian organisations described themselves to be in a remote management arrangement. "Remote management" was characterised by INGOs having chosen to work from neighbouring countries due to security concerns and a lack of access.

By sub-contracting local partners, local organisations were able to implement programming in their say. As a consequence, it was found that the decision-making of partners came at the expense of this. Local actors rarely seemed to have a say in program design, with their input being limited to program implementation (Dixon et al., 2016). Evidence identified further that this type of collaboration led to the deterioration of program quality and increased incidents with aid diversion, manipulation, corruption, and aid used as a political tool (Donini, 2013). Dixon et al. (2016) found that the international community saw local actors as "a risk to be managed rather than an asset to be cultivated." With many local organisations only established in response to the conflict, they were said not to fulfill various requirements or INGO standards. For example, Syrian actors' lack of proper reporting and accountability mechanisms posed significant challenges to donors and INGOs. Consequently, many international organisations and donors mistrusted to support Syrian agencies; their argument was they could not assess whether the aid provided reached the most vulnerable or was diverted due to the Syrian groups' potential political agenda. Syrian actors dismissed such arguments, highlighting that monitoring and demonstrating the delivery of assistance is tough in the conflict-torn Syrian environment. (HPG, 2015; Mechoulan, 2015).

Different sets of requirements by each INGO and donor resulted in added pressure for local partners, which already faced limited resources. From a field study, Dixon et al. (2016) found that Syrian and international organisations felt significant differences in the way each one worked. Many Syrian aid agencies recognised their lack of necessary experience and professional skills required to respond to the general requirements expected by INGOs. On the other hand, it appeared that many international actors often faced difficulties in understanding the Syrian culture and context – a topic this paper will discuss later – thus adapting to it. Further, in terms of general positioning within a potential form of partnership, Syrian organisations pointed out that they wanted more recognition from the wider humanitarian community, as well as the chance to access direct funding, rather than working as "silent implementers for international NGOs" (The New Humanitarian, 2015).

Another aspect discussed by scholars referred to 'capacity building' in the collaborative effort of organisations. It was said that it often remained absent in the subcontracting arrangements. Dixon et al. (2016) voiced that capacity building in the form of training and workshops was limited to the goal of a particular project rather than for a long-term benefit in a sustainable response. The lack of sustainable capacity building presented a major obstacle in the realisation of the full potential of the Syrian response, according to data from Dixon et al. (2016). Subcontracts were seen as one of the root causes for Syrian organisations in reaching equal partnerships (Dixon et al., 2016).

Humanitarian Principles

Scholars argued that the Syrian response posed challenges for agencies to ensure humanitarian principles. "The humanitarian space in Syria is a product of the dynamic interaction between the competing interests and objectives of various politicised actors" (MSF, 2015; Slim & Trombetta, 2014; HPG, 2015). International actors faced a dilemma: on the one hand, to deliver assistance inside Syria, it was necessary to work with local groups; on the other, this complexity discouraged the collaboration. By choosing to work with actors in the opposition-controlled area northwest, international actors feared that the situation was not transparent enough in identifying trustworthy and capable actors who ensured humanitarian principles (Dixon et al., 2016). Problems with this mindset for donors on local actors persisted, leading to issues of trust, scepticism and strict compliances in the partnerships. On the other hand, Sovoda and Pantuliano (2015) identified that the formal humanitarian system similarly had differing mandates and was not immune from the same criticism. Numerous examples from other contexts showed that international humanitarian agencies struggled with the question of principled humanitarian action.

Culture and Context

In academia, issues of trust and language appeared as a significant factor in the collaboration between Syrian actors and INGOs. A general frustration was found to characterise the attitudes of many Syrian actors toward the inability of the international system to provide a better response to the crisis (Mechoulan, 2015). This frustration was seen as a tone of mistrust, as Syrian actors felt the crisis and its humanitarian response were neglected by the West and, by extension, INGOs. Trust issues were also particularly visible in the reluctance to share information from Syrian and international agencies. The language was seen as another significant obstacle to better collaboration between international and Syrian groups. As the primary language of INGOs was English, Syrian organisations with staff members who speak English were at an advantage for receiving assistance from INGOs. However, this excluded staff and organisations that were in closer proximity to the crisis who did not speak the required business English (HPG, 2015). By that same token, without Arabic-speaking staff with knowledge of the local culture, INGOs risked overlooking the population's priorities and even the opinions of their Syrian counterparts (Mechoulan, 2015).

3.4.2. Coordination

In the joint Syrian response, frequent discussions by scholars arose in aspects that shaped the coordination of the humanitarian response. Due to the activated cross-border operations from Turkey into NWS, Syrian organisations were highly active across sectorial clusters and had access to international funds through the Humanitarian Pooled Fund (HPF) by UNOCHA. Registered LNGOs in UNOCHA were eligible to apply for this fund. It was described as a key to the localisation framework and to to avoid duplication of effort. However, main challenges for local actors to access these funds, remained such as the absence of the banking system in NWS, which made LNGOs reliant on the Hawalah system, as described earlier.

Another main challenge was related to the ambiguity of the Turkish government legislations in relation to the use of the above-mentioned system, as there was no previous legalisation in place in relation to such system for money transfer to cover cross-border activities. While the Turkish government was trying to develop a legalisation to balance between the urgent needs to transfer money for the operations inside Syria and the need to fully control the money movement across the border, most cases related to this issue were discussed through unofficial channels between NGOs and the Turkish government. Even though the goal was to strengthen partnerships with local and international non-governmental organisations in the coordination,the HPF amounted to only 6% of all funding allocated to the Turkey cross-border response in 2016 (Duclos et al., 2019; Dixon et al., 2016).

Moreover, Syrian NGOs did not have exclusive access to this fund. INGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and UN agencies were also eligible to receive funding from the HPF. Up until 2015, approximately 63% of the total number of projects financed by the Turkey HPF were Syrian owned, yet these projects received less than half of the available funding. Another distinct aspect in the coordination by INGOs and LNGOs was the absence of leadership roles, although for instance, in the health cluster, they constituted 80% of membership (Dixon et al., 2016). A reason for the lack of leadership and responsibilities was attributed to the fact that local actors were generally not effectively represented in governance mechanisms of the humanitarian system such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (Dixon et al., 2016).

3.4.3. Funding

A large part of the review on the study case constituted findings around the theme of funding in the collaborative effort. The way funding operated between local and international organisations was found to profoundly affect the relationship of the humanitarian response in terms of ownership, and sustainability (Dixon et al. 2016). Els et al. (2016), in their publication "Funding to Syrian Humanitarian Actors. Between sub-contracting and partnership" found that more than 70% of the overall funding to the Syrian cause came from just five large donors: the US, the Kuwaiti-based International Islamic Charity Organisation, the European Commission, the UK, and Germany. Five UN agencies were reported to have received 50% of the known humanitarian assistance to Syria in 2014. The overreliance on unilateral funding increased the dependency and posed a critical factor to equal relationships (Els et al., 2016) Data from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) in 2020 found that the main donors didn't change much. The below pie chart grasped a picture of the funding by main host governments to the Syrian Arab Republic in 2020 (FTS, 2021).
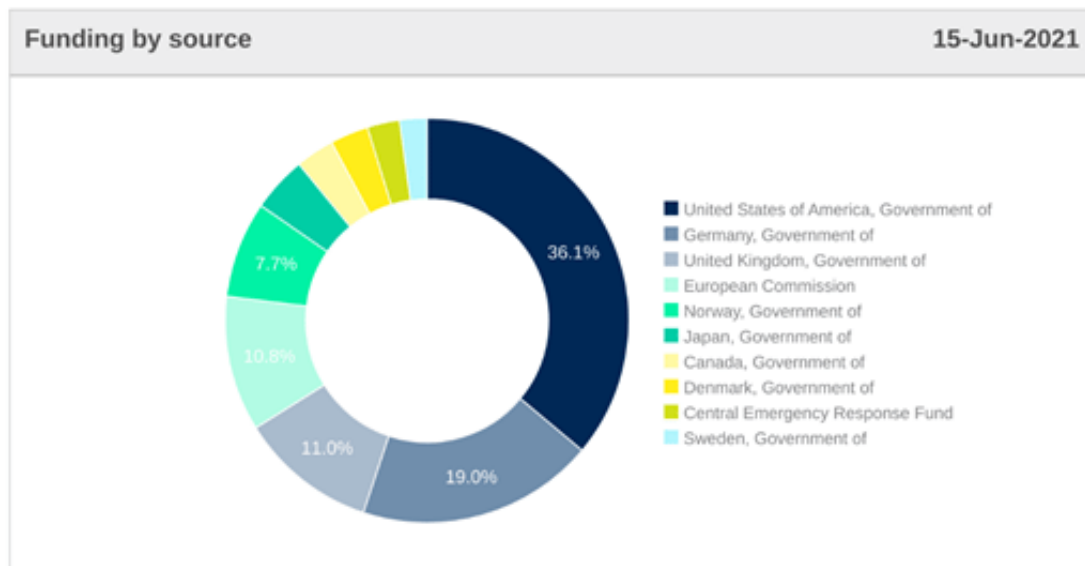
Image 6: Top 5 sources of funding to the Syrian crisis in 2020 by country including the US, Germany, UK and the EC Source: FTS, 2021

Yet while Syrian humanitarian actors were responsible for delivering 75% of the humanitarian assistance in 2014, they received only 0.3% of the direct- and 9.3% of the indirect cash funding available for the overall Syria response, according to the research by Els et al. (2016). Similarly, from an interview by Hall and Todman (2021), a Syrian NGO worker noted: "Syrian NGOs and local governance structures received only 0.7 percent of direct funding in the 2018 Syria Regional Resilience and Response Plan, despite their large and growing role in delivering and implementing aid programs." Although at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, donors promised to increase funding to local organisations with funding through the United Nations' Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF), which had a positive impact on their roles and their credibility as a partner of the UN, no significant changes occurred regarding increased direct funding. The little direct support for Syrian NGOs undermined the efficiency and efficacy of the aid response in various ways (Hall and Todman 2021). Another critical remark was seen in the way funding was channelled. Because UN agencies or international NGOs (INGOs) acted as middlemen for most of the funds they receive, more money was spent on administrative costs, or so-called "overhead costs" (Hall and Todman, 2021).

In addition, from the publication, Els et al. (2016) argued that while international actors were committed to transparency, 30% of the known funding remained unknown which humanitarian actor received the funding. The image below shows the complex pattern of humanitarian actors and funding flows for the Turkey-Syria cross-border responses in 2015/6. As Els et al. stated (2016): "Syrian actors (diaspora groups, larger Syrian NGOs and CBOs) remain, however, the main implementers." Adding the problem of the global declining support in humanitarian funding, the United Nations' annual appeals were consistently underfunded (Hall and Todman, 2021). In 2020, almost half of the appeal requirements were not met by the international aid community (FTS, 2020).
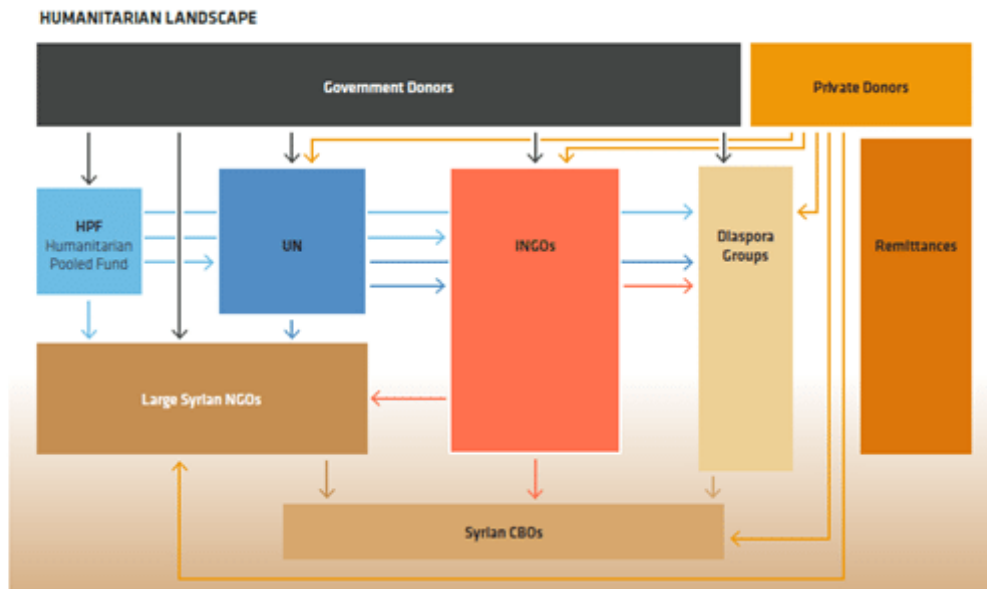
Image 7: Funding flows through the Turkey- Syria cross-border responses in 2015/16. A complex pattern of humanitarian actors and funding flow between them has emerged. Syrian actors (diaspora groups, larger Syrian NGOs and CBOs) remained, however, the main implementers. INGOs and UN organisations as "funding intermediaries".
Source: Els et al., 2016

Apart from direct and indirect funding sources, a way for Syrian NGOs to receive funding was described as diversified funding sources. The paper from Bals et al. (2016) highlighted that significant financial contribution were from private remittances and assistance from diaspora groups. Although specific numbers were not identified, the level of support was seen as a significant influence for Syrian organisations at the beginning of the crisis from 2011-2012. However, this was found to have had decreasing impact over time (Els et al. 2016). In addition, Barnett and Walker (2016), in "Regime change for humanitarian aid. How to make aid more accountable?" talked about a rising trend of donors which were outside the OECD members, such as China, India, and various Gulf States which are mainly outside the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Barnett and Walker, 2016).

In the process of finding common ground that local actors should have a leadership role and more decision-making power, these reflections found expression in the localisation argument (Bonis-Charancle, Vielajus, 2020). With the momentum created by the pandemic and the necessity to (re-) assess the role and contribution of local actors in the collaborative effort, a central and reoccurring concept in international debate refers to "aid localisation". To get a comprehensive picture of what localisation explicitly means, the second part of this chapter looked at the term, its origin and benchmarks to allow for further analysis.

3.5. Aid Localisation

The following sequence looked at aspects that defined the discussions around aid localisation. From literature review, majorly shaped by voices of Van Brabant and Patel (2017), Adam (2015), and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (2019), roots of the concept in the Grand Bargain were identified, along with its objective(s), its approach, dimensions that measure localisation and ambiguities that exist around the idea.

The idea of localisation has been in international debate for over 20 years, framed as 'strengthening local capacities, 'working in solidarity', or establishing 'partnerships with local organisations'. Since then, many different definitions have existed around the concept, which triggered much confusion and debate among the international community (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017; Bonis-Charancle, Vielajus, 2020).
With COVID-19, localisation re-gained significant attention, providing space to focus on the roles of local actors, provoked by enforced mobility restrictions and global lockdowns, and online communication (Bonis-Charancle, Vielajus, 2020).

Localisation Committments in the Grand Bargain
While there were many different ideas of what localisation explicitly meant, this research oriented on the latest official reference found in the Grand Bargain document (IFRC, 2017). The Grand Bargain, established at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, is an agreement between more than 30 of the biggest global donors and aid providers. The agreement aimed to improve humanitarian action's effectiveness and efficiency, notably emerging from the concern over a financing gap between rapidly growing humanitarian needs and a slower increase in available humanitarian funding (IFRC, 2017). At the same time, more self-criticism was voiced towards the Western-centric and traditional humanitarian system (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017).

Among nine workstreams, 51 commitments were set out in which workstream two addresses "More support and funding tools to local and national responders" (ICVA, 2021). Popularly, this was referred to as "localisation" in which Grand Bargain Signatories were committed to making principled humanitarian action "as local as possible" and "as international as necessary." It was recognised that international humanitarian actors played a vital role, particularly in situations of armed conflict (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017).

The graphic below illustrates the Grand Bargain signatories, which made localisation-focussed commitments in four main areas: Partnerships, Capacity Strengthening, Coordination and Financing. A detailed explanation of each theme along with indicators can be found in the appendix. These were crucial for the design of the research.

Image 8: A graphic of the Grand Bargain's Localisation Committments among 4 key areas
Source: IFRC, 2021

3.5.1. Ambiguities around localisation

In this section, two central ambiguities or challenges associated with the concept of localisation are presented. They refer to defining the local and the different interpretations of localisation.

Defining the Local
According to Barakat and Milton (2020), humanitarian action operated with a binary division between "the local" and the "international" which was reductive and gave rise to "analytical blind spots" (Roepstorff, 2019). In Syria, for example, many Syrian-led organisations must register in other countries to operate and often also work in neighbouring countries. It was said: "What do we mean (and what do international humanitarian actors and the rest of the international community mean) when we say an organisation is 'local'? Because some 'local actors' in practice may have quite complex transnational organisational and regulatory frameworks so they can do their work." Furthermore, the label of "international" was usually applied to Northern actors, yet, especially in the "Arab world," in which regional powers such as United Arab Emirates and Qatar played a significant role in all forms of conflict response, the definitions of regional and international interveners were blurred. Many "local actors," including experts and staff from capital cities or distant areas of a conflict-affected country, may be viewed as just as much of an outsider as international staff by residents of conflict-affected locals (Barakat and Milton,2020). Van Brabant and Patel (2017) empahsised another ambigiuity which referred to the slogan "as directly as possible". The authors remarked the unclarity to whom the slogan applied and thus who classified who is a local actor. This also raised the question about the agency deciding and assessing the progress of localisation, if there were 'southern' NGOs working regionally or more widely, and the original international ones from OECD DAC countries (Adam, 2016).

Interpretation of Localisation

Another contested point remained around the objective of localisation which could lead to different outcomes. Under a "decentralisation" interpretation, the focus is on the 'centralisation' problem and acknowledged the need to try and be more cost-effective. Under this interpretation, 'localisation' can be achieved if strategic, operational, and financial decisions were made close to at-risk or affected areas, and if 25% of financial resources went 'as directly as possible' to local actors in proximity to the crisis area, irrespective of who they are. In that interpretation, more direct funding of the nationally registered offices of international agencies and the national affiliates of international alliances counted as contributions to the 25% objective. This interpretation took a more technical-operational perspective. Van Brabant and Patel argue that a possible outcome may be that localisation as "decentralisation" could become a powerful incentive for international agencies to pursue more comprehensive registration of their national offices in different countries, or for the accelerate multi-nationalisation of international NGOs, through alliances and federated structures (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017).

If the focus was on a "transformation" interpretation, localisation saw success in much stronger national capacities and leadership. Now, strategic, operational, and financial decisions were made by 'national' actors (governmental and non-governmental) in support of which 25% of the available international resources went directly to them. Proponents of this interpretation took a broader historical and systemic view. They argued that the 'domineering' presence and attitudes of international agencies were crucial obstacles to national leadership and building strong and sustained national capacities. Under this scenario, Van Brabant and Patel (2017) argued, crises were managed by the government authorities, who control the relief funding. They direct where their national and local non-governmental relief providers must work and determine the space, location, and sector of work of the supporting international agencies, which could pose a threat to principled humanitarian action (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017).

