Political, yet Neutral?

A Case Study of the Pressures on Humanitarian Aid Provision in Venezuela

Petronella Ottosson

Abstract

This thesis explores the nature of the challenges local NGOs face when responding to the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. In doing so, it draws on material collected from distance interviews with Venezuelan NGOs involved in delivering humanitarian aid and on qualitative analysis of political statements from members of the Venezuelan government. Further, it investigates whether and how identified challenges are connected to the Venezuelan government's politicization of aid. Such identified challenges are; leverage of state-sanctioned benefits against humanitarian aid, confiscation or retainment of aid, threats of blocking organizations' funds, and lack of acknowledgment or inclusion of local organizations in the national humanitarian response. Moreover, NGOs faced the pressure of having to remain formally neutral in the face of such challenges. Since neutrality is a principle guiding humanitarian work, NGOs indeed perceived neutrality as an essential principle for gaining trust from donors as well as beneficiaries. Neutrality, however, did not contribute to open up a politically-neutral humanitarian space wherein organizations could efficiently deliver aid. Hence, it is found that local organizations operate in a shrinking space where their existence and activities are under constant assault. These findings are in line with the general trend of a shrinking space for international humanitarian operations, and this thesis show that this tendency also can be extrapolated to local actors.
Word count: 215

Key words: Humanitarian aid, Local NGOs, Politicization, Neutrality, Venezuela
Words: 19 999

Table of contents

1   Introduction

*"(…) nos cuidamos a nosotros, a nuestro equipo, y de cuidar sobre todo
que podamos seguir operando porque confrontar o enfrentar abiertamente
al gobierno puede suponer que dejemos de operar y eso seria abandonar a
la gente" Interviewee 4.*

Venezuela is classified as one of the most acute humanitarian crises in the world today with around 7 million people in need of urgent assistance and 94% of the population estimated to live in poverty. In 2018, the United Nations began to classify the situation in the country as humanitarian and UN OCHA initiated its humanitarian response coordination during the first half of 2019 (OCHA 2019). Before an international response plan was in place, Venezuelan civil society organizations (CSOs) had repeatedly tried to communicate the magnitude of the escalating situation (CIVILIS 2016, PROVEA 2019) to the international community. However, their word stood against the Venezuelan government that far dismissed the claim of a humanitarian crisis (Sida 2019: 6).

Today there is no doubt that the Venezuelan situation represents a complex humanitarian crisis, where needs are manifold and have reinforcing effects on one another. Furthermore, the challenges of response are multiple and the context is highly politicized. Response restrictions on international aid organizations have led Venezuelan CSOs to take on a big part of the humanitarian operations and it is this situation that has inspired the puzzle in this thesis.

This study aims to map the different challenges faced by local NGOs when navigating such a politicized context and how they approach requirements from both the government and donors. Particularly, the study is centered around how the humanitarian principle of neutrality, which states that all humanitarian actors must abstain from political, racial, religious, and ideological controversies (OCHA 2010), affects the work of these organizations. Thus, exploring the dual processes of being both politicized and neutralized.

To in-depth investigate these dynamics, I draw on previous research concerning the principle of neutrality, the politicization of aid as well as NGOs' and civil society's role in humanitarian assistance. As a theoretical base, the concept of neutrality is expanded upon through the idea of political action and constituency. Through a qualitative case study, the thesis uses the methodological components of thematic coding and qualitative content analysis. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews and literature searches. The qualitative content analysis aims to map and identify the most critical challenges local humanitarian organizations face to respond to the humanitarian crisis, and to what extent these challenges are connected to the politicization of aid and the humanitarian principle of neutrality. Relating to the fact that all local civil society organizations

engaged in humanitarian aid in Venezuela previously were non-humanitarian, this thesis investigates what implications this transition have had for them.

The concluding chapters of the thesis both aim to sort out and establish the consequences that the dual pressure of politicization of aid and the adherence to neutrality have had for the civil society in Venezuela.

The economic and political crisis in Venezuela has unfolded and deepened quickly during the past years. The situation has fueled the most considerable migration flows in modern Latin American history, and today it is estimated that around 5 million people have migrated from the country. Due to political tensions and an economic implosion with hyperinflation, the state has been rendered incapable of providing its citizens with essential supplies such as food and medicines. As the humanitarian situation continues to worsen and severe shortages of necessary goods prevail, crime and violence are increasing, and the human rights situation is deteriorating (Sida 2018). A humanitarian and human rights response by the global community has repeatedly been called for by different organizations from the Venezuelan civil society (Civilis et al. 2016), and even after a response was implemented, many local NGOs remain critical of its width and independence (PROVEA et al. 2019, Acción Solidaria et al. 2019).

The magnitude of the crisis is not fully identified since population data is not publicly available, and the government has been denying the crisis and rejected humanitarian assistance. IACHR, the human rights organ of the Organization of American States (OAS), was denied access to Venezuela to conduct an in-depth analysis of the human rights situation as late as the 4th of February this year (Reuters 2020). Although the approach toward humanitarian assistance on behalf of the Venezuelan government was gradually relaxed during 2019; bureaucratic obstacles still make it practically impossible for international humanitarian agencies to establish themselves in the country. Thus, donors, the UN, and humanitarian international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have had, to a great extent, initiate partnerships with organizations within Venezuela. As a result of the lack of humanitarian actors, civil society organizations previously operating within other branches have been mobilized and established as humanitarian actors in the crisis-ridden context (UN OCHA 2019: 16). Roughly, around 75% of all humanitarian work is performed by national NGOs, rendering them the most vital actors in the response. The extensive denial of the presence of a humanitarian crisis has contributed to a politicization of aid and NGOs delivering aid, therefore, face multiple challenges. Politicization has led to reprisals against actors trying to collect data or communicate on the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis (Human Rights Watch 2019), as well as against civil society activists engaged in humanitarian work (Acción Solidaria et al. 2019).

However, at the beginning of 2019, aid was further politicized when international media covered American relief convoys from USAID being stopped by the Venezuelan government at the Venezuelan/Colombian border. The scenes at display were later interpreted as an attempt by the U.S. to make the national military switch loyalty to the opposition leader Juan Guaido (Baddour 2019). Both the NGO-forum InterAction and the Red Cross have made official appeals to

parties in Venezuela to stop politicizing and using aid as a weapon in the political debate. Of uttermost importance, is that humanitarian organizations are not perceived as associated with any side of the political division, as this hampers both effectiveness and reduces the worker's security (InterAction 2019, IFRC: 2019).

Furthermore, to gain access to crisis-ridden areas, humanitarian organizations have historically gained the trust of host governments through a commitment to neutrality, i.e., by not taking part in, or favoring any part of the conflict. This practice has been consolidated as the principle of neutrality, which is among the most well-established humanitarian principles endorsed by most humanitarian organizations and governments engaged in humanitarian operations. In the Venezuelan context, neutrality has been seen as the only remedy towards depoliticizing the humanitarian aid and creating broad acceptance for its delivery.

This thesis aims to discover how the national NGOs engaged in humanitarian work have been affected by the requirement and process of neutralization, as well as how this neutralization is challenged by politicization. In line with this ambition, the literature review elucidates, on the one hand, the different debates surrounding the meaning of neutrality applied in the humanitarian context, and on the other, the increasingly complex role of NGOs operating in politicized humanitarian contexts.

The Venezuelan case, where aid is criticized and cast under suspicion because it originates from western donors, is contextualized within the greater discourse of politicization of aid. The debate on politicization is traced back to the end of the Cold War, where major debates on funding-dependency and Western powers' political priorities shaping the humanitarian agenda took place (Leebaw 2007, Reiff, 2002). However, aid can also be politicized by the host government, through inhospitable bureaucracy, access restrictions, and fees (Sullivan 2019).

Neutrality is the humanitarian principle that should guarantee that aid is not politicized and is therefore also the most discussed and contentious humanitarian principle (Kurtzer 2019). There is no uniform interpretation among humanitarian organizations on what neutrality means in practice, and it is therefore applied differently depending on the context. However, in cases where humanitarian access is restricted and has to be thoroughly negotiated, it is typically given a stricter meaning (Harroff-Tavel 2003, Hillhorst & Jansen 2010). While neutrality has been recurrently questioned for the naïve presumption that it is possible to operate outside politics, defendants have argued that it is only when you are exceptionally well informed about the politics that you have the choice to abstain from it (Minear 1999). As neutrality entails an assumption that it is possible to separate the humanitarian mission from politics, it is argued that this principle for humanitarian action has been developed at the expense of the ability to critically address and tackle the root causes of humanitarian crises (Leebaw 2007: 228). Neutrality has also been seen as an obstacle to dealing with human rights abuses and misuse of aid, which has led to the need for humanitarian organizations to explore how aspects of human rights can be incorporated into their operations (Leebaw 2007). Moreover, the fact that the humanitarian principles were originally formulated in the context of war has made some critics

ask whether neutrality works, or if it is even desirable in today's considerable and more complex humanitarian crises (Curtis 2001: 13).

Since political engagement is an ambiguous term, it requires this research to look deeper into what the notion means for local humanitarian NGOs in this particular context. Political abstention further revitalizes fundamental questions of the identities of the local NGOs as previously independent forces in society. The inherent tension rising from the current politicization of aid in combination with requirements of neutrality blazes a trail for the following research question:

How does the humanitarian principle of neutrality impact the everyday operations of local humanitarian NGOs in Venezuela in the context of the government's politicization of aid?

As this study centers around the specific context of the politicization of humanitarian aid in Venezuela, a case study is the natural choice of a research design. The case study is beneficial in the situations where a researcher wants to investigate and explain a contemporary circumstance in depth without losing a holistic and real-world perspective (Yin 2018: 4-5). The reason for choosing this specific case is the particular and contentious character of the humanitarian crisis in the country. The most distinctive feature is the political rivalry between two presidents, President Maduro who has possessed the power since 2013, and the opposition leader and president of the country's national assembly Juan Guaido. Juan Guaido was proclaimed interim president by a majority of the assembly in January 2019 and the political crisis reached the international arena when more than 50 states recognized Guaido as the legitimate leader of the country (Al Jazeera 2019). While the political polarization, which can be traced many years back, has increased dramatically along the government's growingly authoritarian actions and the economy's steady deterioration, a conceptual battle has taken place over whether the country has fallen into a humanitarian crisis or not. Whereas the opposition has brought attention to the lack of medicines, food, basic services etc., naming it a humanitarian crisis, and popular protests have erupted in the streets demanding basic goods and services, the government has refused to call it a humanitarian crisis (García-Guadilla & Mallen 2018: 66).

Hence, actors subscribing and acting in accordance with the humanitarian narrative have been seen as non-supportive of the government. This leads to the hypothesis that the dual processes of politicization and neutralization increase the challenges of the operation of local NGOs delivering humanitarian aid in Venezuela.

To investigate the postulated hypothesis, thematic qualitative content analysis is conducted on primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with Venezuelan NGOs engaged in humanitarian work and secondary data was collected through identifying relevant documents indicating politicization of aid such as news articles, governmental documents and utterances.

Since qualitative content analysis is both a deductive and inductive approach themes are both developed prior to data analysis, based on the literature

review and theory, and developed during the analysis process itself (Kuckartz 2014: 69).

This thesis has two main aims: to explore the operational meaning and consequences of neutrality on CSOs engaged in humanitarian aid and to explore how politicization is expressed and manifested in connection to aid delivery in Venezuela. Thus, this study problematize the inherent tension of being a neutral NGO in a highly politicized context and investigate how the requirement of being neutral affects the capacity of aid delivery.

The preliminary findings point toward an extensive, national politicization and in most cases, criminalization of humanitarian aid. The politicization seems to obstruct the ability of local NGOs to undertake humanitarian work. Concerning neutrality, findings point towards that Venezuelan civil society organizations encounter organizational challenges in complying with neutrality in light of their previous work as actors of advocacy and condemnation. It is also found that CSOs neutrality is challenged by politicization.

The analysis will thus first discuss different indications of politicization and link different identified challenges that local NGOs face to these. Thereafter, the theoretical framework of constituency will be applied as a general perspective on political interaction between the involved actors. Lastly it will also be showed what impact neutrality have had on local NGOs' work and ability to carry out humanitarian tasks.

Henceforth the thesis is structured through the following parts: The next chapter is a literature review on neutrality, the politicization of aid, and local NGOs in humanitarian aid. A method chapter follows, describing the theoretical framework and the used methods. Next comes a data chapter structured according to different themes, leading to the subsequent chapter of discussion. Finally, conclusions are presented, which aim to place the results within the greater humanitarian debate and state the contributions of the thesis.

2   Literature review

Humanitarian aid has become an increasingly frequent practice on the global arena, between 2000 and 2010 the amount of aid channeled to crisis-ridden countries nearly doubled and in 2018 the amount of aid reached 28,9 billion US dollars compared to 22,2 billion in 2014 (Wood & Sullivan 2015: 736) (GHA 2018). The expansion of the humanitarian system gained notable momentum after the end of the Cold War when many states started to dedicate themselves to the development of humanitarian units simultaneously as international organizations such as the World Bank began to offer assistance. Nongovernmental organizations dedicated to different aspects on the humanitarian spectrum have soared in numbers and became increasingly sophisticated (Barnett 2005: 723).

The proliferation of actors dedicated to the humanitarian mission has resulted in an expansion of the meaning of humanitarianism itself. As an action previously restricted to a narrow sphere of activity, where the aim was to provide basic assistance and relief to victims of disasters, it has grown into a practice focused on a number of issues such as human rights, economic development and even democracy promotion (Ibid 753). The expansion of the sector and the magnitude of actors and practices has led to the development of a strategy called the 'nexus', where humanitarian aid and development complement each other through collaboration between respective actors. More recently humanitarian aid and development have also been accompanied by peace-keeping actors, evolving into the new idea of a triple-nexus: aid, development and peacekeeping (Sida 2018: 5). The triple-nexus can be regarded as a reaction to the increased prevalence of attacks on humanitarian workers in humanitarian crises (Hoelscher et al. 2017: 538). As the incidence of protracted conflicts is spreading, humanitarian action also assumes a greater role within contexts of conflict. A more active engagement in the protection of and provision of service to people affected by violent conflict entails risks for both beneficiaries and workers. Hence, donors and aid organizations have been spurred to consider how their actions might have unintended consequences and contribute to the production of negative externalities (Wood & Sullivan 2015: 736-7). These externalities are in this thesis explored from the perspective of NGOs. Even though the main players in humanitarian aid are many, including beneficiaries, humanitarian workers, NGOs, donors, host states and civilians, NGOs are the primary actors that implement humanitarian aid (Sullivan 2019: 3). In addition, it is not uncommon for 70% of the aid workers in the field to be locals or nationals working for an NGO (Davis et al. 2019: 60), a number that can be estimated to be a lot higher in the Venezuelan case, due to restrictions on the registration of international NGOs (INGOs).

