

Governance, Humanitarian Aid, and Basic Service Restoration in Northwestern Syria

*Flavia Eichmann
Chae Yeon Kim
Leyla Schreiber*



—
INSTITUT DE HAUTES
ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES
ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
GRADUATE INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AND
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Executive Summary

Despite being the single largest recipient of humanitarian aid for six consecutive years, the humanitarian situation in Syria leaves more than 13.3 million people in need. The situation in the northwestern part of Syria is marked a complex political landscape, due to the presence of armed groups, Turkey, the Syrian Interim Government, local councils, and international organizations. This report examines three research questions regarding governance, humanitarian aid, and basic service restoration:

1. How are humanitarian aid and basic services distributed and organized in the northwest?
2. What implications does the governance situation have for the provision of aid and services?
3. How much authority and autonomy do Syrian organizations have in defining and implementing projects?

The results of this report are based on both primary and secondary data collection. Interviews with Syrian NGOs in Gaziantep, Turkey were prioritized. Other interview partners included members of Syrian civil society and international organizations.

This report first aimed to identify the stakeholders in the northwest and their activities related to the provision of aid. The main actors involved in coordinating the humanitarian response are OCHA, the Syrian Interim Government Directorates, and the Turkish authorities. The main implementation partners are Syrian organizations. A sectoral analysis was conducted to evaluate how aid activities might differ between them. The extent of coordination between actors and the funding vary between sectors.

Humanitarian aid delivery and the restoration of basic services are largely dependent on governance structures in place that facilitate the delivery of aid. One of the main obstacles regarding the effects of the governance situation of northwestern Syria is the security concern and the resulting lack of access to certain regions. Particularly in Idlib, the presence of armed groups severely impedes humanitarian assistance due to concerns about aid diversion. Furthermore, the political instability results in numerous challenges for aid to be effective.

Despite the extensive connections between governance and aid provision, there seems to be little consideration for the strengthening of Syrian civil society as the basis for long-term stability. This is the case in both Turkish influenced areas as well as the opposition-held areas, where international organizations largely set the agenda for aid provision. All over the northwest of Syria, Syrian actors are involved in the delivery of humanitarian aid, however they are largely playing a role as implementing partners and are not consulted in the design-phase of projects. In order to increase the agency and autonomy of Syrian civil society to determine their needs, it is crucial that international interests do not override local needs, and that dependency is reduced.

The literature on humanitarian aid suggests that aid can be more efficiently and sustainably delivered when local organizations are actively engaged in aid provision, through localization and local peacebuilding. In recent years, localization has been embraced, especially in Syria, where remote management of Syrian non-governmental organizations by international organizations is the dominant model of aid delivery. This research exposes the limitations of remote management models of aid delivery in the northwest: localization of aid does not amount to empowerment of Syrian civil society,

but international organizations employ a variety of control mechanisms to ensure implementation of their priorities. The governance structure and provision of humanitarian aid is relatively stable in the Turkish-operated areas. Nevertheless, little room remains for Syrian civil society to autonomously implement projects and take up an active role in governance as well as the planning of humanitarian aid provision.

The major, resounding issue concerning humanitarian aid is the mismatch between Syrian needs and international priorities. After eight years of conflict emergency relief alone is not an adequate response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Truly involving Syrian civil society requires increasing their institutional capacities for a long-term, coordinated approach for aid delivery and basic service provision. This would ultimately pave the way for civil society to take part in the establishment of legitimate political authority, ensuring the future well-being of the Syrian population. Based on these findings, the following areas were identified for improvement:

1. *Change the current power dynamics of humanitarian aid mechanisms*

- International actors should include Syrians in all steps of the decision-making process.
- International actors should commission more sustainable, long-term support for projects and Syrian organizations.
- International actors should increase non-earmarked funds available to Syrian organizations.
- International actors should base their work on Syrian needs assessments.

2. *Improve coordination between actors*

- Humanitarian aid providers and governance actors should acknowledge the interconnectivity of their work and aim towards more collaboration and dialogue.
 - Create a platform to discuss ways to systematically approach aid and basic service provision
 - Organize a conference inviting all relevant actors involved to improve communication
- Strengthen and expand OCHA sectoral clusters.
 - Cluster members should improve collaboration in conducting needs assessments laying the basis for the provision of humanitarian aid funds.
 - Clusters should be set up in other sectors to improve the coordination across all projects.

3. *Shift towards a more long-term approach*

- International Organizations should make an effort to prolong funding cycles for projects that address more long-time recovery.
- IOs should reexamine the definition of basic needs:
 - Higher education should be considered as a priority, international donors and implementing agencies should establish a more comprehensive and durable health care system, invest in infrastructure in order to improve access and service provision.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the engagement and approachability of our academic supervisor, Professor Ronald Jaubert, and the project advisor, Ahmed Haj Asaad, who provided valuable help and GIS support during the process of this ARS project. Also, we would like to express our gratitude to the Graduate Institute, especially the Teaching Assistant Bugra Güngör, for the support and guidance provided. Finally, we would like to thank the Syrian NGOs and Civil Society members as well as our Arabic-English translator Abdullatif Shretah for sharing their expertise and time with us and without whom this project would not have been possible.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	7
2. Context and Background.....	10
2.1 Humanitarian Situation in the Northwest.....	10
2.2 Literature review.....	11
3. Methodology	14
4. Presentation and Discussion of Results	16
4.1 Distribution, organization, and implementation of humanitarian aid and basic service restoration.....	16
4.1.1 Stakeholders in governance and aid	16
4.1.2 Sectors	18
4.2 Implications of governance situation for aid	19
4.2.1 Access and security	19
4.2.2 Political Instability	20
4.3 Scope for Syrian involvement	21
5. Conclusion	24
6. Recommendations.....	25
7. Bibliography	27

Acronyms

CSO - Civil Society Organization

DFID - Department for International Development

GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [German Corporation for International Cooperation]

HTS - Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

ICCG - Inter-Cluster Coordination Group

IDPs - Internally Displaced Persons

INGO - International Non-Governmental Organization

IO - International organization

LAC - Local Administrative Council

LACU - Local Administrative Council Unit

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

SDF - Syrian Democratic Forces

SIG - Syrian Interim Government

UNOCHA - United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

WoS - Whole of Syria

1. Introduction

Despite being the single largest recipient of humanitarian aid for six consecutive years, the humanitarian situation in Syria leaves more than 13.3 million people in need, equivalent to 78.7 percent of its population.¹ This report aims to fill the gap in the literature about the context of governance, humanitarian aid, and basic service restoration in northwestern Syria, from a Syrian perspective.

The northwest is currently an area with large needs, faced by continuing clashes between the Assad government and opposition forces, in addition to an influx of internally-displaced persons (IDPs). The political situation is highly dynamic and is complicated by the presence of Turkey, various armed groups, and actors who attempt to govern at various levels. The area is an interesting unit of analysis due to the presence of Turkey and as one of the last strongholds of opposition forces.

This project operates under **three research objectives**:

1. Identify stakeholders and their relative weight in the governance of Aleppo, Afrin, and Idlib governorates
2. Assess humanitarian aid and basic service restoration activities and coordination
3. Identify the scope of improvement of governance, humanitarian aid, and basic service restoration

