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Scope for Humanitarian Partnerships

Lessons learnt from civil society in Idlib

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Scope for Humanitarian Partnerships in a Protracted Crisis: Lessons from Civil Society in Idlib

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Cover image © AFP
"There are 2.9 million people in Idlib, many of whom have already been displaced from elsewhere"

List of abbreviations used

CBPF	Country Based Pooled Fund
CCCM	Camp Coordination & Camp Management
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CPE	Complex political emergencies
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
GHP	Global Humanitarian Platform
GP	Guiding Principles
HLP	Housing, land & property
HPF	Humanitarian Pool Fund
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INGOs	International non-governmental organizations
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LAC	Local Administrative Councils
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PoP	Principles of Partnership
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
SHF	Syria Humanitarian Fund
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Crises of a protracted nature present complicated challenges that keep the multitude of actors involved, on their toes. The nature of the crisis that engulfs the Syrian Arab Republic (hereafter Syria) has brought forth a set of new challenges that threaten the very foundation on which the international humanitarian community rests. This has led to a series of reforms being introduced within the international humanitarian community, in an attempt to strengthen the response by adapting to the ever-changing conditions in Syria. One such reform has been the increased reliability on local actors that have proven their mettle as first-responders in crisis or disaster settings.

Within this context, this report, '*Scope for Humanitarian Partnerships in a Protracted Crisis: Lessons from Civil Society in Idlib',* aims to explore how partnerships between the international humanitarian actors and civil society organizations pan out in a politically volatile setting. The report seeks to assess the reforms made by the humanitarian community so far with respect to enhancing the scope for partnerships. The underlying question addressed also pertains to how, if at all, more inclusive partnerships with civil society can improve humanitarian response. However, the proposition of building partnerships comes with its own share of obstacles. While partnerships are governed by the Principles of Partnership (PoP) instituted in 2007, which are compliant with the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality, in practice, there is always a risk of the latter being defied. This danger leads to humanitarians being exceptionally wary of associations with external actors, lest their mandate be co-opted for military and political purposes. This fear of co-optation is the reason behind humanitarians distancing themselves from proponents of developmentalism and stabilization projects.

The report has a contextual focus and situates the general scope of the study within the Syrian governorate of Idlib, and its civil society organizations (CSOs). Operating in a highly repressive environment, the evolution of the Syrian civil society is one worth noting. However, the current political situation threatens the existence of CSOs, especially the ones operating in Idlib. Idlib being the last opposition held area is believed to be a target, with the Syrian government having made its intentions about a "takeover" known internationally. In such a context, humanitarian operations are under severe threat of complete shutdown, including the Turkey-Syria cross-border humanitarian assistance. The role played by the Turkish government, thus, is instrumental in determining the future of the CSOs.

The fieldwork undertaken in Gaziantep, Turkey, which serves as the hub for cross-border CSOs, revealed three thematic concerns shared by CSOs, namely: a) the changing nature of projects; b) impact of cross-border operations and; c) funding channels. A recent trend among the CSOs has been a shift in focus from projects addressing immediate material needs of the affected populations in Syria to projects that are more protection oriented and long-term. This is especially true of projects in Idlib, given that 50 per cent of the governorate's population is constituted of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Further, as the representative sample for the fieldwork comprised cross-border organizations, a shared concern emerged to be the renewal of the United Nations Security Council resolutions on Turkey-Syria cross-border operations. The impending renewal of the resolution in 2019 is a cause for worry as CSOs are fearing that a non-renewal would translate into even more constricted fund availability, which in turn threatens their existence. In a similar vein, the concerns surrounding funding channels are multifarious. Perturbed by the possibility of humanitarian funding drying up, CSOs are increasingly turning to other funding channels including governmental and private funding sources. The interviews with the international humanitarian organizations revealed that this does not settle well with the humanitarian donors as the funding from other channels is deemed to be non-compliant with the principles of impartiality and neutrality. Relatedly, the change

in the nature of projects from relief work to more long-term, rights-based projects is also seen as problematic by the humanitarian donors.

On the basis of the findings, it can be seen that there is a perceptible shift in the operational focus of CSOs, along with increased usage of alternate sources of funding. In the face of threatened existence, the Syrian CSOs are confronted with tough decisions and at this point it becomes crucial to avoid narrow definitions of humanitarian action, while remaining respectful of the humanitarian principles. The report thus, identifies the need for principled engagement which is respectful of both the PoP and the humanitarian principles as being the need of the hour.

In line with this, overall, inclusive and strengthened partnerships are required for ensuring that CSOs remain in a position to respond to the changing nature of the crisis. For this purpose, the report delivers the following nine recommendations:

For humanitarian donors –

1. Humanitarian donors should introduce and adopt guidance mechanisms strengthen CSOs' commitment to principles of partnership and the humanitarian principles.
2. Humanitarian donors should not prioritize one sector over the other and distribute funds equally among all sectors. The principle of impartiality can be extended to the realm of funding as well in this context.
3. Humanitarian donors should avoid narrow definition of humanitarian action that reduce the affected population to "victims" and operates within the donor-beneficiary binary. Humanitarian donors should respect the provisions of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and remain open to protection-oriented initiatives undertaken by CSOs that are more sustainable and long-term.
4. Displacement is a common occurrence in conflict settings and the phenomenon affects CSOs both operationally and financially. Humanitarian donors should keep such conflict dynamics in mind and make funds more flexible in terms of transferability and being made available as per organizational needs and not granted as per projects.

For CSOs –

1. CSOs should be encouraged to take up more long-term projects that are not only meeting immediate needs but looking to address the violations of human rights and ensure respect for the dignity of the Syrian peoples, because the needs of the population affected by a protracted crisis cannot be met by emergency relief materials alone.
2. Syrian CSOs should be encouraged to explore self-funding avenues as this would decrease their dependency on unpredictable funding channels and put CSOs in a position to develop projects that are tailored to operate in volatile crisis settings.
3. CSOs should explore funding options made available by state governments and governmental development agencies as these can prove to be more flexible, all the while, avoiding politicization of humanitarian work.
4. CSOs should engage actively in constructive dialogue with humanitarian organizations that allows the donors to understand their context specific needs and concerns. Most misunderstandings between humanitarian donors and CSOs stems from the differing interpretations of the humanitarian principles as well as the principles of partnership.

II. INTRODUCTION

Entering its seventh year, the Syrian conflict has recorded nearly 400,000 deaths since 2011 and 6 million have been internally displaced. The race to consolidate territory and power has come at the cost of human rights and humanitarian law (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In the midst of humanitarian challenges, there is a heightened realization among the humanitarian community that inclusion of national and local actors, be it governmental agencies, NGOs or civil society in general, is crucial for strengthening humanitarian response in any given crisis and emergency situation. Humanitarian are increasingly introducing methods and mechanisms with the intention to forge new partnerships based on principles of equality and complementarity (Global Humanitarian Platform, 2007).

Against this backdrop, the present paper seeks to assess the scope for humanitarian partnerships with respect to the Syrian conflict. For this purpose, the study focuses on civil society organizations with operations in the Idlib governorate. In the face of a variety of obstacles, such as denial of access by the Syrian government, the international humanitarian community has increasingly come to rely on locally based CSOs for successful delivery of life-saving services and materials. Partnerships between Syrian CSOs and international actors is not a new phenomenon and has been researched extensively. However, recent political developments have led to a shift in the priorities of both the CSOs themselves as well as their target groups. There is increasingly a shift towards more protection-oriented projects and activities, as opposed to relief focused efforts preferred by humanitarian actors. This has led to a new set of questions being raised in relation to the partnership dynamics between CSOs and humanitarians. Relatedly, the report attempts to present an account of these challenges, both for international actors and CSOs. The report rests on and seeks to address the following research questions:

1. **What are the challenges to humanitarian partnerships in Idlib? Is the shift in focus of the CSOs from immediate relief assistance to more protection activities an obstacle or an opportunity?**
   Objective 1: By addressing this question, the report aims to identify challenges specific to the situation in Idlib. Given the large internally displaced population in Idlib, the operational challenges confronting CSOs are unique and the report attempts to study this context.

2. **Is a collaborative model of humanitarian assistance, based on mutual respect for the Principles of Partnerships (PoP), essential in the context of Idlib? Why?**
   Objective 2: With this question, the report attempts to determine that CSOs are in a better position to respond to long-term protracted crises situation and CPEs.

3. **How can the scope for humanitarian partnerships be broadened and how can partnerships strengthen the humanitarian response in Idlib?**
   Objective 3: Lastly, through this question, the report aims to argue for more inclusive and equal partnerships between humanitarian donors and CSOs to avoid politicization of humanitarian work. The question also explores the consequences of underfunding in a protracted crisis.

For the purpose of addressing each of these questions systematically, the report is divided into two sections broadly, with the first section comprising the views presented by the international humanitarian actors on the issue of partnerships. The following section elaborates upon the perspectives shared by the CSOs in Idlib regarding humanitarian partnerships dynamics. On the basis of these findings, the report presents an analysis of the current situation and concludes with a set of

recommendations for international actors and CSOs involved in humanitarian action in Idlib that seek to improve the existing partnership dynamics and mechanisms.

The **purpose of the study**, thus, is to present avenues that will allow international humanitarian organizations and CSOs to have a principled engagement that is ultimately respectful of the Principles of Partnership as well as the humanitarian principles contained in international law. In this respect, **the study and its recommendations are meant for** international humanitarian actors, donors specifically, and CSOs operating in or out of Idlib or a similar context characterized by protracted crisis and large-scale displacement.

III. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The report makes use of a qualitative research methodology, including collecting information from a range of primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data for the CSOs is the in-person interviews conducted with 16 CSOs based in Gaziantep, Turkey. The team of authors undertook a ten-day long field trip to Gaziantep in July 2018. Gaziantep is a town close to the Syrian border and is known to be hub for cross-border CSOs. 5 officials from international humanitarian organizations and 1 from a development agency were also interviewed to gain an insight into the international perception of the situation at hand. In addition to this primary research, desk research was also undertaken as part of which a variety of sources including position papers, codes of conduct, bylaws, reports, and other materials relevant to the study, were coded and analyzed. The report also draws from a selection of secondary literature and theoretical discourses, with the aim to produce academically sound recommendations complemented by the primary data collection.

The primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The respondents were selected through a technique of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a technique that allows the gathering of research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who is used to provide the names of other actors, and this in turn opens up an inter-connected web of other research subjects (Lewis-Beck, et. al, 2004). Contact with potential respondents in Gaziantep was established via emails or text messages once a contact had been obtained through snowball sampling. A total of 21 CSOs responded to the request for an interview and expressed an interest in engaging with the research team. However, due to scheduling conflicts and subsequent unavailability during the period of the field trip, only 16 in-person interviews could be conducted with a total of 20 persons, out of which only 2 were female respondents. The respondents, however, were not selected randomly. The aim was to select organizations engaged in cross-border operations, primarily humanitarian in nature. Interviews with international humanitarian organizations were also in-person, with the exception of one, which took place via Skype. Out of a total of 11 international organizations that were contacted, a total of 3 responded and 5 officials were interviewed. The sample included officials based in Damascus, Beirut and Geneva. The scope and main research questions of the study were shared via email so as to provide the participants with a context for the interview.

All participants were assured of anonymity being maintained, unless any participant expressed the desire to be named for purposes of recognition. In Gaziantep, each interview lasted for about 40-60 minutes. Interviews with CSOs in Gaziantep were conducted in Arabic primarily, with the exception of 3 organization leaders who were comfortable speaking English. Interviews with international organizations were conducted in English. While main questions corresponding to the problematique of the research were prepared beforehand, these questions were not always relevant and interviews went off-track several times which added to the duration of each interview. However, using follow-up sub-questions, the interview conversations were redirected to obtain data relevant to the pre-determined research questions.

There were, however, a number of limitations and challenges. The language barrier being one main challenge, with certain information either mistranslated or misunderstood owing to the difficulty of translating technical terms into English. Another challenge faced was the authors' own underlying assumptions, as a result of which the first few interviews' focus was pre-determined and not truly reflective of the changing political situation on the ground in Idlib. Further, while attempts were made to steer clear of politics and avoid leading questions related to the political situation, the nature of the work undertaken by CSOs and international organizations both, inevitably led to political issues being raised during the interview. These discussions were indicative of the underlying

bias of both the interviewees and the interviewers. It was also noticed that upon learning about the Graduate Institute and that the authors were based in Geneva, which is known as the hub of humanitarian donors, the CSOs had a tendency to focus on funding related concerns and other matters were sidelined. The ever-changing political landscape within Syria also did not aid the research as the focus of the study was changed several times to reflect the situation on ground.

Owing to time constraints, the research lacks in comprehensiveness as not all relevant actors were interviewed or assessed. Further, it must be noted that the recommendations presented are considered context specific and apply specifically to the CSOs operating in Idlib. Thus, the study does not assume that the lessons drawn from these findings can be generalized to all conflict situations concerning humanitarian partnerships.

IV. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

IV.I. Conceptual framework

Conflicts are known to have an ever-changing nature. As the forces of globalization introduce new threats of terrorism, and climate change presents challenges of displacement, humanitarian response to these crises situations is also expected to be evolving. However, accompanying these new changes are also new concerns regarding the humanitarian space being threatened in the face of increasing use of military assets in response and recovery (GHP, 2010). These concerns add to the age-old humanitarianism-developmentalism debate. Theoretically, humanitarian work and developmentalism are distinguished from each other in terms of objectives, temporality and actors involved (p. 45, Carbonnier, 2014). However, the distinction of temporality is increasingly being seen as outdated and humanitarian action is believed to have "diversified" (p. 45, Carbonnier). While a truce between development actors and humanitarians might be in sight, adding to the debate are the proponents of the concept of stabilization. Concerns regarding the principles of neutrality do not permit or welcome a synergy between humanitarian work and stabilization (p. 52, Carbonnier) because the objectives of stabilization namely, prevention and reduction of violence to create conditions for development and political settlements (p. 4, Muggah, 2013), are contested by humanitarian actors on grounds of securitization and politicisation of aid (Collinson, et. al, 2010). It is also posited that the conflation of the stabilization agenda with humanitarian or development aid is the cause behind orthodox purist humanitarians distancing themselves from other partners, including local NGOs and development agencies.

Thus, the challenge of maintaining sufficient humanitarian space in order to access populations in need is bigger than ever today. While stabilization as a concept has been introduced only in the post 9/11 agenda, it is not an uncommon practice for states faced with disaster or conflict to make use of military forces (p. 2, GHP, 2010). International humanitarian actors are often the last to arrive in such situations and the local actors, including military personnel, serve as the first responders. However, many have questioned the legitimacy of providing neutral humanitarian assistance with armed forces that are ultimately dedicated to supporting a partisan foreign policy (p. 2, GHP). However, the humanitarian actors' capacities and resources are over-stretched anyway. The limits of humanitarian action in this regard where revealed at their worst in the 2003 Darfur crisis in South Sudan. In this context, international humanitarian actors are increasingly coming to terms with the fact that engaging with local and national capacities might prove to be more effectual. It is in this setting that the conversation concerning humanitarian partnership and coordination reached its peak (GHP, 2010). As posited by the GHP,

> "Partnership in a humanitarian setting refers to the relationship between humanitarian organisations involved in similar activities. It is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility. In the context of humanitarian reform effective partnership requires the adherence to the GHP Principles of Partnership (PoP)." (p. 5, GHP, 2010)

However, reform on this front has been slow to come (Houghton, 2011). Despite the development of the Principles of Partnership, questions are often raised about how to operationalize them and the question about how to achieve these principles remains unanswered (Hougthon, 2011). This is complicated by the fact that agencies use the term, and understand and approach partnership, differently (Houghton, 2011; Knudsen, 2011). Adding to this, local organisations often feel that there is a lack of respect and appreciation for their knowledge and contributions, and that their 'partnerships' are limited since they are rarely involved in decision- making processes with their

partners (p. 11, Brown, 2011). Too often in emergencies local partners may be seen as short-term service delivery mechanisms, rather than civil society organisations (p. 13, Brown, 2011).

With respect to this narrative, it becomes important to understand what constitutes a civil society. There exists a large pool of scholarship dedicated to understanding the concept and conceptions of civil society. With hopes for civil society co-existing as an alternative society as a parallel to a delegitimised and weakened official state, the classical conception placed the civil society as above the state (p. 403, Rowley, 1998). Further, it is also argued that it is within civil society that citizens are introduced to the principles and practices associated with modern democracy and is thus recognised as the "realm of citizenship education" (p.42, Jensen, 2006). Hence, against this classical understanding of civil society and linked to notions of good governance and state stability, strengthening civil society has been highlighted as playing an important role in reducing conflict and achieving stability in post-conflict contexts (p. 13, Smillie, 2001). As emphasized by Harvey (p. 201, 2001), "it is argued that, by working with local partners, international agencies can engage in more developmental forms of relief and move assistance towards rehabilitation and development". Thus, overtime, strengthening the capacity of civil society has become an important focus of humanitarian aid (p. 13, Smillie, 2001). The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) emphasizes that civil society serves as one of the most crucial sources of humanitarian assistance in the context of humanitarian emergencies (Dixon et. al, 2015)

The conceptual framework can be situated within the practical setting in current day Idlib. The following section traces the evolution of the Syrian civil society in the face of a series of repressive leaders and throws light on the war-torn society of Idlib.

IV.II. Contextual background

a) Evolution of Syrian civil society

To understand the operational framework of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Syria today, it proves important to have an overview of the pre-revolution i.e. before 2011, political situation in Syria. When the Baa'th regime came to power in 1963, it aimed to monopolize and control the civil society, and it did so through establishing its own associations. Licensing and registration were denied to any other civil society on the grounds that there was no necessity for a parallel structure of civil society (Khalaf, et. al, 2014). Starting from 2000s, civil society organizations were granted license to work but was restricted to solely charity, driven mostly by religious interests rather than civil and/or political rights-based issues. (Ruiz De Elvira, 2013). These aspects left the civil society paralyzed and incapable of progressing, which was been reflected in its inability to organize and initiate collective action during the early stages of the conflict. However, the events of 2011 triggered a reaction from the Syrian population and paved the way for civil society to "co-exist as an alternative society as a parallel to a delegitimized and weakened official state" (Jensen, 2006). The last eight years of conflict have, ironically, contributed to the development and growth of civil society in Syria.

b) IDP situation

The protracted nature of the Syrian crisis has led to mass displacements. Idlib has seen highest number of displaced people and serves as a host community for nearly 1.5 million internally displaced peoples (IDPs), amounting to nearly half of Idlib's total population of 3 million (UNHCR, 2017). IDPs bring with them a variety of challenges that an already conflict-torn society is not equipped to cope with. Among the main obstacles confronting IDPs are lack of livelihood opportunities that might allow them to restart their life and complete violation of housing, land and property (HLP) rights. (REACH, 2018). With particular reference to HLP rights, it is important to note

the introduction of the **controversial Law No. 10** by the Syrian government on property rights. The law, passed in April 2018, has come under fire for depriving forcibly displaced populations of their land and property as it mandates proof of documentation for the reclamation of property. This law is in direct contradiction of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. According to Principle 29, competent authorities are obliged and responsible to assist IDPs to recover their property and possession left behind during their displacement, and in case such recovery is not possible, a suitable compensation is required (OCHA, 2004).