In order to obtain international funding, humanitarian organizations need to adhere to a set of humanitarian principles, which have raised several dilemmas in the Venezuelan context. One especially controversial principle is the requirement of neutrality, which is expected difficult to attain in such a politicized context. To investigate what challenges local humanitarian NGOs experience in applying neutrality to their operations, an explanation of the humanitarian principles, neutrality and the surrounding debate will be covered in this literature review.

2.1   The origin of the principle of neutrality

Most humanitarian organizations conform to four guiding principles of ´Humanity', 'Impartiality', 'Neutrality' and 'Independence', more commonly referred to as 'The Humanitarian Principles'. These principles were adopted by the United Nations in two General Assembly resolutions (Resolution 46/182, Resolution 58/114). Many countries have agreed to carry out all humanitarian activity in accordance with the UN resolution 46/182. Hence, the adoption of the humanitarian principles and the acknowledgement of the unique role of the UN to provide leadership and coordination of humanitarian aid is widespread among donors (Sida 2020).

UN-OCHA is responsible for the coordination of humanitarian aid and the agency operates according to the following definition of the principles:

• Humanity: "Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings."

• Neutrality: "Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature."

• Impartiality: "Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions."

• Operational Independence: "Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented." (OCHA 2010).

These four principles were originally inspired by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Red Crescent movement's seven funding principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality (Plattner 1996). In order to understand the meaning of the principles,

it is essential to look back at how they were once formed, namely in the context of war where the attempt to restrain the limits of war and to enforce the right for non-combatants to receive assistance became legislated through International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The humanitarian principles on the other hand, were decided as a response to the difficulties in implementing the right to assistance provision, as this is ethically very complex. Hence, the ICRC formulated their seven core principles of humanitarian action in order to navigate in a politically and ethically charged landscape (Leader 2000: 2). Leader (2000) underscores that the humanitarian principles can be seen as embodying a part of the 'rules of war', where the principles are a compromise between belligerents that promise to accept humanitarian work and humanitarian actors that promise to not interfere in the conflict. The way humanitarian aid can be conducted and the humanitarian principles can be deployed is constantly renegotiated as the nature of conflicts or specific situations changes (Ibid 11).

2.2 Neutrality in practice

In the Human Rights report presented in June last year by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, it was stated that the Venezuelan government has been employing a strategy to neutralize, oppress and criminalize the political opposition as well as people that are perceived to be against the government (UN/HRC 2019). Given the government's politicization of aid as a 'foreign bad', the report also points to the risk that actors delivering foreign humanitarian aid are viewed as 'being against the government'. Local NGOs are now also neutralized in their aid work through their adherence to humanitarian principles, potentially contributing to making important voices from civil society abstain from open protests.

First and foremost, there is no universal understanding among humanitarian organizations on what neutrality exactly entails (Harroff-Tavel 2003) and both the principles of impartiality and neutrality are applied differently depending on the context of humanitarian crisis. The meaning of the principles is also dependent on the relationship between principles and structure, objectives and culture of the implementing organization. The fact that the principles are often debated in isolation from their implementation fails to account for the conceptual development around principles in different organizations (Leader 2000: 17).

Weller (1997) discusses the relativity of the principles' meaning and legal nature when he distinguishes between the different contexts within which the two principles can be invoked. The context of invocation decides whether the principles are invoked as constitutional principles, as rules of process (code of conduct), as a part of a substantive justification for a conduct or in connection to collective security mandates. The principles are relative in two ways, as they not only differ in terms of legality but in the standard of activity that they require, also depending on the context of application. For example, since the legality of the

humanitarian principles depends on the context in which they are invoked, the ICRC's definition of the principles is not legally binding. ICRC's principles are an entirely internal regulation by a non-governmental entity (1997: 446). The exact meaning that the principle of neutrality will embody is thus dependent on the source of obligation that makes it applicable to the specific situation. Likewise, the General Assembly resolutions, which require the adherence to the humanitarian principles by the UN in humanitarian missions, is also not automatically legally binding. Whereas Weller (1997) terms them as being of 'a slippery legal nature' and open to question, The International Association of Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection (PHAP 2015) underscores this contention as they explain that the principles in their raw form simply are principles and not 'rules'. To be sure, organizations or donors can include the adherence to principles as a paragraph in grant agreements of aid-provision (PHAP 2015).

2.3 The contentiousness of neutrality

The principles' importance has been particularly demonstrated in humanitarian operations in the context of war, mainly as a shield for organizations against the risk of being used to further strategic and political interests of parties to a conflict (Leader 2000: 2).

Thus, the adherence to the humanitarian principles opens up a 'humanitarian space' for aid provision to be carried out within. The concept of humanitarian space comprises both the physical environment of activity but also the room for maneuver for humanitarians to be able to carry out their mission under secure conditions, without the fear of being attacked by other actors. The humanitarian principles act as enablers for the creation of and access through humanitarian spaces (Hilhorst & Jansen 2010: 1118). The concept of humanitarian space also tends to allude to the idea of an apolitical space, where agencies work without involvement in any kind of politics (Leader 2000: 8). The idea of the humanitarian space, and the ethical assumption that it is possible to separate a humanitarian mission from politics, meant that the method to alleviate human suffering was developed at the expense of addressing and targeting the very causes of poverty and conflict.

Well disputed is thus the matter that abstention from political engagement prevents a critical response to the use and abuse of aid (Leebaw 2007: 227). To keep quiet about atrocities committed by a state on its own population in order to 'stay away from politics' was for instance the reason that Doctors Without Borders (MSF) was founded by previous workers of ICRC, where the MSF does not allow themselves to be silenced on grounds of state sovereignty (Leebaw 2007: 227). In todays' operational framework of MSF, the principle of neutrality is left out altogether. Action Against Hunger (ACF) has employed a slightly different approach, it attaches the right to denounce human rights violations that it witnesses to the principle of neutrality and also reserves itself the right to criticize

obstacles to humanitarian activities (ACF 2020). ICRC recognizes that it can be important to challenge their strict adherence to neutrality in the cases where it has been stretched too far. Such situations occur when ICRC keeps silent about humanitarian abuses for a long time in the belief that violating states themselves will react to the problems. ICRC's approach to abuses is to through dialogue persuade governments to self-correct humanitarian deficiencies (Harroff-Tavel 2003). As the UN still refers to the original humanitarian principles and uses these as requirements for collaboration with NGOs and since UN OCHA occupies the position of humanitarian coordinator in Caracas, one main incentive for this thesis is to investigate how neutrality is manifested by local humanitarian NGOs in this particular context.

The notion of neutrality is not only criticized from a human rights perspective where public condemnations are a modus operandi, but also from the point of view of capacity building; it raises doubts about whether humanitarian work in conflict prevents a direct engagement with root-causes of the conflict (Leader 2000: 7). In Zimbabwe, a humanitarian context which has, like Venezuela, been characterized by a governmental suspicion towards aid, NGOs were increasingly silent as the government was extremely susceptible to any public expression that could be interpreted as a critique towards its actions. Neutrality was increasingly undermined as the government decreased the aid organizations' space to conduct a dialogue around current problems, as well as looked for points to criticize in the humanitarian programs (McIvor 2003).

Another example that critics have drawn attention to is the argument that state leaders during the war in Yugoslavia were accepting and investing in relief efforts just to avoid commitment to change the current situation; since humanitarian actors had their hands tied to neutrality relief efforts contributed to perpetuating the status quo (Leebaw 2007:227).

Furthermore, if neutrality implies abstention from political involvement, there have been widely different interpretations of what it really means or if it is even possible. Some claim that even if humanitarian aid per se is not political, it will become political when it operates within a political situation (Morgenthau1962: 301). Some scholars also point to how the introduction of development practices (nexus) into humanitarian work is incompatible with the original humanitarian principles. The necessary separation between the humanitarian and political is dissolved when strategies of development, which always represent some preconceived values and ideas, are introduced to humanitarian operations (Anderson 2004: 70-71).

Minear (1999) on the other hand contends that to abstain from politics is possible, but it should not be conceived as not being aware of the politics permeating a humanitarian context; contrarily, it entails being very well-informed without becoming part of it. It is through employing this approach to politics, that ICRC continues to manage its role as a moral force when rejecting involvement in politically charged issues. In the discussion on neutrality and abstention, the moral discussion has arisen on whether it is really in anybody's interest to avoid distinguishing right from wrong or perpetrators from victims in humanitarian aid. Hence, ICRC has been called naïve for the belief that neutrality is possible in

contexts with distinguished 'bad' and 'good' actors (Minear 1999: 67). On the other hand, it is also argued that ICRC today is one of few entities that truly can uphold the humanitarian principles as it is not involved in practices of development as in the abovementioned 'nexus'. Neutrality is in its original sense described by its proponents as a form of discipline that can be temporally adopted by the people engaged in humanitarian work and that it is almost impossible to encounter in a context where one party is entirely wrong and the other entirely right (Minear 1999: 67).

It cannot be denied that even if NGOs appear neutral, the political significance their actions can have still has to be accounted for. In Venezuela, this is particularly important at the moment, because humanitarian aid can contribute to inadvertently fuel more violence (Laskowski et al. 2019: 26).

The vivid debate on neutrality indeed illustrates that it is 'the least self-evident and most problematic' of the humanitarian principles (Minear 1999: 66). The concept of neutrality itself is nevertheless useful in exploring the political dimension of the humanitarian organizations and the environment in which they operate. Some scholars argue that even if most humanitarian organizations adhere to the humanitarian principles today, compared to the founder of the principles, ICRC, they situate humanitarian activities within broader political frameworks (Ibid: 65).

Lockyear and Cunningham argue that humanitarian organizations should and can engage politically through a proactive and conscious approach without compromising the original formulation of neutrality. Neutrality allows for a space of action, which, if not used and if NGOs only engage in reactive responses to pressures imposed by other actors' interests, risks undermining the NGOs' responsibility towards their beneficiaries (2017: 2). In order to understand the nature of engagement between different actors and who exerts influence over the frames of operations, the discussion of neutrality needs to be connected to a discussion on the different ways aid risks to be politicized.

2.4   Politicization of aid

While humanitarian action is performed as a response to a specific, time-limited event, these events themselves are often the result of a more far-reaching crisis. A crisis can follow from political mismanagement or political conflict, where the segments of a population that are heavily affected is decided to a great extent by socio-political structures of the state (Vickers 2015: 3). A contextual-political awareness is thus the necessary base from which humanitarians can navigate and situate their work. In Venezuela, an NGO response cannot be studied without properly accounting for the political conditions triggering humanitarian action. While the crisis has been fueled by an economic collapse due to miscalculated policy reforms, a drop in oil price and unsustainable levels of external debts, it has lately been exacerbated by American sanctions as a response to authoritarian leadership (Patel 2019: 8). Since the country has been increasingly polarized and

the gulf between government and opposition has widened, humanitarian aid has turned into a tool in the political battle, where the opposition is accused of using the humanitarian situation as a legitimate reason to topple the government (Ibid 2019: 9).

The politicization of aid is not a new phenomenon and upholding the humanitarian principles –not least the principle of neutrality– has been increasingly challenged in the post-Cold War context. As states started to engage and invest in humanitarian aid, a tendency of aid being used as a strategic leverage to attain political goals and stipulations has emerged. Furthermore, as more complex humanitarian emergencies arose, humanitarian actors started to interact with other, often controversial, types of actors within these contexts; besides, as most aid agencies originate in the West, humanitarian actors have been seen as aligned with Western interests (Leebaw2007: 227). Despite ambitions of independence, almost all humanitarian NGOs have to accept institutional and funding realities which recurrently turn them into subcontractors of donor governments and the UN-system (Rieff 2002: 118).

That political interests influence the operations of humanitarian organizations is manifested by the actions for which NGOs are granted funds. The Rwandan genocide was for many the ultimate proof of the powerlessness of aid agencies: despite being in acute need of aid, a proper humanitarian response was rendered impossible due to governments' and the UN's unwillingness to act (Ibid: 166). The intertwinement of aid with politics was also underscored during the war in Bosnia, where humanitarian aid functioned as a substitution for political action (Ibid: 137) and where the humanitarian mandate and abstention from political involvement implied that UN troops could utilize force in the protection of aid, but not in the protection of citizens (Ibid 137).

The argument of Reiff (2002) is that humanitarian NGOs came out from the crisis in Bosnia with the intent to become politically engaged when operating in host countries. The impulsion to become political followed from the determination to avoid similar events, where apolitical and neutral humanitarianism were seen as tacit bystanders or even obstacles to the fight against state violence (Reiff 2002: 140-144). Humanitarian action turned into a force of change and inspired democratic activism guided by human rights. This gave rise to the debate on rights-based aid delivery, where the charter of human rights law was supposed to be the guarantor for humanitarian access (ibid 149). Reiff contends that the humanitarian experience in Rwanda not only demonstrated that humanitarian action is not equipped to address the root causes of humanitarian emergencies, but also that relief work could not be effectively carried out without political engagement. The 'political' element that was let into the humanitarian sphere supported acts of lobbying and advocacy (Ibid 172) and some scholars praised the development of rights-based humanitarianism as "an escape from the paternalistic limitations of philanthropy" (Ibid 322).

Today, most humanitarians have refrained from the ideas of active political engagement and the humanitarian principles are still seen as the shield protecting the humanitarian enterprise from political involvement. The rights-based approach is more adopted than ever, but the fact that it still rests on

organizations to determine what the specific role of the rights should be, or how the approach should be interpreted has led to multifaceted implementations (Cotterrell 2005: 5). However, the incorporation of human rights into humanitarian action is not a clear-cut practice. It can for instance mean that needs are so great that some rights have to be prioritized over others or that a contradiction in principles arises if the party possessing the authority of access is responsible for violating human rights (ibid 6-7).