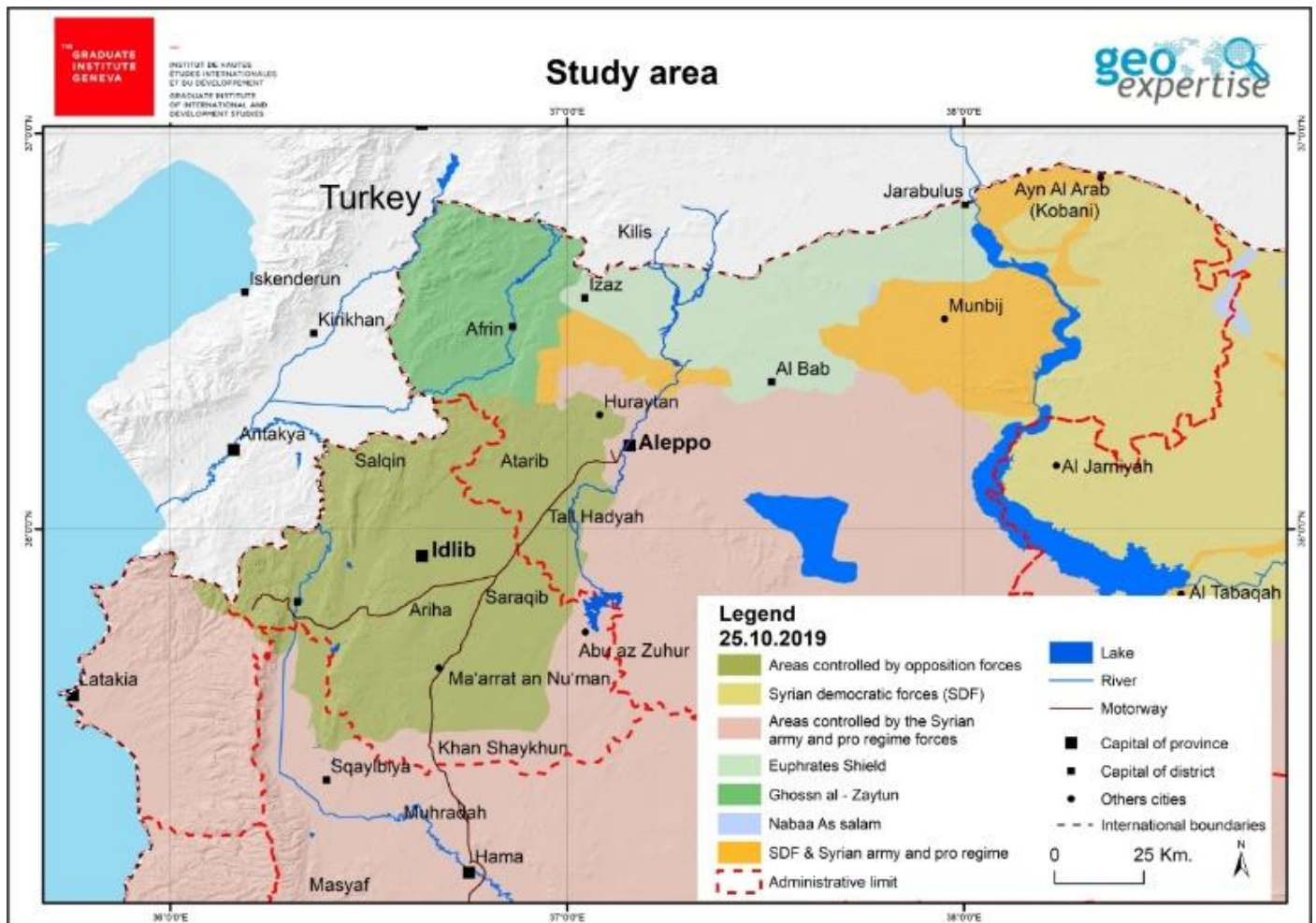
The **specific research questions** for this project are the following:

1. How are humanitarian aid and basic services distributed and organized in the northwest?
2. What implications does the governance situation have for the provision of aid and services?
3. How much authority and autonomy do Syrian organizations have in defining and implementing projects?

Some definitions:

- **Northwest** - The 'northwest' of Syria refers specifically to Aleppo, Afrin, and Idlib governorates, as pertaining to areas not held by pro-Assad forces (at the time of writing this report). The political situation in the northwest is highly dynamic, but the focus on this area is not meant to treat it as a vacuum, especially since new developments in other parts of the country may have direct implications for the northwest.
- **Humanitarian aid** - The provision of short-term emergency aid in case of a national crisis to meet the needs of victims of violence or disasters.
- **Basic services** - Basic services include access to food, water and sanitation, health care, education, electricity, and shelter. This report will consider basic services and aid in the same general category of 'aid,' because the protracted nature of Syria's conflict the disconnect between the various opposition-held territories create a situation where a distinction between basic services and humanitarian aid is hard to make.
- **Civil society** - The Syrian civil society includes Syrian NGOs, and individual members of the population (e.g. journalists and academics) representing the interests and needs of the population as the voice of the Syrians.

¹ Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2019*, 2019, p. 22.



Map of northwestern Syria: depiction by Geo Expertise

This report stresses that in order to improve the humanitarian response in northwestern Syria, the involvement and capacity building of Syrian communities needs to be strengthened. Current approaches to humanitarian aid delivery do not allow for the authority and autonomy of Syrian civil society organizations. In order to increase the agency of Syrian stakeholders in the humanitarian response, they should not only be involved in the implementation phase of projects, but also be consulted when projects get designed. Furthermore, this report emphasizes the need to recognize the interconnectivity of governance and humanitarian aid to reach long-term stabilization in the area. The financing of the providers of basic services and level of involvement of the Turkish government and the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) as well as the role of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) are also of interest, in order to determine

the scope of action for Syrian organizations within a power dynamic that is constantly in flux.

In the following report, it is assumed that the increased agency and autonomy given to Syrian actors, including local councils and their ministries and Syrian NGOs, will ultimately pave the way to empower the Syrian civil society. Consequently, needs will be better assessed and met through the inclusion and active participation of Syrian actors in the decision-making process of projects implemented in the area.

In order to answer the research questions, this report is structured in the following way. The first section will provide a background on the Syrian crisis, the humanitarian needs faced in the northwest and concepts related thereto, including localization theory, local peacebuilding and

remote management, will be discussed. Secondly, the methodology explains the primary data collection and analysis of the 26 semi-structured in-depth interviews that were conducted. This lays the basis to discuss the main findings in the third section, where the main stakeholders to the conflict in northwestern Syria are outlined. Furthermore, the role of governance in humanitarian aid and interconnection between governance and aid delivery are examined. Lastly, this section discusses the involvement and autonomy of Syrian actors with regards to

international organizations and the Turkish authorities, as well as the main issues impeding this autonomy. After some concluding remarks, the last section draws recommendations from the analysis.

2. Context and Background

The Syrian conflict began in 2011 when protests against the Assad government escalated into a full-blown conflict with various Syrian and foreign actors involved. In addition to the direct effects of violence on civilians through death, injury and destruction of infrastructures, the protracted nature of the crisis has major implications regarding the socioeconomic situation of the civilian population. Access to basic services such as food, health, shelter, education, water and sanitation, and the rehabilitation of livelihoods remain some of the biggest challenges.² The highly internationalized nature of the conflict contributes to the complexity of the crisis, since several foreign governments have played crucial roles and supported different parties to the conflict. Thus, examining the kinds of state and non-state actors operating within Syria, their histories, and motives is key to understanding the nature of the conflict in the northwest.

2.1 Humanitarian Situation in the Northwest

After more than eight years of conflict, the humanitarian situation in northwestern Syria remains worrisome. Out of more than four million people that are living in northern and western Aleppo, northern Hama, eastern Lattakia and the Idlib governorate, close to 2.7 million people urgently need humanitarian assistance.³ Escalations between Syrian government forces and opposed non-state armed groups earlier this year have exacerbated the situation further and

have displaced more than two million people. The majority of IDPs have fled towards the Syrian-Turkish border in the north to areas that are already densely populated and where humanitarian assistance has already been overstretched.⁴

The destruction of facilities such as schools, hospitals, and water stations constitutes a major challenge for the provision of humanitarian aid. In addition to the shortage of equipment and teachers, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), which is one of the main stakeholders in coordinating humanitarian assistance in Syria, estimates that half of the schools are either used as a shelter for IDPs or have been destroyed in Idlib.⁵ As a consequence, it is estimated that the capacity of the schools in northwestern Syria serves for less than half of the approximately 650'000 children in the region.⁶

Since 2015, the Whole of Syria (WoS) response framework has been bridging the humanitarian efforts of actors operating within Syria and neighboring countries in an attempt to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Access to the Turkish-operated territories remains nevertheless heavily restricted for international humanitarian actors, partly due to the complexity of the situation and the ongoing violence, as well as restrictions on movement into northwestern Syria and denials of permission to take up operations in the region by Turkish authorities.⁷

² UN OCHA. *Humanitarian Update: Syrian Arab Republic*, August 29, 2019.