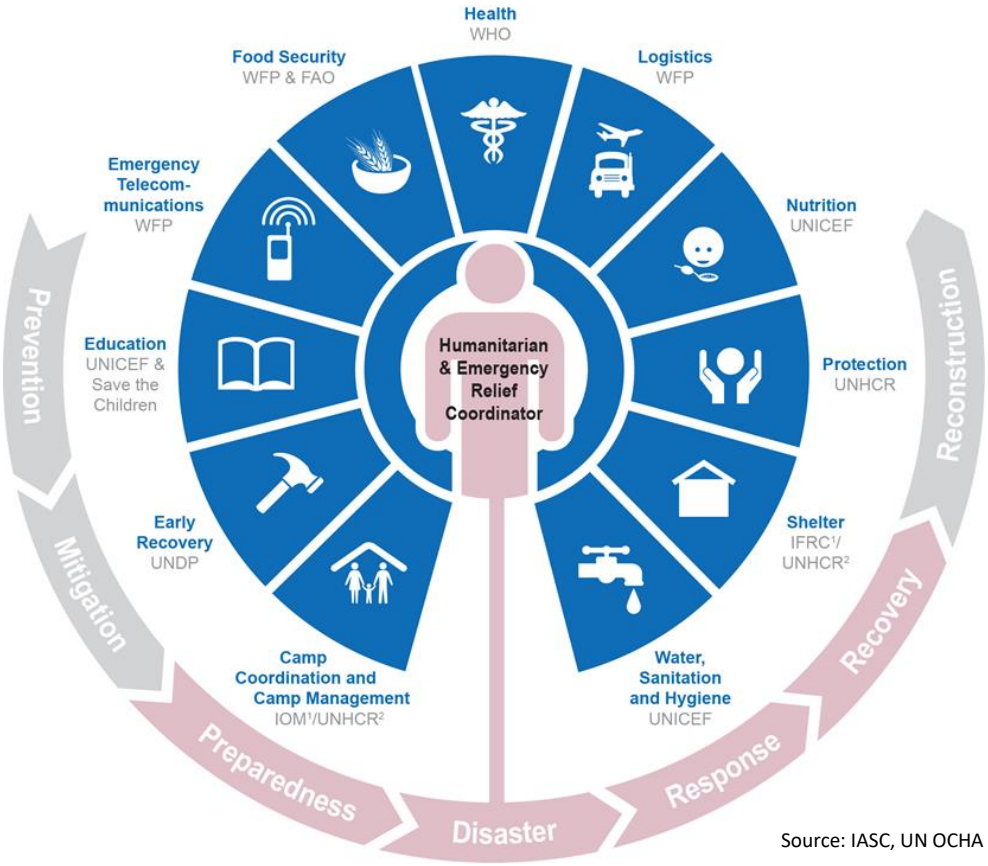
In the face of such hardships and ever-increasing challenges, the work undertaken by CSOs in Syria proves to be the only source of hope for conflict-affected populations. However, given that Syrians are no longer in need of only life-saving relief materials, the CSOs have has to alter their approach to meet and address the concerns of the masses. This, however, has led to conflict of interests between CSOs and their donors as well as other international actors. These dynamics are examined in the following sections of the report.

V. FINDINGS

V.I. International humanitarian organizations

It is widely acknowledged across the humanitarian community that an effective response to crisis and emergency situations is facilitated only by coordination and inclusive partnerships among/between the humanitarian actors (Humanitarian Response, n.d.) "Good coordination means less gaps and overlaps in the assistance delivered by humanitarian organizations." (Humanitarian Response, n.d.). However, humanitarian partnerships and coordination, as discussed in the theoretical framework, are challenging not only conceptually but in practice too. This section seeks to elaborate upon the findings derived from interviews with international humanitarian organizations and associated desk research on principles humanitarian action and partnerships. The humanitarian community has time and again tried to come up with a variety of frameworks and structures to try and improve the coordination between different actors involved, including governments, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and even local or national CSOs. The two main international level coordination mechanisms are the **Cluster Approach** and the **Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP).**

a) Cluster Approach

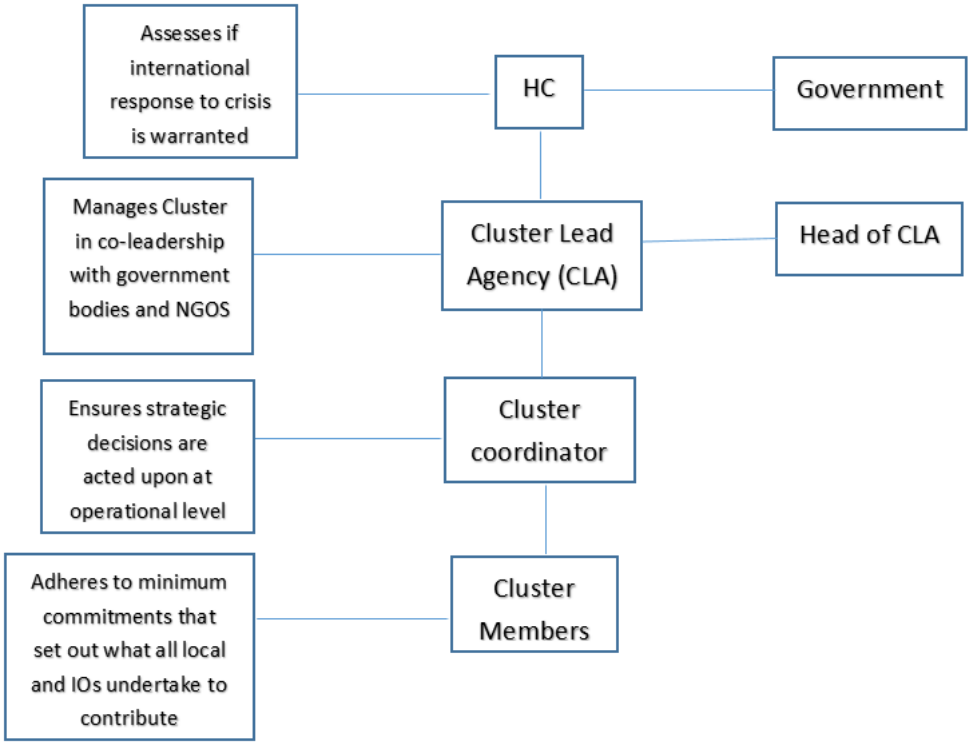


Source: IASC, UN OCHA

In 2005, a major humanitarian coordination reform resulted in the creation of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda, which introduced a new elements in the humanitarian community to "enhance predictability, accountability and partnership" (Humanitarian Response, n.d.). The **Cluster Approach** was one of these new elements. Each of the main sectors of humanitarian action such as education, health, early recovery, WASH, etc. came to be divided into clusters constituting both UN

and non-UN humanitarian organizations under this approach (Humanitarian Response, n.d.). This cluster approach was designed with the aim to "strengthen system wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies" (Humanitarian Response, n.d.). At the country or national level particularly, the approach targets the bolstering of partnerships by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of all actors within the humanitarian community so as to ensure predictability and accountability of humanitarian action (UNHCR, 2011). The country level architecture of the Cluster Approach can be understood as depicted in Fig. 1.

Figure 1: Country level cluster system



Under the UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182, the affected government and national actors, retain the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory (Pasoma, 2015). Hence, building on this and as delineated by UN OCHA (OCHA, 2014), the responsibilities of the cluster leads at the country level can be understood as including, but not limited to the following:

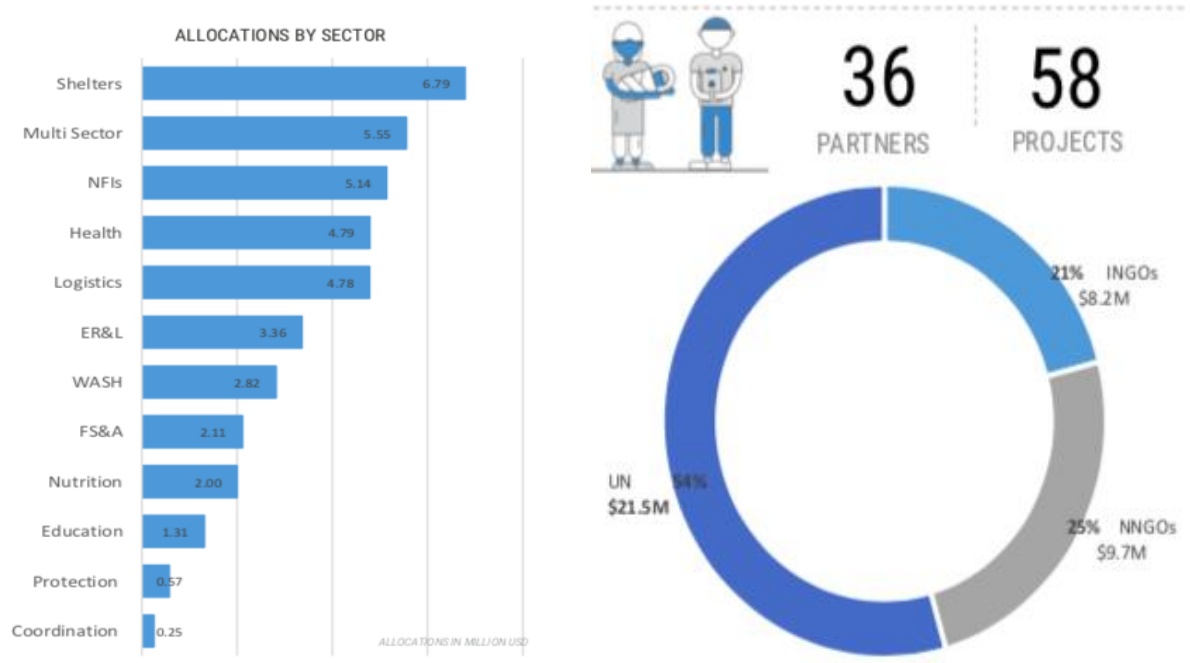
a. **Participatory and community-based approaches**
b. **Attention to priority cross-cutting issues**
c. **Needs assessment and analysis**
d. **Emergency preparedness**
e. **Planning and strategy development**
f. **Advocacy and resource mobilization**
g. **Training and capacity building**
h. **Provision of assistance and services as a last resort**

The HRP 2018 for Syria has been developed by the HC. The HRP sets out the framework within which the humanitarian community will respond to the large-scale humanitarian and protection

needs in Syria throughout 2018 on the basis of the prioritization undertaken across and within sectors (HRP, 2018). The HRP also presents urgent funding requirements to address needs (HRP, 2018).

Part of the Cluster Approach is also the Syria Humanitarian Fund (SHF). The SHF plays an important role in empowering first responders and civil society actors and aims to provide greater reach and sustainability (SHF 2018). It rests on a commitment to support the capacity of local and community-based organizations. The sector wise and actor wise allocations (in USD millions) is depicted in the diagrams given below (SHF, 2018).

Diagram 1: Syrian Humanitarian Fund allocations



b) Global Humanitarian Platform

An initiative stemming from the July 2006 dialogue between the UN and NGOs, the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) was founded with the belief that the international humanitarian community was made up of three equal families: UN agencies, Red Cross/Crescent movement, and NGOs.[1] Acknowledging the unique positionality of national and local actors, the GHP places special focus on strengthening the involvement and engagement of these organizations, as they are often the first to respond to disasters, and have more detailed knowledge of the communities in which they operate (ICVA, 2010). In line with this focus, an important achievement during the first year of the GHP was the development and endorsement of the PoP. As a result of this, humanitarian partnerships between Red Cross/Crescent movement, NGOs and UN agencies was to be based on the principles of **"equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity"** (GHP, 2007).

[1] NGOs with respect to the present report are included under the umbrella of CSOs.