Humanitarian aid does not only risk being politicized by its donors or in their linkage to peacekeeping, development and human rights, but also runs the risk of politicization by host governments or other parties in the country of operation. In Venezuela, major challenges for NGOs have arisen as the government has been refusing humanitarian access on the grounds that aid represents a political standpoint , i.e. serves specific political purposes. This reaction is not baffling as the US is the country providing the greatest portion of aid and has a well-documented history of interventionism in Latin America. These facts reinforce the Venezuelan president Maduro's distrust against aid provided by the US. But the reaction is also consistent with the anti-imperialist discourse that has characterized the leaders of the Bolivarian revolution (Ellner 2016: 69). That the interim president and opposition leader Guaido is recognized and supported by the US and most other Western countries further reinforces these claims: humanitarian aid sponsored by foreign donors implicitly serves the interest of Western powers to topple the Venezuelan government.

Global powers, such as Russia and China which support president Maduro have condemned the Western support for opposition leader Guaido as another attempt to use humanitarian language and practice for political ends (Sullivan 2019: 24-25). This discussion leaves NGOs with the difficult choice between either accepting aid that originates from Western donors and hence presumably interferes with sovereignty and risking unpredictable political consequences or leaving humanitarian needs unmet. The current politicization of aid thus, greatly affects the work of NGOs, both international and local, and jeopardizes the need of the Venezuelan population (Ibid: 23).

A government's use of inhospitable bureaucracy, fees, access restrictions and aggravation of NGOs' work within the country on purpose, can all be explained as an intent to politicize aid and promote their own agenda (Sullivan 2019: 18). More generally, governments can also politicize aid by taking the credit for the aid delivered, even though they have not provided any service (Ibid). In Venezuela, this has been a great point of contention as foreign humanitarian aid would take over part of the government's responsibility. The government has during the past years promoted their own aid provision of food packages called Bolsa CLAPS, along with several other humanitarian programs. Yet, the fact that Bolsa CLAPS is based on political registration managed by the party in power, PSUV, has led to the exclusion of sections of the population from access to aid if not ideologically aligned with the government (García Guadilla & Mallen 2019:66). Thus, national aid programs with a political dimension have been operating for years, but have far from complied with any humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality.

Another risk of aid being politicized is when governments are partly liberated from catering for the needs of the population since aid organizations take over; then state resources can be redirected towards other goals, such as oppression and violence instead. NGOs' cooperation with states in the delivery of aid thus has to be carefully considered, so they do not become part of the prolongment of suffering (Laskowski et al. 2019: 26).

Sullivan claims that one of the greatest obstacles to a safe humanitarian environment is that the Venezuelan state can fall back on claims of sovereignty to reject humanitarian aid. The rejection underscores the contradiction between the UN charter's commitment to sovereignty and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which postulates the welfare of the individual. This gap becomes less problematic, however, if it is clear that a government does not enjoy popular sovereignty. In cases such as Venezuela, it can be hard to discern the popular will as a transparent voting system is lacking and free press very restricted (Sullivan 2019: 24).

Politicization thus seems to affect humanitarian aid from different directions and in different forms. Many NGOs have condemned the mode in which USAID tried to bilaterally send humanitarian aid to Venezuela and the practice is today largely regulated and supervised by OCHA. In 2019, the latter started to employ a scale-up strategy to open up a humanitarian operational space in the country and to strengthen the capacity of humanitarian organizations to operate (UN Response Plan 2019:8). Nevertheless, the skepticism towards humanitarian aid lingers within the government and its supporters. A part of this thesis therefore aims to explore how the politicization is expressed in order to be able to assess its relation to challenges put upon humanitarian actors. As mentioned earlier, local NGOs are the most central actors in the provision of aid. To study more closely the challenges that Venezuelan NGOs are subjected to, the next part of this chapter is dedicated to sketching a background of the challenges prevalent to NGOs in humanitarian aid.

2.5   NGOs in humanitarian aid

Historically, response to disasters and humanitarian crises have involved the contributions of both the nonprofit sector and governments. The role of both local NGOs and international NGOs in disaster settings has increased as crises have become more protracted in nature and increasingly prioritized by donors. Lately, scholars have attempted to shed more light on the nature of the partnerships fostered in the lines of humanitarian response. Sapat et al. (2019) argue for the need of such research since an insufficient collaboration among actors, or lack thereof can have serious implications for recovery and efficiency of aid in crises (957).

The debate on local ownership and donors' commitment to 'localisation' has long been an issue of contemporary humanitarian action. In depth-studies of the relationship between donors and local NGOs have shown that priorities are

still almost exclusively decided by the donors. As donors approach a context with a predefined political agenda and profile framed and addressed in conformity with the international community, it creates a risk of undermining civil society's previously comprehensive work. When donors only have narrow funding interests, they might be unwilling to make funds available for work on a broader front. An example is a civil society organization for women rights in Syria, whose broad work with gender-based violence became artificially skewed when donors wanted them only to focus on atrocities conducted by ISIS (Al-Abdeh & Patel 2019: 243). Hence, a study undertaken by Al-Abdeh and Patel (2019) shows how local NGOs perceive what is termed as partnerships with INGOs or donors as resembling in practice more sub-contract arrangements, where the priorities of the latter tend to heavily dictate the work of the organization being funded. This illustrates the lack of a donor/INGO perspective of mutuality with local NGOs, which could foster equal exchange of knowledge and ideas (Ibid 2019: 246).

Donors and INGOs need to be aware of their power position in relation to local actors, in particular in the sense of financial resources. For many local NGOs there are thus financial incentives to comply with conditions postulated by donors and INGOs, which further serves to illustrate how civil society organizations most likely have to change their way of working when entering to an agreement. (Sullivan 2019: 3). Due to the polarized dimension of the Venezuelan crisis, neutrality is expected to be the most significant principle for the humanitarian operation. But how do local NGOs, previously working largely with advocacy and political resistance, now adhere to requirements of neutrality in a polarized country? And what space is there for neutrality in such a politicized environment?

As discussed above, the combined expansion of both actors and practices in humanitarian aid at large has led to increased politicization of aid. Moreover, the provision of humanitarian aid more often takes place within protracted conflicts as well as non-traditional warzones. As new contexts pose new challenges to the humanitarian work, NGOs find themselves forced to navigate in more complex realities when delivering aid. The challenges facing NGOs in many humanitarian crises today are characterized by how to reach the recipients most in need, without reinforcing the situation that produces that need, supporting a party's agenda and/or putting staff in danger along the way (Sullivan 2019: 3).

In the Venezuelan context, NGOs are engaged in a situation that requires them to balance the urgent needs of citizens against the risks of delivering humanitarian aid. Not only does this take place in a context where aid is highly politicized and state-backed arm groups interfere in aid delivery, NGOs are also requested to carry out all operations in accordance with the UN humanitarian principles (Sullivan 2019:4).

Although the literature acknowledges the importance of local staff and NGOs in humanitarian aid, much research is conducted on donor incentives and INGOs' challenges. However, few studies put local NGOs in the center of study. Hence, their role in humanitarian responses remains understudied. This is a gap that needs bridging because not only in the Venezuelan case where local

organizations make up roughly 75% of the humanitarian actors, is it uncommon that local organizations are a majority.

Combining the three strains of research on neutrality, politicization, and NGOs in humanitarian aid, opens up for the potential to create an understanding of the different dynamics that shape local NGOs' work. Against the backdrop of existent research, a gap concerning politicization on behalf of host governments seems to exist, this gap will be addressed in this research through an expansion upon on politicization by the Venezuelan government. Furthermore, the seemingly adversarial nature of politicization and neutrality will serve as the guiding themes when this research aims to encircle how these two factors relate to the main challenges local NGOs engaged in humanitarian work face in Venezuela today.

3 Method

This method section will outline and motivate the choice of theoretical framework, method, and research design that will enable an investigation of the posed research question. The research question allows for an examination of the relationship between the politicization of aid and the request and ability for local NGOs to be neutral actors. Furthermore, to incorporate this relationship into the research itself, the two strands of literature on principled neutrality and politicization in aid are combined and used to form the basis of interview questions. The empirical material collected through interviews with Venezuelan CSOs will subsequently be analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The content analysis will apply a thematic approach to identify and highlight overarching themes raised in the interviews by the interviewees' own experiences. Accordingly, the chapter is given the following structure: First, the theoretical framework is described, followed by the methodology, methods, analytical approach, and finally, the section is concluded by a discussion on ethics and identified limitations.

3.1 Theoretical framework

From the discussion on the politicization of aid above, it is clarified that how and with whom humanitarian organizations engage affects how their identity is perceived. The perception of an organization further has great effects on their ability to implement humanitarian activities. Thus, to elucidate how different exogenous forces affect the work of local humanitarian NGOs this thesis will draw on Lockyear and Cunningham's (2017) ideas of the relation between constituencies and identity. Their view postulates that humanitarian actors can engage in politics without being regarded as explicitly political. Furthermore, this claim is consistent with the fact that even if NGOs do not intend to be political, their actions have political consequences (Laskowski et al. 2019: 26).

The appropriateness of humanitarian organizations' political engagement, and the meaning such engagement has for their identity, recurrently causes confusion and controversy within organizations themselves about whether they comply with the principle of neutrality or not. Lockyear and Cunningham (2017) therefore introduce the concept of 'constituency' as a tool for framing the political identity and process of political engagement for a humanitarian organization. Constituency is here conceptualized as: "A group of people, or political entities, sharing similar political views and aspirations, or as the people involved with, or served by, a humanitarian organization" (Lockyear & Cunningham 2017).

Constituents in the context of humanitarian aid are thus all actors involved in the process of aid provision, e.g. NGOs, INGOs, donors, host governments, parties to a conflict and beneficiaries.

Through looking at constituency-building as a process of giving and taking, actors can be defined as either potentially cooperative or as possessing potential co-opting strategies. Even though beneficiaries are the primary constituents for humanitarian organizations, complex political contexts require political engagement with other actors. In most humanitarian crises, and particularly in cases of complex humanitarian emergencies, like in Venezuela, an important feature is that some actors possess more power than others over the content and means of implementation of aid (ibid: 2). This asymmetry is often expressed through local NGOs extensive conformity to donors' requirements and host governments' ability to set the frames for modes of implementation through for instance claims of sovereignty (Norweigan Refugee Council 2016: 9). The process of constituency-building can be seen as a means for the different actors in a humanitarian crisis to attain their goals and can dependent on the different power configurations and coping strategies be characterized as either constituency by coercion, constituency by discretion, and constituency by compromise (Lockyear & Cunningham 2017: 3).

Constituency by coercion implies that humanitarian organizations have no option but to incorporate restrictive actors into their constituency, simply because these actors possess too much power to dictate the humanitarian operations. These actors are mainly host-governments, donors or paramilitary groups, and if humanitarian organizations do not adjust, they risk ceasing to exist. When constituency by coercion occurs, humanitarian organizations' interests are most likely completely at odds with the other actors' interests (ibid 3-4).

Constituency by discretion refers to a situation where a humanitarian organization chooses to incorporate political actors into its constituency without it compromising its political objectives. This requires that the political objectives of both actors are aligned from the outset. If the constituency entails that the humanitarian organization can come closer to fulfilling its aims (satisfy the needs of its beneficiaries) the act cannot be seen as compromising neutrality, this is for instance embodied in the support provided by UN OCHA to humanitarian organizations (ibid: 4).

Constituency by compromise describes how a constituency is drawn into the sphere of influence of a humanitarian organization through processes of deliberation whereby each side makes concessions. The constituency does typically not fully align with the aims of the organization but does neither contradict them or the organization's identity, this may entail partly giving up on principles to fulfil part of the aims. The difference between compromise and coercion in these examples is that compromise is a pragmatic choice, while coercion involves a threat to the organization's existence. Examples of constituency by compromise are negotiation with non-state armed groups and cooperation with the UN when it is present in a crisis as both humanitarian and political actor (ibid: 4-5).

These categories are not likely to always be as clear-cut as defined above and can change over time as political interests and priorities alter. The combination of constituents for a humanitarian organization is thus part of defining its political identity. Depending on the pressures it is subjected to by other actors it can more or less successfully maintain its neutrality and identity as a humanitarian actor (ibid: 6).

The discussion surrounding constituency suggests a way to think about neutrality as something that has to be active politically negotiated and which breaks with the notion of neutrality as abstention and inactivity. Proactive engagement is here put in opposition to passive adherence, meaning that NGOs should, by choice, actively engage, and not let the will of other actors decide the frames of operation (ibid 2).

The process of upholding neutrality, therefore, entails to form coalitions and pose constructive requirements towards coercive constituents whose actions threaten the compliance with humanitarian principles. Since the objectives of humanitarian action have developed towards comprising *both* the implementation of humanitarian programs *and* to mitigate drivers for human suffering, humanitarian organizations need to constructively engage with political actors based on humanitarian objectives (Lockyear & Cunningham 2017: 2: Own emphasis). On the other hand, to engage politically in order to advance humanitarian goals is often a risky and challenging enterprise given the frequent occurrence of political manipulation and pressure by states' and intergovernmental organizations' vested interests.

Moreover, the ideas put forward through the concept of constituencies follow from a debate on politics that has grown increasingly relevant since the expansion of the humanitarian system gained momentum. The debate developed as the humanitarian sphere expanded, but the destructive forces that caused suffering did not retire, making it apparent that humanitarianism could not impact politics. The issue has also been subject to a post-structuralist debate on whether the insistence on a separation between humanitarianism and politics, in fact, is politics in itself (Warner 1999: 112-113).

In light of the theoretical insights outlined in this chapter, this thesis will investigate in which ways humanitarian NGOs are subjected to different stressors and critical choices. The interpretation of neutrality as something that not only embraces political engagement but also includes non-neutral consequences in its calculus opens up for a more critical outlook on neutrality and not merely as a principle of adherence and passivity. In order to study how humanitarian organizations perceive their operations and how these are formed by engagement with other humanitarian actors, proper methods need to be accounted for.

3.2   Description of method & analytical approach

Case studies in different forms are commonly employed approaches for research conducted within the field of humanitarian aid, reflecting the general perception

of every humanitarian crisis as having its own very particular traits. A single-case study also sets the frame for this research. Following this, data will be collected through the method of semi-structured interviews and subsequently analyzed through the approach of qualitative content analysis. Moreover, this chapter will outline the methods and clarify their suitability in this particular study.