While both interpretations are very complex, the researcher decided to not adopt any but rather focus on puncutal issues and challenges found in the social interactions between international and local actors that were most relevant to to provide practical recommendations to involved stakeholders.

3.5.2. Measuring Localisation

In an attempt to address ambiguities and challenges, primarily around the definition around the concept, the Global Mentoring Initiative developed a framework with 'seven dimensions of localisation' during its work with the START Fund of the START Network. One of the key elements was to break down what localisation meant to NGOs by identifying seven distinct dimensions of localisation, derived from analysis of the Grand Bargain and other sources (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017).

The seven dimensions and its commitments are displayed on the next page.
Combined with the four localisation committments from the Grand Bargain document, the dimensions of partnerships, coordination and funding served as a way for analysis for this research. Indicators for assessing localisation in this study case were adapted and find furhter explanation in chapter 5, Methodology.

Image 9: The Seven Dimensions Framework for Localisation- The Start Network (James, 2017)

- **Funding:** The commitment to ensure that at least 25% of internationally raised funding reaches national and local actors 'as directly as possible'. For local actors, it is as much the quality of funding that is important (flexible, covering core costs, maintaining cash flow etc.) as it is the quantity. For INGOs, too this holds true. Furthermore, in middle- income countries, NNGOs are also looking to increased domestic fundraising.
- **Partnerships:** More genuine and equitable partnerships, and less sub-contracting.
- **Capacity:** More effective support for strong and sustainable institutional capacities, and less undermining of those capacities by international actors (e.g. funding direct project costs only; hiring away the best staff of national actors for their surge capacity);
- **Participation Revolution:** Fuller and more influential involvement of crisis-affected people in what relief is provided to them, and how.
- **Coordination Mechanisms:** More presence and influence of national governmental and non-governmental actors in 'coordination' mechanisms such as clusters (Grand Bargain 2016:5).
- **Visibility:** Greater public recognition and visibility for the role, effort, contribution, innovation and achievements of local actors.
- **Policy Influence:** Increased presence of national actors in international policy discussions and a greater accounting of their views and proposals.

Source: Van Brabant and Patel, 2017

3.6. Conclusion

The first part of this chapter reviewed background information on the study case. Precisely, scholars pointed to the challenging environment in (northwest) Syria in which aid actors operated. The review of the ten-years long conflict fought against international humanitarian law produced a fragmented landscape with multiple states- and non-state parties. Failing political negotiations and ongoing escalations of violence led to a devastating humanitarian situation with the rising scale of needs for millions of people (McGoldrick, 2016; BBC, 2021)

The inital Syrian response saw a limited 'NGO culture' in Syria before the conflict. With protraction of the crisis, the humanitarian sector evidenced a substantial and rapid growth in the sector which gave birth to a high number of professionalised local NGOs, yet facing major obstacles, mainly in access and funding (Alzoubi, 2015). Simultaneously, the international response to Syria, as a product of the complex political context, resulted in access challenges for the international response: violence and insecurity dominated the picture of an unpredictable aid environment. Bureaucratic obstacles, cross-border resolutions with unknown time and modality of operations, international sanctions with significant economic impact, and financial restrictions determine challenges and overall characterised the aid environment (Hall and Todman, 2021; Kurtzer, 2019) This led to shrinking humanitarian space and brought out increasing interactions with locals in the delivery of aid has which has become the prevalent case to continue delivering support. Aspects which provoked discussions among scholars in the social interactions of organisations were characterised by partnerships, the culture and context, humanitarian principles, coordination and funding (Dixon et al, 2016; Els et. al, 2016)

The second part of this chapter gave an understanding and a rationale to the concept of localisation. It identified its origins and 4 main commitments embedded in the Grand Bargain. Ongoing recognition and relevance of localisation led to the development of "7 Dimensions of Localisation" which were communicated in seven key areas (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017).
Overall, findings pointed to most discussed and challenging aspects in partnerships, coordination and funding, likewise committments to ensure more effective aid were made in these areas in the GB document.

With COVID-19 and its unknown consequences for the delivery of aid for aid actors in NWS, the researcher identified a knowledge gap on this matter. It needs to be understood what impact COVID-19 had on the delivery of aid and the social interactions of the community in the context of localisation. The need to triangulate findings from previous desk-based findings to assess their validity presents another factor for conducting further research. Qualitative content analysis was sought as a way to address the aim done through semi-structured interviews with humanitarian practitioners from the field. The process of reaching these findings is explained in the methodological part in the next chapter.

METHODOLOGY
Chapter 4

The chapter indicates how the research was structured and which methods were used to answer the research- and sub-research questions. The paragraph further details how data was analysed and processed. Lastly, research reflections in the form of scientific data, ethical considerations, and research limitations were considered.

4.1. Research Approach

The research focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of humanitarian aid for international and Syrian organisations active in response to Northwest Syria, and on arising opportunities and challenges for the localisation agenda.

The research was approached in two distinct ways: part one consisted of an analysis of secondary sources. Secondary sources were investigated through desk-based research on concepts and terms, (as identified in the conceptual framework in chapter 2.5.) as deemed relevant to ensure a thorough understanding of the topic and identify knowledge gaps that demanded further investigation.

To triangulate literature findings and collect further information on the impact of COVID-19 on the study area, primary data was collected. Given the social nature of this topic in finding out about organisations' relationships, it was of great concern to uncover the experiences, the perspectives, and the underlying meaning of involved persons. For this aim, a qualitative methodology for collecting primary data was found most suitable to extract meaning on subjective experiences, words and intentions, and understanding concepts (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Primary data in the form of interview observations and the inclusion of a key- informant- was used to cross-check for consistency and build confidence in the resulting conclusions. Furthermore, it benefitted the research in the way that more profound and in-depth findings were given. Thus, this study gained more relevance and credibility (Seale, 2008). The explicit way of how data was collected is explained in the next part.

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1. Desk-based Study

An essential aspect of the methodology was the review of the literature of the desk-based study. The purpose was to understand relevant concepts and terms of the case study.

Literature Review on the International and Local Responses to NWS
Although the research focused on the social interactions between organisations at a micro-level, shaping factors that determined their aid environment at a macro-and meso level that provoked their response to the emergency in northwest Syria needed to be understood. The development of the Syrian crisis served as the base. From there, crucial factors that shaped the local and internatinon responses were identified. Arising challenges explained the interdependecy and evolving collaboration of organisations.

In reviewing aspects that shaped their collaboration, three main themes appeared that were most discussed and appeared with highest relevance in the literature. They addressed partnerships, coordination and funding.

Literature Review on Aid Localisation

Since the final objective existed in finding out challenges and opportunties for aid localisation, arising from the pandemic, the concept needed to be understood. Since definitons were diverse and contested among scholars, the researcher used the latest official reference, the Grand Bargain document, describing localisation committments among 4 themes, partnerships, capacity building, coordination and financing as a point for reference for this study.

Choice for Sub- Research Questions

To define the impact of the pandemic on the deliery of aid for agencies in NWS, the researcher sought most challenging aspects in their pre- COVID-19 responses as most expressive for the aim of research. To make a final analysis, a comparison with most challenging aspects in the delivery during the pandemic served as SRQ1.

SRQ2-4 were to investigate the social interactions which were found most distinct in aspects of partnerships, coordination and funding. While the assessment of localisation was a second focus of this paper, the localisation committments, as described in the GB document, were chosen as a marker to assess progress. To analyse findings, the researcher sought to compare the "real state" desk-based analysis and qualitative content analysis versus the "ideal state", deriving from the concept of localisation in the GB and the Seven Dimensions of Localisation, as found in the literature review.

4.2.2. Semi-structured Interviews

The interactions between international and local organisations and the unknown impact of COVID-19 represented the need to conduct primary research. One of the most commonly used methods in gaining qualitative data about respondents' experiences, feelings, and perceptions is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were an essential and flexible method within this research. Facing the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent travel restrictions that prevented the researcher from traveling to the research location and conducting in-person interviews, nine interviews were the maximum reached during the primary data collection phase. Another limiting aspect of getting in contact with respondents was the negation or non-response of mainly international targeted participants. They declined the request referring to legal matters in sharing information. This will be taken into consideration at the discussion. In contrast, roughly 90% of contacted local organisations were happy to participate in this research.

Sampling

In choosing respondents for interviews, the technique of purposive sampling was applied. The main objective of a purposive sample was to produce a sample that could be logically assumed to be representative of the population (Lavrakas, 2008). The main advantages of the strategic sampling were identified in the cost and time effectiveness. Another aspect was exploring anthropological situations where the discovery of meaning could benefit from an intuitive approach (Dudovskiy, no date).

To locate appropriate respondents, the researcher used both, existing contacts and opportunistic emails. Contacts were mainly approached through the commissioner's network. Additional candidates derived from previous google searches to identify networks and individual organisations of interest for this study. Consequently, platforms, such as the Syrian NGO Alliance (SNA) and the NGO Directory of Syria, were sought and used to detect organisations. The snowballing technique was also used, so participants could propose further respondents (Bryman, 2012:183,419,424). Respondents were selected based on their role at an international or local NGO active to the response in Northwest Syria. Possible candidates were contacted with more detailed information, including a briefing of the research objective, background and method, and a disclaimer of anonymity. Later on, another key informant (KI) was added to the sample size, reached through the supervisors' contact at VHL. On the one hand, the purpose served for triangulation purposes, and on the other hand, to acquire further information about respondents' answers. The KI's response mainly supported the discussion in chapter 7 and will occasionally be used as a reference in the findings if found to support the analysis.

Research Tools

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the country context, interviews were exclusively conducted over a Skype video call or, with one exception, over a What's App phone call. The video call held the advantage of creating trust among the researcher and the interviewee. The researcher also sought to make observations on attached emotions, such as frustration, sadness, anxiety. These observations had a significant impact on the data analysis part, in which the researcher put more emphasis on evaluating these answers. Conversations were typically between 60-80 minutes long. The heavy data from the interviews was collected by the App "VoiceRecorder", for which the audio was transcribed manually at a later time. The interviewees confirmed an interview date shortly within a few days of receiving the inquiry.

Interview Questionnaire

For the development of the interview questions, the conceptual framework served as the base. The four sub-research questions aimed at answering the two main research questions. They were used as the main source. To avoid bias, sub-research question 1 aimed at catching general feelings and perceptions about general challenges and modes of operations before and during the pandemic, first before diving into the three chosen themes aimed at identifying aspects of the mutual collaboration, as part of the localisation argument. While the conceptual framework derived from the literature review identified main aspects of each relevant theme, interview questions, however needed to cover each theme more in-depth to be able to serve as an indicator for conducting qualitative content analysis. Therefore, the framework of "Seven Dimensions of Localisation "and subsequent indicators as reviewed under chapter 3.5.2, were used to establish interview questions, concentrating on the three most crucial aspects found among partnerships, coordination and funding. A more detailed version of the three selected dimensions, including their indicators can be reviewed in the apendix along with further readings. The interview questionnaire can as well be found in the appendix.

Structure of the Interviews

The structure of interviews began with an introduction of participants, followed by contrasting their experience on the delivery of aid prior and during COVID-19, moving onto observations or experiences of selected themes, and then moving onto a discussion on aid localisation. Follow-up questions were posed when appropriate or when answers needed further clarification, though it was up to the respondent's own experiences and comfort to discuss and guide the flow of conversation. Different types of questions were more suitable for different actors according to their position within an international or local organisation, so it was up to the researcher's discretion to adapt the questions matching the context. The role of the interviewer was thus designed to be a facilitator, listener, and reflector able to tap into complex viewpoints and the data that was most relevant or interesting (Tracy, 2013:133,139; Checkland, 1999). Finally, "catch-all" questions were asked to provide a comprehensive answer to the entire topic. (Tracy, 2013). The questions were intended to be flexible prompts to stimulate organic discussion, not dictate it, with the conversation adaptive to the interviewee (Seale 2008:418; Bryman 2012:208, 245, 468). Questions were made up of a neutral tone to avoid leading the respondent's answers. Additional to the tone, questions were posed in a rather general way, for example, asking for challenges and opportunities of the delivery of aid to receive answers in an unbiased manner.

Regarding the position of interviewees at their organisation, a decent range of fields of expertise can be noted which corresponded to the area of investigation. It should be added that approximately half of the respondents had a strong focus on the health sector, which may have influenced the analysis, however, in light of the pandemic, this seemed applicable to answer the research questions in relation to the health crisis of COVID-19. The years of experience among interviewees at their organisation ranged from 1-4 years, with a majority of 1-2 years of experience. Since the researcher did not see any restrictions or the inability to answer the interview questions, this was not further detailed in the analysis course.

4.3. Data Analysis

The information obtained from the primary research provided the way of triangulating findings from secondary sources. The main way of extracting meaning from secondary sources was through content analysis of literature based findings. The previously drawn conceptual framework served as a base. Most relevant information which related to the concepts and terms was portrayed and concluded in chapter 3.6.

The main form of extracting meaning from the interview data was through qualitative content analysis. The type of qualitative data analysis used in this study was content analysis. It referred to the categorisation, tagging, and thematic analysis of qualitative data (Brysiewiczb and Erlingssona, 2017).

This included combining the results of the analysis with behavioural data for deeper insights. At the initial step, all interviews were transcribed. To analyse the heavy data set (80 pages of transcripts), the researcher chose to systematise and label the data manually. Coding was selected as a tool to interpret and analyse responses accurately. By assigning codes to words and phrases in each reaction, it captured what the answer was about, which, in turn, helped to better analyse and summarise the results of the overall responses. Thus, the researcher could quantify common themes and make data-driven decisions based on the responses. The researcher coded the text using words from the interviews, themes emergent, and the selected themes prior to the data collection (e.g. decision-making power, local leadership) and interpreted observations or feelings, such as satisfaction, concern of fear. Previously defined categories can be reviewed in the appendix "interview questionnare"

The secondary data gathered from the desk-based study was then utilised and triangualted against the results of the primary research, and vice-versa, to evidence where the theoretical discourse and the practice find common ground, where compromises have been made or need to be made, and where actions can be adapted to the context. This process drew the chapters of the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations, derived from data analysis of this research.

4.4. Scientific Quality

Scientific quality was ensured in this study in several ways. First and foremost, it aimed to achieve sincerity by self-reflective the researcher's values, biases, hypotheses, and limitations while being transparent about the method, data, and limitations (Tracy, 2013). The methodology itself was designed to be repeatable to any and yield a similar format of results. Each interviewee was briefed and interviewed roughly the same way, emphasizing certain topics if experience or conversation led (ibid: 231-232).

4.5. Triangulation

Triangulation was used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings (Heale and Noble, 2019). One way method used was data triangulation. By including sources from multiple people from local and international backgrounds active in different fields and positions in the humanitarian response, data triangulation was used to cross-check results. Another way to validate findings was the use of theory triangulation. This typically involves using professional perspectives from different disciplines to interpret a single set of data/information (Guion, 2002). In this regard, the inclusion of an added key-informant working at a governmental institution served the cause. This held the advantage of cross-checking findings from previous interviews. Another reason was, based on a preliminary drawn conclusion, that underlying structural issues were much more complex and influential on the effect of COVID-19. Using this triangulation method, the researcher investigated these dynamics and found explanations for challenges by interviewing the KI.

4.6. Reflections

4.6.1. Ethical Considerations

The researcher acted under the principle of 'do no harm' for the entire research period. Full disclosure of the research intention and process was given to all interview subjects before they agreed to partake in the study via an introduction over email. All participants were volunteers providing their views and information freely, with consent gained for recording their audio responses. Due to the sensitive nature of some content, anonymity was ensured, with the participants briefed that their contact information would remain private and confidential to the researcher (Seale 2008:115,420; Tracy 2013:242-244). Therefore, this research did not reveal the names of interviewees, it did define them according to their location at the time of the events, as deemed relevant for the interactions and perceptions that might vary according to different positions. Accordingly, a list of interviewees and the key informant was provided. Names of respondents were coded following "R1-R8" and "KI" as for Key Informant. A table reflects this consideration in the following chapter.

4.6.2. Research Limitations

As part of reflections, study limitations are an ethical element of scientific inquiry. It ensures transparency of both the research and the researcher and provides transferability and reproducibility of methods. Presenting limitations also supported proper interpretation and validity of the findings (Ross, 2019). The most important limitations were considered below.

Sample size
The small sample size of 9 people presented a limitation in how it might influence the power of the study. Small sample sizes endanger the ability to generalise research findings and threaten the representativeness of research (Ross, 2019). A reason for the small sample size, equally posing a limitation to reaching more participants, laid in the absence of a field trip to the research location. Security constraints and mobility restrictions with COVID-19 made it challenging to reach a higher number of respondents by physically approaching the target group. Consequently, using an online tool for the interview process limited the establishment of a trustworthy relationship, influencing the outcome of the interviews and interpreting the data adequately. If this research was conducted again, it would benefit from (1) a planned field visit to Turkey to gather further information from Syrian actors face to face and (2) a more comprehensive research strategy which might include, for example, an intersectional study of a wide range of staff at organisations, including donors and (3) an analysis post COVID-19.

Purposive Sampling Method

Another limiting factor of this chosen methodology presented the purposive sampling strategy. Holding the advantage of time and cost-efficiency, however, the strategic sampling method was vulnerable to lower reliability and higher bias by the researcher. Targeting only "local" respondents in Turkey, who were denied access to the northwest, might have decreased the reliability and credibility of results. In addition, contacts were only established with people with fluency in English. The limitation of the researcher's ability to speak Arabic were considered as a disadvantage with an impact on the sampling method. In addition, the lack of contacts inside Northwest Syria increased the chances for bias. Due to the lack of connections, the researcher sought to reach possible participants mainly via google searches. This excluded smaller organisations with fewer resources and less online presence from being contacted by primarily reaching out to potential local candidates included in the Syria Alliance or other representative platforms.

Qualitative Analysis and Coding

Another limitation posed was for careful consideration to be made during the researcher's coding process, for this was where the researcher committed to categorising the data in a certain way, which ran the risk of narrowing thought and shaping the results according to her own bias (Seale 2008:306). One aspect presented the difficulty of coding value judgements. The researcher aimed to overcome this limitation by going through multiple rounds of listening and extracting meaning from the interviews during the coding process. In ranking answers with the highest to lowest frequency, value judgements were carefully placed in the suitable category.

Access to Secondary Sources

Lastly, limited access to data played a role in the selection of documents the researcher made. The researcher's lack of financial resources and limited availability of literature on the university's access may have contributed to bias in choosing sources and obtaining recent information on the study case. Acknowledging this limitation, the researcher included open-ended and follow-up questions during the interviews, which were sought to reduce the bias.