BOX 1: Principles of Partnership that humanitarian actors have committed to:

- Engage in a dialogue on strategic issues of common concern and express views that seek to address these common concerns. They included: our accountability to the populations for and with whom we work; our strengthening of the capacity of local actors; the safety and security of our staff; and our roles in situations of transition (GHP, 2007).
- 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 (GHP, 2007).

Having delineated the primary partnership and coordination mechanisms, it is important to note that all such mechanisms have an underlying complicity to the humanitarian principles as delineated in Box. 2. The principles tend to form part of acceptance strategies and measures to mitigate the misappropriation of aid (p. 7, Macdonald & Valenza, 2012). Adherence to the principles, however, has sometimes presented difficulties for humanitarian actors, especially with reference to respecting the principles of partnership. These challenges emerged prominently in the interviews with the international humanitarian organizations. The challenges as described by the interviewees can be understood thematically in terms of the concerns regarding the political alignments of the CSOs in Idlib, capacity of these CSOs and the alternate sources of funding.

BOX 2:
The four principles commonly accepted as key foundations for humanitarian action, as set out by the ICRC, are:

- humanity: to 'prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to en- sure respect for the human being.'
- impartiality: to ensure 'no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours only to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most ur- gent cases of distress.'
- independence: to 'always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with Red Cross principles'.
- neutrality: not to 'take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature' (Pictet, 1979).

The Red Cross codified these principles in 1965 to legitimize and support the movement's engagement in conflict situations. This frame- work reflects obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL).

c) Interview findings

Political alignments

International humanitarian organizations' most prominent apprehension about partnerships tend to be rooted in the fear that CSOs can become politicised. The projects and operations of the CSOs are increasingly developing characteristics that are similar to that of stabilisation projects and as posited by Collinson (2010) in the theoretical framework, humanitarians fear that stabilisation

operations blur the distinction between military and their own selves, allowing for the co-optation of the humanitarian enterprise for political and military ends (p. 7, Macdonald & Valenza, 2012). In the context of Syria, and the Idlib governorate particularly, international humanitarian actors are fearful of the immediate aftermath i.e. the post-conflict backlash that the dissenters might face from the pro-government factions and the government leaders themselves. International humanitarian organizations are also of the view that the case of the Syrian conflict is especially volatile and calls for all the more caution as the interim government led by Bashir al-Assad is in already opposed to the idea of even humanitarian aid and has made attempts to obstruct access. In the face of this kind of a situation, projects that are not strictly humanitarian in nature, run the risk of undermining the neutrality of the humanitarian agencies and thereby, putting at stake the lives of thousands of those dependent on relief materials. Therefore, international humanitarian actors are wary of CSOs at the local and national levels engaging in projects that are not for life-saving purposes and possibly have an underlying long-term reconstruction or stability agenda.

Capacity

Capacity of CSOs has been a cause for concern ever since the inception of the concept of localization. While there is no denying that CSOs often do not have the capacity to even meet the documentation requirements of donors, for example, application forms and auditing records, there is another aspect to this capacity challenge that was revealed during the interviews. Humanitarian organization are themselves also under-staffed and reportedly have "limited resources and administrative capacity" to give smaller amounts of money to a larger pool of CSOs (Sriskandarajah, 2015). It has often been expressed by humanitarian donors that giving a larger sum of $10 million to an INGO is much easier than giving a smaller amount of say, only $`10,000 to a CSO for monitoring purposes (L2GP, 2016). As a result of this, humanitarian organizations and INGOs tend to channel money through a select few and trusted partners so that risks can be managed as these partners strictly comply with the donors' rules (Sriskandarajah, 2015). Further, humanitarian organizations also informed that often anti-terror and anti-money laundering rules in host countries of the CSOs make it quite difficult to give money directly. This holds true especially for the case of cross-border SCSOs in Turkey.

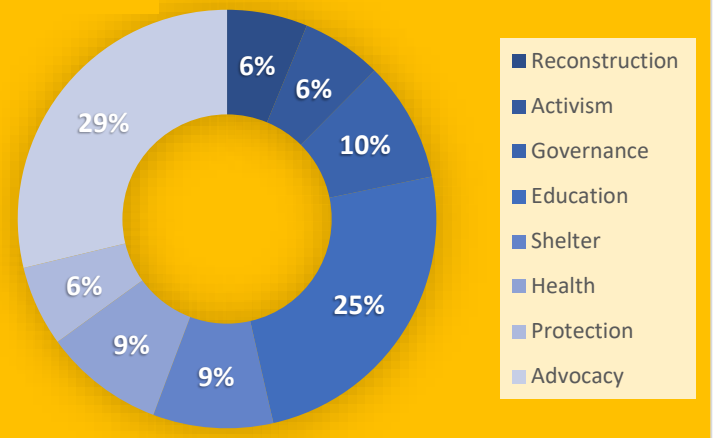
Alternate sources of funding

As mentioned in the previous section, Syrian CSOs are receiving funding from other channels including the Syrian diaspora and corporate donations in the form of private funding. However, this is a cause for concern as humanitarian donors fear that these funds are not compliant with the principles of neutrality and impartiality. On the basis of this belief, humanitarian donors are also wary of state governments funding CSO projects. The reasoning behind this can be understood through the following statement given by an official of a humanitarian organization:

> *"We encourage CSOs not to entertain other sources of funding. The reason being that if tomorrow Assad is to make an advance and Idlib falls, CSOs receiving funds from these non-humanitarian sources will be taken to be implicated in political efforts to overthrow the interim government. This puts them at risk of persecution at the hands of the government. In such a situation, we won't even be able to protect them citing that they are engaged in humanitarian work because they're clearly not funded by us." – Representative of an international humanitarian organizatio*

Sectors of CSO engagement

Figure 2



Formal structures

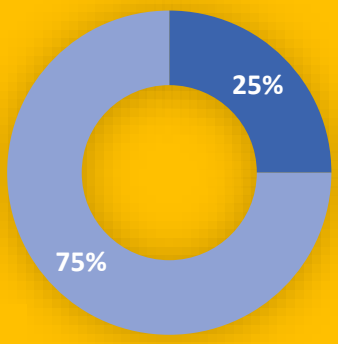


Figure 5

Have formal auditing and financial structures

Have informal auditing and financial structures

Staff ratio

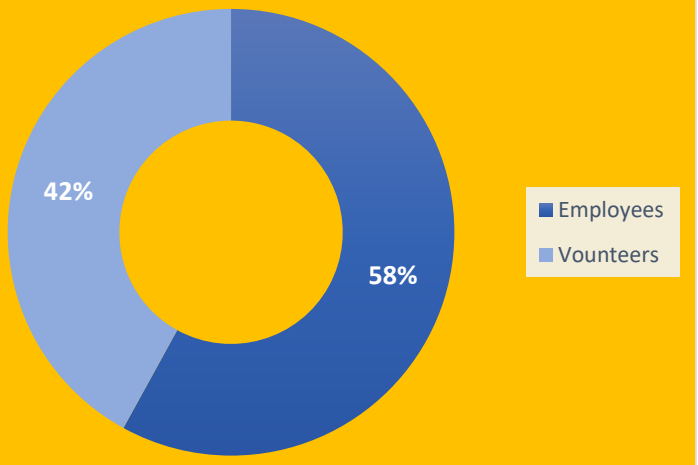


Figure 3

International partnerships

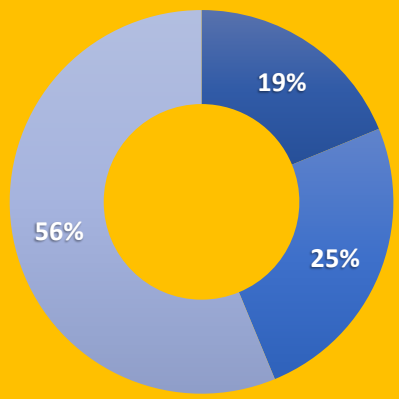


Figure 4

Governmental INGO/UN Both

Box X: Syrian civil society at a glance

- Fig. 2 depicts the number ratio of sector wise engagement of the CSOs – maximum number of CSOs are involved in the education sector. This is indicative of the funding patterns as will be discussed later.
- Fig. 3 indicates the constitution of the staff body within CSOs. A significant number of CSOs rely on unpaid volunteer work which affects their operations to a great extent.
- Fig. 4 shows the kind of partnerships that CSOs engage in – the fact that majority of CSOs have both governmental and INGO/UN partners is indicative of the growing use of alternate channels of funding.
- Fig. 5 depicts the financial structures. CSOs reported that most of them were forced to restructure their organizations to be eligible for funds.

sections seek to bring together the findings in an analysis and concludes with a list of recommendations for both donors and CSOs.

V.II. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

a) Nature of projects undertaken by CSOs

Syrian civil society has historically been engaged in a wide variety of social and political issues. As indicated previously, Syria has had an active civil society despite difficult and repressive circumstances and till date remains exceedingly critical of the Assad government. This legacy has carried on into the post-revolution period and continues to survive the eight-year long conflict. In such a setting, it becomes civil society then serves as a central actor in the Syrian conflict and an examination of this actor is, thus, pivotal to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the conflict itself. In light of this, the current section of the report seeks to study the CSOs operating in or out of Idlib governorate. For this purpose, the projects and work of the 16 interviewed organizations are examined under the broad categories of humanitarian and non-humanitarian projects.