3.2.1 Case Study

Since this study is built around a problematization of a situation in a specific country, it follows the methodological determinants of case study design. The case study as a research design enables more extensive incorporation of broader history and context of a specific case than other designs. It is generally more robust in countering two threats to internal validity: history and maturation. Historical or contextual factors vary widely between countries and are, therefore, a common source to weak internal validity in comparative research. It is also easier to account for maturation, i.e., how natural changes can have an effect over a longer time and suddenly affect the relationship between the independent variables and the result (Halperin & Heath 2012: 172). The case study design enables this research to be focused around a well-delimited case where attention is extended to a more holistic notion of history and situational particularities.

Yin (2015) distinguishes between different types of case studies, roughly defined, between single- and multiple-case studies. This study falls under the former category, which is an appropriate choice under certain circumstances defined by Yin: when you want to critically test an extant theory, to investigate an extreme or unusual situation, get a better understanding of a common case, or for a longitudinal or revelatory purpose (Yin 2015: 182). The case of humanitarian aid in Venezuela can be considered to involve the two reasons: critical testing of theory and unusual circumstances. In the first case, the study aims to investigate more precisely the meaning of neutrality in humanitarian aid and its interpretation and application on the ground. In the second case, a combination of the politically polarized context, the politicization of aid, and the greater engagement of local NGOs in delivering aid make Venezuela an unusual and complex context for aid provision.

One limitation of the case study as research design is that it tends to have weaker external validity than comparative research. Since case studies only rely on a single or small number of cases to explain a phenomenon, the results are not as easily generalizable as in a comparative study. Greater generalizability and higher external validity can be achieved by including more cases, yet this can also contribute to conceptional stretching, which in turn decreases validity (Halperin & Heath 2012: 172). However, considering the time scope of this research in combination with the aim to shed light on the particular challenges permeating the Venezuelan situation, generalizability is not the primary objective. Rather, the case study enables us to account for the particularities of the Venezuelan case which in future research may constitute a building block for more comparative approaches.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews as a method for data collection is commonly employed in research on contexts of humanitarian crises, for instance, in Hilhorst & Jansen (2010) and Lemaitre (2018). Simultaneously, when the research involves interviews with CSOs and the local population, it is often combined with field research. Fieldwork, which usually aims to acquire a more profound knowledge of a social community and its individuals (Bray 2008: 298), makes it possible for the researcher to gather information from many different actors. However, a field study was infeasible due to current levels of insecurity in Venezuela and the ability to reach interviewees over the internet enabled the usage of interviews to collect data.

The reason for choosing interviews as a tool for data collection is that interviews, compared to, for instance, questionnaires allow for collecting detailed and specific information from a smaller amount of individuals. Thus, the aim of interviewing as a technique is not to make generalizations, but rather to deeply understand a specific matter and get valid knowledge about the respondents' view on that matter (Halperin and Heath 2012: 254). In order to explore some themes in-depth, this thesis will rely on a semi-structured interview design. The semi-structured interview allows for both questions that demand fixed responses and discussion around broader topics (O'Reilly 2009: 126). A valuable aspect of using the format of semi-structured interviewing is that the interviewee is treated as an active subject and not merely as a source of information and experiences (Halperin & Heath 2012: 262). Similarly, through the looser structure of the semi-structured interview, different topics can also be raised by the interviewees themselves if the researcher has failed to include any aspects considered necessary, contributing to a more fruitful study.

3.2.3 Analytical strategy: Qualitative Content Analysis

In order to grapple with the manifold ways through which humanitarian local NGOs can be subjected to different challenges, this study follows the research strategy of qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA is a qualitative approach that aims at contributing to "a cultural and contextual description and interpretation of social phenomena" (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove 2019). QCA is similar to thematic analysis in that it is context-sensitive, attentive to both descriptive and interpretative data analysis and that it treats the data through the search for themes. However, QCA is both inductive and deductive, whereas thematic analysis is mostly inductive and mainly develops themes that are considered as latent content (Ibid). This study contains deductive elements as the inception of the analysis will be based on previous concepts and variables retrieved from previous research and theory. The study also deploys inductive reasoning as themes and categories are defined throughout the analysis where a careful examination, comparison, and interpretation is undertaken (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009). What this research aims to investigate is the merging of perspectives on

politicization and neutrality as plausible challenges and how the former may affect the latter; meanwhile, it remains susceptible to additional aspects and relationships. Against this backdrop, QCA is a well-suited method as it allows for both deduction and induction.

Two main procedures that characterize QCA are to code in different cycles and to move back and forth between the defined themes and the text. During the data analysis, existing research, as well as the researcher's own experiences and knowledge, contribute to the construction of new understandings of a phenomenon. The aim of a study using QCA is to generate analytical products in the form of categories and themes with subdivisions such as subcategories or subthemes, which can then contribute to the presentation of a complete narrative of the data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove 2019). Consequently, relevant extracts will be taken from the interviews in order to illustrate and support the development of themes (Prior 2014: 364).

Furthermore, since QCA is dependent upon the researcher's own judgement, which is influenced by both own experiences and the philosophical lens, transparency is of utmost importance when using QCA and constructing themes (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove 2019). In order to carry out a rigorous and reliable inquiry the reason for different choices taken during the analysis are transparently accounted for.

3.2.4 QCA applied

The primary material collected through interviews is transcribed and subsequently processed and analyzed. From a deductive starting point, the following predefined themes have been defined based on the literature review and theory; politicization, challenges connected to aid delivery, impact of compliance with neutrality in relation to; access, legitimacy, political engagement, understanding of neutrality, relation with donors, relation with the government.

Accordingly, interview questions were also tailored to some extent, capture these predefined themes. Against this backdrop, the main factors hypothesized to significantly influence the setting for the humanitarian NGOs will be explored and complemented through the inductive development of new themes during the analysis. Findings from the QCA will be supported with secondary data illustrating tendencies highlighted by interviewees.

3.3   Project design

3.3.1   Primary data: Interviews with NGO staff

The primary data consists of interviews with civil society organizations that are engaged in humanitarian aid in Venezuela. The interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face over the internet through Skype and Zoom, but in case of faulty internet connection over telephone calls through Whatsapp. The live online interview has similar traits to a physical 'face-to-face' interview in that it takes place in real time and that the communication takes place through direct talk where the participants see each other. All interviews took place between the 2nd and 30th April 2020.

The criteria for selecting interviewees was that they worked within the field of humanitarian aid in Venezuela, collaborated with UN OCHA and that they were local organizations. In order to access potential interviewees, multiple sources were reached out to, among them, Venezuelan contacts, the UN OCHA in Caracas, humanitarian INGOs operating in the country as well as directly to various local organizations. Typically, the sampling procedure should strive for collecting data that is as representative of the target group as possible (Becker 1998: 96-97), however, since this study has a delimited target group, it draws on nonprobability sampling. Nonprobability sampling implies the intentional selection of interviewees, which in this case enhances the probability of gathering meaningful data (Phillips 2014: 541-2).

In the end, six interviews were conducted, with organizations working in the clusters of health, nutrition and shelter. One organization worked with the monitoring of rights and trained other humanitarian organizations.

Two organizations were created during the time-span of the past ten years as a response to a state retraction from providing certain basic services. The other four organizations have a longer experience of working with defense of rights on behalf of either vulnerable groups or more general rights. The names of the organizations will not be presented in this thesis, mainly because it does not add any further value to the results, neither does it expose these organizations to unnecessary impacts on their work in an already sensitive context.

Furthermore, the difficulties in getting hold of potential interviewees proved bigger than anticipated. It became evident that the role of the 'gatekeeper' was significant for this project. The interviewees were in five out of six cases accessed through key informants, or gatekeepers, once again proving the importance of someone with an eminent position being the bridge between researcher and interviewee (O´Rielly 2009: 132). The connection with interviewees was established through guidance by UN OCHA in Caracas in three cases, through a Venezuelan acquaintance in two, and in one through direct contact with the organization.

Two interviews were conducted in English and four were conducted in Spanish. The strategy from interviewing solely in English shifted during the search for potential interviewees as it was evident that many potential interviewees only spoke Spanish. The potential language barrier did not represent any obstacle since the interviews, with permission of respondents, were recorded. It however, resulted in a heavier workload, requiring first transcription and then translation to English.

The interview guide is added as Appendix A.

3.3.2 Supplementary, secondary material

To support and contextualize the primary material collected through interviews, the discussion also draws on secondary data. This data comprises one speech, two utterances from a tv-program and a tweet from members of the Venezuelan government in connection to humanitarian aid and NGOs. The timeframe within which data was collected was between January 2019 and April 2020.

More precisely the data is:
•A tweet published by the Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza.
•Two utterances concerning NGOs by politician Diosdado Cabello in the TV-program Con el Mazo Dando.
•A speech held by President Nicolas Maduro after the attempt by the opposition to publicly bring in humanitarian aid.

3.4   Ethical considerations

All research should conform to certain ethical principles. In the chosen case, there are inherent ethical implications with taking up the time of already heavily burdened civil society organizations engaged in humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, the particular difficulties and challenges these actors are subjected to remain a downplayed part of the research on humanitarian aid. Yet, the need for such research is necessary in light of the potential benefits that these organizations can get out of it in the long run, therefore it is deemed ethically feasible. In order to assure that the part of the study that includes direct contact with the civil society organizations is in line with ethical research, the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy and harm are accounted for.
        The principle of voluntary consent serves to clarify for the participants of the study that participation is totally voluntary and that it can be discontinued at any time without any consequences. Closely related to voluntary participation is informed consent, which requires that the researcher explicitly informs the interviewee about the study's purpose, expected benefits, and the process through which participants were chosen (Halperin & Heath 2012: 178-179). The third

ethical consideration concerns privacy and aims to both inform the participant that he or she can decide what information can and cannot be made public and that they are entitled to anonymity (ibid: 179). In the current study anonymity of individual persons and organizations will be granted, but the fact that they are a cooperation partner with OCHA will for the aim of this study inevitably be revealed. The decision to maintain the identity of organizations anonymous stems from the increased possibility for interviewees to talk more freely and not expose them to unnecessary stressors.

Concerning the last-mentioned principle alluding to harm, a study that risks harming the participants is not a study that should be conducted (ibid: 180). In the particular context of the study, the interviewees are well-informed and aware; if participation would harm them in any way it is assumed that they would decline participation. However, to assure that the above-mentioned ethical issues are accounted for, they will be addressed in the consent form which will be sent out to the participants before the interview takes place. Concerning harm, which is the most difficult factor for the researcher to estimate, the sending of the interview guide to the participants beforehand will enable them to abstain from the interview if they find the nature of the study threatening to their organization or its workers in any way.

3.5 Limitations

A primary limitation of this study is that the perspectives of donors and INGOs are not included. Even though local NGOs would remain the focal point, interviews with donors and INGOs could have complemented and deepened the understanding of the nature of the conditions on which they collaborate with NGOs, particularly in relation to the interpretation of neutrality. This limitation, however, is the result of deliberately adjusting to the limited time and scope of this project.

Another limitation is the fact that the subject of research is a contemporary situation, which constantly evolves. Therefore, there is not a lot of context-specific research that can be drawn on, forcing me to some extent to rely on news sources. Considering the politically polarized context, which extends beyond the limits of the country to the international sphere, it is also important to critically assess information provided by news media.

Lastly, an important limitation is the lack of discussion and detailed definition of neutrality from the viewpoint of the UN public information system. This also pertains to the somewhat closed information system of the UN and donors, which does not provide insights into collaboration partners in humanitarian crisis areas other than the geographic and thematic areas of operation.

However, despite these limitations, following a relevant adjustment of the scope of this project, it is still possible to provide an answer to the research

question concerning how the work of local humanitarian NGOs in Venezuela are affected by both the compliance with neutrality and processes of politicization.

4 Data

The data presented below is extracted from the semi-structured interviews conducted. The interviews encompassed four grander topics concerning challenges, relations to donors and government, neutrality and politicization. In line with the ambition to encircle data proper to answer the posed research question, themes and categories presented below will serve to provide a basis for the establishment of the relationship between politicization, identified challenges, different aspects of neutrality and relations to other relevant actors.

*All quotes from interviewees 3-6 used below are my own translations. Original quotes in Spanish are found in Appendix B.

4.1 Politicization

The categories postulated in this section illustrate three processes that emerged from the data as directly associated with politicization of humanitarian aid. The categories were not necessarily coded as adhering to politicization because the respondents explicitly said so, but because it became evident that these were major formative aspects originating in politicization.

4.1.1 Denial of the emergency

One of the most indicative aspects of politicization was the government's largely continued denial of the emergency. Respondent 3 describes that "(...) in Venezuela the humanitarian crisis is not yet recognized by the Venezuelan state and it has been very complex to receive that humanitarian aid in a direct way" and "Sometimes, in some moments, it is difficult as humanitarian organizations to make visible what is happening since it's not that open, or since you cannot talk in an open way about this type of issue"(interviewee 3). Two organizations said that they have been actively fighting for the recognition of the crisis for many years, but that it still has not fully materialized on behalf of the government. "(...)we have been, since before this calling for a more openness of the humanitarian space, meaning for example recognizing the many organizations doing humanitarian work bringing in food and medicines and so on. (...)and it has not happened" (interviewee 1).

      The denial makes the mere fact that many organizations work with some kind of humanitarian response seen as opposing the government. "First of all, the

political polarization makes many of the tasks we do, they are seen by the government as being against them. Yes the fact of diffusing, of going to the IACHR, of going to the United Nations council, the Human Rights Council of United Nations, makes the government see us like opponents" (interviewee 4).

4.1.2 Control over humanitarian aid

The government is trying to increase its control over aid through restricting NGOs ability to raise funds; "We can go to jail cause we are receiving international funds (…) there is no way you can receive humanitarian aid if it's not going through the government, and the government wants to manage the humanitarian aid." (interviewee 2). The tight control the state possesses over the modes of aid distribution raises concerns for some organizations. "Maybe among the ones that are humanitarian actors, and within what is called the humanitarian space, there is a, let's say there is a special relationship with the state that we can understand to a certain extent, but there comes a moment where that relationship damages the humanitarian space itself (…)" (interviewee 4).

Concerns were also raised that the government's control over humanitarian aid serves political purposes and that it was not impartial; "For me that one is really politicized, completely politicized for example if Nicolas Maduro's government receives humanitarian aid they decide where does it go" (interviewee 2). And that it was used to further political aims; " (…)the delivery that UN, the Red Cross or whatever organization does (…) well it's like really politicizing it. What the state does is, it says afterwards that they are the ones who are giving it and appropriates that aid and it serves political purposes (…)" (interviewee 6).