³ UN OCHA. *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic*, February 28, 2019.

⁴ UN OCHA. *Syrian Arab Republic: Recent Developments in Northwestern Syria Situation Report No. 13* - as of 8 October 2019, p. 2.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ UN OCHA. *Syria Crisis Survey Report on Humanitarian Access in Northwest Syria*. May 2019.

Main actors involved

Structure, function, characteristics

Syrian Interim Government

- Composed of directorates, ministries and local councils
- Governing actor aiming to form a central authority over the local councils
- Centralize activities and harmonize sectors

Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS)

- Military wing of the Salvation Government
- Work with local councils in Idlib and pay salaries, but lack of trust and imposed rule

Local Councils

- Emerged in 2012 to build governance institutions as an alternative to the Assad government
- Collect data and coordinate projects as the primary intermediary between Syrian NGOs and INGOs
- Very heterogeneous

Turkey

- Coordinates projects, all projects require coordination with Turkish authorities in Turkish-operated areas
- Provides services

OCHA

- Main coordinating international organization
- Arranges funds towards NGOs and manages the cluster work

2.2 Literature review

This section discusses the academic literature related to humanitarian assistance, local involvement in humanitarian aid and peacebuilding activities and the role of civilians in conflict more broadly. Civilians are often deliberately targeted in contemporary warfare and therefore need specific support and protection both during conflict as well as in post-conflict reconstruction. The literature on 'new wars', a concept coined by Mary Kaldor, has emphasized that in contemporary conflicts, goals are often achieved through control of the population. Violence is no longer directed against combatants, but rather against civilians. In situations of protracted conflict where civilians are severely under threat, it is therefore imperative that efforts are undertaken in order to protect

civilians from attacks and strengthen local capacities for humanitarian aid provision and reconstruction.⁸

The literature on the involvement of local actors in humanitarian aid suggests that greater successes can be had when they are actively engaged in aid provision. The so-called 'localization' of humanitarian aid has been a response by several international organizations to this evidence, where local actors are included as part of an effort to correct the dominance of non-local actors in humanitarian aid delivery, as well as to improve its

⁸⁸ Mary Kaldor, "Inconclusive Wars: Is Clausewitz Still Relevant in these Global Times?", *Global Policy* 1, no. 3 (October 2010): 271-281.

efficacy.⁹ Local actors often have the contextual knowledge that is crucial in order to identify the needs of beneficiaries and best ways to deliver and implement aid and restoration projects. Localization promotes funding national and local organizations for humanitarian action by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), which is presumed to make aid more effective and sustainable and reach the populations it aims to reach.

In recent years, localization has been embraced in theory, which is apparent in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Grand Bargain.¹⁰ However, the 2019 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report states that the Grand Bargain's target of 25% of humanitarian funds for local and national actors remains challenging.¹¹ Humanitarian funding goes primarily to international responders, with local NGOs receiving only 0.1% of total funding. Similarly, multi-year funding, considered a crucial factor for aid to have lasting impact, is directed mostly towards UN agencies and international NGOs.

On another level, the local turn in peacebuilding, influenced by a critical turn in Conflict Studies, argues that long-term sustainability of peacebuilding operations can be increased when local actors are involved. The development of this local turn was due to increasing critiques about the top-down nature of peacebuilding, after some of the failures of top-down processes in places like Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Iraq.¹² This kind of bottom-up approach in peacebuilding is supposed

to increase the legitimacy of peacebuilding projects and contribute towards a more stable peace by supporting local institutions.

While localization of humanitarian aid is focused on increasing the efficiency of delivering aid to the recipients, local peacebuilding takes place on a variety of levels, whether through collaboration of local actors with international organizations,¹³ informal networks of civil societactors,¹⁴ or through local peace committees that represent a form of decentralized ('local') governance.¹⁵ All these are proposed methods through which post-conflict situations might be recovered in a more sustainable manner. Recent efforts in peacebuilding to include local civil society organizations as part of horizontal networks for peacebuilding have also taken shape; however, the issue of funding for these organizations is a potential impediment for their operations.¹⁶

Local actors often have the contextual knowledge that is crucial in order to identify the needs of beneficiaries and best ways to deliver and implement aid and restoration projects.

In recent years, however, critical views of local peacebuilding have been increasing. Scholars have pointed out that actors use representations of the local according to their own interests, and the construction of the 'authentic local' must be legitimized by the international community for it to be a valid representation.¹⁷ Furthermore, the

⁹ Andras Derzsi-Horvath, Julia Steets, and Lotte Ruppert. *Independent Grand Bargain Report*, 2017.; Theodora-Ismene Gizelis and Kristin E. Kosek, "Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail," *Cooperation and Conflict* 40, no. 4 (December 29, 2005): 363–83.

¹⁰ Andras Derzsi-Horvath, Julia Steets, and Lotte Ruppert. *Independent Grand Bargain Report*, 2017.

¹¹ Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2019*, 2019, p. 64.

¹² Elisa Randazzo. "The Paradoxes of the 'everyday': Scrutinising the Local Turn in Peace Building", *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (August 2, 2016), p. 1352.

¹³ Nina Wilén and Vincent Chapaux. "Problems of Local Participation and Collaboration with the UN in a Post-Conflict Environment: Who Are the 'Locals'?", *Global Society* 25, no. 4 (October 2011): 531–48.

¹⁴ Webster Zambara. "Civil Society Organizations Networking for Peace in Zimbabwe," ed. Lesley Connolly and Laura Powers, *Local Networks for Peace: Lessons from Community-Led Peacebuilding*, 2018.

¹⁵ Andries Odendaal. *An Architecture for Building Peace at the Local Level: A Comparative Study of Local Peace Committees*, 2010.

¹⁶ Lesley Connolly and Laura Powers. *Local Networks for Peace: Lessons from Community-Led Peacebuilding*, ed. Lesley Connolly and Laura Powers (New York: International Peace Institute, 2018).

¹⁷ Andreas T Hiblinger and Claudia Simons. "The Good, the Bad, and the Powerful: Representations of the 'local' in Peacebuilding", *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 5 (October 20, 2015): 422–39.

paradox of local peacebuilding is that it can undermine any space for the development of legitimate political authority to be built up in places of conflict.¹⁸ Local participation can reinforce the existing hierarchical relationship between international and local, which means that the power relations remain the same.¹⁹ Thus, although local peacebuilding might have originally been intended to counteract the traditionally top-down processes, it falls into the same dangers of reproducing the same power relations even while 'local' actors are being involved. While local participation has increasingly become a part of mainstream discourse about peacebuilding, the extent of its actual implementation has been less clear.

These critiques of local peacebuilding can also be applied to including local actors in humanitarian aid provision. Many of the same concerns about the binary between local and international and the ensuing power relationships apply. The inclusion of local actors is a necessary but not sufficient condition for their empowerment. In this sense, the third research question of this project is a crucial one, which inquires about the level of autonomy and authority that Syrian organizations have in the provision of aid and basic services. When concerning the long-term, sustainable provision of basic services, the literature suggests that Syrian institutional capacities should be built up to be able to provide aid and services long after the international organizations have left.

The literature identifies the local involvement in aid through three general models:

1. The IO has a country office within its area of operation, which directly provides aid
2. The IO subcontracts local and/or national organizations to do the implementation of aid or provide services
3. There is an inclusive partnership between the IO and local and/or national organizations, which design and implement projects together.

The dominant mode of remote management in Syria is subcontracting Syrian organizations to implement aid (Model 2). The inclusion of local actors in humanitarian aid and basic services provision in Syria tends to be made up of informal networks of individual NGOs that are subcontracted to IOs. The result of the rise of remote management is that humanitarian aid is provided almost entirely by Syrian actors. The literature suggests several issues that impede the provision of basic services, including the ad hoc implementation of aid projects as a response to needs that arise, the disconnect between the various opposition-held territories and the lack of long term planning. These factors create a situation where a distinction between basic services and humanitarian aid is hard to make.²⁰ These issues are compounded by the political situation and the numerous actors, both Syrian and international, who have interests in the conflict.