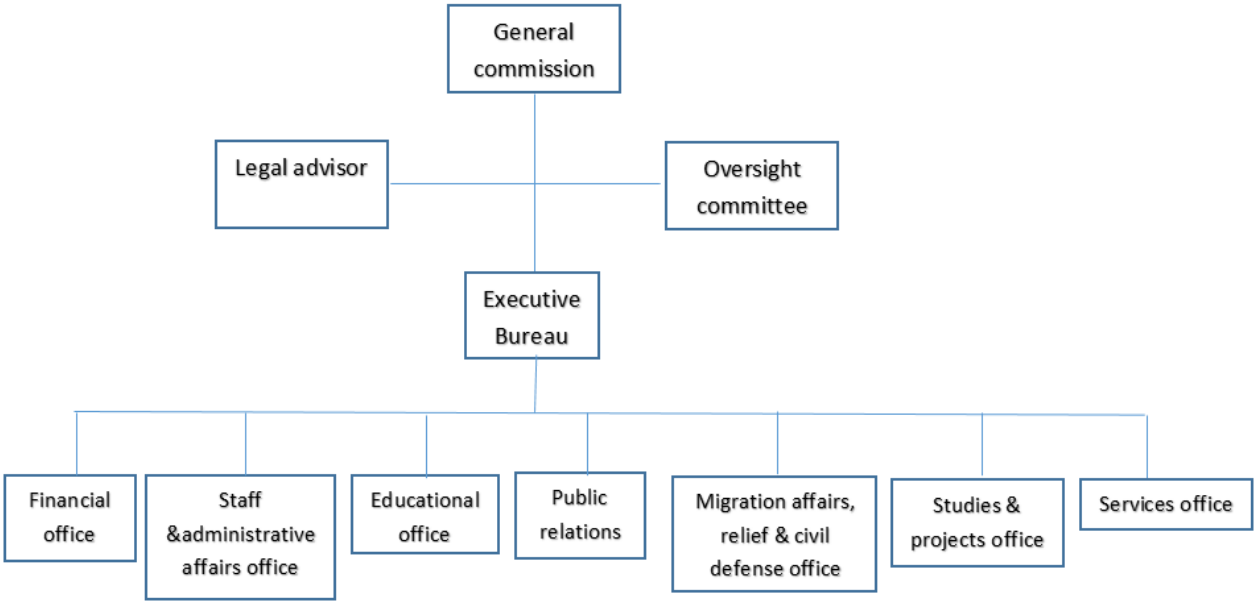
37% per cent of the organizations studied are engaged in provision of immediate relief and emergency response, with projects spanning across sectors of food, health, WASH and shelter. These CSOs receive funds mostly through the SHF. The SHF is a multi-donor country-based pooled fund (CBPF) established in 2014 by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) to facilitate the timely allocation and disbursement of donor re- sources to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs and assist people affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria (p. 8, SHF, 2018). To be able to access the Fund, CSOs need to undergo a rigorous capacity assessment process to ensure they have the necessary structures in place and the capacity to meet the Fund's robust accountability standards to efficiently implement humanitarian activities in Syria (SHF, 2018).

However, the CSOs that describe themselves as humanitarian are also engaged in projects that are more long-term. The CSOs' admitted to shifting their focus from projects addressing only immediate needs to those that target more "rights-based" concerns. As a result of this, 75% per cent of the studied organizations reported to be engaged in projects described as non-humanitarian, such as advocacy campaigns, livelihood, reconstruction and rehabilitation, higher education and even political participation and governance. This shift has been a cause for contention and is discussed later in the report.

25 per cent of the CSOs interviewed reported to be addressing concerns relating to political participation, governance and political rights through their projects. For such projects, the organizations reported to be receiving funds mostly from state governments and development aid from INGOs. Two CSOs are reportedly also engaged in reconstruction projects. 87 per cent of the interviewees reported to be actively participating in or intending to partake in advocacy campaigns. The sentiment shared by these CSOs was that of hope as accurately expressed by one representative's statement, ***"Syria deserves to get back up on its feet after a long ailment. It is our duty to facilitate its recovery."*** The CSOs' projects are reflective of this statement. Of particular concern to the CSOs were the challenges posed by the large and ever-increasing IDP population in Idlib. One organization associated with projects targeting the IDP concerns, such as housing, land and property rights, registration and verification, informed that there are high risks of an inter-community conflict breaking out.

One organization reported to be specializing in promoting the concept of local administration by providing the Syrian local authority councils with a variety of services, such as monitoring and evaluation and capacity building. The organization is engaged in a project that aims to enhance the capacities of the Local Administrative Councils(LACs) and equip them with the know-how to address more long-term needs of the Syrian society, including concerns regarding security and public participation. In this capacity, the CSO assists the restructuring of LACs in different districts and sub-districts of Syria to reflect the most participatory and effective organizational and operational structures. The structure of one LAC in the district of Zamalka as devised/designed by the CSO is depicted below.

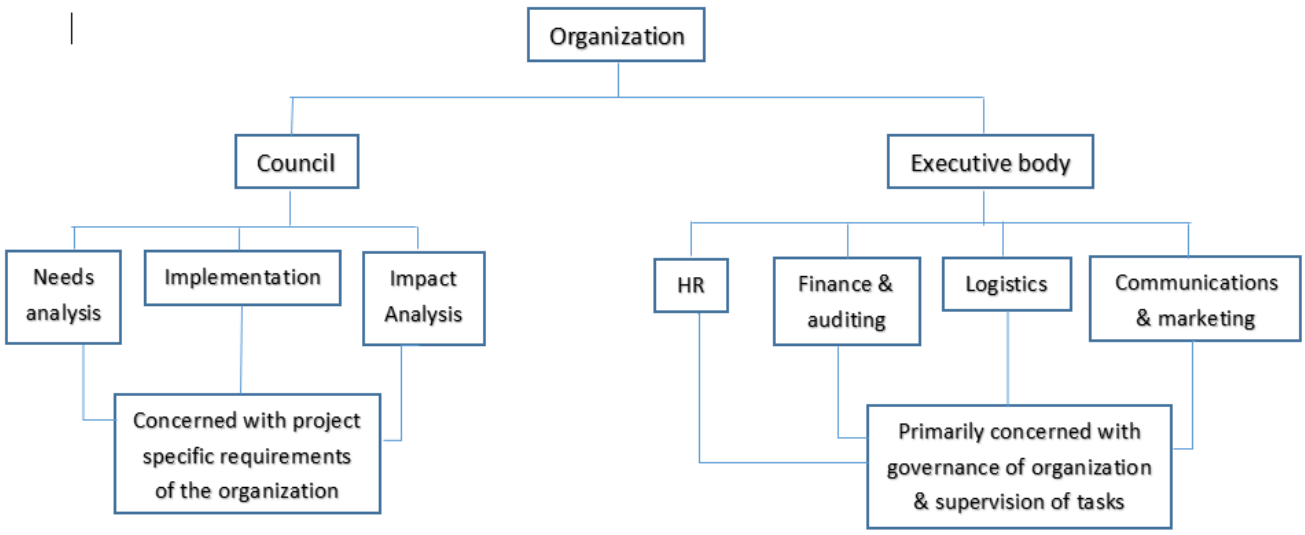
Figure 6: Example of an LAC structure in Zamalka district



While the projects undertaken by CSOs are of distinct types, with differing objectives and operations, the same cannot be said about the organizational structures of the very same CSOs. The CSOs seem to have a uniform structure in terms of operational divisions and branches, with a few, minor variations. All of the interviewed organizations reported to be broadly divided into an "executive body" and a "council". The former concerns itself with decision making tasks while the council works on the ground and looks into implementation, impact, etc. The executive body's mandate also covers human resources related tasks and is constituted of sub-branches handling communications, finance and auditing, marketing and operations. With this type of a structure and a clear division of tasks and roles, the CSOs reported to be operating within a formal structure. This formal structure also facilitates their cooperation and coordination with other CSOs that either partake in similar projects and sectors or receive funds from the same donor.

However, it is important to note that both the nature of the projects as well as the organizational structure of the Syrian CSOs are not accidental but influenced by the changing circumstances, political conditions and donor politics. For instance, the introduction of the cluster system within the UN agencies led to a demand for formalized finance and auditing structures and the CSOs were made to comply. The following sections of the report seek to examine these aspects and determine/assess their impact on the operations of the CSOs.

Figure 7: Organizational structure of Syrian CSOs



b) Funding

Till date, procuring funding continues to be a challenge for Syrian CSOs. Concerns regarding the limited capacity of Syrian CSOs, imposition of conditionalities, and other political concerns, remain contentious issues with respect to funds. However, an interesting development in the realm of funding and donors has been the entry of new actors i.e. non-state private actors. The addition of private funding has a different set of implications. For the purpose of this report, the sources of funding are studied in terms of private, governmental and international sources of funding as depicted in Fig. 8. 50 per cent of the studied CSOs reported that a significant portion of their funding comes from private sources; while only 20 per cent acquire funding from international organizations. The remaining reported to be receiving project specific funding from state governments, and only one CSO gave an account of self-funding activities.

Nearly all of the CSOs relying on private funding are small organizations, with less than 15 full-time employees. On account of this, the organization receiving private funding reported that INGOs and state governments tend not to donate to smaller organizations as they are understood to have informal (or less formal) structures and operations, in addition to limited capacity. However, while it is no new fact that INGOs are hesitant in investing in local and national CSOs, it is interesting to learn that CSOs are also steering away from funding coming from INGOs. Organizations prefer to receive donations from private actors and state governments and this may be due to the flexibility they have with reference to the use of the funds.

Organizations did not report to having conditionalities being imposed on the funds received from IOs. However, it was pointed out by 35 per cent of the recipients of IO funding, that the funds received were expected to be invested in specific projects that were being implemented on behalf of the IOs. In relation to this, the dominant view among studied Syrian entities indicates that private funding is preferred to other sources. In addition to the absence of conditionalities, benefactors of private funding reported to have more freedom in relation to the kind of projects that could be

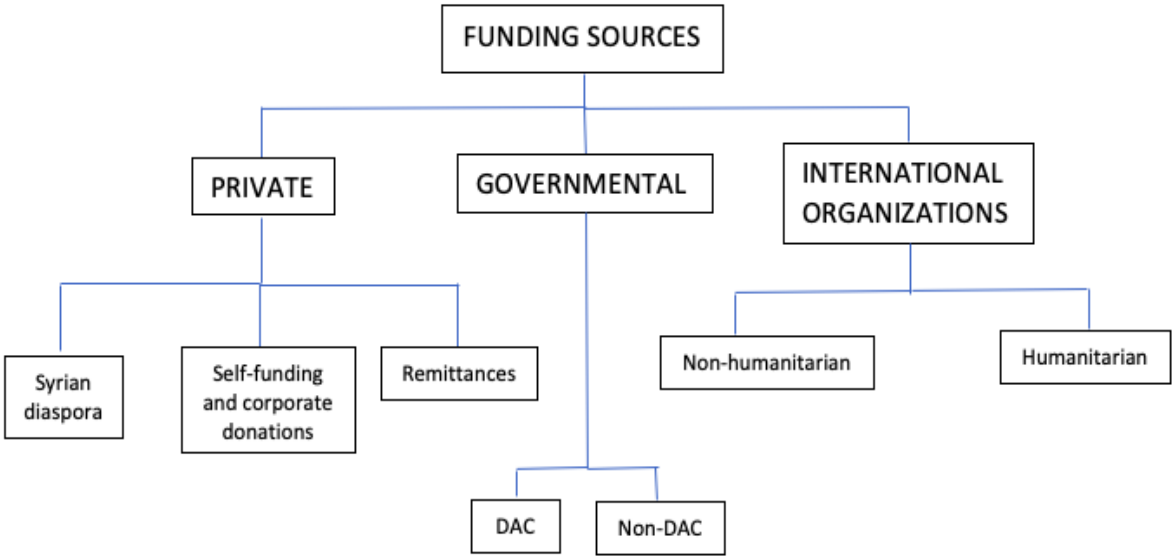
undertaken by them, especially advocacy projects. One CSO representatives justified their CSO's inclination to private funding as follows:

"We prefer to receive funding from private actors. The reason being that private funding gives us the freedom to design and undertake advocacy campaigns that reflect the reality of the situation on the ground. We do not have to worry about who might end up attacking or questioning when the funding is private. Whereas when we receive donations from say, states, then we have to alter our advocacy campaigns to ensure that we are not attacking potential donors. The risk of souring relations runs high and this affects our advocacy work."