RESULTS
Chapter 5

The following part summarizes the coded and grouped answers of the interviews. Data was organised per by sub-research question. Themes or topics were displayed according to answers from highest to lowest frequency. As information of answers often overlapped, they were suitable for more than one category.

5.1. Respondents

A total of nine (9) interviewees participated in the study. Interviewees were classified by the researcher as Respondents (R) who were currently working on the scene and were able to share directly from their own current field experiences, such as country managers, project officers and coordinators. As mentioned, the KI was added later on to the sampling population because of mentioned reasons.

Reference	Type of Organisation	Location of Interviewee/ Organisation	Sector of Assistance	Position	Gender
R1	Syrian organisation	Gaziantep, Turkey	Health Protection FSL Emergency	Project Manager General Protection	F
R2	Syrian Organisation	Gaziantep	Emergency NFI RTE	Programs Officer	M
R3	International organisation	UK	Protection Livelihoods	Programme Manager for Resilience Department for Whole of Syria	F
R4	Syrian Organisation	NL/Syria	Health	Director	M
R5	Syrian Organisation	Gaziantep	Health Protection FSL Emergency	Health Programs Manager	M
R6	Syrian Organisation	Gaziantep	Primary and Secondary health Nutrition Protection	Head of Programs assisted by the Country Director of Turkey during the interview	M
R7	International Organisation	Netherlands	Health Protection Shelter/NFI Cash WASH Food	Project Manager	M
R8	International Organisation	Amman	Protection Recovery Early Childhood Development	Partnership Coordinator	F
KI	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	NL	Humanitarian Affairs	Policy Officer for Humanitarian Aid	F

Image 10 : Reference table with respondents (R1-R8) and KI interviewed during data collection.

5.2. Most Challenging Aspects for the Delivery of Aid for INGOs and LNGOs prior and during COVID-19 (SRQ1)

5.2.1 Unresolved Needs in NWS

"The level of need, the type of conflict, and the absence of institutions was the biggest challenge before COVID-19. People are just moving and don't know where to go. It's a chronic war." (R7, personal interview, 2020)

The majority of answers reported to the most challenging aspects of the delivery of aid prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 complied with the unresolved needs of the more than 4 million people in NWS, particularly in the area of shelter (R1-R8, personal interviews, 2020). All interview participants linked the incapability of covering needs to the lack of available funding. A main reason was the large displacement of 1mio people to the Northwest between December and February 2019-2020. Additionally, all interviewees took a stand regarding the complexity of the pre-COVID-19 situation in NWS by expressing challenges that IDPs put on already existing needs of host communities in the area. "There are some 271 informal settlements in NWS, most households are outside the camps. They are not just overcrowded but prone to the risk of flooding due to their location in valley areas" (R6, personal interview, 2020). It was brought up that these random camps faced legal issues because IDPs moved to new areas and occupied space in host communities. These legal concerns added to the "whole issue around housing, land, and property" (R3, personal interview, 2020). With additional strains that IDPs put on host communities who were already at capacity, the situation remained an "unresolved issue that is not going to be resolved anytime soon" (R3, personal interview, 2020).

People's loss of resilience, specifically livelihood and income, was correlated with the economic context and the lack of infrastructure. The Syrian economy was in freefall for the last year, which resulted in the devaluation of the currency. Consequently, households' purchasing power decreased while their negative coping strategies increased. It appeared as a vicious circle in which most people, active in the informal sector, were not able to make a living. Respondents mentioned the lack of infrastructure as a concern, particularly in education (R5;6, personal interviews, 2020).

5.2.2. Working in a Constant Emergency

The insecure environment in Syria, marked by armed groups, shelling, and bombing and its unpredictability was picked up by all interviewees who highlighted the danger for humanitarian staff at the front line throughout the whole cycle of the Syrian crisis. A local interviewee referred: "It's very dangerous. We lost eight workers during the bombing at hospitals and airstrikes" (R2, personal interview, 2020). Not only life-endangering challenges but also the ongoing changes of control of the regime and the opposition were mentioned to be an earmark for difficulties in responding to needs. Aid intervention by local groups and restricted access for humanitarian workers resulting in their forceful allocation were by-products of these developments and led to the disruption of aid activities. R2 (personal interview, 2020) explained: "We had a project in the southern countryside of Idlib. Suddenly, the crisis started again, so we lost connection to the beneficiaries".

Another concern for the humanitarian community was raised concerning the UN cross-border resolutions and its uncertainty of extension by June 2021."It has to be renewed every few years, and literally every time that it's up for renewal, there's a lot of worry and fear among organisations" (R8, personal interview, 2020). However, many interviewees acknowledged that the cross-border mechanism was not per se of a particular challenge itself "it just means that it takes longer" (R3 and R4, personal interview, 2020). Also, another interviewee added that the transfer of utility items, medicine, and furniture did not see any changes with COVID-19.

5.2.3. Spike of Needs during COVID-19

Overall, when asked about challenges with COVID-19, all interviewees stated that previous existing needs and challenges were exacerbated with COVID-19. Especially that of health emergency needs. R3 (personal interview, 2020): "Sanitation becomes an issue, the ability to access and buy soap, water, sanitizers. Especially in the camps, there isn't any access to water. That was an issue before, and now it becomes even more critical". Furthermore, all respondents mentioned challenges with COVID-19 "governmental" regulations and restrictions. The following paragraph portrays the nature of COVID-19 measures and its impact on humanitarian services as mentioned by interviewees.

5.2.4. COVID-19 Regulations Changed the Delivery of Aid

On a political level, international staff reported an issue with the delay of COVID-19 regulations taking effect. A cause was seen in the absence of government. Differences in regional approaches were cited. For example, in Northeast Syria, many curfews and restrictions were imposed because there was a de facto administration which was self-regulated. An interviewee responded that going through checkpoints was tough and that all supply chains were affected, which was not the case in the Northwest because there was not one single group controlling the area (R3, personal interview, 2020). The fear of power loss for local groups was seen as another determinant in the challenge with timely COVID-19 regulations. "The Syrian government offered to help in NWS but fearing to lose political ground the de facto ruling groups refused"(R4, personal interview, 2020).
According to interviewees, the issue of priorities with the delayed COVID-19 restrictions also played an important role (R4, personal interview, 2020). It was argued that there were so many other priorities that it took a while for all the restrictions and curfews to come into place because the groups didn't force it as much (R3, personal interview, 2020). The inability to close down markets because of many people depending on daily labour illustrated the severe initial situation of people in NWS. R3 (2020) argued that there was "no luxury of closing things down".

After border closures came into effect in the Northwest, respondents mentioned challenges on the cross-border supply from Syria. Export movement from Turkey was restricted to minimise the exposure to the virus on both sides (R2, personal interview, 2020). However, interestingly, an exacerbated challenge connected to the cross-border supply was not mentioned. It was reasoned by the fact that due to stock barrels, it had a less severe impact. Stocks at the UN were kept for 1-2 months in case of an outbreak of conflict. According to a respondent, this was planned for a year due to the anticipation for the closure of the cross border. That said, it was seen as "an advantage in the light of COVID-19, compared to African countries, where not enough was dispatched" (R4, personal interview, 2020). Another respondent repeated this.

Since governmental regulations came with much delay in NWS, interviewees talked about humanitarian-led efforts rather than "an effort from an external force" (R3, personal interview, 2020). As a result, humanitarian organisations enforced precautionary measures, which resulted in changes in the delivery of aid. All interviewees mentioned that the pandemic led to the adaptation, interruption, or delay of aid delivery.

"Adaptations required the design of contingency plans and Standard Operational Procedures.The staff needed to be trained, beneficiaries needed to understand it. The initial stage of adapting the entire program was really stressful and required so much work. The staff was at risk; it was really challenging. The hours are long, nothing is a straight line" R3, personal interview, 2020

Interruptions occurred for those activities which were not life-saving, such as psychosocial or awareness-raising sessions. This evoked a concerned sentiment among interviewees. Furthermore, COVID-19 measures led to an overall delay of the responsive activities. For the case of distributions, for example, it took longer because fewer people were able to attend, the number of community activities had to be reduced from 20 to 6-8 participants. Social distancing needed to be guaranteed. Instead of mass gatherings, there was door to door distributions. Cleaning and sanitising took additional time and delayed services. Concern was raised that sessions were able to be held outside due to the warm season under umbrellas with potable chairs, but in winter, this was a challenging issue (R1, personal interview, 2020).
Further, locals mentioned that it was hard to reach beneficiaries when doing distributions due to the fear of the spread of the virus. Outreach teams and mobile protection units had challenges because it was hard to control the situation, especially with children. This was brought into connection with the lack of access to information, especially concerning the COVID-19 disease and the lack of access to technology. "There is no news access in NWS, no electricity, information is distributed through the internet but not always available for beneficiaries" (R2, personal interview, 2020).

When digitalising more activities, a challenge was indicated for beneficiaries to do it online, as they needed to have credits which a lot of them couldn't buy. The overall sentiment connected to the delivery of services at the intial start of the pandemic and subsequent measures was related to uncertainty combined with high-stress levels and linked to much workload in changing processes.

5.2.5. Insufficient Health Infrastructure

As all interviewees stated, particularly those working on the health response in the northwest, severe difficulties in the response were linked to the ragged health landscape. Concern was the dominant feeling due to the fear of a rapid increase of COVID-19 cases related to the lack of health capacity. Firstly, the lack of doctors and health staff was seen as a major obstacle. Secondly, with only seven testing places, tracking and reporting of COVID-19 cases were not sufficiently possible. Therefore, the actual number of people infected with COVID-19 was much higher and caused a risk of misinformation. Thirdly, the absence of suitable hospitals was seen as worrying regarding the growing number of cases. R6 (personal interview, 2020): "there are field hospitals with a capacity of 20-30 beds. Some hospitals with a capacity of 70 beds which are considered very big have been the target of airstrikes." Another staff mentioned: "There are no suitable hospitals for COVID-19: most of the hospitals established in governmental buildings have been shifted for this purpose by NGOs, for 15-25 beds" (R5 and R6, personal interviews, 2020). In addition to the insufficient number of hospitals, interviewees expressed concern about the lack of COVID-19 lifesaving equipment like ventilators, oxygen generators. "We have had major challenges in funding and resources from donors in delivering items and hygiene kits, medical devices, ventilators. Upon registration, it took 2-4 months to receive (R5 and 6, personal interviews, 2020). Lastly, the interviewees pointed out that the absence of government made the response really challenging: "there is no health system, WHO and cluster approaches are trying to do the connection between the health systems but the absence of government makes it really hard" (R5 and R6, personal interviews, 2020).

5.2.6. Deteriorating Economy

The stagnating economy was mentioned as a particular hurdle before COVID-19; during COVID-19, interviewees remarked an overall exacerbated economic development which impacted the delivery of aid. Particularly of effect for the humanitarian sector was the impact on the currency fluctuations. And, consequently, the price increase of items the back off of vendors to supply these items. R3: "We sign contracts with vendors. We usually try to sign contracts for price per unit, and now it's been challenging to get vendors to sign the contracts because there is so much fluctuation in the exchange rate. With COVID-19, they only want to sign contracts 1-2 months in advance. They want the contracts signed in USD rather than SYP because it's more stable"(R3, personal interview, 2020). Additionally, in regards to the absence of banking institutions, local humanitarian staff referred to restrictions in terms of fees via the "hawala" money transfer system which made it more difficult to access money (R1, personal interview, 2020).

The following part explores the findings according to the three themes partnerships, coordination, and funding (SRQ2-4) the researcher previously selected.

5.3. Impact of COVID-19 on the Partnerships for INGOs and LNGOs

When asked about the management of their organisations, all international staff indicated to operate through local partners in Northwest Syria. 90% of participants indicated to be in a "partnership agreement."

"It is useful for us to have these partnerships because we are not in the field for too long, compared to international organisations. They strengthen our capacity and enhance our experiences in the humanitarian field." (R5, personal interview, 2020).

The general sentiment about the partnership for international and local staff was connected to satisfaction, relevance, and necessity. While the viewpoint of local interviewees on the partnership was dominated by trust and usefulness: "of course we trust them (INGOs). We have a long term relationship with them. It is a good relationship" (R2, personal interview, 2020), R5 (personal interview, 2020) added: "it's going well, INGOs listen to the needs and listen to the feedback which is coming from donors", the viewpoint of international staff acknowledged the necessity for working with local partners. "Due to the security situation, we can't be on the ground ourselves. We need to work with local partners" (R8, personal interview, 2020).

In decision-making processes, most answers reported to aspects in the project design. In detail, all interviewees described a "participatory process" and that of "equal power" in regards to the project design. "The core ideas come from the fields, how a project is done comes from international organisations" (R7, personal interview, 2020). Higher decision-making power in project designs correlated to the size of the local organisation. "Big Syrian NGOs can send proposals to donors, they have grant programs, they have staff working on proposals with international NGOs, and they also have expats" (R5, personal interview, 2020).

Regarding changes with COVID-19 on the general partnership, respondents highlighted the flexibility of partners, arguing that COVID-19 tested the NGO community and their cooperation. This notably came for amendments in the health sector, for example, in isolation centres or procuring COVID-19 equipment. Answers reflected a "good test for the partners in the Syrian crisis" (R8, personal interview, 2020).

5.3.1. The Custom of Remote Communication

A popular theme corresponded to the communication between partners. Inarguably, most frequent replies to intital changes with COVID-19 were made regarding the impact on communication. Confirmed by all interviewees, any in-person communication disappeared with COVID-19 restrictions and converted into online correspondence. This was particularly the case with meetings, country visits, and recruiting (R2, personal interview, 2020).

The sentiment about the conversion was of divided views. Popular opinions related to a negative sentiment when wanting to understand the situation on the ground and the needs of people. due to restricted field visits, and physical distancing (R7 and R8, personal interviews, 2020). Also, the inability to exchange and hold training in person was seen as a loss. "Normally we bring over 20-30 people from our organisation from various sectors and different fields of expertise to provide training which stopped with COVID-19" (R8, personal interview, 2020). On another note, respondents referred to the custom of remote communication in the Syrian context already prior to COVID-19 which was seen as benefitial. "We were already used to do remote partnering; we already have had regular Skype and Teams conversations with the partners" (R8, personal interview, 2020). On a positive note, interviewees referred to the opportunity of a higher number of participants in online training and meetings, enabling them to conduct meetings with 800 people in a virtual workshop instead of 200 (R1, personal interview, 2020).

5.3.2. Sub-Contracting Partners

In the eyes of locals, a prominent concern in the partnership laid in the donor compliances. As an example, locals stated issues in seeing the relevance of particular criteria imposed by donors and INGOs, which were reported as "very strict" and "sometimes contradicting" (R6 and R7, personal interviews, 2020). For example, criteria in applying for direct funding required to have an EU certificate, which meant to have office and a registration in a European country.This limited options for locals due to financial constraints (R6, personal interview, 2020). Another example appeared around the objectivity and accountability of donors and INGOs. The implementation according to the highest needs seemed influenced, as a local partner expressed:

"We are partnering with (international) organisations in Idleb, but we have a real need in other areas, such as Afrin, but we don't have permission to work there" (R6, personal interview, 2020).

Similarly, a respondent talked about the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) which saw limitations in reaching the most vulnerable. Due to compliances, the DRA was only eligible to reach people in the Damascus area, although needs in NWS were higher. With stricter donor criteria and limited support, the question of "who are the most vulnerable and how do you defined them?" raised by R7 (personal interview, 2020) appeared as a challenge among local respondents.

Addressing this challenge to the KI (personal interview, 2020), it was reported that NGOs and the DRA had the flexibility "to spend money where needs are highest in wherever field they want, for example in WASH, psychosocial support". A the same time the KI confirmed there were limitations.

The reasons why compliances were in this condition was linked to the risk environment that the next theme will address accordingly.

5.3.3. Strict Compliances in a High Risk Environment

Another theme of the partnership dimension reported to the management of risks. Risks, according to international interviewees, were mainly identified with the reporting and monitoring of activities. With Syria as a high-risk country, INGOs had to report on their work with high frequency to provide data on beneficiaries, milestones and outputs. R3 (personal interview, 2020) argued that "partners find it very difficult to comply with these mechanisms" (R3, personal interview, 2020).
An example was given regarding risks at aid distributions:

"Local partners have to have these distribution lists signed by beneficiaries to get verified. So if something goes wrong, for example, if the local council says to beneficiaries you can't get this assistance unless you give me a portion of it, it is very challenging for local staff" (R3, personal interview, 2020).

Due to a "zero-tolerance policy" for fraud and aid diversion, donors launched investigations as soon as there was a suspected incident of fraud. The amount of time and money spent on investigations was a seen as defining parameter. "If local authorities turn up at a distribution and they would take one kit which is worth 20USD, we launch a massive investigation that takes months and costs a lot more than that kit is worth"(Respondent 3, personal interview, 2020). International respondents remarked that this was especially sensitive for NWS because of many cases in the past (R3, personal interview, 2020). The sensitivity for donors with aid diversion was also related to the medial impact. For example, with the death of a British girl during a cash distribution at Al-Khol camp in Northeast Syria, the British news reported, "The British government was providing money to terrorists." This led to the suspension of all of the cash programming in Northeast (R3, personal interview, 2020). When addressing the KI about this issue, it was confirmed that there were challenges with projects that local groups, aligned with terrorist organisations, supported. Therefore, donors decided on very strict compliances.

International organisations agreed that it was a difficult process in working with local partners which went beyond project implementation. It included building local capacities, trying to reduce risks of fraud and aid diversion to additional security challenges. (R3, personal interview, 2020).
With pre-work assessments to identify potential risks and how to mitigate them and trainings over the course of years, it was stated that "partners are more familiar with this" which was an overall positive connotation (R8, personal interview, 2020).

Regarding changes with COVID-19 on risks, a local respondent commented that local actors didn't care so much for the health sector, so there was less aid diversion (R5, personal interview, 2020). On the other hand, R3 (personal interview, 2020) expressed that everything became more unstable, so it was more challenging to monitor. In summary, respondents couldn't make a final statement about an increase of fraud or aid diversion cases yet because it was too early to say.

5.3.4. Accountability to Humanitarian Principles

Another discussion arose around the issue of accountability of humanitarian actors and actions. Regarding the humanitarian principles, all local respondents took a stand, arguing to ensure this mandate because they were bound to do so and help people in need, disregarding their background or their political ideology (R7, personal interview, 2020). Further, international respondents justified that humanitarian action was an independent, neutral, and impartial way which was part of the Code of conduct (R3, personal interview, 2020). This was ensured by delivering training, such as "conflict sensitivity, "do no harm" workshops (R3 and R8, personal interviews, 2020). In another way, donor compliances prohibited any interaction for local organisations with local authorities because there was no relationship. Instead, the UN and the Red Cross had the chance to communicate with these authorities (R3, personal interview, 2020). On the other hand, sceptical voices were raised about the neutrality of local actors. "They don't work in a vacuum, so they can't be completely neutral or independent" (R3, personal interview, 2020). With a need to work with various stakeholders in terms of providing assistance, the challenge for local staff remained in cooperating with authorities while ensuring that aid is based on the highest needs.