Furthermore, it was indicated that the moves of the opposition had contributed to an even harder control of humanitarian aid. "I was even at the bridge of Cúcuta 'the day of the delivery' of the humanitarian aid, what happened there has no comparison(...) What was the plan? And what has happened is that organizations that are not linked to politics, are working with their bare nails and with the little they are given to achieve miracles with many communities" (interviewee 5). And "We expressed our concerns (…) that what was a huge, huge mistake and that it harms people more than doing any good at all" (interviewee 1).

4.1.3 Criminalization a result of politicization

All organizations said that their work was politicized, and four respondents said that they had been criminalized in different ways. For instance when trying to bring attention to the crisis; "(...) it was more and more again even criminalized when we had those reports in 2015, it was like we were made somehow enemies, we were called some of those adjectives, we were enemies of the revolution, or serving foreign powers (...)" (interviewee 1). Several organizations bring up that they have been exposed and recurrently criminalized in a national TV-channel

through a program called 'Con el Mazo Dando' for instance in relation to funds; "(…) two weeks ago in a national channel (…), they told that all organizations who were receiving funds from the US call it USAID AFTA, or USAID in general, they were going to jail (…)" (interviewee 2) and; "Even Cabello at the National Constituent Assembly has called for passing a regulation on receiving funds from abroad and even saying that these ones are being used to undermine the government, that anyone who receives them should be called a terrorist (…)" (interviewee 1).

Other concrete acts of criminalization are described by, for instance; "That makes many of our organizations subjected to processes of criminalization, yes of penalty by any means, they raid your facilities, they do tax inspections, they put up obstacles, it can happen things like the one I told you yesterday, the seizure of items" (interviewee 4) [1] and "Normally we have been able to enter with donations. We have a network since a long time back, but well, they [the government] have tried to pass, of criminalizing our work. They forbid my entrance at personal level, my team no" (interviewee 6).

4.2   Challenges

Through the categories of this theme, the most frequently mentioned and most significant challenges are listed. Most of the challenges are recognized to have a correlation with processes of politicization, respondents also talked a lot about challenges related to the material reality and the serious lack of essentially all basic goods.

4.2.1   Needs are increasing but funds are not

Almost all organizations express the feeling of being torn between significant needs and an inability to expand operations due to limited funding. "I mean we are not the only ones who need to duplicate our operations in the country, there are so many organizations looking for that and we don't receive funds also because the government is totally impeding us to ask for funds" (interviewee 2). Interviewee 5 describes that: "The resources are finite and due to the great difficulties they [donors/INGOs] have encountered to enter Venezuela, they have decided to help other countries, in the surroundings, like Colombia, and they have focused their aid on the many Venezuelan migrants" (interviewee 5). Similarly interviewee 4 says "Look, the truth is that it is rewarding to be able to help, but it

[1] One interview had to be postponed due to that the organization had gotten their aid confiscated by the authorities.

is nevertheless also worrying knowing that it is insufficient, our humanitarian needs do not correspond to the humanitarian aid that is entering" (interviewee 4). Another example is "To be honest, what we are seeing is that it is aggravating every day and then the challenges get bigger, you see? Because it's no longer only what we did, but it is as if everything was made more difficult for us, the state doesn't, it doesn't solve the day by day problems of people" (interviewee 6).

4.2.2 INGOs are leaving

One interviewee raised the fact that their workload is increasing further when INGOs leave. "We have knowledge of that in the last 3 months, a big part of the INGOs have left the country, due to not getting accreditation and for not getting their visas renewed. Others almost operate in clandestine because they haven't been given safe conducts or visas. So that is terrible, because no new partners are arriving that can contribute to the humanitarian aid" (interviewee 4).

4.2.3 Practical difficulties of operation

Several physical constraints are brought up as severely impacting the humanitarian response.

One topic raised by all interviewees was the issue of physical mobility, mobility is impeded by the lack of safe-conducts and an increasing lack of gasoline. Interviewees express that "The gasoline is totally, totally scarce, we don't have access to gasoline of course that makes the mobilization for the humanitarian actors very difficult" (interviewee 3) and "it is very discretionary of the militaries themselves that are attending the gas stations, that is, it is as likely that they supply you as that it is that they don't. (...) we have asked UN OCHA, (…) for that those who carry out humanitarian work be issued a kind of safe conduct or some kind of permit, well something that assures that the pumps will serve us with gasoline" (interviewee 4).

The lack of water is also a recurring theme of complication, "We have a very complex situation where we don't have access to water, 70% of the populations are being affected by the topic of water" (interviewee 3). Gas for cooking is identified as another great challenge; "We have three states where we have been working over open fire since march last year of the blackout that we had" (interviewee 2).

4.2.4 Counteraction of aid deliveries

One significant challenge that was brought up by two respondents was the active attempts to make beneficiaries abstain from accessing humanitarian aid. "for example when we start a community kitchen in our communities the government or the representors of the government in that community, they constantly go for

the mothers who are becoming part and they say like 'if you are part of [name of organization] you are not receiving the CLAP box any more (interviewee 2).

Another interviewee states that "(...)we think it is unfortunate that the humanitarian aid has been so highly politicized in Venezuela. Basically, to be able to access your benefits, it is sometimes complicated because there is a great fear of retaliation by some state corpuses to be able to receive certain aid. (…) beneficiaries with whom we are in the community request to not be named for receiving certain aid for fear to get, or that they take away the benefits that they are given in the communities (…)" (interviewee 3).

4.2.5 Fear for one's safety and well-being

All organizations talk about risks, if not for themselves, about the exposure of other organizations to risks. A recurring dilemma is a constant threat against the operations, explicitly indicated as originating from the government "We continue doing what we know how to do, reinforcing the care measures, that is, we take care of ourselves, our team, and take care above all that we can continue operating because to confront or face openly the government can involve that we stop operating and that would be to abandon the people" (interviewee 4) and; "(...) obviously the political challenge is the main one because the government does not want us to operate, that is an obvious thing, they want to have the communities completely controlled so it is a risk for us, but a risk that we face and it is a risk that we take because the communities need us" (interviewee 2). "(…) it is really difficult to work in a country where you are constantly persecuted by the government (interviewee 2). Interviewee 5 stresses the same issue "Talk to other organizations. But overall, they are all at the same conclusion, you are going to arrive to the same conclusion, which is that the people are afraid to do things because they are afraid that the government takes it away from them. They expropriate it, they put you in jail, tell you, you cannot do that anymore" (interviewee 5).

Three interviewees talk about the persecution of staff, the constant subjection to questionings, and often being blocked to enter sites where humanitarian aid is going to be distributed (interviewees 2,4,6), for instance; "We encounter, for instance, to access the hospitals many barriers. The first barrier, the issue of security; in the hospitals we now have different types of armed forces. That is, we have the national Bolivarian police, the regular security officers of the hospital, we have something called militia, which is a force that the state created (…)" (interviewee 6). However, one interviewee explains that this is not seldom solved through giving up some items to the actors stopping them "So it's like extortion, they are constantly extorting us" (interviewee 2).

Interviewees also talk about the mental challenges for organizations when the agency is continuously shrinking, and the state of emergency is deepening. One heavily emphasizes working with "Supporting our teams in the topic of resilience and support to them financially, emotionally, because unfortunately in

Venezuela, many people are breaking, many people are under a stress (…)"
(interviewee 4).

4.2.6 Lack of recognition/ support of civil society organizations

One organization describes how small organizations had traveled for days to meet
with OCHA and the "shock of these organizations (…) that had come to search
for economic aid to help their villages and suddenly they are told 'we are also
talking with the government'(...) And they need to negotiate with the government,
but then those organizations that are very small tells you, it is that I do not want
the government to see me. Because it is going to look for me and it is going to
take everything I have away" (interviewee 5).

     Furthermore, it was described as an uneasy feeling that the government
was going to benefit and be portrayed as the provider of aid when many
organizations had been fighting for the provision of aid "(...) in several meetings,
we found ourselves with our backs against the wall, because it seemed that the
entry of aid was being negotiated with the government, and many organizations
were affected, (…) they did not feel comfortable that the government was going to
benefit (…)" (interviewee 5).

     Another point raised by several interviewees is that there is great respect
for the work of OCHA, but that "they, the very agencies of the UN have their
hands tied" (interviewee 4). In addition, they are seen as supporting the CSOs but
only to a limited extend, "So even when the UN is trying to link the civil society
and the government, it has been really difficult because they have been called by
the government. They are not able to be here if the government tell them like
'please goodbye you are not able to operate in the country" (interviewee 2).

4.3   Coping

Although coping was not a given theme from the beginning, the two categories
presented below were so frequently mentioned that they could reasonably not be
omitted.

4.3.1 Strong networks

A unanimous point raised by all interviewees was the importance of NGO-
networks. It was clear that there is a strong cohesion among many of the local
organizations engaged in the humanitarian response. These networks did not seem
to merely serve purposes of coordination and innovation of the humanitarian
response "(…) we all try to do it together and we really see, we have many
barriers and in order to reach the people, we need the support, a lot of support"
(interviewee 6), but also as a way to ease the burden and support each other "We

try in every possible way to provide support to them [other organizations]"
(interviewee 5). Rather than competing for funds, one interviewee said "(…) that
makes us having to support our own teams more and establish, networks with
others, work with others, present projects together, search for financing"
(interviewee 4).

4.3.2 Empowerment of beneficiaries

As a result of the many complications for the organizations working with
humanitarian aid and the many risks it entailed three interviewees described how
they slowly started to increase the ownership of the contribution to the
beneficiaries themselves. Interviewee 6 tells "Thanks to all the work that has been
formed with the women (…) and that they have been trained, they have organized
committees, not us, they themselves (...)" (interviewee 6). Through giving the
beneficiaries and the population of the communities leading roles in the response,
the organizations can both mitigate the risks for their own workers and create
more acceptance for the aid as it becomes de-politicized, for instance "They
[trusted beneficiaries] are the ones who select kids, they are the ones who make
the house per house to interview the families, they are the ones who get in touch
with the community council, that's a figure we have in our communities (…)"
(interviewee 2). This process of engaging the communities was by the respondents
described as both an empowerment and a source of hope for beneficiaries when
they were given tools to improve their own situation.

4.4 Neutrality

All respondents2 agreed that neutrality is a necessary principle. However it varies
to what extent the respondents considered it applicable, expressly when it comes
to speaking out and condemning an actor in public. The reason for being neutral
overall seemed to have little relation to the fact that the humanitarian system
formally requires it, but instead rested on a genuine understanding of its
importance for both reaching beneficiaries and to mitigate pressures from
politicization.

4.4.1 Conception

Some interviewees defined neutrality as "not take part in what can be the high
conflictive situation that we are living in" (interviewee 4) and "if you are

---

2 Respondent 6 did not answer the questions about neutrality due to time-constraint.

implementing, if you are on the ground if you are helping people that must be you know the end of it, without any other consideration (…)" (interviewee 1) although most defined it as a synonym or extension of the meaning of impartiality. Some also emphasized the beneficiary as the most important concern in relation to the topic "(…) We have always had our tendency against the beneficiary (…)we never ask them if they belong to a governmental organization or the opposition, our work is to help and save lives" (interviewee 5).

It was found that neutrality is perceived as very useful, "we understand that to be able to support and be able to reach the beneficiaries we have to maintain that process and that neutrality throughout whole the process" (interviewee 3) and as a good way to visualize that "the emergency does not distinguish between political colors" (interviewee 4). One respondent even said that "that this principle could allow us to pave the way for reconciliation" (interviewee 4).

On the other hand, one respondents said "(…) there is a need to put first among the four humanitarian principles humanity. Because it's impossible to be neutral and not to at least express what one sees as effects on people's dignity, humanity, to keep quiet and particularly to local organizations when you don't see responses," (interviewee 1). Thus, neutrality should never be compromised in work in the field, but should neither prevent organizations from telling the truth about the magnitude of the actual situation.

4.4.2 How to comply with neutrality

To comply with neutrality was, in most cases, mentioned as unproblematic, mainly since the aim is to save lives, not do politics. Three interviewees said that compliance with neutrality could be challenging in respect to beneficiaries themselves, especially in very polarized communities where key actors are determined that aid aims to topple the government "It is not that easy [to comply with neutrality], maybe because when you are going to provide the aid they label you and they categorize you to be on one side or the other" (interviewee 3), this has led to a complete shut out of organizations to some communities "[neutrality] affects us, because in previous years we were working in several communities (…) and unfortunately we could not continue because they would not let us in, the political issue is complex" (interviewee 5). These comments demonstrate that even though organizations aim to be neutral in their approach, they are not always perceived so due to the deep political divide. One interviewee described its organization's strategy to comply with neutrality as making sure that "(…)our allies in the communities are not political actors in order to avoid that the list of persons who receive aid is biased towards that only the ones that receive the help are from specific political tendencies" (interviewee 4). Interviewee 1 talked about how to comply in relation to condemning "what we do, is to be very careful that our concerns are not expressed politically. I would never, never be involved in calling the government or Mr. Maduro with any of the adjectives that are being

used around. I would never diminish a person with responsibility, I would call for his or hers responsibility".

4.4.3 Access

One of the primary purposes of neutrality is to allow for a neutral space where aid can be delivered, a humanitarian space. According to the interviewees, no such space is opening, "To create a space (…) would facilitate our participation in the humanitarian space and it has not happened, so what we saw from the very beginning in 2016 when we started receiving aid was that we were let's say allowed by looking somewhere else I mean by the authorities to get aid in" (interviewee 1). Another interview underscores this notion "(…)not yet have the humanitarian channels been opened so directly that they can cover the needs of the population" (interviewee 3). The creation of space would facilitate and recognize the organizations as humanitarian actors, but instead, the humanitarian space seems to be shrinking. Naturally, one of the most commonly voiced concerns was, how will we access our beneficiaries?

4.4.4 Legitimacy

Neutrality has enabled local NGOs to gain more confidence from beneficiaries and communities, for instance; "(…) the community council doesn't block them from the CLAP boxes because we are linked with them (…) we have explained to them importance of accepting these in their communities and they really like what we have done" (interviewee 2). Another interviewee expresses that: "maybe neutrality, what it allows us is to have some kind of shield because the community itself recognizes us as an actor that in fact have never politicized the aid, and that converts us as well into a shield towards the state itself because it is the communities themselves that in fact attest that well, here they helped everyone" (interviewee 4). However, a general lack of credible information, "people poorly understand what we refer to as humanitarian aid" (interviewee 3) continues to be an obstacle and contributes to undermining the work of humanitarian organizations.