¹⁸ Vivienne Jabri. "Post-Colonialism: A Post-Colonial Perspective on Peacebuilding", In *The Palgrave Handbook of Disciplinary and Regional Approaches to Peace*, edited by Oliver P. Richmond, Sandra Pogodda, and Jasmin Ramović, 154–67, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016.

¹⁹ Vivienne Jabri. "Post-Colonialism: A Post-Colonial Perspective on Peacebuilding", In *The Palgrave Handbook of Disciplinary and Regional Approaches to Peace*, edited by Oliver P. Richmond, Sandra Pogodda, and Jasmin Ramović, 154–67, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016.

Roger Mac Ginty. "Where is the Local? Critical Localism and Peacebuilding", *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (May 4, 2015): 840–56.

²⁰ Chas Morrison. "Providing Basic Services under Siege: Preliminary Insights from Interim Councils and Medical Providers in Besieged Urban Areas of Syria", *Environment and Urbanization* 31, no. 1 (April 2, 2019): 309–24.

3. Methodology

In order to assess the situation concerning governance, humanitarian aid, and basic service restoration in northwestern Syria, both primary and secondary data were analyzed. As information about humanitarian actors involved in the northwestern territories remains rather scarce, primary data collection provided crucial insights with regard to the coordination and nature of humanitarian efforts and governance structures.

A field trip to Gaziantep in September 2019 allowed for conducting 21 open-ended, semi-structured interviews as well as in-person observations. Additionally, five interviews were conducted via Skype or in-person in Geneva. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews seemed the most appropriate approach for this research project for several reasons: As the sample size was relatively small with a total of 26 interviews, it was of interest to gather a lot of in-depth information in each interview. Open-ended questions allowed for the interview partners to express their own views without having to choose from predetermined answer possibilities.

The conversational nature of semi-structured interviews enabled follow-up questions and engagement with interview partners throughout.²¹ The semi-structured approach further allowed to create consistency among interviews as we were able to always address the same broader questions and themes, while at the same time allowing for some flexibility.²² The interview guide that was used for all interviews is included in the Appendix.

The fieldwork location was chosen as Gaziantep is the regional hub for most humanitarian actors operating in northwestern Syria. The interviews were conducted partially in English and Arabic, in

which case a local translator was consulted. The primary data was collected using a snowball sampling technique. Conducting field research added many benefits to the project, including a more accurate mapping of the humanitarian aid and basic service provision activities, gaining a more holistic understanding of the governance situation, and the ability to record in-person observations. Furthermore, the constantly changing landscape of actors and interests in the region call for reliance on local sources to evaluate the current situation.

The initial contact with potential interview partners was established through the project partner and through ad-hoc contact. As former reports on humanitarian aid provided in northwestern Syria lack in-depth interviews, the methodological approach of this project attempts to fill this knowledge gap. Apart from interviews with Syrian organizations and individuals, further interviews were conducted with international organizations that take a prominent role in humanitarian aid provision and support of local governance structures, including UNOCHA and Swisspeace. Upon the request of Syrian interview partners, they will not be mentioned throughout the report by their name.

Interviewee Type	Quantity
Syrian NGOs	16
Syrian Civil Society Representatives	6
International Organizations	4
Total	26

²¹ Robyn Longhurst, 'Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups', in *Key Methods in Geography*, ed. Nicholas Clifford, Shaun French, and Gill Valentine (SAGE Publications, 2010), p. 113.

Joseph C Hermanowicz, 'The Great Interview : 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed', *Qualitative Sociology* 25, no. 4 (2002), p. 482-483.

²² Hanna Kallio et al., 'Systematic Methodological Review: Developing a Framework for a Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide', *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 72, no. 12 (2016), p. 2955.

Interviews were transcribed on the same day as they were conducted. The results presented in this report are based on a thematic content analysis. The analysis is based on the interview transcripts of the hand-written notes that were created during the interviews. All of the interviews were coded manually based on a code book that was developed by the group. An inductive approach was chosen in order to ensure that the raw interview data determined the structure of the analysis. The first interviews were coded collectively as a group in order to ensure a harmonized coding approach. For the remaining interviews, the coding was divided among the group members. However, all of the coding was cross-checked and discussed in order to ensure intercoder reliability. After all the interviews were coded in an initial stage, we then developed our final coding scheme consisting of meta codes or code families which include all of the initial codes that address the same theme. This final coding scheme provided the foundation for the analysis. The key findings are reported under section 4 in this report.

The limitations of this study arise primarily from its focus on the perspective of Syrian civil society actors and organizations. Stemming from a lack of Syrian voices within the literature and discussions about the conflict, this project aimed to center those voices by selecting them in greater numbers than Turkish or international organizations. In order to counter this bias, alternative views were

included through complementary Skype interviews which were held with civil society members in other areas of Syria and with international organizations. The Syrian organizations and individuals interviewed do not necessarily represent the whole of the Syrian people but reflect specific experiences regarding the conflict and aid. The primary data was only collected in Gaziantep with Syrian NGOs based in the city. This may have led to a bias with regards to the issues voiced and discussed. Although repeated contact was attempted with Turkish organizations, a lack of response posed a barrier to inquiring about their perspective. This project does not include the views of international organizations and Turkish authorities in equal proportion to the interviews with Syrian civil society, and results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to Syria as a whole.

Practical challenges included the identification of and outreach to relevant actors caused by non-responsiveness of NGOs and lack of public information concerning local implementation actors, as well as the language barrier which might have led to minor misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Furthermore, the fast-changing nature and the overall complexity of the situation in northwestern Syria made a holistic and up-to-date analysis of humanitarian aid and basic services restoration more challenging.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Results

4.1 Distribution, organization, and implementation of humanitarian aid and basic service restoration

Governance structures are central to the distribution and implementation of aid. The different political actors in the region coordinate their aid activities to varying degrees. The results of this report display the complex interrelations between the various stakeholders involved in governance, humanitarian aid, and basic service provision. The main actors involved in coordinating the humanitarian response are UNOCHA, the Interim Government Directorates, and the Turkish government. The main implementation partners are Syrian organizations. Most NGOs discuss implementation with the local councils. Based on interview results, this section will first discuss the stakeholders involved. Then, a sectoral analysis will be conducted.

4.1.1 Stakeholders in governance and aid

Local councils

The local councils, also sometimes referred to as local administrative councils (LACs) first emerged in 2012 in opposition-held areas.²³ Local coordination committees established the local councils to meet the needs of the population and to build governance institutions as an alternative to the Assad government, ultimately providing the basis for a future transition to an elected government.²⁴ In recent years, local councils have evolved from these informal structures into more formalized and bureaucratic institutions. Because of their heterogeneity depending on the political context, Syrian NGOs view the local councils with varying degrees of trust and goodwill. Some

organizations expressed the need to strengthen local councils, because they have some political authority.

Local councils commonly play an intermediary role between Syrian NGOs and International NGOs and coordinate projects on the ground. Local councils publish tenders for projects by international organizations and take part in the selection process of local implementing NGOs that apply for the respective project. They are further involved in needs assessment and data collection on behalf of INGOs and often select the beneficiaries for projects. The coordination between Syrian NGOs and local councils vary and can be divided into three categories. First, the local council is being informed and coordinated with. Second, the NGO is implementing the projects together with the local council which includes planning together. The last and rarest scenario is when the NGO works independently. Syrian NGOs regularly meet with the local councils and agreed that working with local authorities was crucial for their work, as they rely on data and statistics gathered by the local councils.

Syrian Interim Government

One governing actor in opposition-held territory is the Syrian Interim Government which was established with the intent to form a central authority over the local councils, however, their actual oversight over the local councils is highly limited.²⁵ The SIG is composed of directorates and ministries which aim to facilitate and harmonize local governance and the provision of services. The directorates focus on the technical coordination of aid within sectors such as education, health, agriculture, finance, and a social and work department. Despite their limitations, the interviewed Syrian NGOs stated that the directorates do help to centralize activities and

²³ *ibid.*, p. 1

²⁴ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. "The Crushing of Syria's Civil Actors: Survival of Grassroots Structures is Crucial for Country's Future," *SWP Comments* 55, December 2016.