"Local partners are within their own communities. They are under so much stress and strain within their own community to provide the assistance. In the assessment area, local partners will have people from their own community phoning them at night. They will ask them directly for assistance. It's hard for them to say no" (R3, personal interview, 2020).

In conclusion, R3 expressed that humanitarian principles were the aspiration and that otherwise, humanitarian services couldn't be held accountable.

5.3.5. Trust Issues

What seemed to be a matter of accountability on the one hand, was expressed as a lack of trust on another. R3 (personal interview, 2020) mentioned in order to mitigate risks, it was a donor compliance to hire a third party monitoring team, which could monitor things rather objectively and helped in sharing risks, yet this was interpreted as "you don't trust us" (R8, personal interview, 2020). In regard to the external monitoring team, another international interviewee responded that there were times where the communication wasn't good enough between the INGO and the local partners because they weren't aware of the fact that the monitoring was happening and subsequently denied access to the health facilities (R8, personal interview, 2020). This led to trust issues.
When asked about the insight in funding records for local partners, international interviewees negated. While R8 (personal interview, 2020) was unsure about the reasons, argued that it was not a particular compliance, another interviewee claimed the missing visibility with avoiding preference and competitiveness between partners "they won't have that information because the amount of money differs from NW to NE for example" (R3 and R7, personal interviews, 2020).

5.3.6. Limited Capacity Building

Many participants reported to the theme of capacity building. According to interviewees, capacity building was the way of providing support in delivering training to mitigate compliance issues and reduce risks (R3, R8, KI personal interviews, 2020). The reason why there was a need for capacity building was seen in the lack of experience of local actors. Regarding the quality of training, local respondents saw the usefulness of training, especially with the beginning of a new project. For the majority, capacity building was connected to a "sharing and learning experience from INGOs due to their global experience" (R5, personal interview, 2020).

On the other hand, all participants mentioned challenges with capacity-building aspects. The problems faced differed from local and international interviewee. On the one hand, locals reported to face challenges with different requirements and policies for various partners although being trained on the same topic. That said, R6 (personal interview, 2020) explained: "We have more than 17 partners. Each partner has its tool and its policy." The concern of internationals was mainly in the lack of funding. The problem laid in the down-priority of donors to fund such activities:

"Whenever I put capacity strengthening in my budget, it's always the first thing to get cut. We rely on in-house capacity to do various training" (R8, personal interview, 2020).

When asked about the percentage of capacity building, it was said that it was much less than 10%. According to interviewees' feedback, this was connected to negative feelings and "a lack of thinking ahead "(R8, personal interview, 2020).

The overall impression on the impact on capacity building with COVID-19 was that this didn't see many changes and that it didn't resolve the issue of lack of funding for training. "In a way, with COVID-19, the fact that were doing most of these trainings online instead of traveling, I guess that saves us money, but its funds for capacity building and capacity development is not there" (R8, personal interview, 2020).

5.4. The Impact of COVID-19 on the Coordination for INGOs and LNGOs (SRQ3)

5.4.1. Absence of Local Leadership Roles

The overall evaluation regarding the coordination was that of "close collaboration between partners and organisations" (R3-R8, personal interviews, 2020) When questioned about the participation in cluster approaches, all local interviewees confirmed to be members of all working groups and task forces in Turkey and NWS. R5 (personal interview, 2020) indicated to facilitate the supply chain for WHO in crossing borders and distributing medicine. Additionally, R5 added to be part of the COVID-19 Taskforce with 15-16 other LNGOs. The general involvement was seen as satisfactory among local interviewees reasoned by holistic "participation in all aspects of meetings and discussion." In addition, daily communication helped in avoiding the duplication of work. Another interviewee talked positively about improved coordination over the last four years. In the beginning, there was a challenge in the duplication of work in some areas, while some areas were not covered at all. Additionally, due to continuous movement interviewees reported challenges in tracking beneficiaries (R5 and R7, personal interviews, 2020). Through daily communication and progress on the coordination level, organisations became more familiar with it. However, when asked about leadership roles in coordination mechanisms, all local interviewees negated.

Overall, the process was described as a "fluid movement" and "a close net response" when comparing pre-COVID-19 with the COVID-19 response (R8, personal interview, 2020). Again, the familiarity of working in a constant emergency helped coordinate the response, especially among local partners. R8 (personal interview, 2020) specified, "I think the clusters have worked really hard. "

5.4.2. Local- Local Cooperation

Regarding local to local cooperation in the coordination of the response, opinions diverged. Some respondents reported about competitive work among local organisations with communication out of necessity (R3-R4 and R7, personal interviews, 2020). This happened for the sake of coordination or because it was good to know regarding funding and donors (R7, personal interview, 2020). Two reasons which were brought up concerned a lack of trust and a stigma around local actors: "People want their own rating system within the societies but they don't even trust their own guys on the ground" (R4, personal interview, 2020). This was explained by a case where a local NGO was leading training, and local employees didn't show up. R8 (personal interview, 2020) reported that over time this has improved, but there was still a stigma that local trainees lack quality.

On the other hand, local interviewees talked about "good communication and collaboration between Syrian NGOs." This was justified with local-local partnerships: "We have a partnership with more than 12 Syrian NGOs which implement little projects in NW of Syria and the "Syrian NGO Alliance which contains 30 of the major Syrian organisations". One interviewee referred: "we are one of the HQ of this alliance so there is a good communication and cooperation with other Syrian NGOs" (R5 and R6, personal interviews, 2020).

Additionally, many local interviewees expressed themselves as members of consortiums, the NGO forum, and the Syria NGO Alliance (SNA). The SNA, as a major platform for communication for NWS, collaborates with SERF and other platforms of international organisations on the advocacy level. The Alliance was said to be supported by EU and in direct contact with OCHA (R6, personal interview, 2020).

Positively connoted was the leading role of the organisations of R5 and R6 (personal interviews, 2020) who reported: "We are the hosting agency of the NGO forum in Gaziantep which is a coalition for many actors which contains more than 60 NGOs including INGOs and NNGOs mainly for advocacy, for discussions with the donor, for policies and standards. " The general objective was a coordination mechanism to connect all of the approaches and to work in parallel with the formal coordination mechanism, OCHA, and cluster mechanisms.

Nonetheless, when asked about participation in international committees such as the IASC, interviewees answered currently not to be part of it, expressing strong interest and the need for the future (R6, personal interview, 2020).

"We need to be part of international conferences that local voices are heard, that ideas are heard, that we can express our interests" (R5, personal interview, 2020).

5.5. The Impact of COVID-19 on the Funding for INGOs and LNGOs

5.5.1. Changes in Funding over Time

"Needs will always be greater than the funding available" (R3, personal interview, 2020).

A dominant part of the discussions related to funding. Questions by the researcher regarding the quantity of funding led to most opposing answers among international and local organisations. After the Grand Bargain financial committments, local partners stated to have received more funding over the last four years, while international staff expressed a decreasing amount of funding. Popular opinions of local staff related to an increase of funding due to more needs, however their statements were closely linked to concerns about funding in the future: "In 2020 we received good funding, but we are worried about 2021 because Western donors are facing problems in their economy themselves. So far, we haven't experienced donor cuts" (R5, personal interview, 2020). In contrast, exceptionally, all international staff reported a decrease in funding over the recent years. In addition, the majority talked about donor fatigue with the Syrian crisis (R3-4 and R8, personal interviews, 2020). R3 (personal interview, 2020) linked it to the lack of coverage in media: "Media and donors lost interest in the Syrian crisis. We are ten years into the crisis. Also the number of other crises have gone up around the world". In addition, compared to the beginning of the crisis, internationals reported to be challenged by stricter standards and quality requirements from donors: "Now when we are in call for proposal processes, we have to design perfect project designs and proposals to get funded" (R8, personal interview, 2020). In this regard, concern was expressed over lost proposals linked to funding gaps for the following year. Furthermore, fear was expressed over organisations "just starting to go for any money," which posed a threat for losing accountability of humanitarian action (R8, personal interview, 2020).

5.5.2. Additional Funding to the COVID-19 Response

With regards to funding, all interviewees stated to have received additional funding to the COVID-19 response, either through "top-ups," "bullet funds," or "pooled funds." Most of it, was in support of shelter, vouchers, and non-food items. However, local interviewees said that most of the funding went to institutional organisations because they had the leading role in the COVID-19 task force in the cluster (R5-R6, personal interviews, 2020). Also, locals reported that there was no direct funding from governmental institutions. The general view by local organisations seemed to be of an acceptable but rather dissatisfying amount (R1-2, personal interviews, 2020). Also, the speed of funding added to the overall sentiment. "Funding from international donors did not receive us rapidly for the response to COVID-19. Therefore, in the beginning, we were dependent on private donors, donations from members, through donation platforms (R2, personal interview, 2020). International partners relegated to programmatic adaptations or have relied on contingency funds rather than an extensive amount of additional funding.

5.5.3. Access to Funding

One big discussion point arose around the access to funding. Exceptionally all local organisations declined to have received direct funding from governmental institutions. This also didn't change with COVID-19. The reasons were linked to donor regulations, as described under the Partnerships dimension. Similarly, interviewees expressed criticism towards time-consuming and inefficient funding due to the nature of layers (R3, personal interview, 2020). R3 gave an example:
"The UK is the grant holder for the resilience program. They take a certain percentage, 2.6%, and pass it onto DIFID, who is the donor. We receive the funding from DIFID and pass it onto our office in Amman to the program manager. R3 (personal interview, 2020) expressed:

 "Every layer was a cost and that it is very time consuming until the funding reaches partners, and beneficiaries respectively" (Respondent 3, personal interview, 2020)

When asked the KI about the cost aspect and funding intermediaries, a cost disadvantage was not confirmed. Instead, the benefits for donors working with international organisations laid in their capacity to check local organisations' reliability (KI, personal interview, 2020). Another advantage of working through international partners lied in the provision of sustainable funding. R8 (personal interview, 2020) expressed: "We are trying to provide sustainable funding. We have had funding with DIFID almost for five years now". As a result, foresighted planning was possible, which enabled organisations to provide multi-year funding to local organisations. The KI (personal interview, 2020) further pointed to the advantage of international organisations taking on the role of a broker between the donor and the partner organisation. Thus, it saved time for donors to identify potential partners while international NGOs could check the reliability and check matching criteria with the donor. The decision of whom to work with also laid in the hands of international organisations. Therefore, a preferred method was to operate through UN pooled funds because it was easier for UN agencies to identify areas of the highest needs. Overall, the KI agreed that funding is going through many layers, and there was a lot of management to do.

5.5.4. (Diversified) Funding Sources

A popular topic among local respondents concurred with the theme, as explored in the literature, diversified funding sources. Most of the local NGOs stated to have access to diversified funding other than through their international partners. Strategies mentioned concerned individual fundraising and joint campaigns, funding from Gulf countries, and diaspora funding. In this regard, interviewees reported challenges relating to laws and regulations of the individual countries and restrictions of their flow of money. "We have had governmental funding from Arab countries, Kuwait and Qatar Foreign Ministries. However, it was easier before 2014 to reach these donors, after that a lot of restrictions on their flow of money, especially for Turkey" (R5-R6, personal interviews, 2020). This will come back as a separate theme for consideration. Talking about the possibility of approaching new donors during the COVID-19 response, all participants referred to no changes in donors by noting that reaching new donors during an emergency was very difficult (R6, personal interview, 2020). The process of identification took up to 3-4 months. Overall, participants seemed worried about future funding. R3 (personal interview, 2020) discussed the challenges with EU/ECHO funding, especially with Brexit and the UK being one of the biggest donors to the Syrian response (R5, personal interview, 2020).

5.6. Opportunities from COVID-19?!

In the discussion about opportunities from COVID-19, the overall sentiment was of reserved attitude. However, some frequent opportunities reported greater awareness for the Syrian cause, which shed light on Syria again (R4, personal interview, 2020). In terms of funding, it was said that the COVID-19 response enhanced the flexibility in funding and likewise put more focus on the overall response. The second most frequent answers appeared around digitalisation and online communication concerning the positive impact on the climate. The ability to work online and remotely was more cost effective as it saved funds for travelling and was also more sustainable, as it will also continue to be prominent in the long run (R8, personal interview, 2020). In terms of developments, interviewees noted an increase in creativity in the delivery of projects. This found expression in doing projects and sessions online, such as in visiting a doctor online. Another interviewee referred to the enhanced health infrastructure in hospitals, medical devices, and the capacity of medical devices (R6, personal interview, 2020). Also, the general collaborative effort saw improvements because a fast response was needed. A very outstanding answer was made by a local respondent, which relates to the opportunity with COVID-19 on localisation.

"Through the pandemic it was proven that Syrian organisations could be at the high level of responsibility to respond on the total health sector in NWS.
Also, they have taken the responsibility of taking the lead of the community engagement at the community level even though there is no government or there is no system
Those organisations deserve the focus of international donors actually on their work (not just in terms of funding) but also at the capacity building of the local organisations to give them more space to have innovation, ideas and implement in this context and have access. People are considered as experts and can work in any field globally" (R6, personal interview, 2020)

This quote will be central to the next largely discussed theme which appeared around localisation.

5.7. The Current State of Localisation

"Especially with a few ministers in several European countries hearing the term, liking it without realising what it is and asking all their staff, where are we on localisation?" (R4, personal interview, 2020)

5.7.1. Issues of Defining Localisation

Generally speaking, the majority of interviewees' opinions coincided with the issue around defining localisation. Initially, it was discussed that there was no agreement on what localisation was (R4 and R7, personal interview). Most respondents related to aspects of direct funding to local organisations and more training and support attributed to the concept. Another remark was made regarding the definition of localisation according to "who are local actors?" and "what is local?" (R4, personal interview, 2020). All interview partners expressed an issue in defining it.

"We have served almost 70.000 people, it's all locally done, but still, we don't qualify for 'local actors' in the European sense" (R4, personal interview, 2020)

This quote represented the issue of defining a local actor. As stated in the Partnership dimension, a reason for local actors to qualify for direct funding and thus, to be considered a "local actor" in the European sense was to have a registration in an EU country (R4, personal interview, 2020).
Also, definitions of local actors were largely dependent on the context and cultures. "In the Arab and Muslim world charity was run by religious institutions, however, in the Christian world, these religious institutions or establishments were said to be linked to terrorism which has an impact on defining who is our local actor and where do we send money to?". According to R4 (personal interview, 2020) the image of an Arab who is Syrian, has a beard, is a Muslim is perceived in a negative way by the Western community and bring the fear of linkage to ISIS. As a result, these stereotypes had an impact on mutual trust. (R4, personal interview, 2020).

By referring to "what is local?" an example referred to the cost calculation of delivering a service to a beneficiary when calculating the bureaucratic expense. According to an interviewee, to establish a local NGO, with their own HR office, their own legal department in the framework of the setup of an international organisation, 1mio Euros was needed, before 1 Euro could be spent on beneficiaries. In comparison, it costed 70ct to send a child to see a doctor if it wasn't done according to international standards. The local interviewee argued:

"I'd rather spend the money in Syria, children, on women, for 1 Euro, than having an office in Turkey and qualify as a local actor in the European sense" (R4, personal interview, 2020).

5.7.2. Contextual Differences

Another challenge appeared in determining a unified approach to localisation considering socio-cultural differences among areas and sectors. It was argued that localisation did not move in the same way for all sectors. For example, for the case of COVID-19, the support in localising aid in the health sector was incomparable with other sectors. R4 (personal interview, 2020) furthered:

"We have to have the local context in mind. What works in Syria would never work in Somalia."
(Respondent 4, personal interview, 2020)

With previous connotation to fragmented Syria, there were major contextual differences: while direct programming for INGOs in Northeast Syria was possible, partnerships, coordination mechanisms and funding aspects looked significantly different (R3, personal interview, 2020). The delay of COVID-19 regulations in NWS due to the absence of government was another factor for contextual differences. Furthe differences within Syria were mentioned in the following paragraphs, such as the 5.7.4. Sustainability of Aid and 5.7.5. the Politicisation of aid.

5.7.3. Power Imbalances

One of the main reasons why aspects of localisation were not implemented was seen in the power dynamics of the humanitarian system. "The international community is putting on things like the GB and starts talking about localisation, but the first thing is the way localisation is done is top-down. It's not localised" (R8, personal interview, 2020). During the interviews, international staff exercised criticism that localisation meant "we are going to empower you" but that this only happened up to a certain level because "if partners are being strengthened too much, they're going to take over our work" (R8, personal interview, 2020). The respondent talked about a division in the sector. According to interviews, some people were in favour of local leadership and decision-making but on the other hand there were people, who "were in the sector for a long time and who "like their jobs in the cushy Amman and they don't want to change anything" (R8, personal interview, 2020).

"Power is the gatekeeper, and this is with the big international NGOs. The closer you are to the field, the more critical you are, so localisation is also romanticised" (R4, personal interview, 2020).

This quote reflected the mainstream opinion. An exemplary case related to the contradicting positions on localisation of the donor community. While funding cuts were experienced due to Brexit, the donor recommended to apply for the UN OCHA funds for Syria. However, the UN OCHA funds were said to be one of the very few funds for local partners to acces directly. The interviewee argued: "Here is DIFID saying we need to localise, if you're not localising were not going to fund you, but since there will be a gap, go ahead and take the money from the local partners. One of the few funds that are encouraging localisation. I think people say one thing, but do another; when it comes to actual money it's a different story "(R8, personal interview, 2020).

5.7.4. Sustainability of Aid

A significant debate appeared around the ability to invest in early- recovery and development aid programs. On the one hand, locals argued: "there must be a focus on development because the Syrian crisis is the only crisis in the world lasting for ten years and still called an emergency" (R5, personal interview, 2020). A second important point was spoken out for the future of Syria. For local organisations to be taken seriously, there needed to be more direct funding to local actors who were the representatives for the re-construction of Syria (R5, personal interview, 2020).

Foresighted thinking and long term investement - this was also connected to fear regarding the potential cancellation of the UN cross-border resolution in July 2021. "How can we proceed with the number of hospitals, money, and projects, if UN agencies' funding supports 50% of the hospitals and primary health care centres in the northwest?" (R6, personal interview, 2020). Local staff argued that the lengthiest project only lasted one year and that it was "difficult to deal with short term projects after such a long time of conflict "(R6, personal interview, 2020). Hopes for the EU and the US investing in long-term projects were expressed, because there were 4 million innocent people that needed support and development in their communities (R4, personal interview, 2020). It was said to be an essential aspect to prepare the communities to have developmental aid because they had been used to the emergency strategy and the hand to mouth life (R6, personal interview, 2020).