4.4.5 Political engagement- the discrepancy between humanitarian aid and human rights

Some organizations more heavily involved in human rights express the problem of not being able to speak as freely anymore, not necessarily because of neutrality, but because of fear that the government stop their projects and force them to leave the people in need behind. "Basically I believe that the difficult decisions have been at certain times to moderate the response to the state to precisely preserve the operability of the humanitarian space. (…) to not confront [the state], rather try to

assume a mediation role so that they in fact don't suppose sanctions, punishment, persecutions and well that has been complicated, because well we protect rights" (interviewee 4).

Simultaneously the humanitarian system sees human rights and humanitarian aid as two separate things "And sometimes, the humanitarian and human rights they seemed like.. even within the humanitarian space itself they see it as two sperate things. We don't, (…) So, that relation, has been a bit difficult (interviewee 4). Linking into this concern is the fact that several organizations say that they cannot stop speaking up, one interviewee says, for instance; "(…)neutrality is easier to be called by international actors at a humanitarian situation (…) because it is very difficult to you know, ask of me as a Venezuelan not to again with my colleagues in human rights and doing humanitarian work not to raise our voices and to take those risks, (…)if I have to speak up because the conditions for implementation are not there we do it and what we do however, is to be very careful that our concerns are not expressed politically" (interviewee 1). It was also expressed that if local organizations are going to reduce their work of advocacy and denunciation, they must be able to know that someone else (The UN) take that responsibility; "then we don't want those [workers] in there (…) starting arguing with the government but somebody at some level must say hey you have to allow this, that's our point" (interviewee 1). Moreover, since many of the organizations have a history of work underpinned by the values of human rights where documentation and visualization are vital activities, humanitarian activities cannot be undertaken without really talking about the underlying lack of rights fueling the crisis.

4.5   Relation to the government

None of the respondents have any relation to the central government, even though two report that they had good relations back in time; "It was not always like that, earlier yes we had a lot of contact on ministerial level, on governmental level but since we started defending rights, it seems like they do not invite us to meetings anymore" (interviewee 3). The current relation has hitherto mostly been based on public, verbal attacks, and attacks on funding sources; "Something we have to recognize, they have mentioned us (…) in public spaces, they have attacked some of our fund sources, international fund sources so maybe we can be scared about it but we haven't had issues with them" (interviewee 2).

Another interviewee expresses "The relation to the government is neither good, nor bad, to be frank it is a relation that is not even based on respect, it is fundamentally based on the fear of coercion of the organizations" (interviewee 4). A general notion is that of the importance of keeping a very low profile.

4.6   Relation to donors

Donors were referred to as very trusting, understanding, and supportive of the situation, also in terms of when an organization choses to speak up about something. "Donors really understand the government situation in Venezuela and they know that we are trying to do our best. They really understand when we make a point on something" (interviewee 2). All organizations are aware of the importance of diversifying their funding sources, partly because international funds risk being blocked. It is not possible to openly speak about what donors one has as this implies a risk both for the beneficiaries to be deprived of the aid and the donors themselves.

One organization expresses that "we don't want to get involved in large calls of financing because it requires let's say a structure of accountability (…) beyond what we want in terms of having our minds really set on operations and on helping people" (interviewee 1). In connection to this understanding, two other organizations express tiredness of the heavy bureaucratization and waiting for funds that do not materialize "(…) the organizations, many of them, we already start to feel a bit not comfortable with the high level of bureaucratization, to fill and fill forms and we feel that the help is not coming" (interviewee 4). Interviewee 5 ties into dilemma when expressing that one of the biggest challenges have been "the deception of funds".

4.7   Summary

In general, the data shows that the respondents widely and almost exclusively shared the same perceptions of what the most substantial challenges faced by local organizations engaged in aid work are. A strong unanimity was also evident in the description of the sources of these challenges. Furthermore, it was apparent that politicization is one of, if not the main obstacle for a well-functioning delivery of humanitarian aid; it contributed to multiple stressors and challenges for the humanitarian actors. The amount of stress and difficulties the organizations are facing depend either on the nature of their work ethic - i.e., the ones with a background in human rights advocacy were experiencing more challenges - and how close the respective organizations were to the implementation of actual aid delivery. Two coping strategies also arose as important, namely the high level of cooperation between organizations and the empowerment of the beneficiaries. At last, the interviewees described the humanitarian principle of neutrality as a fundamentally important principle, mostly in order to create acceptance among beneficiaries and to open up for reconciliation between people. However, on a national level, in terms of acceptance and protection of the organizations, it seemed to make little difference.

5 Discussion

The central objective of this paper was to increase the understanding of the challenges facing local NGOs in their humanitarian work. From the Venezuelan context, it was also hypothesized that politicization and the requirement of neutrality would pose significant challenges to these organizations' work. The findings presented in the data chapter above help to identify some of the key challenges confronting local Venezuelan NGOs. Through the thematic treatment of the data, it became clear that many of the challenges raised have their roots in the polarized society but materialize through the explicit politicization of the humanitarian crisis itself. Consequently, the first part of this chapter will look deeper into the issue of politicization to further illustrate how it is linked to identified challenges and how it contributes to placing humanitarian NGOs in the firing line. The part on politicization, will also tie into the theoretical framework of constituencies on NGOs' interaction with the two other actors influencing the humanitarian landscape, the government, and the UN. The second part of this chapter will provide a comprehensive understanding of the position of NGOs in the specific humanitarian context concerning neutrality. To support certain arguments, the supplementary data of utterances from the Venezuelan government will be included.

5.1 What is the case of politicization?

Politicization of humanitarian aid has traditionally been discussed and linked to Western donors and their political interests as drivers for humanitarian interventions and investments. This has resulted in making humanitarian organizations gradually more exposed to external control and hence more dependent on the will and political priorities of donor states (Barnett 2005: 731). From the data compiled here, it was indicated that all organizations interviewed in Venezuela experience donors as supportive, trusting and as understanding of the organizations' way to operate. Neither were donors perceived to be politicizing aid or to pose requirements on aid delivery apart from financial accounting and sometimes 'heavy bureaucratization'. These results are in many ways contrary to the notion that aid is politicized from the donor's side, firstly, in the sense that donors do not seem to make specific demands on organizations that run counter to the organizations' own interests and, secondly, that donors do not unilaterally seek to earmark money without dialogue with the organizations.

On the contrary, more significant restrictions on operations were acknowledged to originate from the government and the national political conflict.

The political conflict in Venezuela has manifested itself in the humanitarian crisis through the opposition's demand for a humanitarian response and the government's denial of the crisis' existence. After the Venezuelan opposition's failed attempt to bring in aid in front of media coverage in the beginning of 2019, the government intensified its discourse towards humanitarian aid through terms such as an 'economic war' 'a political show' and 'an attempt to justify an American intervention' (Maduro 2019). Interviewed organizations brought up how the denial of the humanitarian crisis by the government inevitably has contributed to placing them as government opposites (interviewee 4) and that the opposition's move contributed to further deteriorate the prospects for an appropriate humanitarian response (interviewees 1 & 5).

However, the fact that a host state rejects the existence of a humanitarian situation is not uncommon, it is often linked to a wish to prevent external interference and an overall suspicion towards the aid as a western practice. In such cases, aid is inevitably politicized by the host-government and risks to restrain the space for national actors (Maietta et al. 2017:11). Rejection of aid in the Venezuelan case is motivated against a backdrop of many factors. In line with presented research and as demonstrated by public statements there is a widespread suspicion towards the international agenda and a demonstrated unwillingness that international actors assess the magnitude of the situation. Maietta et al. (2017) also denote a host state's belief that it can adequately respond through its own measures as another common reason for aid rejection (2017: 116). Nevertheless, the Venezuelan government seems to have by now comprehended that the scale of the crisis is beyond their scope, thus to a certain extent accepting aid and coordination with key UN actors to respond. The range of international actors permitted to be part of the humanitarian response however is very limited, and the coordination with local organizations remains problematic. From the viewpoint of interviewees it was problematic with joint coordination since local NGOs are aware that the government does not want them to operate at all (interviewee 2) and that it may close down their projects once it finds out about them (interviewee 5). It is thus highlighting the kind of dual processes of aid delivery in the country where the full spectrum of actors collaborating with UN OCHA, is not recognized by the government.

Signs of suspicion and ambition to attain greater control over humanitarian aid are demonstrated in, for instance, a tweet published by the Venezuelan foreign minister where he claims; "The EU cynically imposes sanctions on Venezuela & asks not to politicize humanitarian aid, while its governments refuse to coordinate assistance with the Venezuelan govt. & make shipments to third countries or organizations of dubious origin, for uncertain purposes" (Arreaza 2020). In national TV an important politician in August last year said the following; "We will approve a law to severely sanction the NGOs that receive money to conspire" and in February this year; "We are going to introduce next week in the ANC the revision of the laws that have to do with financing of NGOs or private individuals from other countries (...). We are going to apply all sanctions, the maximum sanctions that we can to those who receive financing from the United States to conspire with our country. Stop […]. Then they will say that they are persecuted".

Simultaneously as the state attempts to attain full control over humanitarian operations, the quotes provided above points to a discourse that delegitimizes the work of local NGOs trying to sustain a humanitarian response. According to the literature, delegitimization is invoked through ascribing political motifs to the humanitarian actors, in this case, conspiration and uncertain purposes, and this often fuels the population's mistrust and discontent towards these actors (Hilhorst & Jansen 2010: 1129-30). From the interviews conducted, it became clear that the delegitimization and thus politicization of most organizations' work has led to a process similar to criminalization. The criminalization seriously compromises the safety and well-being of humanitarian workers that, apart from working with extremely challenging issues, are frequently confronted with mistrust. From the data presented above, four categories within the theme of challenges appear to be associated with criminalization, namely to a great extent 1) Counteraction of aid deliveries and 2) Fear for one's safety and well-being; and to a significant, but lesser extent 3) Practical difficulties of aid delivery and 4) Lack of recognition/support of civil society organizations.

The counteraction of aid delivery mainly refers to the organizations' work in the communities, where five organizations talked about the difficulty of accessing their beneficiaries because they have been labeled as anti-government. Not only could people accepting aid be stigmatized, but aid was also actively used to condition state-sanctioned benefits when distributors threatened to deprive people of benefits if accepting aid (interviewee 2). These phenomena resulted in beneficiaries not always openly daring to access the aid they needed, and it was not unusual that recipients asked not to be registered by humanitarian organizations (interviewee 3).

Criminalization is also expressed in the organizations' fear for safety and well-being since three interviewed organizations talked about how their work was either physically encumbered or impeded by militaries, polices, or community leaders themselves and that they often had to negotiate themselves out of the situations. Criminalization was also present in the fact that some had had their aid confiscated, their facilities raided or expressed that they could be arrested at any time (interviewees 2, 4, 6).

Another connection between politicization/ criminalization and challenges was the practical difficulties of carrying out the operations. The illustrating example is how the lack of gasoline impacts organizations. All organizations brought up the shortage of gasoline as one of the most critical material challenges, and some expressed a fear that their operations slowly would grind to a halt because of it. However, it was said that the organizations had requested the issuance of Safe Conducts or any permit that would allow them to be served at gas stations so that they could continue to reach their beneficiaries. Still, the request had after a month remained unanswered (interviewee 4). To not provide humanitarian organizations with some kind of permit both risks contributing to sustaining perceptions of de-legitimacy and can reasonably be interpreted as a way to restrict access deliberately. Access restriction that has long presented itself as a problem for international humanitarian organizations in the country now

seems to be a growing issue for local organizations themselves. Moreover, to restrict access on behalf of the host government is a common way to politicize aid (Sullivan 2019: 18). If the government sees workers that already have access as having political intentions, it is common that they lose that access (Barnett 2018: 333). Even though discussions on access initially concern international organizations' relation to host governments, the situation for local NGOs, in this case, demonstrates significant similarity.

Lastly and somewhat connected to all points mentioned above, politicization is expressed through the lack of recognition of local NGOs for their humanitarian work. As indicated by one interviewee in connection to the coordination meetings between OCHA and the Venezuelan government, making the organizations sit down with the government made many organizations vulnerable, since the government would detect that they were doing humanitarian work and could chose to stop it.

Hence, there seems to be a marginalization in the aid process, where the government holds the upper hand of setting the frames of operation. Another interviewee describes how this dictating role is heavily restraining aid response and controls OCHA capabilities (interviewee 4). Thus, illustrating the fact underscored in the literature that the greatest obstacle for a safe humanitarian environment is the state's possibility to fall back on sovereignty (Sullivan 2019: 24). In this case, it rejects local NGOs' role in the humanitarian response against the background of their alleged political motives.

By linking the identified impacts of politicization to the theoretical framework of the thesis, it is possible to assess the type of political relation the different actors involved in the humanitarian response have to each other. According to the framework, NGOs continuously need to engage politically to reach their beneficiaries, uphold neutrality, and prevent getting their agenda co-opted by more powerful actors (Lockyear & Cunningham 2017: 3). It has been demonstrated that local NGOs face multiple and severe challenges in trying to maintain their agenda and identities as humanitarian actors in the Venezuelan context. Moreover, despite the fact that all organizations described their direct interaction with the state as very limited, they persistently felt the state's influence over the humanitarian landscape through different obstacles to their operations.

The humanitarian agenda of the state, which seems to be permeated by full control over implementation and funds, and a strategy to prevent the visualization of the magnitude of the current situation, can be perceived to be at odds with the organizations' interviewed here. Hence, it became evident that the state would prefer that these organizations do not operate at all. Consequently, the government totally sets the stage for the conditions under which local NGOs are currently working. Through criminalizing and targeting organizations' funding sources, publicly undermining their legitimacy through labeling and ascribing political motifs, and through letting different branches of the authorities present themselves as constant threats to operations, the humanitarian work is actively undermined. More subtle mechanisms such as not providing public information about humanitarian aid, not providing permits, and remaining passive towards INGOs'

attempts to establish themselves in the country also present themselves as limiting aspects.

Taking all of these obstacles into account it becomes clear that the relationship between the state and the NGOs contains elements of constituency by coercion, where actors' interests are entirely at odds with each other and one actor severely impacts the other's possibility to reach its goals (Lockyear & Cunningham 2017: 3). In this type of constituency relation, the more powerful actors generally also possess the means to make the less powerful actor cease to exist (ibid). This illuminates the fact that, in comparison to international actors, it is not as simple as to deny local actors access, evidently leading to other attempts to control their operations.