²⁵ Swisspeace. *Perceptions of Governance - The Experience of Local Administrative Councils in Opposition-held Syria, Synthesis Paper*, January 2017, p. 12.

made it easier to harmonize the sectors in different regions. Both Syrian and international NGOs coordinate their activities with the respective directorates and announce their projects to the local administrative councils, that take on the role of local governments in most parts of the opposition held areas. The local administrative council unit (LACU) is involved in giving assistance to the SIG but has no say in their decision-making.

HTS

HTS is the military wing of the Salvation Government, which influences the directorates and local council in Idlib and takes an important role in the governance structures. In July 2017, HTS gained control over parts of the Idlib province in the northwest, further complicating the delivery of humanitarian aid due to ongoing airstrikes against the group and international sanctions.²⁶

Interviewees expressed a lack of trust in HTS, stating that their rule is imposed and that they do not have legitimacy among the population, though small parts of the population may support them. The vast majority of local councils oppose collaboration with HTS, for some local councils, however, collaborating with HTS is their only option. The LACU described that, some local councils work with HTS and receive salaries from them, given that they rely on external funding, which has been severely restricted in Idlib due to international embargoes.

Turkey

In August 2016, the Turkish military launched Operation Euphrates Shield followed by Operation Olive Branch in March 2018 with the aim to oust armed groups such as Daesh as well as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from the region to improve the security situation.²⁷ As a result,

Turkey has increased its military involvement in the northern region.

Turkey plays a direct role in the governance of areas of Afrin, Azaz, and Aleppo, providing the administrative structures for service provision. Turkey rehabilitates schools, pays teachers' salaries, builds and runs hospitals. To work in the areas under Turkish influence, Syrian NGOs are required to coordinate their activities with Turkish authorities and be registered under Turkish law. Two Turkish provinces supervise projects implemented by local councils in Syria, Gaziantep and Kilis. Those that work in the opposition held areas must also be registered in Turkey in order to set up their cross-border activities.²⁸

The Turkish authorities see themselves as the biggest player in coordinating the provision of humanitarian aid and financing the reconstruction of hospitals, schools as well as providing for the salaries and recruitment of doctors and teachers in the Turkish-operated areas of Syria.²⁹ Furthermore, for the majority of humanitarian organizations providing aid in northwestern Syria, the country serves as a base of management and operations.³⁰

UNOCHA

UNOCHA is the main coordinating international organization in northwestern Syria. Its primary activities are arranging funds toward NGOs and humanitarian aid projects through the Humanitarian Fund. Other actors administering aid in the region include DFID (Department for International Development), and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) to name a few.

OCHA manages project implementation by Syrian NGOs remotely. Limited physical access within Syria beginning mid-2013 has meant that the majority of international organizations moved

²⁶ Mapping Militant Organizations. *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*, Stanford University, Last modified June 2018.

²⁷ Selen Temizer. *Syrian civil war in its 9th year*, March 2019.

²⁸ Van Leeuwen & Van Veen. *Turkey in northwestern Syria*, June 2019, p. 3.

²⁹ Anadolu Agency, 'Local officials hail Turkish largesse in Syria's Afrin', February, 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/local-officials-hail-turkish-largesse-in-syria-s-afrin/1390965>

³⁰ Refugees International. *Losing their last Refuge - Inside Idlib's humanitarian nightmare*, September 2019, p. 26.

their offices outside Syria, to the point that remote management is now the predominant mode of operation for most international organizations (IOs) working in humanitarian aid in Syria. This change to remote management was a response to increasing security concerns caused by violent clashes between different armed actors.³¹

According to the latest update about the recent developments in northwestern Syria, UNOCHA confirms that \$24 million were allocated to the Humanitarian Fund funding 37 projects.³² The humanitarian response is coordinated under the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG), that manages the cross-border activities from Turkey into northwestern Syria. Along with the ICCG, OCHA organizes activities sectorally within clusters and provides a platform for sharing knowledge and coordinating projects in order to avoid the duplication of aid. However, not all activities fall under a cluster.³³

4.1.2 Sectors

Education

Education remains one of the most pressing issues with respect to humanitarian needs. Overall, the quality and continuity of education have been mentioned as two of the main problems. Due to the ongoing violent clashes over the past eight years, a large number of educational facilities like schools and universities has been destroyed. As a result, about 90% of people in the opposition held areas are deprived of education and a large part of the population is illiterate. As a result of destroyed infrastructure, classes are sometimes being held in the open air under olive trees and with very minimal equipment. Some initiatives have tried to address the issue of lacking infrastructure and have set up caravan schools near IDP camps.

Various NGOs have undertaken efforts to rehabilitate schools, however, these efforts are not coordinated and remain few. A representative by a Syrian NGO working in the education sector stated that the main cause for the lack of coordination in school rehabilitation efforts is that the individual NGOs that are working in the education sector are too small to support all schools. In order to ensure that schools keep running, teachers' salaries need to be funded on a long-term basis and infrastructure needs to be rebuilt.

In response to the dire situation regarding education, many international organizations have started to focus on pre-university education projects. In the areas administered by Turkish authorities, all teachers are provided with an equal salary and most schools have been rehabilitated. In the opposition-held areas in Aleppo and Idlib, teachers' salaries are sometimes provided by INGOs, however, due to a lack of harmonization the wages can differ significantly.

Many of the interviewees identified the lack of recognition for university education as a priority as a major issue. International organizations, and in particular the UN, do not consider higher education as an emergency need and, thus, do not provide funds for universities in opposition-held territory. The interviewed Syrian NGOs that are working on education emphasized the crucial value of higher education as a counter-radicalization tool.

WASH

Within OCHA's WASH cluster, about 40 different NGOs coordinate their efforts and meet on a monthly basis to discuss progress and challenges. The allocation of projects follows the same logic as in other sectors; the local councils send out a concept note to the WASH cluster where different NGOs can apply for the project implementation.

³¹ Kimberly Howe and Elizabeth Stties. "Partners under Pressure: Humanitarian Action for the Syria Crisis", *Disasters* 43, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 3–23.

³² UN OCHA. *Syrian Arab Republic: Recent Developments in Northwestern Syria Situation Report No. 13 - as of 8 October 2019*, p. 3.

³³ UN OCHA. *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic*, February 28, 2019.

The NGOs working within the cluster assessed that the coordination with other organizations was good, however they struggle to obtain funding for WASH projects. Specific projects that are currently being implemented among others are the setting up and maintenance of sewage systems, water treatment and solid waste management. The maintenance of water stations, solid waste management and sewage systems is commonly being done by local council units that receive their training and salary by the NGOs that fund these projects. Interviewees voiced concern about the widespread use of unsafe water by the population that is caused by the high operational costs for the water stations.

Health

Health is one of the biggest sectors in which humanitarian aid is provided. Although many hospitals have been destroyed, there are still a few local facilities and national hospitals in bigger cities in places that are run by different governance actors and NGOs. Many of the buildings in which medical treatments are currently being provided have not been designed as medical facilities, and the infrastructure is often inadequate, and equipment is lacking. However, as the establishment of new hospitals is difficult due to the unstable security situation and continued air attacks, these facilities provide the best alternative for many NGOs working in the health sector. The activities that are being provided range from mobile clinics, primary health care and dialysis, training for local medical staff and midwifery education programs. In areas where no health facilities are present, NGOs also provide cross-border transportation of patients to Turkey.

The coordination within the OCHA health cluster was generally described as working well. The funding of health services during the first two years of the conflict was initially mainly provided by the Syrian diaspora, but this gradually shifted to become dominated by international donors. This means that the provision of health services has become increasingly fragmented due to each donor's different approach. International donors fund individual NGOs, who cannot continue to run

hospitals or pay medical staff salaries once the funding shifts elsewhere.

Reconstruction

There are very few projects concerning more long-term reconstruction, and most interviewees voiced that they perceive the lack of reconstruction initiatives as one of the biggest problems. The few initiatives that do address more long-term reconstruction are undertaken in the agricultural sector or focus on economic empowerment through vocational training, but all remain extremely small in scale. These projects have aimed to secure more permanent work opportunities by connecting youth to agricultural activities within Syria. There has also been some road reconstruction, but these projects remain scarce.