On the other hand, internationals argued for reasons why long-term investment in Syria at this moment was difficult to realise. "

You can't talk about Syria as a whole. In NWS, they are still being bombedm they are still in the emergency phase of conflict. Then you have the South, which is now almost entirely taken by governmental Syria but with occasional bombing and localised conflict from opposition groups. Those areas are more likely to benefit from going into that recovery phase" (R8, personal interview, 2020).

When asked the key informant what reasons were for institutional donors not to invest in long-term projects, she pointed out three arguments. Firstly, there were no diplomatic relation with the government. To invest in long-term projects, you needed to have an embassy in the country and work locally with people to see if the projects worked well. Secondly, she indicated: "it's not so much the risk of the country but rather the political attention it gets from the politicians," which determines the kind of funding. Thirdly, the decision lied also with the EU's objective, rather than individual states. However, it was said that some EU donors did more of "humanitarian plus." The key informant further pointed out challenges in the determination around the distinction between humanitarian and development aid aid and gave political reasons for it (KI, personal interview, 2020).

5.7.5.Politicisation of Aid

Political reasons- yet another great discussion arising for challenges in localising aid. In this concern, anti-terrorism regulations and sanctions were addressed, which seemed to be a boundary to access funding. Before 2014, it was said that it was easier to reach donors from Gulf countries who invested more in longer-term projects, such as in the education sector. After 2014, there were many restrictions on their flow of money. (R6, personal interview, 2020). The imposed sanctions, especially by the US and the EU, were said to be used to prolong the conflict and empower certain actors overall (R4, personal interview, 2020).

"It is no longer a revolution, but a proxy war between different countries, regional and international actors, but due to the interventions, the whole population is suffering"
(R4, personal interview, 2020).

Respondents talked about stakeholders using aid as a political tool to keep the power in place and define structural aspects. "The EU is investing in the NWS because they don't want more refugees. The US is putting so many sanctions on Syria and thereby prolonging the conflict and giving leeway for Iran, Hezbollah, Russia. As reported, "One of the causes of instability in the region is that the local community is asking for more power. They demand the localisation of politics but also the localisation of aid, but the call for localisation has gone unheard because it impacts the power position of the US in the region" (R4, personal interview, 2020).

"Localisation in a particular region, if not liked by Americans, won't be possible."
(R4, personal interview, 2020).

Interviewees and the key informant brought up one more critical remark about emergency and development aid. It concerned the issue of competitive agendas at ministries. While the KI (personal interview, 2020) talked about the differences of perspectives with people looking at Syria from a political or from a humanitarian perspective. an interviewee phrased it more drastically.

"There is an issue of separation at governments. The humanitarian department is next door to the stabilisation department. It's literally one door apart. However, they have a completely different agenda and always the political wins" (R4, personal interview, 2020).

The KI argued that countries such as the Netherlands, don't have individual sanctions but through the EU. In her opinion, this had no impact why there was no development work (KI, personal interview, 2020).

5.7.6. Localisation and COVID-19

Some positively connoted answers referred to the general support of the concept "We support localisation which means we try to work through partners as much as possible" (R3 and R8, personal interviews, 2020). R5 (personal interview, 2020) added opportunistic points in "the value of money, access, feedback from the field." All interviewees reached the consensus that COVID-19 created momentum and empowered the idea localisation. Hope was a strong sentiment that it would lead in the right direction. Also, the fact that the UN focussed more on localisation connected to hopeful sentiments. "The UN changed the slogan, to working with local organisations and BBB (building back better) " The UN also supported localisation through UN pooled funds (R8, personal interview, 2020).Participants argued that with the uncertainty of the cross-border resolution, it was seen as inevitable to work closer with local organisations. This was linked to the urgency of localisation with COVID-19: "it meant to come at another time when the global South is more mature and to allow time for the process to unfold on its own, but now there is no escape" (R4, personal interview, 2020).

However, when asked about significant benefits from the pandemic on the progression of localisation, the majority of interviewees expressed criticism. Most answers talked about the opportunity that had shown all the gaps in the system and that it had shed light again on how much risks local actors were exposed to (R3, personal interview, 2020). Worries were that initial programmatic changes would go back to 'business as usual'. Local interviewees remarked that the Grand Bargain commitments failed with achieving less than 20% of the objective of the Grand Bargain and that it needed more focus on these plans (R2 and R5, personal interviews, 2020). Additionally, the Key Informant was rather negative about changes in Syria:

"Syria is not the country where localisation can be piloted because there are no authorities, no governmental relationships, and no embassy." (KI, personal interview, 2020)

DISCUSSION
Chapter 6

This section provides a critical reflection and interpretation of some of the research findings. It is of importance to remark, that only the findings from primary data were discussed which had a previous reference to secondary findings. Those concurred with the first sub-research question of: "What were challenges of the delivery of aid among INGOs and LNGOs prior to COVID-19". As primary findings confirmed the predominance of aspects in themes around partnership, coordination and funding, the discussion also ran along these three dimensions. Findings from the current state of localisation were discussed thereafter.

6.1. Challenges of INGOs and LNGOs Regarding the Delivery of Aid to Northwest Syria before COVID-19

Overall, the data collected from interviewees was fairly comprehensive, both, in literature and from the responders themselves when investigating challenges of INGOs and Syrian NGOs in their delivery of aid before COVID-19 (SRQ1). Since a lack of data was remarked previously around the perspective of local humanitarians, the interviews allowed investigating this cause.

The primary and secondary data results on the challenges prior to COVID-19 presented a homogenous outcome. Unsurprisingly, most common answers regarding perceptions and challenges of the delivery of aid referred to the high amount of unresolved needs (BBC, 2021; Hall and Todman, 2021; personal interviews, 2020). The state of the conflict, its political implications, and the insecure environment have practically not changed for the humanitarian response since the produced and referenced literature (BBC, 2021; Kurtzer 2020; personal interviews, 2020). Shrinking humanitarian space occurred as a matter of restricted access due to interference of non-state groups, high bureaucratic and financial obstacles, security concern for aid workers, and the interrelatedness of politics and humanitarianism, as exemplified by sanctions and the uncertainty of cross-border blurring the lines for principled humanitarian action (CARE, 2020; Daher and Moret 2020; Balkhi, 2021; Roerpstorff et. al, 2020). As primary and secondary data sources produced largely consistent outcomes, a higher credibility supports the presented arguments which helped in drawing a conclusion.

6.2. Aspects of the Partnerships for INGOs and LNGOs before COVID-19

The most amount of produced data corresponded to the theme around partnerships, prior to COVID-19. Results from primary and secondary data overlapped in some parts but differed in significant others. Reasons could be due to the rather artificial distinction between categories made by the researcher, or the rising importance this theme has drawn over the last couple of years. Furthermore, the small sample size and, thus, limited representativeness could be a reason for diverging results. While reviewed literature discussed the prevalent existence of a hierarchical collaboration with INGOs, with local organisations as "silent implementers" and very limited decision-making, findings from interviews gave insight that the overall state of partnerships had a positive character for interviewees. ((Dixon et al, 2016; The New Humanitarian 2015; personal interviews, 2020)

Also, in contrast to academic findings, interviewees from both types of organisations stated to develop projects jointly to ensure program quality, sustainability, and effectiveness while literature findings charactersised it as a single way process (Dixon et al., 2016) Satisfaction of this process was the dominant feeling perceived in this matter, as opposed to unsatisfactory outcomes detected in literature. Another contrasting outcome between literature and primary data lied in the perception of local actors themselves. While data from literature argued that local actors possessed a lack of experience and necessary skills to become equal decision-makers and obtain more power in the response, findings from interviews contrasted these outcomes with many locals demonstrating confidence in their way of work, their skills and their experience with the demand for localisation (Alzoubi, 2015; Respondent 5, personal interview, 2020). In this regard, however, the researcher acknowledged that a difference of 5 years between produced evidence might be the argument behind existing differences.

In identifying harmonized outcomes from both methods, a range of aspects concurred. According to data, the biggest challenge occurring in the partnership laid in the debate around regulations and donor compliances. Commonly detected issues targeted, for example, the high amount of reporting activities, the requirement to have a monitoring team, and the inability to access direct funding linked to the requirement to have an office location in a Western country. Another matching issue was reported to the different objectives of donors and INGOs, which produced confusion and inconvenience among locals (Dixon et al., 2016; personal interviews, 2020). Trust issues were simultaneously becoming evident from literature. Outcomes showed synchronicity when looking at the role of humanitarian principles, too. Literature, as well as primary data, indicated the challenge of ensuring them (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015; Mechoulan, 2016). Although many problems in terms of the partnership remained, the findings suggested that the situation started to change. Primary data revealed that partnership arrangements if done correctly, can improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and likewise benefit local actors (personal interviews, 2020).

6.3. Aspects of the Coordination for INGOs and LNGOs before COVID-19

The processed data from primary and secondary sources regarding the humanitarian coordination in the response among INGOs and LNGOs showed main similarities. As a matter of fact, literature and primary data produced the most positive and progressive connotation on the coordination dimension of the collaboration between international actors and locals. For the most part, literature and respondents referred to the inclusion of local actors in the cluster approach and the cross-border assistance. Authors and interviewees indicated positive examples regarding the collaborative effort among aid actors along with cluster operations. One reason for these outcomes may be related to the prevalent local interviewees active in the health cluster, which has been the dominant sector for local NGOs ever since. On the other hand, consistent results were also seen at the level of inadequate representation of local actors in leadership positions of clusters and international forums and committees (Dixon et al. 2016; personal interviews, 2020). One of the major discoveries of the primary research corresponded to aspects of local-local cooperation and coordination mechanisms. While literature findings evidenced a lack of these aspects, interviews gave much validation to it. While INGOs stated local aid actors mainly were competitive about their work, many local interviewees talked about thriving cooperation among local organisations. Significant achievements in the foundation of the "Syrian NGO Regional Forum" and were attached as reasons which spread high expectations and hopes for local actors regarding a growing recognition and a driver for change.

6.4. Aspects of the Funding for INGOs and LNGOs before COVID-19

The flow of funding between INGOs and Local NGOs was much discussed by scholars, and during interviews. Largely, data was coherent. In detail, it carved out similarities in access restrictions in funding and trends in diversified funding sources (Barnett and Walker, 2015; Els et al., 2016; Dixon et al., 2016). According to primary data, a divergent outcome for international and local interviewees occurred in the different perceptions of changes in funding over time. Reasons for why these divergences occurred could be two-fold—one argument points towards the limited sample size. A second argument addresses locals who referred to an overall increase of funding over the last four years, were simply not in the position, or the awareness of actual numbers. A positive interpretation could lead to the fact that partnerships brought an overall higher amount of funding to local actors. This could be linked to the commitments of the Grand Bargain. However, these remain assumptions by the researcher. Further research should be undertaken to prove these interpretations.
Another point of discussion arising from primary data considered the role of INGOs as funding intermediaries between donors and locals regarding growing costs. This found reference in primary as welll as in secondary data (Els et al., 2016; personal interviews, 2020)

6.5. The Current State of Localisation

As a central theme of this research, localisation produced many outcomes from desk-based research and primary data. In most cases, primary data analysis reflected the sentiments of scholar's literature. Those laid with issues in defining the concept of localisation, who is accounts as local actors and who is entitled to receive 25% of direct funding (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017; personal interviews, 2020). Analysis from primary data added another layer and dived deeper into the dynamics of the humanitarian system in highlighting more profound issues, such as different contextual differences, different power dynamics and the interference of humanitarian aid with political agendas (personal interviews, 2020)
On this note, it was interesting to refer to the willingness of international organisations to participate in this research. While local organisations showed a high interest in participating in an interview, the researcher found that most approached international organisations active in the Syrian cause were unwilling to participate in this research by declining the request due to legal concerns of sharing insights into their work. While this may not account for all international organisations and underlying reasons were unknown, the researcher considered this relevant when talking about power structures and its hypothetical confirmation for the given cause. Overall, discussions about localisation in the study case of NWS carved out many important layers and reasons that emphasised the complexity behind the implementation.

CONCLUSION
Chapter 7

This chapter draws a conclusion to analysed findings and answers the main research questions asked by the researcher "How did the pandemic impact the delivery of aid for INGOs and LNGOs in Northwest Syria?" and "What opportunties and challenges arose for the localisation of aid from COVID-19?"

This research investigated the interactions between international organisations and Syrian actors in the present context of Northwest Syria to find out which impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the delivery of aid. To frame the argument of relationships between international and local organisations, this study was placed into the context of localisation. Based on this, the researcher evaluated arguments for opportunties and challenges for aid localisation in NWS. Findings revealed that in this humanitarian landscape, Syrian actors had a vital role in assisting the population, however, being faced by many risks, their equal role in delivering assistance seemed limited, bound to the hierarchical set-up of the international system. Cooperation with international actors tied local actions to imposed compliances, which, in some parts, revealed a successful way of working, in others, it highlighted contradictions between actions and words of INGOs and donors. Evidence pointed towards an interrelation of multiple reasons for why present challenges existed. The latest emergency of COVID-19 and subsequent measures re-addressed these dynamics.

This study utilised desk-based research and a primary research methodology to make an analysis. The desk-based study investigated the academic literature around most crucial aspects of the individual and collaborative efforts for international and local actors. Key features were mainly found around access challenges which hindered agencies to deliver aid most effectively. With portraction of the crisis, findings pointed to increased collaboration and interdependency of INGOs and LNGOs. Aspects that were most relevant for their way of delivering aid were found around themes of partnerships, coordination and funding. Likewise, these pillars were committments of localisation-focussed committments, derived from the GB, which demanded investigation of how the pandemic impacted those.

The primary research provided a thematic review of the interactions between international and local organisations, presented through a series of semi-structured interviews with local and international humanitarian workers, along with a key-informant interview. It supported the research aim and confirmed that detected aspects particularily ran along the three themes. The findings demonstrated that these categories often overlapped. With occurence of the pandemic, primary data revealed that the pandemic has impacted the interactions of organisations in their delivery of aid. While changes, at the point of analysis, were rather minor, this research revealed that challenges in the delivery and in implementing localisation committments go beyond the pandemic and include sector wide dynamics. The following paragraphs draw a conclusion how the delivery of aid impacted organisations operations on a macro- and their and their relationships on a micro-level, considering opportunties and challenges for aid localisation, arising from the pandemic.

The (preliminary) impact of the pandemic on a macro-level, congruent with the research findings, pointed towards the exacerbation of already existing factors in relation to a challenging COVID-19 response. Factors were the insufficient health infrastructure, the lack of COVID-19-protective and rehabilitative items, the degradation of the economy, and the shelter issue provoked by large scale displacement. Overall, an exacerbation of needs was noted. On the other hand, the temporary interruption of humanitarian services demanded increased operational capacities. In effect, uncertainties, a stressful working environment, and a higher degree of communication were felt among the humanitarian community. Findings also identified the delay of COVID-19 preventative measures as a factor for a tense and unpredictable situation for aid workers. This was explained by COVID-19 as less of a priority due to more existential problems. In short, this provoked a more challenging humanitarian response. However, the overall coping mechanism with the pandemic in terms of delivering services was acknowledged as effective. It minimised the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of aid. Quick adaptations in funding, programs and organisational functions justified these arguments. In this regard, an outstanding reason was the custom of working in a continuous emergency: insecurity, pressure and the unpredictability of developments, which demanded continuous monitoring and evaluation, belonged to the business-as-usual, even prior to COVID-19. The example of stock reserves kept for new emergencies simultaneously, remote communication as part of remote management, was already prevalent before COVID-19. This was experienced as a benefit for regulating effects of the pandemic. Because COVID-19 was reasonably new at the point of interviews, long-term and lasting impacts had not yet been detected by the researcher. Therefore, the results should be taken with caution. Overall, further evidence on how COVID-19 initially impacted services needs to be produced to estimate the validity of findings.

On a micro-level, (preliminary) impacts of COVID-19 were predominantly felt along the three themes of partnerships, coordination and funding. The reported impact of COVID-19 on the partnership for international and local organisations was mainly felt in levels of communication. The switch to fully remote communication represented two main standpoints. First, the effect as such was minor due to the ongoing emergency context, as referred to above. Secondary and primary data underlined these findings. The switch of communication for the fewer occasions of in person meetings, conferences, and training entirely disappeared or changed to online meetings. Overall, advantages were correlated with a higher capacity of attendants, while disadvantages pointed to the disconnection to the field and the beneficiaries. The oingoing digitalisation process dominated the discussions around the partnerships and were seen as a major benefit for future communication.

The data analysis produced a minor impact of COVID-19 felt on the humanitarian coordination. One aspect pointed towards the foundation of a "COVID-19 Task Force" with local participation, partially with higher local responsibilities. Overall, positive feedback on cluster mechanisms in regard to the response among organisations resulted from the data. Again, interviewees correlated the familiarity of the pre-COVID-19 situation with a better handling of the response to the COVID-19 emergency due to previous experience in cross-border and cluster activities.

Allthough the pandemic had an insignificant impact on the funding for local and international organisations, effects were mainly felt around the quantity. Evidence showed that funding increased slightly in the form of top-offs for the COVID-19 response. However, most organisations reported having had relied on contingency funds. The quantity was described as insufficient prior to and during COVID-19, arguing that "needs will always be greater than the money available" (R3, personal interview, 2020). Analysis brought out concerns about future funding, mainly due to donor countries' political and economic conditions caused by global economic degradation and Brexit. Future funding cuts were feared for the Syrian cause.

In addressing **opportunities and challenges for localisation arising from COVID-19,** an overall pessimistic attitude was evidenced towards the feasibility of localisation committments, particularly in higher decision-making, local leadership roles and more direct funding. Findings referred to underlying obstacles of why localisation has had limited success.

First, the lack of a shared definition of the concept, going hand in hand with the absence of (measurable) indicators, placed a significant challenge to operationalise the presented idea. This was argued by the issue defining who a local actor was. As neutral and impartial bodies delivering aid to the most in need, local actors are likewise citizens of the country they serve, which seemed challenging in regard to ensuring principled humanitarian action. In the context of NWS, cultural differences were also a reason for the issue of defining a local actor as a determinant for the localisation argument. The historical development of Syrian NGOs from often religious charitable organisations posed cultural misunderstandings for the Western community on how locally driven aid should work. Consequently, underlying stereotypes constructed an image which seemed challenging in the creation of trustful and equal relationships between international and local responders. The way of a collective mindset for the course of working on the humanitarian agenda seemed divergent.