The kind of impact a coercive relation has is also dependent on the coping strategies available for the parties, emerging from the data collected here is the important fact that NGOs in Venezuela have high levels of cooperation and support for one another. Furthermore, even though the government has the power to set the frames for operations, it does not seem to inflict negatively on the organization's' possibility to maintain neutrality, even though it constantly challenges it.

Concerning the relation with the other significant actor in the setting UN OCHA, the actors have common goals of humanitarian response and OCHA allows linkage between donors and organizations. The relation thus more resembles a constituency by discretion since it brings the organizations closer to their goal of assisting beneficiaries (Lockyear & Cunningham 2017: 4). On the other hand, it appeared through the interviews that it is noticeable that also OCHA has restrained capabilities considering the will of the state. These restraints in turn reduces its power as coordinator and mediator between organizations and the state.

5.2   The role of neutrality

Although neutrality has historically been equated with an apolitical approach, more and more researchers and practitioners today believe that humanitarian work will always entail political interaction or decisions (Barnett & Weiss 2008: 37, Collinson & Elhawary 2012: 3). Additionally, what is considered as neutral and non-neutral is highly dependent on the context of operation; as discussed above, the mere fact of acknowledgment and action towards the humanitarian crisis contributes to the politicization of actors.

What makes the Venezuelan case even more complicated is the interaction of another significant tension, namely that most local NGOs from before the humanitarian crisis employed a rights-based language and stance towards the state. The debate on the separation between human rights and humanitarianism has often fallen back on the argument that human rights imply political activities, such as speaking up about violations and addressing root-causes of crises, whereas humanitarianism should be apolitical (Barnett 2018: 326). With time the rights-

based approach has been generally incorporated into humanitarian guidelines, but its application becomes cumbersome and often deprioritized in most humanitarian situations. As in the Venezuelan case, this is often necessary for reasons of power, sovereignty, and the fact that the actors granting access to humanitarian workers are not seldom the ones responsible for causing the actual situation (Barnett 2018: 330). The theme is further complicated in the sense that marking against violations of human rights can be perceived as condemning one part to a conflict, automatically contributing to a breach of neutrality.

This separation between human rights and humanitarianism in connection to neutrality was a topic that was brought up in one interview where the interviewee expressed the concern that deliberate obstacles to humanitarian action, which put people in danger risk being left unconfronted due to anxiety to contravene neutrality (interviewee 1). Interviewee 4 further said that it is difficult to comprehend that humanitarian actors and donors see the humanitarian sphere so separated from the human rights sphere. The data also indicates that some organizations had started to moderate its response towards the government in order to preserve the humanitarian operability. However, rather than explicitly articulated as reasons of complying with neutrality, it was repeatedly said that the reason for keeping low profile concerning advocacy and condemnation towards duty-bearers was due to fear that the government would close down projects, not that donors would retract money.

Nonetheless, this is not a novel debate and how 'noisy' one can be within the frames of operations has long permeated humanitarian work (Barnett & Weiss 2008: 37). Still, all organizations except two (which had not previously engaged in human rights advocacy) said that they cannot completely stop denouncing certain violations and that it cannot be asked of them to not bear witness of violations against compatriots' dignity. The trade-off between what one can say and still maintain operability was often described as 'a difficult situation.' One conceivable aspect to this dilemma is the general vagueness of what neutrality really is, this was also illustrated in the wide-ranging responses obtained from the interviews. Even though the general notion of 'not taking sides' was well embed among the respondents, insecurity persist as to when that line is crossed in the eyes of the humanitarian system.

One of the main reasons for being neutral and refraining from taking sides is the creation of a humanitarian space, where humanitarian organizations should be allowed to assist populations in need in case of conflict. Space is conditioned on that aid provision represents neutrality, impartiality, and humanity. In addition to a principled approach, the creation of a humanitarian space will also be dependent on the consent of access (Collinson & Elhawary 2012: 2). It could clearly be distinguished in the data that such a space has not materialized either in the sense of facilitating the import of aid (interviewee 1), obtaining permits for mobilization (interviewee 1 & 4) nor facilitated access to beneficiaries (interviewee 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6). The absence of a humanitarian space was, in return, perceived as challenging a neutral humanitarian response, mainly because beneficiaries were suspicious towards the humanitarian aid itself. The general lack of knowledge and information on what humanitarian aid is, and most importantly,

that it does not aim to favor any of the political parties sometimes made communities refuse aid and deny the organization's entrance (interviewee 5). Thus, despite aiming to be neutral, it often happened that organizations were not perceived as such, which in turn hampered their ability to reach their beneficiaries. This demonstrated the necessity that not only implementing actors enforce the principles but also that principles are supported in the humanitarian response as a whole.

However, neutrality was also considered very important and as increasing the legitimacy for the humanitarian organizations on a beneficiary level. By explaining to beneficiaries that the aid was not given by neither the opposition nor the government, communities were increasingly willing to accept aid. Thus, reaching beneficiaries, while respecting neutrality, contributed to a bottom-up process, where communities could attest to the authorities that the aid was not used politically (interviewee 4). The same interviewee also said that neutrality had a higher value for the Venezuelan society as it would help to shed light on the fact that a humanitarian crisis hits everyone in a similar way, independent of political affiliation (interviewee 4). Another pointed out that neutrality has allowed organizations to work with inclusion and that it could soften the hostility that has been allowed to grow between the population (interviewee 5).

The organizations thus saw neutrality as occupying a vital role, both in reaching beneficiaries and as a shield allowing the organizations to carry out their tasks with slightly more legitimacy. But it was also voiced that neutrality should not imply 'silencing' and that human rights need to be as prioritized as ever in a humanitarian emergency. Because if these actors would be silent, who would speak up for the human rights of the people?

5.3   Summary

Through analyzing and discussing the collected data in relation to existing research and theory, the thesis has advanced towards providing an answer to the posed research question. From the collected data, it was clear that all organizations work under great stress by trying to meet an increasing humanitarian need with ever smaller resources. It was also stated by respondents that aid was politicized and that they were ascribed political motives for wanting to engage in aid delivery and bring attention to the situation. To establish how politicization is expressed in the Venezuelan context, this discussion linked actions undertaken by the state and donors to the bigger debate on politicization and demonstrated how challenges experienced by organizations originate in politicization. Regarding what impact compliance with neutrality has on the everyday work of local humanitarian NGOs; it did not present major challenges. Most respondents said that the principle was very useful and valuable, only one respondent said that it had contributed to moderate their activities of condemnation. However, respondents stated that fear for repressions on behalf of the state was a more important reason to keep a low profile. It was also found that

neutrality and a principled approach makes a little difference for the creation a humanitarian space, or safe way to carry out the work, but this is rather dependent on the will of more powerful actors. Thus, the answer to the research question is that politicization poses severe challenges to local NGOs' everyday operations. Whereas the politicization challenges the ability to comply with neutrality, neutrality has also contributed to mitigate some existent challenges. Lastly, the observed dynamics in the humanitarian context allowed it to connect the relations between actors to the idea of constituency. Mapping power relations through constituencies reinforced the view that the Venezuelan government almost exclusively dictates the relations of operation and that local NGOs are facing ever more obstacles in keeping their operations afloat.

6   Conclusion

The research carried out in this thesis has first and foremost helped to identify a shrinking space for local humanitarian actors operating in the complex humanitarian crisis of Venezuela. Whereas shrinking space is a growing challenge and a predicted future scenario for internationally led humanitarian operations, this study demonstrates that not only is this applicable to INGOs but also highly significant to local NGOs. Furthermore, local NGOs are facing different, and in some ways, more deeply rooted challenges than international humanitarian organizations. This thesis has shown and discussed how local NGOs become targets of politicization and criminalization by their state, and that few means are at their disposal to confront the situation. The state attempts to increasingly control the humanitarian operations as it keeps international humanitarian actors out of the country and surveils local organizations.

This thesis contributes to expanding upon the notion of politicization in humanitarian aid in the context of host-states since the literature almost exclusively revolves around donor states as the sources of politicization. It has also demonstrated that politicization is not merely coupled with the usage of aid as reaching political goals, but also that it can be used as a way to criminalize and destabilize organizations delivering aid. Likewise, this thesis has mapped and shed light on the different ways a government can, both directly and indirectly, create obstacles for aid delivery.

It has also been demonstrated that what 'to be political' means and the boundaries for when aid and its intermediaries are neutral or not, is present and fluid. In this case, this seems to revolve around the separation between human rights and humanitarianism. Moreover, the data indicates that organizations have started to moderate their responses in terms of advocacy and condemnations towards the government and neutrality; thus, to a certain extent, it contributes to silenced and censure sentiments. However, to abstain from human rights activities was mostly connected to a fear that the government would shut down humanitarian projects.

Neutrality also has positive implications for NGOs' everyday work in terms of trust-building towards beneficiaries and can work as a bridging mechanism in a polarized context. Nevertheless, this research shows that neutrality and humanitarian principles, in this case, are ineffective means for local NGOs to gain acceptance from the state and the right to perform humanitarian work.

Conclusively, against the backdrop of these critical findings, new gaps within existent literature are disclosed. First, more research is needed on what role local NGOs occupy in humanitarian work, not the least since these actors make up the most significant part of global humanitarian responses, and their role is

growing as governments become more skeptical towards international aid. Furthermore, local NGOs face more and partially different challenges than humanitarian INGOs, thus requiring further research that can contribute to encircle, emphasize, and subsequently encounter these challenges.

Further research is needed on what consequences a high amount of local NGOs employed in humanitarian operations have for the society in which they operate, especially in connection to human rights defense. Finally, initiatives should also be undertaken to study how the challenges to humanitarian responses in similar situations are connected to processes of politicization and adherence to neutrality to further underline possible tensions or untapped possibilities between the two.

7 References

Acción Solidaria et al. 2019. Comunicado de las organizaciones de la sociedad civil venezolana en relación al Reporte de Situación sobre el escalamiento humanitario de la ONU en Venezuela. http://www.accionsolidaria.info/website/comunicado-de-las-organizaciones-de-la-sociedad-civil-venezolana-en-relacion-al-reporte-de-situacion-sobre-el-escalamiento-humanitario-de-la-onu-en-venezuela/ Accessed 2020-02-17.

Action Against Hunger. 2020. International Charter.

Al-Abdeh, M & Patel, C 2019, "Localising" humanitarian action: reflections on delivering women's rights-based and feminist services in an ongoing crisis, Gender & Development, 27(2): 237- 252.

Anderson, Kenneth. 2004 Humanitarian Inviolability in Crisis: The Meaning of Impartiality and Neutrality for U.N. and NGO Agencies Following the 2003-2004 Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts. Harvard Human Rights Journal. 17: 41-74.

Arreaza, M. Jorge. 2020. *The EU cynically imposes sanctions on Venezuela & asks not to politicize humanitarian aid, while its governments refuse to coordinate assistance with the Venezuelan govt. & make shipments to third countries or organizations of dubious origin, for uncertain purposes.* [Twitter]. 3 March. https://twitter.com/CancilleriaVE/status/1255541308908855296 Accessed 2020-05-10.

Baddour, Dylan. 2019. When Humanitarian Aid is Used as a Weapon to Bring Down Regimes. The Atlantic. 21 February. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/02/venezuela-humanitarian-aid-weapon-regimes/583309/. Accessed 2020-02-17.

Barnet, Michael. 2018. Human rights, humanitarianism, and the practices of humanity. *International Theory*. 10:3 314-349. doi:10.1017/S1752971918000118

Barnett, Michael & Weiss. G, Thomas. 2008. Humanitarianism in Question – Politics, Power, Ethics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Barnett, Michael. 2005. Humanitarianism Transformed. Perspectives on Politics. 3(4): 723-740.

Becker, S. Howard. 1998. Tricks of the Trade. How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing it. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Bray, Zoe. 2008. Ethnographic approaches. In Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating (eds.). *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences – A Pluralist Perspective.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 296-315.

Brodzinsky, Sibylla. 2016. We are like a bomb: food riots show Venezuela crisis has gone beyond politics. The Guardian.

Cabello, Diosdado. 2020. ¡Ya basta! ANC evaluará leyes sobre financiamiento a las ONG desde el exterior (+Cabello). https://mazo4f.com/ya-basta-anc-evaluara-leyes-sobre-el-financiamiento-a-las-ong-desde-el-exterior-cabello Accessed at 2020-05-10

Cabello, Diosdado. 2019. Aprobaremos ley para sancionar severamente a las ONG que reciban dinero para conspirar. https://mazo4f.com/cabello-aprobaremos-ley-para-sancionar-severamente-a-las-ong-que-reciban-dinero-para-conspirar Accessed 2020-05-10

CIVILIS, PROVEA & Espacio Público. 2016. Silence of UN Agencies in Venezuela affects the health, access to food and dignity of the most vulnerable. https://unwatch.org/50-venezuelan-ngos-blast-un-cancellation/ Accessed 2020- 04-16.

Collinson, Sarah & Elhawary, Samir. 2012. *Humanitarian Space: a review of trends and issues.* HPG Report 32, London: Overseas Development Institute.

Cotterrell, Lin. 2005. *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction - Approaches to human rights in humanitarian crisis*. Overseas Development Institute.

Curtis, Devon. 2001. Politics and Humanitarian Aid: Debates, Dilemmas and Dissension. HPG Report 10, London: Overseas Development Institute.

Elizondo, Gabriel. 2019. Venezuela: 65 countries support Guaido, while UN backs Maduro. Al Jazeera. Accessed at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/venezuela-65-countries-support-guaido-backs-maduro-190215134801090.html. Accessed at 2020-05-10.

Ellner, Steve. 2013. Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change in Venezuela. Latin American Perspectives 40 (3): 63-82.

García-Guadilla, María & Mallen, Ana. Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion in Venezuela's Twenty-First Century Socialism. The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 681(1): 62-77.

GHA (Global Humanitarian Assistance). 2018. Annual Report 2018.

Harroff-Tavel, Marion. 2003. Does it still make sense to be neutral? Humanitarian Exchange. No. 25.

Halperin, Sandra & Heath, Oliver. 2013. Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hilhorst, Dorothea, and Bram Jansen. 2010. "Humanitarian Space as Arena: A Perspective on the Everyday Politics of Aid." Development and Change 41(6):1117–139.