- Representative of a Syrian CSO

In line with this trend, only two organizations reported to be receiving funding from INGOs alone. Another problem with IO donors was identified as being that the funds are given as a lump sum. This is a systematic failure as this lump sum does not take into account project specific costs. For instance, an organization working with persons with disabilities (PwD) reported that the INGO donors do not factor in extra costs involved in caring for those with disabilities, such as costs for wheelchairs, ramps, etc. Further, INGOs were described as not providing long term funding, and it was unanimously reported than any project shorter than six months was bound to *"do more harm than good".*[2]

Figure 8: Funding sources for CSOs

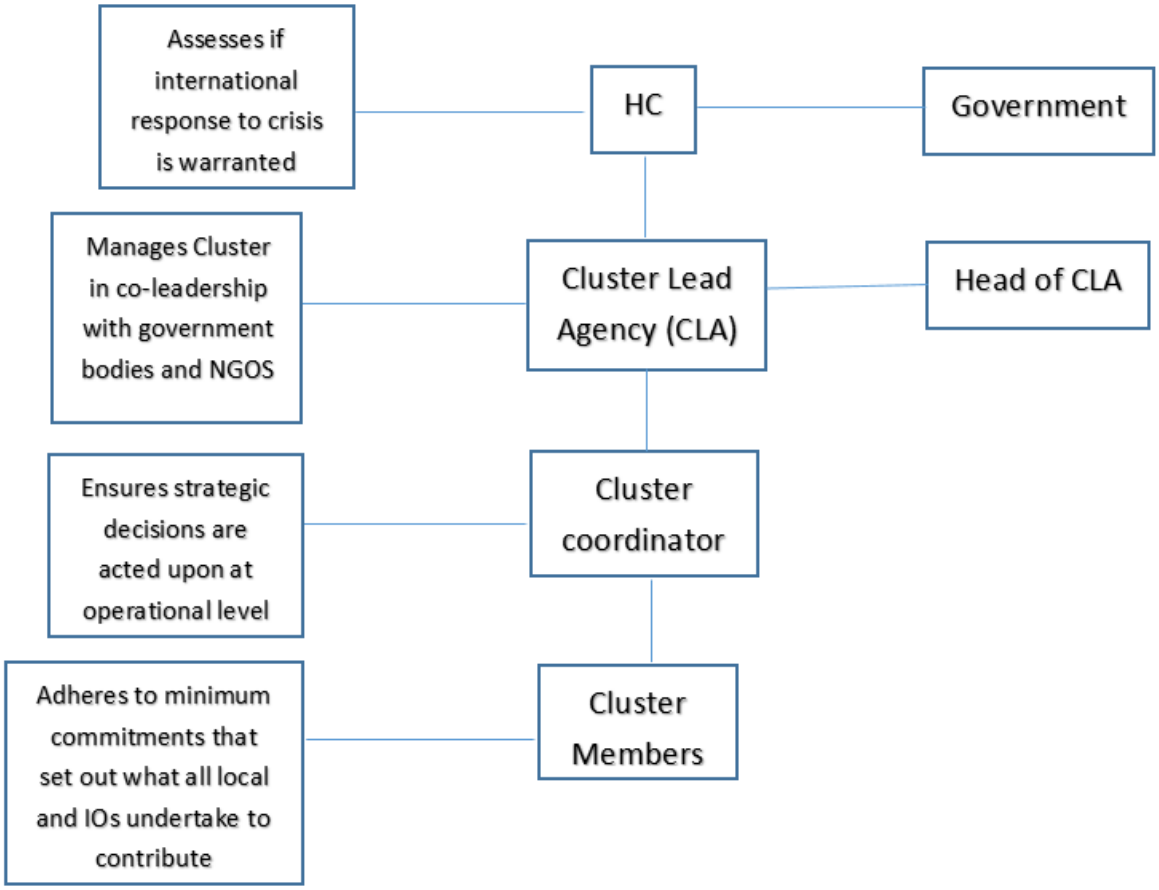


However, while the interviewed organizations did not report to be strictly bound by any specific conditionalities, project specific funding implies that the recipient organizations were compelled to reorganize/restructure their operations to accommodate the demands of the project. This, however, was viewed in a positive light by the concerned organizations as it was seen as a move toward "capacity-building". Further, several organizations are also of the opinion that the priority for survival purposes as of now is procuring funding, and, thus, the fact that pre-designed projects are being outsourced to Idlib by IOs is not an issue of concern. As a result of these overlapping and often contesting preferences within different CSOs, the conditions created are of hierarchy and dependency.

[2] Interview with Syrian CSO #2

"We are willing to work on any project so long as it keeps our organization operating, regardless of its relevance. It's a question of survival as of now."- Representative of a Syrian CSO

Figure 9: Cluster Approach Architecture at the Country level



Another interesting trend pointed out by a CSO leader was that of unequal allocation of funds across sectors. It was reported that while a humanitarian worker in the health sector would receive $400 as a salary per month, a teacher at the same level in an educational institution would receive only $100 per month. This is corroborated by the SHF sector specific allocations recorded in the previous section.

c) Cross border operations and Turkey's role

Cross-border aid operations have a history in Syria that goes beyond the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions (p. 13, L2GP, 2016). A number of informal Syrian groups were engaged in cross-border assistance from Turkey before the sanctions from the UNSC came into the picture and it was only in 2012, that INGOs joined cross border efforts (p. 13, L2GP, 2016). As the number of actors and activities grew, a donor-sponsored (but NGO-led) coordination mechanism was established in southern Turkey undertaking many of the roles UN OCHA would normally play in such situations (p. 13, L2GP, 2016).

Today, UN agencies and their partners have been authorised by the UN Security Council resolutions to use routes across conflict lines and the border crossings at Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa, Al-Ramtha and Al Yarubiyah, to deliver humanitarian assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, to people in need in Syria. The first resolution 2165 was adopted in 2014, followed by subsequent renewals 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) until 10 January 2019 (OCHA, 2017). The next renewal is in 2019 surfaced as an issue of concern for several of the organizations interviewed. 75 per cent of the organizations reported to be extremely worried as a non-renewal would negatively affect operations. A concern shared across the smaller organizations was that as they are majorly dependent on funding from UN agencies and their IO partners, a non-renewal could translate into cessation of all their activities.

"Non-renewal of the cross-border resolution would translate into end of the Syrian civil society as you know it. Look at what happened to the Iraqi organizations – a few years back there were over 400 Iraqi organizations operating out of Turkey. Today, all have shut down ever since the end of the cross-border operations for humanitarian assistance. The same fate awaits us if resolution 2393 is not renewed on 2019." – Representative of a small Syrian CSO

One organization engaged in protection activities for IDPs reported that there was a high rate of competition among CSOs. Within such a context, reports indicated that if the cross-border operations are to end, all individuals engaged in humanitarian work through CSOs will be left unemployed.

"If the renewal does not come through in 2019, the scope for inter-NGO cooperation will definitely diminish. Not only will smaller and local organizations be forced to shut down, but the risk of unemployment runs very high. Those living in and operating out of Turkey will have nothing to do and will eventually be forced to return to Syria, regardless of the social and political environment there." – Representative of a US-funded Syrian CSO

On the other hand, larger organizations with other donors, such as private donors, were observably unperturbed by news of non-renewal of the cross-border resolution. These organizations were, in fact, of the view that closing off borders alone will not end the operations of civil society organizations, and that they will "figure out a way to continue providing support to the beneficiaries". However, 70 per cent of the organizations studied were of the opinion that while it is true that local operations of privately funded organizations will remain unaffected by the fate of the cross-border operations, there is no denying that coordination among CSOs locally would be drastically affected. This would prove to be a problem especially for the organizations that are a part of OCHA's funding pool as well as those in the clusters. Hence, majority of the organizations opined that renewal of the cross-border operations is necessary not only for humanitarian reasons, but also for the sake of survival of the Syrian civil society and the resulting humanitarian coordination.

In the same vein, the role played by the Turkish authorities featured as a topic of interest for the organizations. On August 24, 2016, Turkey launched a military operation in northern Syria, dubbed Operation Euphrates Shield. Turkish officials declared that the cross-border incursion was grounded on the self-defence rights codified under the United Nations Charter Article 51 (Al Jazeera 2017). Ankara explained that the main objectives of the cross-border military campaign were to maintain border security and confront the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorism, and to deny the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organisation - as well as its affiliates Syrian PYD/YPG - a fait accompli to create autonomous zones on Turkey's doorstep (Al Jazeera 2017). Ever

since this incursion, Turkey has reportedly been increasing its area of influence with respect to the civil society space.

Over the past years, Syrian CSOs operating out of Turkey have had to face a range of challenges. Registration, obtaining work permits and transfer of funds continue to remain a concern for CSOs across all sectors. A significant majority of the organizations studied were of the opinion that Turkey's role is only going to increase with time. An organization expressed concerns about the setup of nearly ten Turkish military posts in Idlib, in an effort to tighten control over the region. Adding to registration and permit concerns are perturbations regarding the imposition of hard monitoring and auditing rules. CSOs reported that Turkey has in fact placed a number of organisations under surveillance, with the pretext of "reviewing operations and auditing".

However, views on Turkey's involvement are both divergent and dispersed, and perceptions of Turkish involvement were not all negative. Another dominant view was remarkably optimistic about the Turkish authorities' involvement. The organizations endorsing this kind of a view were in fact advocating for increased involvement so as to ensure the sustainability of CSOs. In relation to this, while it was acknowledged that Turkey does indeed impose strict restrictions and often makes registration processes difficult for CSOs of certain sectors, 47 per cent of those interviewed (Fig. XX) reported that these measures are "understandable" and even "required" given the tense political and security situation.