Secondly, the role of power imbalances played an influential role in the realisation of localised aid. Power imbalances between predominantly Western stakeholders and donors and local actors appeared to be a major pitfall for creating change. A reference can be made to Edward Said's theory on Orientalism and the role of "the Other", which was expressed denoting the "exaggeration of difference, the presumption of Western superiority, and the application of clichéd analytical models for perceiving the Oriental world" (Said, 1978, p.11) The Western mindset of "we are going to empower you" by creating a concept which is designed from a top-down perspective for the local community rather than with them seemed contradictory to participants in this research. Excluded from the decision-making level, localisation could only progress so far.

Thirdly, another factor seemed to be the interrelatedness of politics and aid, arguing that change in the humanitarian sector would not happen if political agendas fuelled it. A concrete example laid with the issue of sustainable aid. While localisation supposedly attributed greater local ownership and more direct funding, which enabled local organisations to invest in strengthening livelihoods or reconstruction projects, Syria and particularily NWS, as a "complex emergency" disqualified for long-term investments due to the uncertain security situation. While a growing recognition pointed towards the need for linking relief, rehabilitation and development, to enhance aid effectiveness, the situation on the ground seemed of dynamic fashion. While some areas were conducive to more sustainable programming, other regions like the northwest seemed more insecure and suitable only for relief aid. Another limiting aspect of the fulfilment of sustainable aid was the lack of diplomatic relationships between donor countries and Syria. Fearing to further political agendas without presence on the ground, donors seemed hesitant to invest in local actions due to the lack of trust. Past occurrences with cases of aid diversion with local authorities' interference increased the risks and the reluctance of donors' direct investment whilst drawing up stricter compliances and standards.

The case of NWS presented a humanitarian paradox: without international access, there was less contextual understanding, less trust in locals, and thus less potential for localisation to unfold. But for higher trust and more opportunities for a localised response to generate, more risks needed to be taken by INGOs and donors to achieve a more sustainable and effective humanitarian response. Research has shown that better mechanisms such as direct funding, the investment in more appropriate capacity building and inclusive partnerships are ways to share risks. However, the limited practice was evidenced as reported by interviewees. In fact, "people say one thing and do the other" – an interviewee's statement reflected a widespread mindset towards a localised response referring to the competition for funding, low investment in capacity training and the lack of transparency in funding concerns.

With COVID-19, existing mechanisms and capacities were tested. Although many factors were already present in NWS, such as the prevalent remote communication, well-organised coordination mechanisms and year's long experience in working with local, respectively international partners, COVID-19 restrictions accelerated existing factors and demanded more reliance on local actions. The overall sentiment towards localisation arising from the pandemic seemed to have shown all gaps in the system.

Albeit pessimistic opinions on localising aid, some opportunities gave hope for change. This a analysis reflected the unanimous support for aid localisation by all interviewees in which respondents expressed hope concerning the urgency of aid localisation COVID-19. Benefits of the pandemic were experienced due to the familiarity of working in a continuous emergency, quick programmatic adaptations were taken which required flexibility in funding and a high level of communication among international and local staff. With creative mindsets, locals produced innovative and digitalised projects that contributed to the response's effectiveness in reaching a higher number of beneficiaries. Furthermore, the pandemic witnessed an enhancement in infrastructure in hospitals and medical devices and equipment. The experience of local representation in a 24hrs appeal for proposal at an international forum to convert ideas and criterias from a field perspective was a new experience in their field of work. Especially in health sector, local actors were able to prove responsibilities of taking the lead of community engagement. They demonstrated coordination skills with international and local bodies, and proved flexible and innovative thinking.

Although more evidence needs to be produced around both- the interactions among international and local organisations- and the effect of COVID-19 on these dynamics, data from this research served as a benchmark for a preliminary evaluation. As many challenges have been detected, the following chapter will detail recommendations for stakeholders of the humanitarian community on future actions to implemet localisation-committments, based on the findings of this paper.

RECOMMENDATIONS
CHAPTER 8

This section provides recommendations to stakeholders of the humanitarian community, precisely to policymakers and institutional donors, to CARE NL and international NGOs, and to Syrian NGOs. Since the findings of this research found underlying factors for challenges bound to structural flaws of the system, the researcher included recommendations for a wider audience. The objective of formulated recommendations by the researcher, address to guarantee the effective delivery of aid during COVID-19 times and beyond, as well as build upon examined opportunties of this research to progress on localisation-committments of the GB.

8.1 Recommendations to Institutional Donors and Policymakers

- **Create a universal and inclusive language:** in addressing the confusion of the concept of localisation, contested points need clarification and definition, such as who is a local actor? what are local actions? and consequently who qualifies for direct funding? Bureaucratic obstacles such as registration criteria in Western countries must be addressed and communicated with partners. As evidence revealed, locals, were not aware of the "NGO language" around these pre-set arrangements. Therefore, measurable and concise indicators need to be fixed, pointing towards the failures of the Grand Bargain commitment in defining objectives and numbers around direct funding, capacity building and local decision-making at the implementation area and project design level. To realise effective localisation, local inclusion is required at conferences at a decision-making level. Local inclusion should be ensured as per agreement.

- **Provide room for change:** as stated in the findings, after ten years of working in crisis settings, locals have developed outstanding skills, capacities and expertise. Not last, the pandemic highlighted the capabilities of local actors. Thus, space for change must be initiated. In concrete terms, as evidenced from interviews, this can be operationalised by calling for proposals for local actors to prove themselves and their qualifications. This presents a way of demonstrating trust.

- **Demonstrate accountability and transparency:** as an argument in the localisation agenda, donor compliances must be accountable, transparent and of equal opportunity. Explicitly, this refers to providing incentives for collaboration rather than competition for international and first-hand responders, such as informing partners about funding opportunities, thereby ensuring local organisations' awareness and providing them with a fair chance to apply.

- **Risk management:** A primary call to action refers to an improved risk management strategy which embeds the way for inclusive partnerships as one of the pillars for a more effective humanitarian response. Appearing from this research, risks are majorly transferred to INGOs and, to the most considerable part, to local staff. Data showed that locals who are exposed to the highest risks, in terms of security and terms of health risks, however, own littlest resources. As a form of risk-sharing, the provision of insurance, such as for health, helps to achieve higher accountability and supports the creation of trust.

Additionally, as a form of risk management, a buffer absorbing some of the risks, for events of corruption and aid diversion, needs to find initiation. At the same time, to minimise these risks, a higher proportion of funding needs to be ensured for capacity enhancement, which can address these risks.

- **Access to direct funding:** as direct funding was identified as challenging due to the context of NWS, funds should be channelled as "directly as possible", including the access through pooled funds and the possibility of LNGOs to apply for direct funding.

8.2. Recommendations to CARE NL and International NGOs

- **Work towards the role of a mediator/ facilitator:** a call to action for international organisations lies with working towards inclusive partnerships. As picked up during this study, inclusive partnerships are those of shared risks and mutual trust. This means that transparency is key, which can be made operational in sharing funding records. Another way of creating trust lies in avoiding competition for proposals in communicating transparently. Investing in local capacities underlies the pre-requisite to listen to the needs of locals and act upon, rather than vice versa. The goal should be to take on a mediator/ facilitator role in assisting and supporting locals rather than managing and sub-contracting them. Capacity sharing in the form of increased communication and e-meetings should be part of each partnership.

- **Build upon digital innovations:** Another way of building trustful relationships is to build upon the COVID-19 wave of digitalisation. In specific, information and communication technology (ICT) should be used as a tool. In practice for NWS, this can mean digitalising data, such as recipients' IDs, during aid distributions. Ensuring transparency during M&E activities similarly increases trust and reduces the risks of aid diversion. Furthermore, transparency in the communication with third party monitoring teams is necessary to avoid confusion and competitive work.

- **Make use of intermediary role:** Lastly, as shown, INGOs fulfil the extension between the donor and local implementers, while being more closely to each party and understanding issues and challenges, it must be their role to demand change at the decision-making level and to advocate for a shifting mindset towards local inclusion and leadership by pointing out flaws in the system. The goal needs to be joint working rather than alongside. This research has investigated local potential with many staff from INGOs recognising the vital role of locals in the response: "They are Syrian, they are already so highly motivated. This is their country. They want to do this." (R3, personal interview, 2020). In recognising momentum given by the pandemic, deeds speak louder than words, and as so, INGOs need to acknowledge, advocate and implement proposed drivers to achieve transformational change.

8.3. Recommendations to Local Organisations

This study emphasised that local actors play a leading role in the humanitarian response but often have the least resources and least power. Research has shown that local actors are subject to "the system" and to existing power structures which naturally gives them less freedom and less voice in articulating needs and communicating desires. However, this should not undermine local capacities and local will to strive for a changing system in which a locally-led response with more decision-making and higher responsibilities is status quo. A few recommendations, grounded in this research, have been formulated in assisting and maximising locals successes.

- **Lobby and advocacy:** insisting and demanding accompaniment not direction in the form of a more remarkable strategic roles in the response by, for example, taking the leading role in cluster approaches, demanding inclusion at international forums, committees and meetings, as well as at policy-making level. One pillar needs to be the reference to past "good practices" that can point towards the fluid COVID-19 response, particularly in the health sector. Another recommendation is for local staff to demand more appropriate and adequate capacity enhancement based on actual needs rather than donor objectives. Another source to increase local assets lies with advocating for more access to funding "as directly as possible," which is a crucial pillar in a more autonomous and sustainable response.

- **Source (funding) alternatives:** with reference to direct funding, this paper pointed out the boundaries of why direct funding is restrictedly possible. As evinced, funding alternatives present an opportunity for local organisations to increase financial assets. Therefore, a recommendation points towards the increased use of diversified funding sources in remittances, diaspora funding, and individual fundraising campaigns. As primary analysis confirmed, online platforms, websites, and joint campaigns with NGOs from Scandinavian countries are a way of reaching donors. Simultaneously, this presents an excellent way to advocate and raise awareness for the Syrian cause from a primary source rather than through mass media channels or bilateral institutions.

- **Rely on local-local cooperation:** the main opportunity lies with an increase of local-to-local cooperation. Positive examples showed the formation of local/regional NGO Alliance networks, which reduces risks, such as in the duplication of work, and mainly increases representativeness as a unified body for exemplified lobbying purposes and the chances for autonomous working. A major factor should include local to local capacity enhancement as a process of sharing and learning. Enabling close communication, dialogue and networking by working hand in hand rather than in competition will have beneficial consequences towards a localised response and a more efficient and sustainable humanitarian system. Research has shown that the confidence of local actors has increased in their way of working overtime and has proven effective in the COVID-19 response. This presents a significant opportunity for growth and transformational change.

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APPENDICES

1) List of Interviews

Respondent 1. Personal Interview. October 19, 2020.
Respodnent 2. Personal Interview. October 20, 2020.
Respondent 3. Personal Interview. Ocotber 24, 2020.
Respondent 4. Personal Interview. October 22, 2020.
Respondent 5. Personal Interview. Ocotber 27, 2020.
Respondent 6. Personal Interview. October 27, 2020.
Respondent 7. Personal Interview. November 13, 2020
Respondent 8. Personal Interview. November 27, 2020
Respondent 9. Personal Interview. November 18, 2020

2) Main Documents on Localisation Used during this Research That Determined the Methodology

Source: IFRC, no date

1) Country-Level Dialogue on Localisation

Available at: https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GB-Localisation-Workstream-Country-Level-Dialogue-Resource-Kit.pdf
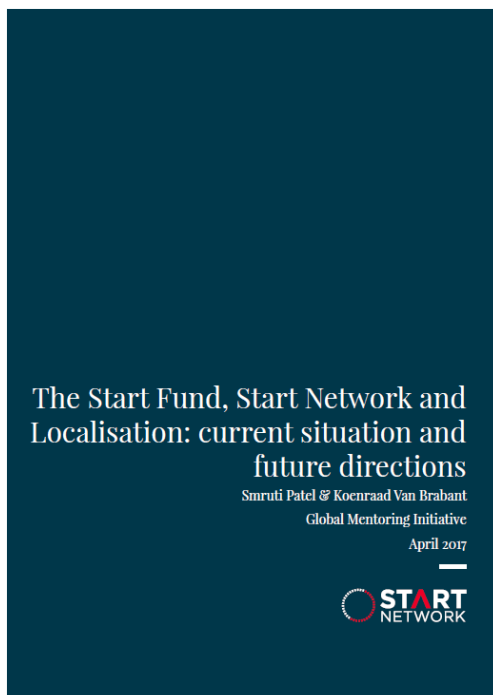
Source: Van Brabant and Patel, 2017

2) The Start Fund, Start Network and Localisation:
 current situation and future directions

Available at:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58256bc615d5db852592fe40/t/5cd70fc54ee28d00016f46f1/1557598162107/GMI+-+UNDERSTANDING+THE+LOCALISATION+DEBATE.pdf

Table with benchmarks for seven dimensions of localisation in "The Start Fund, Start Network and Localisation: current situation and future directions" Van Brabant and Patel, 2017, pp. 17-18

Table 1: Emerging benchmarks for seven dimensions of localisation

FUNDING	• At least 25% of available international funding goes to crisis affected populations with no more than one intermediary • National actors receive quality funding: there is a reasonable and unrestricted 'management fee' • Operational budgets can be adjusted within limits • Procedures are adjusted so as not to cause major cash flow problems • Where a provision exists for post-action 'learning', the national actors can access at least part of it and use it for their own priorities • In-kind or financial contributions from national actors are included and highlighted in the financial reporting • National actors, especially when 'partners' are introduced to private and institutional donors and invited along to all meetings with the latter, that concern joint activities
PARTNERSHIPS	• Sub-contracting relationships (implementing partners) are formally distinguished from (decision-making) 'partnerships', with the latter term only used for 'equitable relationships' i.e. joint design and implementation with joint responsibility and mutual accountability • Genuine 'partners' are pro-actively and fully briefed about the functioning of the Start Fund • In partnership relationships, national actors know that they can take initiative through the Start member organisation • In partnership relations, national actors are involved in the design of the proposal and budget, can observe or are fully informed about the project selection process and the reasons for its decisions, know the full budget and not just their part, as well as the financial flexibility and additional provisions (lump sum for learning) that are available • Possible adjustments during implementation can be quickly and effectively discussed with the member agency on equal terms and 'partners' feed into and see any report that is produced to another stakeholder • Due diligence processes are designed in such a way that they concentrate on purpose (function) and not primarily on form, are contextually appropriate, take into account track record, and differentiate between 'must have' and what is 'desirable' to have but not essential • There is explicit recognition that the partnering of national agencies with international ones, also carries risks for them – so 'partnership' relationships include reciprocal due diligence • Partnering agencies jointly develop and agree on key indicators for a constructive, quality relationship, and periodically review where they are, if needed assisted by an impartial third party. The indicators also cover (implicit) messages projected through behaviours • The ideas, suggestions and proposals of 'partners' are solicited at the very beginning of any initiative in which they are likely to be a stakeholder, so that it can be co-designed • The views of 'partners' are solicited and identifiably recorded for any reflective or evaluative exercise or report.

CAPACITY	• Capacity-strengthening efforts come with clear objectives. Whose capacity, for what, by when. Moreover, the objectives should be clear on what difference successful capacity-strengthening makes, including in the relationship and respective roles of international and national actors • Capacity-strengthening efforts differentiate between competency development of individual staff and institutional capacities • Structural capacity-strengthening investments are made in times of non-crisis, build on earlier capacity-investments, and respond to agency priorities; training and other workshops fit into a broader capacity-development strategy that includes much on-the-job learning • On-the-job learning approaches are made effective by designing-in moments for reflection and intentional mentoring • Organisational capacity-strengthening efforts address the challenges for national actors of: 1) Financially sustainable organisations in a particular funding market; and 2) Maintaining staff with humanitarian skills through periods of non-crisis • When a major surge is needed, national actors are provided quickly with additional funding to hire in extra qualified people • The staff of national actors is not actively approached or invited to apply for vacancies with international agencies • Collaborative capacities are explicitly attended to, and modelled by the capacity-developer, including in the relationship with the agency(ies) whose capacity is being strengthened • National partners are invited to be part of 'capacity assessments' of the international agency
PARTICIPATION REVOLUTION	• Crisis-affected populations are actively involved in the 'needs assessment', and fully understand what the implications of it are for what may be done for their benefit • Crisis-affected populations are briefed about and have a real say in the prioritising of assistance, the nature and quality of the assistance, the identification of beneficiaries and what to do when the available means cannot provide sufficient coverage • Crisis-affected populations are actively asked for feedback during and after the assistance provision • Crisis affected populations are given opportunities for collective reflection and learning, identifying their own priority learning questions; they may also be given the opportunity to insert their own priority questions in a real-time or post-project evaluation • Crisis-affected populations are asked about their longer-term experience with crisis-situations and their suggestions and proposals how to reduce the threat and/or their vulnerabilities, and how to more sustainably strengthen their 'resilience'
COORDINATION MECHANISMS	• Government officials at national and local levels are actively kept informed about the Start Funded response plans and confirmed projects, as well as the core principles on which their execution will be based • Active effort is made to have Start Funded responses support rather than substitute or undermine existing government capacities • The creation or enhancement of direct communication between crisis-affected populations and government officials, as the primary duty-bearers, is a component of any intervention • National non-governmental actors are encouraged to be part of coordination meetings (also among INGOs) and allowed to contribute in their own language • International actors take national actors seriously and listen more deeply to the considerations that may lie beneath their perspectives and proposals
VISIBILITY	• The names of all national and local collaborators, including sub-contractors, appear in all reports to donors and external communication • The role(s), contributions, innovations and achievements of national and local actors are explicitly mentioned;
POLICY INFLUENCE	• National actors are recognised as key stakeholders in international debates about policies and standards that may have significant impacts for them. Consequently, a diverse number of national actors are invited to be part of the conversations • As of their early stages, the conversations are also taken to other continents to enable larger participation of these stakeholders • Dedicated websites, video clips and newsletters in different languages, provide regular briefings to a wider audience that cannot participate directly, who can also feed in questions and proposals that are picked up and attended to

APPENDICES

3) INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview protocol

Dear respondent,

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.
My name is Laura and I am a German student of Disaster Risk Management in the Netherlands doing thesis research.
The aim of my research is to find out about the impact of Covid-19 on the flow of humanitarian aid among International and Local organisations in Northwest Syria, and possible arising challenges and opportunities for the aid localisation agenda.

I'm interested in this topic because I believe every humanitarian practitioner has valuable experiences and opinions on how humanitarian aid could be done better.
Local voices are not always heard when designing or interpreting the way forward at a global level.

This is a sensitive topic, so please be assured all information will be kept anonymous.

INTRODUCTION
1. Could you give a brief description of your organisation and the main functions?
2. What were challenges of the programmes and projects of your organisation prior to the outbreak of Covid-19?
3. What are current challenges of the delivery of aid during the pandemic? (Referring to restricted access/ interruption of programs, social distancing etc.)
4. Did any opportunities arise during the Covid-19 pandemic?