4.2 Implications of governance situation for aid

As a result of the myriad of stakeholders present in the northwest, the main obstacles in aid provision relate to the complex security situation and the lack of access to certain regions. These difficulties are closely tied to the highly heterogeneous and dynamic political landscape in the northwest, which are connected to the political instability the region faces. The fast-changing environment and power dynamics make long-term planning for aid projects difficult.

4.2.1 Access and security

The changing nature of the security situation affects the delivery of humanitarian aid in the northwest. Particularly in Idlib, the presence of armed actors such as HTS severely impedes humanitarian assistance. At the beginning of 2018, INGO work was drastically reduced because of ongoing clashes between state and non-state armed forces. For example, OCHA stopped funding projects in Idlib, as they fear that funds could be diverted by HTS and would finance the groups' activities. Syrian NGOs too face difficulties in gaining access to Idlib, due to the international embargo. Many Syrian NGOs had to terminate

their activities in Idlib, as they could no longer provide services without risking the loss of funds for other areas.

Civilians are the ones that are suffering most from a cessation of humanitarian assistance.

Concerns related to aid diversion are also prevalent in other areas and have resulted in reduced support for the local councils in areas under Salvation Government control. Although these concerns are legitimate, the complete exit of aid agencies is highly problematic, as civilians are the ones that are suffering most from a cessation of humanitarian assistance. Situations like Idlib demonstrate once again the challenges that civilians in conflict face in contemporary conflicts and how their situation can be used as a pawn in order to further political interests. As supporting Syrian civil society is important for the long-term recovery, it is crucial to make sure that these actors are not being weakened because of a general aid embargo and that civilians are not used as a bargaining tool between different political factions.

A second issue restricting access is the lack of infrastructure. Many roads have been destroyed throughout the conflict and have not yet been reconstructed, which is why certain places are extremely hard to reach. In order to avoid access problems caused by destroyed infrastructure, it is crucial that funds are provided for projects that go beyond emergency relief and consider the reconstruction of infrastructure.

In areas under Turkish influence, the security situation is considerably more stable compared to other regions in the northwest, and issues of access are less prominent as infrastructure reconstruction has been conducted in many parts. Syrian actors are, therefore, less negatively affected by security and access considerations in these areas.

4.2.2 Political Instability

Improving governance does not constitute a priority at the moment, even though it constitutes a necessity for the effective provision of humanitarian aid. The rapidly changing political situation does not allow for creating strong governance structures or long-term planning strategies. Within little time, local councils in northwestern Syria have been under various governments. Especially in Idlib, the constantly changing political dynamics hinder the development of strong and stable governance structures.

The ongoing conflict in northwestern Syria has also changed the population's trust in its governing actors. Many interviewed NGOs agreed that the fast-changing political situation undermined the confidence and trust of the population and among other reasons led to the low legitimacy of local councils in some areas. Consequently, the local councils are sometimes perceived as lacking expertise, having very little experience and no actual enforcement power in certain regions. Instead, the enforcement and decision-making power largely depends on the local councils' coordination with armed groups which possess considerable power.³⁴

Improving governance does not constitute a priority at the moment, even though it constitutes a necessity for the effective provision of humanitarian aid.

The issue of the local councils' perceived lack of legitimacy is also connected to their dependence on external funding. The interests of donors is considered to guide the local councils' work rather than the needs of the population. This prioritization led to some local councils' tendency to plan on a short-term instead of long-term basis, prioritizing donor's interests over the population's

³⁴ Swisspeace, "Perceptions of Governance - The Experience of Local Administrative Councils in Opposition-held Syria", *Synthesis Paper*, January 2017.

needs.³⁵ Connected thereto is also the issue of the different approaches of foreign governments regarding the capacity building of local councils. As a result, the interviewed NGOs agreed that the structure of local councils today vary vastly depending on the supporting donors. There were critiques that international organizations would simply provide blueprint solutions for strengthening local governance, rather than tailoring an approach based on the realities and stated needs of the beneficiaries of governance-strengthening programs.

4.3 Scope for Syrian involvement

The nature and extent of collaboration between international and Syrian actors in the delivery of humanitarian aid is of particular interest in this study as the aim is to identify the scope for involvement for Syrian actors. In the current situation, the collaboration is largely characterized by remote management by IOs and direct management by Turkey.

This report finds that the nature of projects plays a significant role with regard to the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and the scope of Syrian involvement. Currently, there are a variety of issues that render the humanitarian response less effective and empowering than it could be, leaving many needs unaddressed. The identified mismatch between international organizations' agendas and Syrian perspectives highlights the urgent need for an increasing involvement of Syrian actors. Only if Syrian actors are involved and their agency strengthened can these issues be overcome.

International organizations: remote management

This research exposes the limitations of remote management models of aid delivery: remote management of humanitarian aid in the northwest demonstrates that that localization of aid does not amount to empowerment of Syrian civil society, but that IOs employ a variety of control

mechanisms to ensure implementation of their priorities. These control mechanisms include: requiring certain institutional capacities, predetermined project objectives, and project-by-project funding. The issue is not that checks on implementation partners are unnecessary, but that these methods that IOs currently use tend to override Syrian needs. Across the board, Syrian organizations are the implementation partners for projects that are pre-determined by IOs. They are not involved in project design or needs assessments, which results in very little autonomy.

The overall focus of the humanitarian response tends to be more on emergency relief and less on reconstruction, because international priorities and consequent agenda-setting leads to less funds being available for reconstruction, even if NGOs would like to work in that area. Syrian NGOs stressed the fact that although both IOs and INGOs did some work to empower local councils, the Syrians were the people who had more stake regarding the future of their country, whereas international actors were more concerned with statistics (e.g. measuring impact in terms of reaching the biggest number of beneficiaries), rather than identifying the areas of need.

The actual relationship between IOs and Syrian NGOs resembles a hierarchical one instead of a truly equal partnership

The current model of remote management limits IOs from working with organizations that are unable to prove their activities and capacities on paper. This means that Syrian NGOs must develop the capacity to speak the language of IOs and prove capacities in departments such as human resources. Considerable effort and resources must go into developing institutional capacities to appear capable enough to receive IO funding. However, within Syria's constantly changing political situation and persisting conflict, extending resources towards 'speaking the language' of IO standards is difficult. As such,

³⁵ *ibid.*

feedback mechanisms are also more difficult under remote management, especially for organizations that are younger and lack comprehensive institutional structures.

Despite the limitations of remote management, IOs often frame it as a method of ‘locally implemented projects’ and ‘local empowerment’. A representative from OCHA stated that the humanitarian response in Syria is “completely facilitated by NGO action” and that “NGOs are the responders.” When pressed about the concerns expressed by Syrian NGOs regarding OCHA’s priorities, however, the representative stated that “These concerns are individual perceptions,” and “I fully acknowledge that they don’t like it... but this is about prioritization.” Despite the desire to disguise implementation of projects by Syrian NGOs as a form of local empowerment, the actual relationship between IOs and Syrian NGOs resembles a hierarchical one instead of a truly equal partnership. Syrian NGOs are limited in their abilities to take the steps to envision their long-term future.

Turkey: direct management

In the Turkish-operated areas of northwestern Syria, the local councils are largely influenced by and work closely with the Turkish authorities. Their structure and administrative work is primarily shaped by the Turkish authorities. Little room remains for Syrian civil society to autonomously implement projects and take up an active role in governance as well as the planning of humanitarian aid provision.

In general, basic service provision seems to be more coordinated in areas under Turkish influence, especially in the education and health sectors, but Syrian organizations are relegated to project implementation only. Syrian NGOs had a variety of opinions about Turkey’s activities. One NGO explained that although Turkey had initially banned Syrian NGOs from working in education, they began to develop clear procedures to involve them in project implementation. Some said that the coordination was not enough to meet the needs inside Syria, and while some NGOs emphasized the solely supervisory role of Turkey,

others expressed that working in areas under Turkish influence was more complicated because they needed to obtain explicit ‘permission’ from Turkish authorities. Though project design is more long-term due to Turkish oversight, the model of direct management in the areas under Turkish influence results in similar power dynamics as in remote management by IOs.