"Turkey's involvement is going to change matters for the better as Turkish authorities are more accommodating of our [CSOs'] demands. They are slowly and gradually beginning to realize that our work is not political in nature". – Representative of CSO in the health sector

Further, with reference to the problems pertaining to bank transfers, it was pointed out by organizations that Turkey took the initiative of opening branches of the national post office, PTT, in Idlib so as to facilitate money transfers for CSOs. The interviews also revealed that several Gulf countries, especially Qatar and Saudi Arabia, are interested to invest in Turkey. In the face of this kind of an opportunity, there exists an incentive for CSOs to establish a stronghold in Turkey, for at least the foreseeable future.

Apart from operational and logistical support, organizations also reported that Turkey provides financial support to certain projects. An organization engaged in the high-education sector informed that the Ministry of National Education, Turkey provided accreditations to the education certificates of the Syrians who had sought refuge in Turkey or even migrated further. These organizations have engaged in advocacy with governments of Germany, Belgium and Portugal to obtain similar accreditations, however, to no avail. Hence, as of now, Turkey is the only state offering non-monetary official support to Syrian CSOs. The Turkish government is reportedly also highly supportive of the maintenance on non-formal educational services, especially those run by CSOs, and is actively engaged in infrastructural development in the development sector. The government is also known to be providing the salaries for teachers in the educational institutions operated by CSOs.

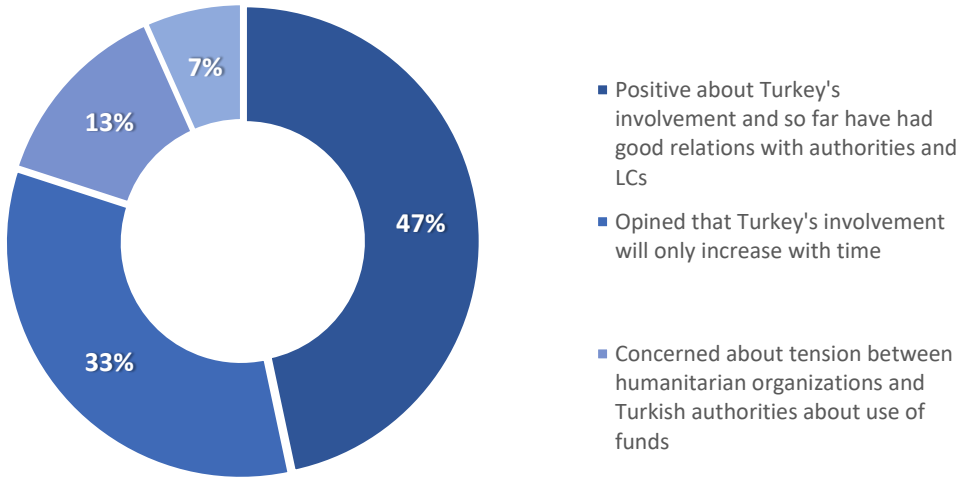
An interviewee provided the information that the violent attacks and the subsequent expulsion of the CSOs in south Syria have put them on alert. In this context, it was reported that Russian authorities are threatened by all civil society activities, including humanitarian operations, and CSOs are under "*constant fear of Russia adopting an aggressive stance towards [these] organizations and their employees."* Against this backdrop, CSOs advocating Turkey's increased involvement were of the opinion that Turkey's support is crucial for stabilisation and security purposes.

Organizations reported that there are some tensions stemming from Turkey's increased support for the CSOs' work. 30 per cent of the organizations studied described the relations between OCHA and Turkey as "tense" or "strained" as OCHA is believed to be contending Turkey's role in what it understands as the "politics" of the conflict. OCHA is, as understood by the CSOs, of the view that the work undertaken by CSOs receiving Turkey's support is not humanitarian in nature as it is not of an impartial or neutral nature, and is thus, not in line with the humanitarian principles. The CSOs reported that their "non-compliance" with the humanitarian principles, as prescribed by international humanitarian actors, endangers the funding offered by these organizations. CSOs, thus, complained of being stuck in stuck in the tussle between the two actors and their principles or interests. Owing to this conflict of interests, the CSOs were of the opinion that there have been incidents of increased misunderstands within the Syrian CSO community. This trend is identified as being rooted in the differing perspectives co-opted by the recipients of the funds coming from two different donors or supporters. This is encapsulated and conveyed by the following statement given in response to questions on inter-CSO coordination:

"We find it difficult to cooperate with organizations that do not comply with humanitarian principles as it affects our relations with OCHA and other donors. While Turkey might be supporting our community's work, we have very differing approaches. We have a humanitarian perspective and we want to save lives, while the Turkish authorities have a bureaucratic approach." – Representative of a large organization in the WASH sector

There is clearly a very divergent understanding of what Turkey's role could be in determining the future of the Syrian CSOs. However, on the basis of the findings, it can be pre-empted that irrespective of the nature of involvement, Turkish authorities will indisputably have a significant influence on the operations and even existence of these organizations. The question, thus, should not be about whether Turkey will play a role, but to what extent will the regulations imposed by Turkey impede or aid the operations of CSOs? Further, how does this dynamic interact with or affect adherence to humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality? These questions will be addressed in the upcoming/following/ analysis section of the report.

Fig 10: CSOs' views on Turkish authorities



VI. Analysis and conclusion

As presented by the CSO leaders, the predominant view amongst the Syrian community is that if the Assad government were to take control of the last opposition-controlled areas, the CSOs operating out of these regions would be forced to be registered with the government. This would, without doubt, curtail the freedom of the CSOs as the history of civil society in Syria so far has indicated. In the face of these kinds of future prospects as well as a multitude of security concerns, it is only natural for Syrian CSOs to be leaning towards more long-term projects. Given how Turkey's support is cited as being crucial for the operations of CSOs in certain areas, the perception of this kind of support being "political" and thereby undermining the neutral spirit of humanitarian work is not entirely misplaced. While such projects might be identified by international humanitarian actors as being similar to stabilization efforts seen in cases of Afghanistan and Somalia, this conflation is grossly misplaced. In the face of threatened existence, the Syrian CSOs are confronted with tough decisions and at this point it becomes crucial to avoid narrow definitions of humanitarian action, while remaining respectful of the humanitarian principles.

Aid versus protection: who's the winner?

In accordance with the views expressed by the CSO leaders, any project with a long-term agenda could be miscategorized as non-humanitarian, including even education and protection projects. Further, within this context, it seems like the humanitarians view any aspect of the CSOs' work as not being purely humanitarian if it is not focused on life-saving and/or immediate relief projects. However, it needs to be taken into account, that the setting in Idlib is quite unique given a) its large IDP population and b) the protracted nature of the conflict that engulfs the region. In light of this, the CSOs' seem to convey that the humanitarian response should be corresponding or in tune with the situational factors. An internally displaced population calls for durable solutions that are long-term and sustainable, solutions that seek to strengthen the host community's capacity to meet the need of this vulnerable group. CSOs undertaking higher education projects, advocacy and reconstruction project should thereby not be viewed as attempts to militate the work of the humanitarians or as being in absolute opposition to the humanitarian principles. Stemming from this, the CSOs find themselves in a catch-22 situation where they are caught between a multitude of actors, including humanitarian actors, governmental donors and development agencies, because as Syrian nationals themselves, the CSOs expressed the desire to be in a position to be able to facilitate their own recovery and eliminate the element of dependency characterizing the current donor-beneficiary equation. It is possibly for this reason that CSOs are stepping away from delivery of immediate relief materials and lifesaving actions alone, to more long-term projects. In short, the shift can be understood as a move from a purely needs-based approach to one that is more rights-based and people centric. From the CSOs' perspective, the people ought to be central to the narrative and not viewed as "victims" or beneficiaries only but as equal participants in the response and recovery processes.

The politics of protection and funding

However, this is not to endorse the co-optation of humanitarian work for political purposes. On the contrary, the line of argument presented here advocates for a complete and full compliance with the provisions contained in the 2018 HRP. The HRP is anchored by three objectives: saving lives and alleviating suffering, enhancing protection and building resilience. These objectives are interlinked, reflecting that needs are intertwined (HRP 2018). Protection and early recovery are mainstreamed across the operation, adding coherence to the humanitarian response. However, it can be argued that this realization while present at the planning and policy level is not being translated into practice, as can be seen by funding patterns and other types of engagement. With respect to funding especially,

while the humanitarian organizations and INGOs do not impose conditionalities out-rightly on the CSOs, project specific funding severely restricts the freedom of the latter and translates into a relationship of sub-contracting. Equal partnership is not possible in such a setting as CSOs continue to be tasked with major implementation tasks and decision making, monitoring and assessment is concentrated in the hands of the donors. It is because of this lack of flexibility in the humanitarian funding that the CSOs prefer non-humanitarian funding coming from private channels. At this point, it becomes important to note that majority of the CSOs receiving funding from the US government are highly welcoming of the prospect of Turkey's palying a more influential role in the future. This is clearly reflective of the US-Turkish foreign relations. Turkey serves as a buffer between Europe and the refugee influx coming from Syria, and thereby it has been argued, that Western powers have an interest in empowering the Turkish authorities to contain the crisis. For the US especially, Turkey borders Iran, Iraq, Syria, formerly-ISIS-held territory, and Russia across the Black Sea. Within this context, having Turkey in a powerful position in relation to the belligerents is beneficial for the US (Cagaptay, 2018).

A study undertaken by Local to Global Protection (L2GP) in 2016 revealed that:

> "…. actors engaged in the Turkey Syria cross-border responses[do] identify examples of "good-practise partner- ships" but also examples not unlike those found in the for-profit sector. Some of these contractual agreements resemble the kind of business deal where international companies possess the know-how, "owns" the design, and controls access to investors and markets, while local "business partners" deliver cheap labour and low production costs" (p. 3, L2GP, 2016).