PARTNERSHIP
Power
5. Does your organisation have (a) partnership(s) with another (international) organisation?
6. What were challenges and strength of your partnership prior to Covid-19? Has your partnership changed with Covid-19?
Transparency
6. How was the communication/ information sharing prior/ during the pandemic? (Virtual meetings?) How are language barriers/ codes addressed? Prior/during Covid-19? (E.g. translated standards?)
7. Does your organisation with your partner organisation make use of IT? Prior/ during Covid-19? If yes, what type?
Accountability
How is the trust/ risk sharing among your organisation and your partner? Prior/during Covid-19?
Cooperation
8. Do you cooperate/ have a partnership with another local organisation? Are you connected to donors?

9. In your opinion, what are lessons learnt regarding the relationship to other organisations prior/during Covid? What is an effective partnership for you?

FUNDING
Quantity of Funding
10. Generally, has the funding increased over the last four years?
11. Have you received additional funding allocated to your organisation for the Covid-19 response? Who were the donors?
Quality of Funding
12. What was the proximity (time until funding received) of it? Was the amount sufficient?
13. Are there tools or practices to guarantee transparency to/from your aid sources? What are your guidelines/ practices regarding transparency?
Access to Funding
14. How does your organisation access funding? Prior/ during Covid-19?

15. In your opinion, what are biggest challenges of the funding situation of your organisation? Prior/ during Covid-19?
16. What are good practices of the funding situation? What can be done to improve the funding?

COORDINATION
Local Leadership
17. Is your organisation part of any forums/committees? Is organisation part of donor meetings?
18. Is your organisation a (leading) member of cluster approaches/ cross-border activities?
Capacity Building
19. Have you received technical support and/ or trainings by INGOs prior/during Covid-19?
20. Do you think projects and programs are designed sustainably appropriately? Prior/during Covid-19?
21. Has there been a change in problem sharing during Covid-19?
22. Has the there been a change in virtual meetings with INGOs/donors during Covid-19?

23. In your opinion, what are biggest challenges of the coordination of the response and the local leadership? Prior/during Covid-19?
24. In your opinion, what are good practices of the coordination of the response and the local leadership prior/during Covid-19? What is effective coordination for you? What can be done to improve the coordination?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
25. Do you have any additional comments? Remarks?

Sub-Research question	Dimensions	Sub-dimension	Indicators (link to localisation)	Interview questions (link to Covid-19)
1 What were challenges and perceptions of INGOs and NGOs regarding the delivery of aid before Covid-19				What were challenges of the delivery of aid of your organisation prior to the outbreak of Covid-19? What are current challenges of the delivery of aid during the pandemic? What opportunities arise from the pandemic?
2 What is the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the coordination among INGOs and NGOs?	COORDINATION	Local Leadership	Local actors have a greater strategic role (e.g. they are part of lead in cluster approaches, cross-border activities)	Is your organisation part of any forums/committees? Is your organisation part of donor meetings? Has this changed with Covid-19?
			Local actors are represented in governance mechanisms (e.g. ISAC)	Is your organisation a (leading) member of cluster approaches/ cross-border activities? Changes with Covid-19?
		Capacity Building	Appropriate and sustainable projects/programming to avoid 'donor pleasing' or 'action derived from necessity to survive'	Have there been virtual meetings between your organisation and partner organisation? If yes, how frequent? Changes with Covid-19?
			Local actors receive remote guidance/technical support and trainings according to their needs (e.g. financial or project management)	Have you received additional technical assistance by an INGO? Changes with Covid-19?
3 What is the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the partnership among INGOs and NGOs?	PARTNERSHIP	Power	Local partners are equal decision-makers (e.g. in participation in program design& monitoring)	Corresponding to all Partnership questions
		Transparency	Information have been shared timely and openly with partner (e.g. at the occurrence of the pandemic	Corresponding to all Partnership questions
			Language barriers (e.g. of "internationalised" standards have been addressed and led to e.g. the translation of documents	Corresponding to all Partnership questions
			Information technology (IT) is used to ensure transparency e.g mobile messaging used for receipt recording of aid, increased virtual meetings	Corresponding to all Partnership questions
		Accountability	Risks have been shared equally (e.g. security risks) mutual trust is based on the same objectives/ hum. Principles	Corresponding to all Partnership questions
		Cooperation	Increased South-South cooperation Increased connection of local actors to donors	Corresponding to all Partnership questions

4 What is the <mark>effect of the Covid-19</mark> pandemic on the funding among INGOs and NGOs?	FUNDING	Quantity of funding	Increased funding over the last four years	9. Generally, has the funding increased over the last four years?
			Additional funding to Covid-19	10. Have you received additional funding allocated to your organisation for the Covid-19 response? If yes, what was the proximity (time until funding received) of it?
		Quality of funding	Funding mechanisms are well documented, efficient, effective, timely and innovative (bilateral funding)	12. Do you have insights into the funding records of your partner organisation? Covid-19?
			Flexibility in funding (direct funding/ "as direct as possible"/ access to pool funds)	11. How does your organisation access funding? Has that changed with Covid-19?
				13. In your opinion, what were/are challenges of the funding situation of your organisation? What were/are good practices of the funding situation? Covid-19?
		Access to funding	Diversified sources such as "informal" /non-traditional funding systems or remittances or direct funding	11. How does your organisation access funding? Covid-19?

APPENDICES

4) Research Proposal

The initial proposal was submitted on August 19, 2020. During the research process the proposal was adapted several times, due to the changing context and different interests of stakeholders. The latest proposal can be found below.

Thesis Proposal

Localisation during Covid-19-

Assessing the progress of Localisation on the humanitarian response during Covid-19 from an international and local humanitarian perspective on the study case of northwest Syria

1. Preface

The topicality of the emergence of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) and its impact on the humanitarian system gave reason to this research, undertaken by a Bachelor's candidate of International Development Management majoring in Disaster Risk Management at Van Hall Larenstein University (VHL) in the Netherlands. The work complies with the initiative of the platform for humanitarian knowledge exchange in the Netherlands (KUNO) on their aim to discover the impact of corona-measures on humanitarian aid practices, and vice versa on how humanitarian aid agencies respond to Covid-19.

The research focusses on the organisational structure and the humanitarian response and its progress towards localisation on the study case of the international organisation CARE Netherlands (NL) and their direct implementing partner CARE Turkey in northwest Syria. The assessment is based on the scope of 'The Acute Crisis Joint Response for North West Syria 2020' which encompasses access to prioritized areas through local partner(s) and/or through own capacity. The response is aimed at a multi-sectoral level and addresses immediate needs particularly in WASH, shelter, health and protection and the provision of multipurpose cash. CARE NL was taking the role of the commissioner and consultant in the thesis research project. VHL, KUNO and Wageningen University were coordinators and executors of this joint research.

This report is structured into 7 main parts: the background to the research topic providing the research problem and its deriving main research question and sub-research questions.

A literature review underpins existing literature and knowledge which will flesh out common concepts for the researcher to perform a conceptualisation of the continuative research.

Subsequently, the methodology focusses on the research design, the data collection and the data procession. A limitations chapter details research boundaries and challenges.

Afterwards, final results will be stated, leading to the discussion part. A conclusion will be formulated, answering the research questions. Final recommendations will be given to underline the findings. This report includes a list of references and an annex.

This research has been developed independently. All obtained information and data has been treated confidentially by the researcher and will not be shared with a third party. Throughout this research, the researcher has complied with the standards of "do no harm".

1. Introduction

Discussions on the status quo of the international humanitarian system and its performance have been reheated, as the outbreak of the pandemic Covid-19 and its enacted preventative measures such as travel restrictions, self-isolation and physical-distancing measures disrupted humanitarian activities and put on hold 'business as usual' in conflict and protracted crisis settings (ICVA, 2020) While it is still unknown how Covid-19 will ultimately change the development and humanitarian aid sectors, the current pandemic demands an increase of humanitarian needs and acute changes in working processes.

In the protracted crisis context of Syria, people are disproportionally affected by the impacts of the pandemic; unable to cope with either; preventative and mitigative measures. As a result, a negative development is likely to take its course for the system and its people in a country affected by more than nine years of conflict, marked by violence, military operations, multiple displacements and a deteriorating economy leaving 70% of the population to live in poverty and 50% reliant on humanitarian aid. (World Vision, 2020) Due the consequences of Covid-19, the humanitarian community expects long-term humanitarian and socio-economic plights with a growing number of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

However, in light of Covid restrictions and the increase in humanitarian needs, it is recognized that the current system lacks capacity to address them: an impact survey assessed that 97% of humanitarian activities were affected by the preventive measures related to Covid-19 in March, while 60% of organisations reported funding concerns. In addition to the funding concerns, agencies reported risks related to the travel restrictions and ability to continue regular programmes and most importantly to meet urgent needs of communities, and fear of looting of the closed facilities. (Reliefweb, 2020)

In line with the general sentiment that humanitarian needs are growing beyond the current capacity to address them, conflicts have become more protracted, raising questions about the scope and objectives of humanitarian assistance. Funding allocated to humanitarian aid is remarked to fall short, the status quo of the system is being criticised for its underperformance (Come,2016)

However, taking the global health crisis as a catalyst, Covid-19 may also present an opportunity for the system to "build back better".

In this light, the international community has activated a discussion on the performance of current practices and thereby initiated the reflection on the Grand Bargain commitments and the "localisation" of aid.

The language used to refer to the roles and integration of local actors into the humanitarian system "localisation" has been evolving, as exemplified by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. Notably, the Summit's Grand Bargain agreement commits "donors and aid organizations to provide 25 per cent of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020" […] and [incorporating] capacity strengthening in partnership agreements". (SPHERE, 2020) These statements acknowledge a need to reconsider power relationships within the humanitarian landscape and that reinforcing the role of local actors necessitates building their capacities.

It has been widely recognized that more communication and a joint agenda setting of (I)NGOs is needed. Partnerships and networks should be looked at to effectively organize humanitarian aid to achieve sustainable outcomes which would present a major change to the status quo of humanitarian action. (CARE, 2020, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020)

However, in reality the majority of the humanitarian system still employs a disempowering approach to local actors; treating them as sub-contractors to deliver on priorities set by international agencies. It is acknowledged that local NGOs do not yet feel engaged as equal partners or lead actors, despite their frontline, their proximate response, and their contextual knowledge. (COME, 2016,)

Therefore, a wider shift of power in the humanitarian system is required, looking beyond the current timeframe of the Grand Bargain, despite some examples of good practices, there is a need for a more transformative approach to localisation in future.

To what extent this is successful in practice, however often depends on the relationship employed by the international community. Trust issues, the lack of capacity and the question about the political neutrality of

local actors in times of conflicts are common motives drawn on as boundaries for effective partnership and autonomy of local actors.

Therefore, the contribution of local actors needs to be better understood; further evidence is required on how local and international actors currently interact and how this interaction can benefit humanitarian action.
As there is a lack of evidence how the international community interaction with local actors on the ground looks like, this paper aims to investigate into the relationship of given actors, drawing on the example of the Syrian context.

2. Background/ Study Setting

Covid-19 in northwest Syria

The research location is focussed on the response to the humanitarian situation in Idlib Governorate, a region situated in northwest Syria bordering Turkey's Hatay province to the north, Aleppo Governorate to the east, Hama Governorate to the south, and Lattakia Governorate to the west.
With much Western attention drawn to this region, researchers, scholars, news media, and humanitarian practitioners emphasise the critical situation for people in northwest, especially in light of the impact of the coronavirus disease. The international community raises awareness towards a complex humanitarian response in a politically restrictive environment, influencing the ability of aid to reach people in need.

The political environment is labelled as the "last rebel stronghold" (Reuters, BBC, Agence France-Presse, 2020) a territory which is reported to be under the control of the Syrian Salvation Government, with Tahrir al-Sham as the dominant "rebel militia" in the region until 2017. With reoccurring fighting in 2019 and a following offensive in 2020 by government forces to reclaim territory, limited control had been regained, while 57% of territory remained with the regime-opponents, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. (SOHR, 2019) Subsequently, following reports by NRC, the latest riot has displaced more than 960,000 people since December, half of whom were children, many of whom for multiple times. It had been the largest wave of human displacement in the history of the conflict. (NRC, 2020) The influx of nearly one million people to a region which already denotes 2.8 million internally displaced people of an estimate of 4.1 million people, puts pressure on existing resources and registers an increase of needs of a population who already relies on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs including shelter, health, food and water which poses a challenge to the humanitarian response.

Additionally, with the first confirmed case with Covid-19 in northwest of Syria in July 2020 (EWARN, 2020), the response system is now confronted with primary impacts of the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak. For the more than 50% of the people in displacement in the northwest, overcrowded refugee camps lack basic infrastructure, sanitation facilities and access to clean water. These settings prevent people from complying with preventative measures, such as hygiene practices, self-isolation and physical distancing which hold the risk of a rapid spread of the disease (OCHA, 2020)
Concern is also raised on the humanitarian side, reported by Save the Children in northwest Syria, as there were only 153 ventilators, 148 beds in intensive care units and one testing facility throughout the whole northwest for a population of millions. (Save The Children, OCHA 2020)
Also secondary impacts have been reported, with Covid-19 as a catalyst in a precarious humanitarian and socio-economic context: with global economic stagnation due to the pandemic and its subsequent halt of business activities, Syria's war-torn economy is disproportionally affected by the impacts of Covid-19.
Declining ever since the conflict broke out, the Syrian Pound (SYP) has devaluated by almost 100 % between April and May (OCHA, 2020). Covid-19 is feared to provoke income loss, price increases, loss of humanitarian assistance and forced business closures. According to a UN survey, 36% of community focal points reported that living conditions for their communities worsened since the start of the pandemic.
Recognising current symptoms of the pandemic for the people in northwest, Covid-19 produced not only

primary effects such as the increased need for humanitarian assistance as in food, water, sanitation and hygienic items in a landscape of insufficient health infrastructure but also provokes secondary effects to take on crucial consequences such as new displacement, lack of access to education and a further deteriorating economy which threatens more people to fall into poverty (KUNO,2020)

The international humanitarian response in Syria

In this context, humanitarian organisations are working to meet the growing needs of people in northwest Syria, most visibly taken up by a small group of Western donors and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the United Nations (UN) and its agencies. (Come, 2016) Due to an insecure environment, of reoccurring hostilities for aid workers, albeit an ongoing truce between Turkey and Russia, many international aid agencies allocated from northwest Syria to neighbouring countries, prior to Covid-19, such as CARE, operating from Gaziantep in Turkey CARE working in the northern region of Syria with local partners. (Care.org)

Therefore, international efforts to directly reach people in need are limited. The direct assistance is largely replaced by cross-border operations, however seeing additional restraints: with the renewal of the cross-border resolution 2165 which authorizes cross-border aid from Turkey into northwest Syria, Bab al-Hawa remains the only open border crossing to surpass relief items. Henceforth, humanitarians are challenged with activities that are more time-consuming and more costly associated with the longer distances that need to be travelled within northwest Syria in order to reach people in areas previously served via Bab Al-Salam. (Associated Press, OCHA, 2020)

Despite efforts to increase capacity at the one remaining point due to increasing needs by Covid-19, the confirmation of the first case of Covid-19 in this area was made at the same time as the announcement of Russia and China using their veto in the UN Security Council to extend the delivery of humanitarian relief across borders. (SNHR, 2020) Adding these delimiting factors followed by the latest Covid-19 restrictive measures, shrinking space for the interference of international organisations is a result of changing dynamics.

This is just one example of how humanitarian space faces a great dependency on the political environment for international actors. While the latest Brussel Conference, declared that "a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict can only be based on the Geneva the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) calling for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process facilitated by the UN to reach a political settlement that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people." (The European Council, 2020) The emphasis is taken on again that the operationalisation of humanitarian aid should adapt a localisation approach, one that is adjusted to the political context, making space for an independent civil society and principled humanitarian action which includes a partnership of international and national actors to share risks.

CARE's humanitarian response in NWS

CARE International is a globally active, US- based relief and development non-governmental organisation, dedicated to alleviate poverty, achieve social justice and to provide life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable affected in humanitarian emergencies.

CARE, as part of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), implemented 'The Acute Crisis Joint Response for North West Syria 2020' alongside 3 partners: Stichting Vluchteling, War Child, and World Vision. All members have access in the prioritized areas through local partner(s) and/or through own capacity and have been working in North West Syria for a number of years. The Joint Response (JR) encompasses life-saving activities, in line with an integrated multi-sectoral response addressing immediate needs particularly in WASH, shelter/NFIs, health and protection, with provision of multipurpose cash. (aidstream.org)

The JR reached around 100 000 individuals from July 2019 to December 2019. Due to new displacement and the outbreak of Covid-19 the JR was extended until August 2020. In that second part 2 million Euros were allocated by the DRA, topped-up with another 500 000 euros for the Covid response. In total more than 70.000 people were targeted with this response, focussing on shelter, WASH, multi-purpose cash, health and protection. (CARE NL, 2020)

CARE's Global Response to Covid-19

to continue humanitarian work, meeting the urgent needs of more than 100 million people while at the same time, building on our existing networks and relationships, scaling up pandemic response including:

- o Equipping households and healthcare facilities with hygiene supplies such as soap and disinfectant
- o Disseminating accurate prevention information, including promoting handwashing and physical distancing.
- o Installing handwashing stations in schools, markets and other public places.
- o Providing clean water through emergency water trucking and distribution of safe water storage containers.
- o Addressing food shortages and other economic impacts of pandemic-related shutdowns. Supporting and protecting our aid worker

3. Problem Statement

Preventative Covid-19 measures have impacted humanitarian services of INGOs and LNNGOs, such as for CARE and its local partners in northwest Syria. Additional restraints such as the cross-border resolution, shortfalls in funding and an insecure working environment hamper the effective humanitarian response to an environment where a multiplication of needs is seen, exacerbated by Covid-19. The status quo of the existing humanitarian aid system is being addressed under the recognition that humanitarian needs are growing beyond the current capacity to address them. Undermined efforts of the outcomes reached by the Grand Bargain have been recognized which consider the potential of local partners to improve the capacity to respond, more precisely the operationalisations in direct funding, risk-sharing and decision-making power.

4. Research Objective

This research aims to explore to what extent the coronavirus disease Covid-19, and subsequent measures have impacted the relationship between INGOs and NGOs, and their local partners respectively, exemplified on the study case of northwest Syria.
Furthermore, it assesses if Covid-19 may demonstrate an opportunity to foster localisation efforts to deliver aid more effectively in the future by analysing and discussing collected data and literature of how localisation of aid has been operationalised and what the status quo of the system looks like.

5. Research Question(s)

4.1 Main Research Question:
What is the impact of Covid-19 measures on the progress of the localisation processes between INGOs and L/NA which provide humanitarian aid in northwest Syria?