Resulting mismatch and areas for improvement

The major, resounding issue concerning humanitarian aid is the mismatch between Syrian needs and international priorities. Despite the significance of multi-year funding for effective localization of humanitarian aid, the current time frame of project contracts between international funders and Syrian organizations is characterized by short-time funding cycles. These funding cycles greatly impact the kinds of projects that are implemented on the ground. Organizations must apply for funding from IOs on a project-by-project basis, where each project requires a separate agreement. There might also be different phases for funding, such as an initial pilot phase and then a decision regarding extension. Due to the short-term nature of projects, the NGOs themselves can also be short-term. They are often formed based on a single project, as a consequence of project-by-project funding. The proliferation of Syrian NGOs has meant that there is increased competition for funds, which is compounded by the increasingly stringent international standards.

After eight years of conflict, emergency relief alone is not an adequate response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria

All organizations stated it would be more desirable to have long-term contracts for the purposes of strategic planning, which would allow them to build upon emergency aid as the basis for long-term community- and capacity-building. The organizations interviewed for this project expressed the inadequacy of remote management in aid delivery, especially because of the unique and protracted nature of Syria’s conflict. However,

the ability of Syrian CSOs to innovate new solutions or make riskier decisions regarding aid is limited by their organizational capacity. This issue of emergency versus reconstruction aid is most seen in the education sector.

“International organizations just need us for the cameras”

Emergency education curricula are provided by some organizations, but the fact that education is viewed as a luxury is an impediment to building up a basis for reconstruction. University education is not considered an emergency for the UN and thus depends on individual people for funding. Another example are the sanitation systems in camps and villages which are often not considered to be a priority, leading to long-term problems. Overall, in the WASH sector, there has only been very primary rehabilitation of sanitation systems, because complete rehabilitation would be very costly. Because of the volatility of the security situation, the rehabilitation costs are considered to be too high in many instances.

One NGO stated, “International organizations just need us for the cameras.”³⁶ All Syrian organizations interviewed criticized international donors for not making the needed efforts to assess the situation and needs of communities, which leads to many needs not being met. Instead,

donors would prefer projects that have a tangible impact and that ‘look good’ in their reports. In order to proceed from the emergency stage into more sustainable restoration of services and development, humanitarian agencies would have to shift their focus. As one organization stated, “There is a mismatch between the reality on the ground and IO understanding of it.”³⁷ At times, this is caused by competing needs assessments on the ground. A variety of actors including OCHA, the Turkish authorities, individual Syrian NGOs, and clusters conduct competing assessments of the humanitarian needs of the population. The interviewed NGOs agreed that the Syrian needs assessments are often not heard, because funders prefer to determine it themselves.

The mismatch stems from the unwillingness to provide assistance beyond emergency relief as well as the preference for projects that show an immediate and measurable impact. After eight years of conflict, emergency relief alone is not an adequate response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. A more long-term focus is crucial in order to support the restoration of basic services and the reconstruction of infrastructure. Only by taking the collaboration with Syrian actors seriously and ensuring that needs are properly addressed, and restoration efforts are supported can more sustainable humanitarian assistance be provided. If the focus remains solely on emergency relief, the existing dependencies will not be reduced, and Syrian civil society will not be adequately supported.

³⁶ Interview 7, part 13.

³⁷ Interview 2, part 7.

5. Conclusion

This report has contributed toward filling the current gap in the literature of the Syrian perspective on the delivery of aid and involvement of Syrian actors. After almost nine years of conflict, the interconnectivities between governance, humanitarian aid, and service delivery cannot be overstated. The recognition of these relations should lead to increased dialogue between humanitarian aid providers and governance actors. The findings are based on interviews with Syrian NGOs, civil society members and international organizations to create a better understanding of the actors involved and to evaluate the extent to which Syrians are given authority to define the provision of humanitarian aid and basic service restoration.

The humanitarian assistance in the northwest involves a variety of actors. In the areas under Turkish influence, Turkey is strongly involved in the coordination and implementation of aid and basic service restoration. Syrian NGOs that want to work in these areas need to get their projects approved by the Turkish authorities that coordinate all aid activities. The local councils also collaborate closely with the Turkish authorities for the purpose of humanitarian aid delivery. In the opposition-held areas in the northwest outside of Turkish influence, humanitarian aid is largely provided through cross-border activities from Turkey.

The various actors and their activities in aid and service provision were analyzed by sector, demonstrating the highly heterogeneous and dynamic situation. Currently, there is little room for the authority and autonomy of Syrian civil society organizations to determine their needs. This is the case in both Turkish influenced areas as well as the opposition-held areas, where IOs largely set the agenda for aid provision. All over the northwest of Syria, Syrian actors are involved in the delivery of humanitarian aid, however they are largely playing a role as implementing partners and are not consulted in the design-phase of

projects, leading to international priorities frequently overriding Syrian needs.

Recent waves of displacement have further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the region. The lack of coordination in some sectors further leads to inefficiency of aid delivery. Localization of aid through remote management has not resulted in empowerment of Syrian civil society, as IOs are still the main actors in designing and controlling the implementation of their priorities. In the areas where Turkey is providing services, the coordination between different sectors seems to work better and a significant part of the local infrastructure has been restored and hospitals and schools are operated. However, Syrian actors are still not truly empowered, which is problematic in the long run.

In order to increase the agency and autonomy of Syrian civil society, it is crucial that international interests do not override local needs, and that dependency is reduced. The literature on local peacebuilding stresses the importance of civil society for the long-term well-being for post-conflict societies. Laying the groundwork through changing the power relations in current mechanisms of humanitarian aid and basic service restoration can become a valuable foundation for peacebuilding efforts in the future. Within the current mechanism of remote management, Syrian civil society is not being supported and is limited in its abilities to take the steps to envision its long-term future. The short-sighted and fragmented nature of aid projects hinders the opportunity for the development of a strong Syrian civil society and political institutions that serve Syrian populations in the long-term. The presented challenges reveal systemic faults that undermine future livelihoods. There is a need to fundamentally rethink the current provision of humanitarian aid in Syria, including a shift toward a more long-term approach for the real empowerment of Syrian civil society.

6. Recommendations

The findings of this report are in line with previous reports and studies that find that the involvement of local actors is crucial for an efficient and sustainable delivery of aid as well as long-term peacebuilding. Further, humanitarian aid delivery and the restoration of basic services are largely dependent on governance structures in place that facilitate or hinder the effective delivery of aid. In order to strengthen the involvement and agency of Syrian actors that are active in the delivery of humanitarian aid and basic service restoration, it is crucial to improve dialogue between all actors that are currently involved in the humanitarian response. It is important to acknowledge the current challenges apparent in the humanitarian response in northwestern Syria in order to improve the delivery of humanitarian aid, increase the involvement of Syrian actors, and provide support for the long-term rehabilitation of Syrian civil society. While recognizing that the issue at hand in northwestern Syria goes beyond what can be addressed in these recommendations, the findings of this report show areas that can be improved upon. The following recommendations are thus proposed in order to address specific aspects that need to be changed.

1. Change the current power dynamics of humanitarian aid mechanisms

Localization of aid and local peacebuilding indicate the significance of building up the institutional capacities of civil society as the foundations of effective and sustainable aid. However, in the northwest of Syria, Syrian organizations have high levels of dependency and management by both international organizations and Turkish authorities.

- International actors should include Syrians in all steps of the decision-making process including the project design, implementation and monitoring while consulting beneficiaries of aid.
- International actors should commission more sustainable, long-term support for projects and Syrian organizations.
- International actors should increase non-earmarked funds available to Syrian organizations.
- International actors should base their work on Syrian needs assessments.

2. Improve coordination between actors

Humanitarian aid and basic service restoration is disjointed through the lack of donor coordination, competing needs assessments, and the lack of connections to governance.

- Humanitarian aid providers and governance actors should acknowledge the interconnectivity of their work and aim towards more collaboration and dialogue.
 - Create a platform to discuss ways to systematically approach aid and basic service provision
 - Organize a conference inviting all relevant actors involved to improve communication
- Strengthen and expand OCHA sectoral clusters.
 - OCHA sectoral cluster members should improve collaboration in conducting needs assessments which should lay the basis for the provision of humanitarian aid funds.
 - Clusters should be set up in other sectors to improve the coordination across all projects.