While the situation on the ground today might have improved in terms of partnerships no longer being of a contractual nature, there are a number of other limitations that impede truly equal partnerships. One component adding to the inflexibility is the fact that the donors do not take into account the context or geography. Given the nature of the Syrian crisis, protracted and extremely volatile, CSOs are often faced with emergency situations that cripple them either operationally or financially. In such a context, project specific funding is not compatible with the urgent needs of the CSOs as often, a situation arises when CSOs are forced out of certain locations as regions are besieged by one of the parties to the conflict. Once in this sort of a situation, a CSO loses not only its geographic stronghold presence but also its financial support as internationally available funding is non-transferrable. In the face of limited fund availability, inter-CSO collaboration and cooperation is made difficult. The renewal of the UNSC resolution concerning cross-border operations for Syria remains undetermined and a non-renewal, it is feared, will only bring with it fewer funding channels and the threat of a shutdown of cross-border CSOs, especially in Turkey. The cessation of cross-border operations will also translate into increased competition within the CSO community, which will in turn impact efficiency on the ground and the overall outreach of the humanitarian response and early recovery processes. Hence, the implications of under-funding are far reaching and long lasting in the context of Syrian CSOs. However, this is not to say that more financial resources is the only viable solution. The challenges confronting CSOs are rooted in lack of support in general, and not only monetary support. Efforts similar to those made by Turkey in the education sector for accreditation and teachers' salaries are welcomed by the CSOs and aid their operations substantially. CSOs are looking to decrease their dependence on donors as much as possible. In this respect, state governments and humanitarian organizations that are concerned about the humanitarian principles have the option of engaging in capacity building activities with the CSOs. Lack of capacity has been identified as a major obstacle for inclusive partnerships with CSOs. Thus, training workshops and assistance with formalizing of structures can enhance the CSOs work and open up avenues for self-funding, such as organizing fundraisers. Capacity building, however, should not entail only restructuring these organizations in a manner that makes monitoring suitable for the donors. The aim should be to empower the CSOs in a

manner that allows them to conduct assessments and analysis as a basis for developing their own project proposals and then engage in advocacy with potential donors to secure sufficient funds.

Principled engagement: a step towards better partnerships?

The aim, thus, is principled engagement between international humanitarian organizations and Syrian civil society. Principled both in relation to the principles of partnership and the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. Donor policies and procedures that are respectful of the humanitarian principles should be developed for all donors, including states, private actors and INGOs. However, while ensuring that co-optation by counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and other such measures is not impeding humanitarian work is important, a purist approach that excludes any initiative that has a long-term approach is also restrictive. To ensure this balance, what is required is a mechanism for effective monitoring and systematic implementation in line with the HRP which is fully compliant with the humanitarian principles.

VII. Recommendations

For CSOs –

5. **Self-funding avenues:** Given the tense political situation exacerbated by the protracted nature of the crisis and the unpredictability associated with the funding channels, CSOs should be encouraged to explore self-funding options. This would decrease their dependency on unpredictable funding channels and put CSOs in a position to develop their projects that are tailored to address the emergency needs along with being compatible with volatile situations.
6. **Long-term projects with a rights-based approach:** While the eight-year long crisis is nowhere close to resolution, the needs of the population affected by this prolonged crisis are no longer met by emergency relief materials alone. Further, humanitarian must be careful not to make the displaced populations dependent on relief materials by ignoring long-term plans, such as livelihood projects and higher education. Not questioning the importance of immediate relief assistance, it needs to be acknowledged that humanitarian action constitutes two components – relief work and protection. Protection calls for more long-term projects to which advocacy efforts are central. In line with this, CSOs should be encouraged to take up more long-term projects that are not only meeting immediate needs but looking to address the violations of human rights and ensure respect for the dignity of the Syrian peoples, as stipulated in international law.
7. **Combine funds:** In addition to self-funding, CSOs should explore funding options made available by state governments and governmental development agencies, such as GIZ. This type of funding is entirely free of conditionalities and provides CSOs a considerable amount of flexibility. However, while governmental funding is an appealing option, CSOs should keep in mind the humanitarian principles and ensure that the funds offered are free of political and military motivations. Politicization of humanitarian work even for the purpose of saving lives can be detrimental to long term conflict resolution.
8. **Engage in constructive dialogue with humanitarian donors:** Most misunderstandings between humanitarian donors and CSOs stems from the differing interpretations of the humanitarian principles as well as the principles of partnership. These differing interpretations can be rooted in variations pertaining to internal functioning, management and operations of the CSOs and humanitarian donors. To resolve this, CSOs should engage actively in constructive dialogue with humanitarian organizations that allows the donors to understand their context specific concerns and make funds flexible accordingly.

For humanitarian donors –

5. **Redefine capacity building:** Capacity building efforts for the CSOs should be focused on restructuring the organizations to suit the monitoring mechanisms of the donors. This only serves to weaken the CSOs' stronghold and adds to their existing costs. Instead, donors and international agencies should introduce and adopt guidance mechanisms that allow the CSOs to strengthen their commitment to principles of partnership and the humanitarian principles.
6. Equal distribution of funds across sectors
7. **Avoid narrow definition of humanitarian action and practice HRP provisions:** Compliance with principles of neutrality and impartiality is crucial for humanitarian work. However, restrictive definition of humanitarian action that reduces the affected population to "victims" and operates within the donor-beneficiary binary is harmful in the long run. This kind of a dynamic can also hinder the transition from humanitarian assistance to recovery and development phase. Humanitarian donors should respect the provisions of the HRP and remain open to protection-oriented initiatives undertaken by CSOs that are more sustainable and long-term.

8. **Flexible funds:** Displacement is a common occurrence in conflict settings and the phenomenon affects CSOs both operationally and financially. Not only are they forced to shift their geographical presence, but organizations dependent on international funding experience an added loss as their funds are non-transferrable by virtue of being project specific. Humanitarian donors should keep such conflict dynamics in mind and make funds more flexible in terms of transferability. Funds should also be made more flexible in terms of being made available as per organizational needs and not granted as per projects. This is especially pertinent in the case of the CSOs working for Idlib – given the large IDP population in Idlib, CSOs are often faced with situations that require urgent but long term commitments (ex: housing, land and property concerns) so as to ensure durable solutions for the IDPs.

Appendix I: Syrian CSOs information table

Organization number	Year of establishment	Official registration in Turkey	Staff Size	Offices	Funding type	Sector	Work on IDPs	Future prospects
Organization #1	2013	Yes	28	Istanbul, and Syria	International Organizations and Semi-Private Organizations (20%)	Higher Education	Supporting IDPs	Establish a research centre to develop and refine Syrian educational curriculum
Organization #2	2011	Yes	14	Gaziantep	International Organizations and Private Donors (50-50%)	Disabled Rights	Indirectly	Aim to increase political participation of disabled community
Organization #3	2016	Yes	10	Gaziantep & Hama	International Organizations and Syrian Diaspora	Protection, Education, Health	Indirectly	Apprehensive about non-renewal of cross-border resolution and the subsequent shortage of funds.
Organization #4	2013	No	9	Idlib	Private Donors	News Agency	Not relevant	Expand and become an international news agency
Organization #5	2013	Yes	30	Gaziantep & Syria	International Organizations	Governance and Stabilization	Indirectly	Participate in political affairs and policy making
Organization #6	2012	Yes	35	France & Gaziantep & Syria	International Organizations and Private Donors	Protection, Education, Women's Rights	Supporting IDPs	Expand operations in advocacy and community engagement

Organization #7	2013	Yes	700(including volunteers)	Europe & Gaziantep & Syria	International Organizations and Private Donors (20-80%)	Community Development, Health, Education, Emergency Response	Supporting IDPs	Determined to operate even if cross-border resolution fails to be renewed
Organization #8	2015	Yes	18	Stockholm & Gaziantep	International Organizations	Women Empowerment and IDP assistance	Documenting forced Displacement around Syria	Apprehensive about non-renewal of cross-border resolution and the subsequent shortage of funds.
Organization #9	2013	Yes	250	Istanbul & Syria	International Organizations and Private Donors (25-75%))	Education, Shelter provision	Establishing Camps for IDPs	Concerned about Turkish authorities tightening control and restrictive laws being introduced.
Organization #10	1998	Yes	150	Gaziantep & Syria	International organizations and state support and private fund	Health	Providing medical assistance to IDPs	Advance in operations all across Syria
Organization #11	2013	Yes	26	United States & Syria & Tunisia & Erbil	State support	Monitoring and evaluation	Not relevant	Apprehensive about non-renewal of cross-border resolution and the subsequent shortage of funds.

Organization #12	2013	Yes	20	Gaziantep & Syria	State Support and International Organizations	Governance, Advocacy, Capacity building, Community Engagement	Supporting IDPs	Intention to increase community engagement between IDPs and local population in Idlib
Organization #13	2012	Yes	97	Jordan & Qatar & Kuwait & Istanbul	Self- Funding & International Organizations	Education, Health	Supporting IDPs	Determined to operate even if Cross-border resolution fails to be renewed
Organization #14	2014	No	12 volunteers	Gaziantep & Syria	Only International Organizations (DC, SRM)	Consultation	Not relevant	Concerned from closure if regime regains control of Idlib
Organization #15	2012	Yes	28	Gaziantep & Syria	International Organizations and Private Donors (60-40%)	Education, Rehabilitation	Supporting IDPs	Fear from closure if Cross-border resolution fails to be renewed
Organization #16	2015	Yes	120	Jordan & Gaziantep & Syria	International Organizations	Education, Shelter provision	Supporting IDPs	Fear from closure if Cross-border resolution fails to be renewed

Appendix II: Interview questionnaire

1. Structure of organisation

1.1. Employment type: volunteer, per project, part time, full time?

1.2. Managerial/organisational structures If possible the structure and governance of the surveyed organizations should be documented. Decision making process, project management, responsibilities, etc.

2. Founding

2.1. When was your organization founded?

2.2. What was the motivation and objective behind it?

3. **Areas of Operation**

3.1. What region inside Syria does the organization operate in?

3.2. Does the organization have any other branch whether inside Syria or abroad?

4. **Funding and financial structures**

4.1. What are the possible channels for securing funding and how does your organization manage to do so?

4.2. What is the most preferred channel of funding? Could you give reasons?

4.3. Are there any conditionalities attached to the funding that the organization receives? If yes, what kind? (examples)

5. **International partners**

5.1. Are there any international partners the organization cooperates with? If so, which countries are they based in?

5.2. Which platforms/donors are the most commonly used/widely approached by local organisations? Are these equally accessible by all organisations? What are the (possible) obstacles?

5.3. Do these donors enforce any particular policy to be adopted?

5.4. What are the reporting requirements and mechanisms put in place? Does this increase administrative pressure for your staff?

6. **Coordination with other Syrian NGOs**

6.1. Is there any ongoing cooperation with other Syrian NGOs? If so, in what way?

6.2. Would enhanced cooperation among Syrian civil society organisations help in any way? How can organizations further enhance their cooperation amongst one another?

7. Future prospects

7.1. How do you perceive the organization's work in the future?

7.2. What impact might the organization have in rebuilding and restoring peace in Syria?

7.3. How can the international community better support the organization's work?

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