4.2 Sub-Research Questions:
1) What were indictors for the localisation processes between INGOs and LNNGOs before Covid-19 measures?
2) What is the effect of Covid-19 on partnerships?
3) What is the effect of Covid-19 measures on direct funding?
4) What is the effect of Covid-19 on risk-sharing?
5) What is the effect of Covid-19 measures on the decision-making power?

5. Literature Review

The evolution of Localisation

The concept of 'localisation' is not new. Discussions on increased funding and resources to local actors have been occurring in the humanitarian community since the 2000s, when donors acknowledged that a whole of-society approach was needed. (ICVA, 2019)
However, the term 'localisation' was only introduced and gained significant momentum again during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS).
It has since become one of the most widely discussed topics in the humanitarian sector. (ICVA, 2019) The WHS, bringing together stakeholders of the humanitarian community, particularly local, national and international NGOs and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), emphasised the need for the humanitarian system to become more inclusive for local and national actors, especially in crisis settings.

A popular definition of "Localisation" is:
"Localization is the process through which a diverse range of humanitarian actors are attempting, each in their own way, to ensure local and national actors are better engaged in the planning, delivery and accountability of humanitarian action, while still ensuring humanitarian needs can be met swiftly, effectively and in a principled manner." (ICVA, 2019)

The concept of localisation combines the possibility of efficiency and accountability gains, and of financial, political and power balance shifts, into a call to action. (ICVA, 2019) However, the recent Global Humanitarian Assistance report stated that only 0.4% of humanitarian aid is channelled directly to national NGOs and Civil Society organisations, although Local and national civil society organisations are among the first responders to disasters and outbreaks of violence. (Agenda for Humanity, 2016)
Agreements such as the Grand Bargain and the Charter4Change have attempted to institutionalize the role of local and national actors this within collectively-set, time-bound and action-oriented agendas.
For the course of this review, a quick discourse is provided on the Grand Bargain and the Charter4Change agreements which initially led to the operationalisation of localisation and its emphasis during Covid-19.
 Key points of the agreements are stated below:

The Grand Bargain
The Grand Bargain emerged at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul is an agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations to commit to the improvement of the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action with the objective to " shrink the needs, deepen and broaden the resource base for humanitarian action, and to improve delivery." (IASC, 2016)
The Grand Bargain was mostly targeted towards higher-level actors in the humanitarian aid sector, with signatories by 2018 including 24 member states, 13 United Nations organisations, 19 NGOs (mostly large internationals), 2 members of the Red Cross Red Crescent movement, and the OECD.
The table below represents some ten wok streams which have been agreed upon for further implementation of the commitments.

Commitments on the work streams as per Grand Bargain, 2016

Aid organisations and donors to work more closely together towards:
1. Greater transparency
2. More support and funding for local and national responders
3. Increase the use and coordination of cash

Aid Organisations commit to:
4. Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional review
5. Improve joint and impartial needs assessments
6. A participation revolution; listen more to and include beneficiaries in decisions that affect them

Donors commit to:
7. Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding
8. Reduce the earmarking of donor contributions
9. Harmonise and simplify reporting requirements
10. Enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors

(adapted from IASC 2017; UNOCHA 2016; ICVA 2017)

Reports from its first year of implementation stated "the Grand Bargain has successfully mobilised key stakeholders, representing 86-88% of international humanitarian donor funding and 72% of aid organisations' budget" (Derzsi-Horwath, Streets & Ruppert 2017). More recently, the ODI's latest independent analysis for 2018 found some clear progress in areas of increased cash-based programming, better coordination of multi-year planning and funding, and more proactive and coordinated engagement of the aid community (Bennett 2018)

More recently, Good Practices have also been acknowledged by IASC in 2020:

- **Meeting the 25% funding target, as directly as possible**: 99% of Luxembourg humanitarian funding and 27% of German humanitarian funding in 2019 was provided to local and national responders as directly as possible. Germany's 2019 funding data reflects a 6% increase from 2018 – a growth rate that stands out amongst donors. UNFPA (39%), UNICEF (34%) and UNHCR (25%) achieved the commitment to provide 25% funding to local and national responders. INGOs living up to 25% include CAFOD (65%), Action Aid (62%) and Christian Aid (55%). And in 2019, IFRC signed an agreement with ECHO for €500 million to provide cash-based assistance for Syrian refugees in Turkey – the largest humanitarian programme in the history of the EU and the largest programme ever implemented by IFRC. The Turkish Red Crescent is the operational partner of the programme

- **Reducing barriers to partnership:** To facilitate efficient collaboration between the UN and local partners, UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF rolled out the UN Partner Portal - to date, 9,610 civil society organizations have self-registered. The Netherlands stands out in its explicit mention of working towards improving partnership practice. In 2019 NL focused on quality partnerships with local organisations, especially in cooperation with the Dutch Relief Alliance. Emphasis was placed on empowerment of local organisations to set their own priorities, including capacity strengthening as a regular activity in partnerships, and including affected people in planning of response. Some of these shifts were a result of strengthened direct dialogue between NL and local organizations

Charter 4 Change
The Charter for Change was launched in 2016 and appeared as a "follow-up" on the Grand Bargain commitments. The initiative consists of 8 commitments which aim to drive change on localisation by enabling local and national actors to play an increased and more prominent role in humanitarian response. Signatory to a number of INGOs, amongst CARE, Caritas, Cordaid, Oxfam and WarChild, they are intended to play an active part in this transformation towards a more locally-driven humanitarian system by changing the way that they work.
Alongside advocacy to governments which are humanitarian donors, those signed up to the charter have committed that by 2020, they will pass on at least 25% of their own humanitarian funding directly to local and national NGOs.
To achieve faster and deeper progress on the localisation agenda, the following commitments have been formulated:

1. **Direct funding:** commit to pass 25% of humanitarian funding to National NGOs
2. **Partnership:** reaffirm principles of partnership
3. Transparency: publish the amount of funding that is passed to NNGOs
4. Recruitment: address and prevent the negative impact of recruiting NNGO staff during emergencies
5. Advocacy: emphasise the importance of national actors to humanitarian donors
6. Equality: address sub-contracting and ensure equality in decision-making
7. Support: provide robust organisational support and capacity building
8. Promotion: promote the role of local actors to media and public

Critiques on the initiatives

Not last with the outbreak of Covid-19, scholars and policy-makers have returned awareness towards gaps and challenges of these initiatives. Major concerns account as lack of involvement other international NGOs, southern based NGOs, non-OECD donor countries, private corporations and organisations, and arguably most importantly, host governments of LDCs themselves. (Derzsi-Horwath, Streets & Ruppert 2017). A review by ODI further criticised that the architecture of the 51 commitments, ten work-streams and multi-layered governance would be over-structured, its implementation under- governed, lacking the high-level political commitment and investment from signatories needed to encourage momentum, focus and prioritisation" (Bennett 2018). Implementation challenges would remain a lack of consistent and practical indicators of progress, poor engagement on a state or political level, and lack of clarity and agreement on specific terms, actions and even goals (Metcalfe-Hough et al. 2018:2-3)

Further challenges addressed by the IASC account as the lack of data on funding flows allocated directly and indirectly to local and national responders. The inability to measure the amount remains a gap in the localisation agenda. Overall, humanitarian funding going directly to national partners is still very modest and only increasing very slowly.

Additionally, criticism is expressed regarding the under-reported of localisation progress in the Grand Bargain self-reports – several signatories, not least INGO signatories, left the localisation section of the reporting template either blank or very thin.

Summarizing, a major constrain of the actions taken in 2019 under the localisation commitment constitute one-time in-country events and activities –is that there is not much evidence of systematic transformative change.

Covid-19 and contextual challenges

After a long period of UN-led reform, the humanitarian system called in for reform of the status quo, due to a number of factors:

- o Increased humanitarian need, combined with critical funding shortfalls
- o More protracted conflict settings shrink humanitarian space for interference. Objective between humanitarian and development aid becomes indistinctive → thus, efforts to promote closer interface between humanitarian, development and peace action to address complex and protracted crises
- o Remote- management and cross-border mechanisms often due to insecure, volatile environment delays and limits capacity and flexibility to respond quickly
- o Recognition of efforts to find ways to better include people affected by humanitarian crises in the design and delivery of humanitarian action

- Due to these arising challenges and changes, as the latest example of Covid-19 impacts and restrictive measures indicated, six core components have been defined to operationalise the dimensions of localisation. They consist of: Partnerships, Funding, Capacity, Coordination and Complementarity, Policy, Influence and Visibility, and Participation.

This note is framed around the seven areas identified in the Measuring Localization Framework developed by Humanitarian Advisory Group and the Pacific Island Association of NGOs (PIANGO). These complement the areas in the NEAR Localization Performance Measurement Framework. Both frameworks are based on previous work Localisation in Practice: Emerging indicators and practical recommendations, undertaken by the Global Mentoring Initiative for the START Network in 2018. These frameworks and associated tools are useful, publicly available resources that can be used by organizations, networks or coordination bodies for

Section 5. Summary of the localisation performance measurement framework

The table below provides a summary of each localisation component included in the LPMF. It outlines the desired change that is anticipated, provides an impact indicator and summarises the key performance indicators.

Guidance notes: Six colour-coded localisation components are listed below. Each component has a desired change which outlines the shifts that needs to occur to contribute to achieving localisation; each has a number of key performance indicators (KPI) which are grouped thematically (e.g. quantity of funding, quality of funding etc.); each has an impact indicator which addresses whether localisation has impacted the humanitarian system.

1. Partnerships	
Desired change	More genuine and equitable partnerships, and less sub-contracting
Impact indicator	Equitable and complementary partnerships between L/NA and INGOs/UN to facilitate the delivery of timely, and effective humanitarian response
KPIs	(1.1) Quality in relationships, (1.2) Shift from project-based to strategic partnerships, (1.3) Engagement of partners throughout the project cycle
2. Funding	
Desired change	Improvements in the quantity and quality of funding for local and national actors (L/NA)
Impact indicator	Increased number of L/NA describing financial independence that allows them to respond more efficiently to humanitarian response
KPIs	(2.1) Quantity of funding, (2.2) Quality of funding, (2.3) Access to 'direct' funding (2.4) management of risk
3. Capacity	
Desired change	More effective support for strong and sustainable institutional capacities for L/NA, and less undermining of those capacities by INGOs/UN
Impact indicator	L/NA are able to respond effectively and efficiently to humanitarian crises, and have targeted and relevant support from INGOs/UN
KPIs	(3.1) Performance management, (3.2) Organisational development (3.3) Quality standards, (3.4) Recruitment and surge
4. Coordination and complementarity	
Desired change	Greater leadership, presence and influence of L/NA in humanitarian leadership and coordination mechanisms
Impact indicator	Strong national humanitarian leadership and coordination mechanisms exist but where they do not, that L/NA participate in international coordination mechanisms as equal partners and in keeping with humanitarian principles
KPIs	(4.1) Humanitarian leadership, (4.2) Humanitarian coordination (4.3) Collaborative and complimentary response
5. Policy, influence and visibility	
Desired change	Increased presence of L/NA in international policy discussions and greater public recognition and visibility for their contribution to humanitarian response
Impact indicator	L/NA shape humanitarian priorities and receive recognition for this in reporting
KPIs	(5.1) Influence in policy, advocacy and standard-setting, (5.2) Visibility in reporting and communications
6. Participation	
Desired change	Fuller and more influential involvement of crisis-affected people in what relief is provided to them, and how
Impact indicator	Affected people fully shape and participate in humanitarian response
KPIs	(6.1) Participation of communities in humanitarian response, (6.2) Engagement of communities in humanitarian policy development and standard-setting

assessing progress in relation to localization in their context. The seven areas are: Partnerships, Leadership, Coordination and Complementarity, Participation, Policy Influence and Advocacy, Capacity, and Funding. The note highlights a number of recommendations or challenges for good practice in localization associated with each of these areas.

1. Partnerships : Equitable and complementary partnerships between L/NA and INGOs/UN
2. Funding : A funding environment that promotes, incentivises and supports localisation to enable a more relevant, timely and effective humanitarian response
2. Capacity: L/NA are able to respond effectively and efficiently, and have targeted and relevant support from INGOs/UN
3. Coordination and complementarity: Strong national humanitarian leadership and coordination mechanisms exist but where they do not, that L/NA participate in international coordination mechanisms as equal partners and in keeping with humanitarian principles
4. Policy, influence and visibility: L/NA shape humanitarian priorities and receive recognition for this in reporting
5. Participation: Affected people fully shape and participate in humanitarian response

Additionally, INGO leaders can take note of important resources to help them navigate localization. Saferworld created a useful localization spectrum to envision what relationships between INGOs and local and national NGOs would look like through different stages. The Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) developed a detailed framework for INGOs, local and national NGOs, and donors to assess their progress toward localization.

6. Conceptualisation of RQs

Building up on the dimensions of localisation, the *Localisation Performance Measuring Framework* will be used to conceptualise the sub-research questions.

SRQ1 : What is the effect of Covid-19 measures on partnerships?

In order to assess the effect of Covid-19 measures on the partnerships of INGOs and LNNGOs, partnerships need to be defined.
Corresponding to the localisation measurement framework the partnership can be conceptualized in

1. Partnerships
Desired change More genuine and equitable partnerships, and less sub-contracting
Impact indicator Equitable and complementary partnerships between L/NA and INGOs/UN facilitate the delivery of relevant, timely and effective humanitarian response

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

1.1 <u>Quality in relationships</u>
- L/NA have power in partnerships
- Relationships with L/NA are guided by the Principles of Partnership (PoP) (equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity) and are periodically reviewed
- Partnerships have a mechanism by which issues of concern can be raised and resolved

1.2 <u>Shift from project-based to strategic partnerships</u>
- Existence of longer-term strategic partnerships that commit to build systems and processes that reflect the ambition and goals of L/NA

1.3 <u>Engagement of partners throughout the project cycle</u>
- Projects and budgets are co-designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated with L/NA and affected people

Defining partnerships as per Principles of Partnership (PoP) endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform, 12 July 2007

- **Equality**
  Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.

- **Transparency**
  Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.

- **Result-oriented approach**
  Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.

- **Responsibility**
  Humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.

- **Complementarity**
  The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.

In Covid-19 context:
Restrictions on the ability to maintain →
new approaches to establishing and maintaining partnerships while working mostly or completely through **remote means**
 Donors, UN agencies and international NGOs will need to reassess their approaches to risk-sharing with local and national partners **risk-sharing**
 NGO Fora in different countries may be a valuable resource to support the development of **trust-based and risk-sensitive partnerships**

SRQ2: what is the effect of Covid-19 on funding?

2. Funding
Desired change Improvements in the quantity and quality of funding for L/NA
Impact indicator A funding environment that promotes, incentivises and supports localisation to enable a more relevant, timely and effective humanitarian response

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

2.1 Quantity of funding
   - The amount of humanitarian funding to L/NA increases in line with Grand Bargain and Charter for Change commitments
   - INGO/UN agencies routinely publish the percentage of funding that they passed on to L/NA
   - New and innovative funding mechanisms are made available to L/NA

2.2 Quality of funding
   - Funding and support are made available to L/NA for emergency response, are provided quickly and include funding to hire additional qualified staff
   - Funding for operating costs (office, warehousing, transport, communications, computing, printing) is included in L/NA funding agreements

- Overhead costs should be shared equally between L/NA and INGO/UN partners without reporting conditions
- Funding is provided that is adequate to deliver a response that meets quality standards and commitments exist to avoid/address gaps in funding where this is possible
- Transparency of financial transactions and budgets between INGO/UN and L/NA
- Reasonable adjustments required during implementation can be quickly and effectively discussed with the funding agency on equal terms
- Donors should introduce multi-year financing and incentivise their own grantees to do likewise in order to enable local actors to retain staff, and ensure greater programme, and organisational preparedness, stability and quality
- INGO/UN actively seek to strengthen the financial sustainability of L/NA partners

2.3 Access to 'direct' funding
- L/NA access funding without an intermediary.
- Where this is not possible, L/NA can access funding 'as directly as possible' (e.g. funding channelled through a pooled/national funds that are directly accessible to L/NA)
- L/NA have direct access to donors and/or attend donor meetings with their INGO/UN partners

2.4 Financial management and risk mitigation
- L/NAs have robust financial management systems and accounting procedures and have a financing strategy in place. § Fraud and corruption risks are acknowledged by L/NA and effective systems are put in place to mitigate and manage risk
- Shift in organisational culture and reduction of donor legislative barriers to funding L/NA

In Covid-19 context:
- In line with Grand bargain commitments, funding models should be developed that enable resources to be allocated as directly as possible to those partners best placed to respond, prioritizing local and national actors where possible.
- A number of pooled funds have existing good practice in relation to localization that could be shared and built upon in other contexts
- It is essential that additional funds are mobilized to support the GHRP for COVID-19 and not diverted from ongoing humanitarian operations, and that future humanitarian funding allocations are not compromised by the COVID-19 response.
- In alignment with Grand Bargain commitments, funding streams should be flexible to enable rapid adjustments in the response which will be necessary in such a fast-evolving crisis.
- a simplified and harmonized approach to cost allocation and reporting and minimized bureaucratic processes will enable humanitarian partners to respond in a timely and appropriate manner.
- ICVA will support NGOs to communicate to donors the critical role of national and local responders in humanitarian preparedness and response and the need to ensure sufficient, flexible and continued funding to support these and all NGO actors.

SRQ3: what is the effect of Covid-19 on participation?

6. Participation
Desired change Fuller and more influential involvement of affected people in what relief is provided to them, and how
Impact indicator Affected people fully shape and participate in humanitarian response

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

6.1 Participation of affected people in humanitarian response
- Affected people are actively involved in assessment of needs, and have a say in how assistance is prioritised, the nature and quality of the assistance and the identification of beneficiaries

- Affected people have information about the implementing agency and have a good knowledge of what the programme is seeking to achieve and who it will benefit
- Affected people are actively asked for feedback during and after the assistance provision and have a means of making suggestions or providing feedback

6.2 Engagement of affected people in humanitarian policy development and standard-setting
- Deliberations and decisions of humanitarian leadership and coordination forums are informed by in-depth situational understanding, including the views of affected people
- Humanitarian policies and standards are informed by the experience and voices of the affected people

In Covid-19 context:
- NGOs working at the local and national level will often be best placed to bridge this gap, including understanding local community perspectives regarding appropriate roles for national and international partners
- . Local organizations led by refugees and migrants themselves can be key partners at this time
- Innovation by local and national NGOs, supported by international networks and partners, will be needed to develop effective communications strategies for engaging older populations.
- International partners should consider how to adjust their communications methods, style and frequency accordingly.
- Shared understanding and open communication between local, national and international actors across medical, humanitarian and development sectors may be central to overcoming these challenges.