3. *Shift towards a more long-term approach*

The focus on short-term projects and the lack of multi-year funding makes aid less effective than it could be. Emergency aid has been provided for the past eight years, and while it is still necessary in many parts of Syria, it can no longer be the only approach.

- IOs should make an effort to prolong funding cycles for projects that address more long-time recovery.
- IOs should reexamine the definition of basic needs:
 - Education: Higher education should be considered as a priority, as it is a crucial counter radicalization tool and provides a perspective for young Syrians.
 - Health: International donors and implementing agencies should establish a more comprehensive and durable health care system.
 - Infrastructure: Invest in infrastructure in order to improve access and service provision.

7. Bibliography

Burnard, P., P. Gill, K. Stewart, E. Treasure, and B. Chadwick. 'Analysing and Presenting Qualitative Data'. *British Dental Journal* 204, no. 8 (2008): 429–32.

Campbell, John L., Charles Quincy, Jordan Osserman, and Ove K. Pedersen. 'Coding In-Depth Semistructured Interviews: Problems of Unitization and Intercoder Reliability and Agreement'. *Sociological Methods and Research* 42, no. 3 (2013): 294–320.

Connolly, Lesley and Laura Powers, *Local Networks for Peace: Lessons from Community-Led Peacebuilding*, ed. Lesley Connolly and Laura Powers (New York: International Peace Institute, 2018).

https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809_Local-Networks-for-Peace2.pdf

Derzsi-Horvath, Andras, Julia Steets, and Lotte Ruppert, "Independent Grand Bargain Report," 2017, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/nn_-_grand_bargain_report_final.pdf.

Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2019*, 2019.

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHA%20report%202019_0.pdf

Gizelis, Theodora-Ismene and Kristin E. Kosek, "Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail," *Cooperation and Conflict* 40, no. 4 (December 29, 2005): 363–83.

Hermanowicz, Joseph C. 'The Great Interview : 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed'. *Qualitative Sociology* 25, no. 4 (2002): 479–99.

Hirblinger, Andreas T, and Claudia Simons. "The Good, the Bad, and the Powerful: Representations of the 'local' in Peacebuilding." *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 5 (October 20, 2015): 422–39.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010615580055>.

Howe, Kimberly, and Elizabeth Stites. "Partners under Pressure: Humanitarian Action for the Syria Crisis." *Disasters* 43, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12298>.

International Council of Voluntary Agencies, "The Grand Bargain Explained. An ICVA Briefing Paper.", March 2017. <https://www.icvanetwork.org/resources/grand-bargain-explained-icva-briefing-paper-march-2017>

Jabri, Vivienne. "Post-Colonialism: A Post-Colonial Perspective on Peacebuilding." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Disciplinary and Regional Approaches to Peace*, edited by Oliver P. Richmond, Sandra Pogodda, and Jasmin Ramović, 154–67. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-40761-0_12.

Kaldor, Mary. "Inconclusive Wars: Is Clausewitz Still Relevant in these Global Times?", *Global Policy* 1, no.3 (October 2010): 271-281. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1758-5899.2010.00041.x>

Kallio, Hanna, Anna Maija Pietilä, Martin Johnson, and Mari Kangasniemi. 'Systematic Methodological Review: Developing a Framework for a Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide'. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 72, no. 12 (2016): 2954–65.

Longhurst, Robyn. 'Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups'. In *Key Methods in Geography*, edited by Nicholas Clifford, Shaun French, and Gill Valentine, 103–15. SAGE Publications, 2010.

Mac Ginty, Roger. "Where Is the Local? Critical Localism and Peacebuilding." *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (May 4, 2015): 840–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1045482>.

Mapping Militant Organizations. "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham." Stanford University. Last modified June 2018. mappingmilitants.cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/profiles/hayat-tahrir-al-sham

Morrison, Chas. "Providing Basic Services under Siege: Preliminary Insights from Interim Councils and Medical Providers in Besieged Urban Areas of Syria." *Environment and Urbanization* 31, no. 1 (April 2, 2019): 309–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247818804343>.

Odendaal, Andries. "An Architecture for Building Peace at the Local Level: A Comparative Study of Local Peace Committees," 2010.

Randazzo, Elisa. "The Paradoxes of the 'everyday': Scrutinising the Local Turn in Peace Building." *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (August 2, 2016): 1351–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1120154>.

Refugees International, Losing their last Refuge - Inside Idlib's humanitarian nightmare, September 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syria%2BIdlib%2BReport%2B-%2BSeptember%2B2019%2B-%2B1.0.pdf>

Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE Publications, 2013.

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. "The Crushing of Syria's Civil Actors: Survival of Grassroots Structures is Crucial for Country's Future." *SWP Comments* 55, December 2016. https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2016C55_bkp_stolleis.pdf

Swisspeace. "Perceptions of Governance - The Experience of Local Administrative Councils in Opposition-held Syria." Synthesis Paper, January 2017. https://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Mediation/WOTRO_Report_The_Experience_of_Local_Administrative_Councils_in_Oppositionheld_Syria.pdf

Temizer, Selen. Syrian civil war in its 9th year, March 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/syrian-civil-war-in-its-9th-year/1418892>

The New Humanitarian, US and UK halt key Syria aid shipments over extremist "taxes", October 2018. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2018/10/02/us-and-uk-halt-key-syria-aid-shipments-over-extremist-taxes>

UN OCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, February 28, 2019. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria/document/2019-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic>

UN OCHA. Syria Crisis Survey Report on Humanitarian Access in Northwest Syria. May 2019.

UN OCHA. Humanitarian Update: Syrian Arab Republic. August 29, 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FINAL%20HUMANITARIAN%20UPDATE%20NO.%2005%20.pdf>

UN OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Recent Developments in Northwestern Syria Situation Report No. 11 - as of 6 September 2019, page 2.

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/nwsyria_sitrep11_6sept2019.pdf

UN OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Recent Developments in Northwestern Syria Situation Report No. 13 - as of 8 October 2019.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-recent-developments-northwestern-syria-situation-6>

Van Leeuwen & Van Veen, Turkey in northwestern Syria, June 2019.

https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/PB_Turkey_in_Northwestern_Syria_June_2019.pdf

Wilén, Nina and Vincent Chapaux, "Problems of Local Participation and Collaboration with the UN in a Post-Conflict Environment: Who Are the 'Locals'?" *Global Society* 25, no. 4 (October 2011): 531–48.

https://www.academia.edu/2052474/Problems_of_Local_Participation_and_Collaboration_with_the_UN_in_a_Post-conflict_Environment_Who_Are_the_Locals

Zambara, Webster, "Civil Society Organizations Networking for Peace in Zimbabwe," ed. Lesley Connolly and Laura Powers, *Local Networks for Peace: Lessons from Community-Led Peacebuilding*, September 2018. https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809_Local-Networks-for-Peace2.pdf

8. Appendix

Interview Guide

Governance

- Who are the actors that are currently governing the northwestern region of Syria?
- (How are different actors interacting with each other?)
- How is the relationship/interaction between the population and the actors that are governing the region?
- Is the infrastructure, i.e. access to water, schools, hospitals still in place?
- Are the hospitals and schools operated by Syrians or are also international actors involved?

Collaboration/International/Turkish actors

- Are there any Turkish NGO's that you know of that are operating in the region?
- (How is collaboration between Turkish organizations and local organizations?)

Local Syrian CSO's

- What is the role of Syrian CSO's?
- What type of services do Syrian CSO's provide?
- Has the involvement of Syrian CSO's changed over time?

Humanitarian aid provision

- What type of humanitarian aid is being provided?
- Who is providing humanitarian aid? List of NGO's
- Are different activities coordinated?
- Interaction between local and international actors – Who does what?

Reconstruction

- Are there any projects that you know of concerning reconstructing basic services/infrastructure?
- Who is doing these projects? List of NGO's
- Are different activities coordinated?
- Interaction between local and international actors

Problem areas / Priorities

- What are some of the problem areas / priorities in your view? (i.e. collaboration, lack of funding etc.)