Hoelscher, K, Miklian, J & Mokleiv Nygård, H. 2017. Conflict, Peacekeeping, and Humanitarian Security: Understanding Violent Attacks Against Aid Workers, International Peacekeeping. 24(4): 538-565. DOI: 10.1080/13533312.2017.1321958

Hogan, Susan. 2013. Understanding Discourse Analysis. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/3709348/Understanding_Discourse_Analysis

Human Rights Watch. 2019. Venezuela's Humanitarian Emergency – Large-Scale UN Response Needed to Address Health and Food Crises. Report/ Human Rights Watch.

IFRC. 2019. Venezuela: Respect and protect our neutrality and impartiality, says Red Cross President. https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/press-release/venezuela-respect-protect-neutrality-impartiality-says-red-cross-president/. Accessed 2020-02-20.

InterAction. 2019. The politicization of humanitarian aid for Venezuela must end. InterAction.

Kuckartz, Udo. 2014. Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practice & Using Software. SAGE.

Kurtzer, Jacob. 2019. Venezuela's Humanitarian Emergency: Putting Principles First. Center for Strategic & International Studies.

Laskowski, Emily, Miller, India & Steindorf, Molly. 2019. Sovereignty. Humanitarian Aid under Stress: Assessing the Role of NGOs. Task Force, The Donald C. Hellmann Task Force Program. University of Washington. 22-41.

Leader, Nicholas. 2002. *The Politics of Principle: The Principles of Humanitarian Action in Practice*. HPG Report 2. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Leebaw, Bronwyn. 2007. The Politics of Impartial Activism: Humanitarianism and Human Rights. Perspectives on Politics. 5(2): 223-239. DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707070752

Lemaitre, Julieta. 2018. Humanitarian aid and host state capacity: the challenges of the Norweigan Refugee Council in Colombia. *Third World Quarterly*. 39(3): 544-559.

Lockyear, Christopher & Cunningham, Andrew. 2017. Who is your constituency? The political engagement of humanitarian organisations. Journal of International Humanitarian Action. 2:9. DOI 10.1186/s41018-017-0024-1

Maduro, Nicolas. 2019. Venezuela no va a permitir el 'show' de la ayuda humanitaria falsa porque no somos mendigos de nadie'. ABC Spain. https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-maduro-venezuela-no-permitir-show-ayuda-humanitaria-falsa-porque-no-somos-mendigos-nadie-201902091209_video.html Accessed 2020-05-10

Maietta, Michel, Kennedy, Eilidh and Bourse Francois. 2017. The Future of Aid INGOs in 2030. Report IARAN, Action Against Hunger, iRiS, Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Futuribles.

McIvor, Chris. 2003. Neutrality in Humanitarian Assistance: a case study from Zimbabwe. Humanitarian Exchange. No. 25.

Minear, Larry. 1999. The theory and practice of neutrality: Some thoughts on the tensions. International Review of Red Cross. 81 (833): 63-72. Hein Online.

Morgenthau, Hans. 1962. A Political Theory of Foreign Aid. American Political Science Review, 56(2): 301-309.

Norwegian Refugee Council and Handicap International. 2016. *Challenges to Principled Humanitarian Action: Perspectives from Four Countries*. Geneva: Norwegian Refugee Council and Handicap International.

O'Reilly, Karen. 2009. Key Concepts in Ethnography. London: Sage Publications. ISBN: 978-1-4462-6830-8

Patel, Aamirah. 2019. Seeking Refuge: Venezuela's Migration Crisis and the Politicization of Aid. TRT World Research Centre.

Phillips. D, Brenda. 2014. Qualitative Disaster Research. I Patricia Leavy (ed.). The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 533-556.

(PHAP) Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection. 2015. IHL and Core Humanitarian Principles: Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence. Availible at: https://www.alnap.org/help-library/ihl-and-core-humanitarian-principles-humanity-neutrality-impartiality-and-independence

Prior, Lindsay. 2014. Content Analysis. In Patricia Leavy (eds.). The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research. 359-379. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prior, Lindsay. 2011. Using Documents in Social Research. London: Sage.

PROVEA. 2019. Joint Statement. Accessed at: https://www.derechos.org.ve/actualidad/comunicado-conjunto-ong-exigen-a-la-onu-una-actuacion-coherente-y-apegada-a-los-derechos-humanos-en-la-respuesta-a-la-emergencia-humanitaria-en-venezuela

Reuters. 2020. OAS human rights delegation barred from entering Venezuela. Reuters. Accessed at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-rights/oas-human-rights-delegation-barred-from-entering-venezuelaidUSKBN1ZY2DF?fbclid=IwAR05URfjTUFOLs2EkrL2vtaAeclE-NrD8SMDZb63XTDW1hXUANwAbVD6nbI

Rieff, David. 2002. A Bed for the Night. London: Vintage.

Sapat, Alka, Esnard, Ann-Margaret & Kolpakov, Aleksey. 2019. Understanding Collaboration in Disaster Assistance Networks: Organizational Homophily or Resource Dependency? American Review of Public Administration. 49(8): 957-972.

Sida. 2018. *Colombia and regional Venezuela humanitarian crisis analysis 2019*. Stockholm: Styrelsen för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete.

Sida. 2017. Strategy for Sweden's humanitarian aid provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 2017–2020. Strategi/ Styrelsen för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete.

Sullivan, Maya. 2019. Introduction, History of Humanitarian Aid. Humanitarian Aid under Stress: Assessing the Role of NGOs. Task Force, The Donald C. Hellmann Task Force Program. University of Washington. 2-16.

UN Human Rights Council. 2019. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of Human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. United Nations.

UN OCHA. 2019. Humanitarian Response Plan Venezuela. Humanitarian Programme Cycle July – December 2019.

UN OCHA. 2010. OCHA on message: Humanitarian principles.

Vaismoradi, Mojtaba & Snelgrove, Sherrill. 2019. Theme in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis. Forum: Qualitative Social Research. 20(3).

Vickers, Tom. 2015. Grappling with power and inequality in humanitarian interventions. International Social Work. 58(5): 625-627.

Warner, Daniel. 1999. The politics of the political/humanitarian divide. *International Review of the Red Cross.* 81(833): 109-118.

Weller, Marc. 1997. The Relativity of Humanitarian Neutrality and Impartiality. American Society of International Law. 91: 441-450.

Wood, M. Reed & Sullivan, Christopher. 2015, Doing Harm by Doing Good? The Negative Externalities of Humanitarian Aid Provision during Civil Conflict, The Journal of Politics 77(3): 736-748.

Yin, K. Robert. 2009. Case Study Research – Design and Methods. 4: e upplagan. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Yan. Zhang and Barbara. M. Wildemuth. 2009. Qualitative Analysis of Content. In: B. M. Wildemuth, Ed., Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science, Libraries Unlimited. 1-12.

8 Appendix A, Interview Guide

Interview Themes and Questions

Introduction
Introducción

1. Which organization do you work for?
1. ¿Para qué organización trabaja usted?

2. ¿How long have you worked for it?
2. Hace cuanto tiempo que trabaja usted ahí?

3. Where is it based?
3. ¿Donde esta situada?

4. What type of work does it currently do?
4. ¿Qué tipo de trabajo hace la organización actualmente?

5. Has it always done this type of work?
5. ¿Ha hecho la organización siempre este tipo de trabajo?

6. If no: What type of work did it do before? When and why has it changed?
6. Si la respuesta es no, ¿Qué tipo de trabajo hacia anteriormente la organización?

Challenges for humanitarian action
Desafíos para las acciones humanitarias

7. What are the main challenges you or your organization face when delivering aid in Venezuela today?
7. ¿Cuales son los desafíos principales que usted o la organización encuentran cuando entregan hoy en día, la ayuda en Venezuela?

8. Are these challenges unique to your organization?
8. ¿Son estos desafíos únicos para su organización?

9. What is/are the source(s) of these challenges?
9. ¿Cuales son los orígenes de estos desafíos?

10. How do you deal with them as an organization? As an individual?
10. ¿Cómo hace frente a estos desafíos como organización y cómo individuo?

Relations to government and donors
Relación con el gobierno y donantes

11. How is your organization's relation to the Venezuelan government? Has it always been like this?
11. ¿Cómo es la relación entre la organización y el gobierno venezolano? ¿Siempre ha sido igual?

If not: How and why do you think it has changed?
Si no ha sido siempre así, ¿Cómo y por que piensa usted que ha cambiado?

12. Which are your organization's main donors? Are they mostly local or international? Have they always been the same?
12. ¿Cuales son los principales donantes en su organización? ¿Son ellos principalmente locales o internacionales? ¿Han sido siempre los mismos?

If not: Why have they changed?
Si no han sido siempre los mismos, ¿por que han cambiado?

13. How is your organization's relation to (international) donors? Has this relation changed?
13. ¿Como es la relación entre su organización y los donantes internacionales? ¿Ha cambiado esta relación?

If yes: Why?
En caso de que haya cambiado, ¿por qué ha cambiado?

14. Did you ever have to make difficult choices to accommodate the wishes of either the Venezuelan government or donors in recent years?
14. ¿Ha tenido alguna vez que hacer decisiones difíciles para poder ajustarse a los deseos del gobierno o de los donantes en los últimos años?

Understanding and use of neutrality-principle
Entendimiento y uso del principio de neutralidad

15. Are you familiar with the humanitarian principle of neutrality? How do you understand it in connection to aid delivery?
15. ¿Esta familiarizado con el principio humanitario de neutralidad? ¿Cómo lo entiende en conexión con la entrega de ayuda?

16. Do you think it is a useful principle? Is it easy or difficult to apply in general? And in Venezuela in particular?
16. ¿Cree usted que este principio es útil? En general, ¿Es fácil o difícil aplicar este principio?

17. Has the principle of neutrality affected your organization's work in practice? If so, how?

17. ¿Ha afectado el principio de neutralidad al trabajo de su organización en la practica? ¿En caso de que afecte, cómo afecta?

General context and closure
Contexto general y cierre

18. How do you feel about aid delivery in Venezuela in general?
18. En general, ¿cómo se siente sobre la entrega de ayuda en Venezuela?

19. Do you agree that aid delivery is politicized in Venezuela?
19. ¿Esta de acuerdo con que la entrega de ayuda en Venezuela esta politizada?

If yes: How does this affect you as an individual?
En caso de si, ¿cómo le afecta esto a usted como individuo?

20. Is there anything that you would like to add?
20. ¿Hay algo que usted quiera añadir?

21. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
21. ¿Hay algo que usted quiera preguntarme?

9 Appendix B, Original Quotes in Spanish

Here the original Spanish quotes from interviews 3, 4, 5 & 6 are presented. Interviews 1 & 2 were conducted in English and therefore appeared in its original form in the thesis.

Page 27

1."(...) in Venezuela the humanitarian crisis is not yet recognized by the Venezuelan state and it has been very complex to receive that humanitarian aid in a direct way"

"(…)en Venezuela aun no se reconoce la crisis humanitaria por parte del estado venezolano y ha sido muy complejo poder recibir esa ayuda humanitaria de manera directa" (interviewee 3).

2."Sometimes, in some moments, it is difficult as humanitarian organizations to make visible what is happening since it's not that open, or since you cannot talk in an open way about this type of issue"

"En algunos momentos es difícil como las organizaciones humanitarias visibilizar lo que esta sucediendo puesto que no es tan abierto, o no se puede hablar de manera tan abierta de este tipo de tema" (interviewee 3).

3."First of all, the political polarization makes many of the tasks we do, they are seen by the government as being against them. Yes the fact of diffusing, of going to the IACHR, of going to the United Nations council, the Human Rights Council of United Nations, makes the government see us like opponents"

"En primer lugar, la polarización política hace que muchas las labores que nosotros hagamos, pues sean vistas por el gobierno como que son en su contra. Si, el hecho, de difundir, de ir a la CIDH, de ir al consejo de naciones unidas, el consejo de derechos humanos de naciones unidas, el gobierno nos ve como adversarios" (interviewee 4).

Page 28

4."Maybe among the ones that are humanitarian actors, and within what is called the humanitarian space, there is a, let's say there is a special relationship with the

state that we can understand to a certain extent, but there comes a moment where that relationship damages the humanitarian space itself (…)"

"(…)quizás dentro de los que son los actores humanitarios y dentro de lo que es el espacio humanitario, hay una digamos como una especial trato con el estado que podemos entender hasta cierto limite pero llega un momento en el que ese trato pues lesiona el propio espacio humanitario(…)" (interviewee 4).

5." (…)the delivery that UN, the Red Cross or whatever organization does (…) well it's like really politicizing it. What the state does is, it says afterwards that they are the ones who are giving it and appropriates that aid and it serves political purposes (…)"

(…)la entrega que hace las organizaciones de Naciones Unidas, La Cruz Roja o cualquier organización (…) bueno es como politizarla realmente. El estado lo que hace es que dice que después ellos son los que la están entregado y se apropia de esa ayuda y le sirve con fines políticos (…)" (interviewee 6).

6."I was even at the bridge of Cúcuta 'the day of the delivery' of the humanitarian aid, what happened there has no comparison(...) What was the plan? And what has happened is that organizations that are not linked to politics, are working with their bare nails and with the little they are given to achieve miracles with many communities"

"Yo estuve incluso en el puente de Cúcuta, "el día de la entrega" de la ayuda humanitaria, lo que paso ahí no tiene parangón (…) cuál era el plan? Y que ha pasado, que organizaciones que no están vinculadas a la política, están trabajando con las uñas y con lo poco que les dan para hacer milagros con muchas comunidades" (interviewee 5).

Page 29

7."That makes many of our organizations subjected to processes of criminalization, yes of penalty by any means, they raid your facilities, they do tax inspections, they put up obstacles, it can happen things like the one I told you yesterday, the seizure of items"

"Eso hace que efectivamente muchas de nuestras organizaciones estén sujetas a procesos de criminalización, si de penalidad por cualquier via, te allanan instalaciones, te hacen inspecciones via tributaria, te ponen trabas pueden pasar cosas como lo que te decía ayer, de decomiso de cosas" (interviewee 4).

8."Normally we have been able to enter with donations. We have a network since a long time back, but well, they [the government] have tried to pass, of criminalizing our work. They forbid my entrance at personal level, my team no"

"Nosotros normalmente hemos podido entrar con las donaciones. Tenemos una red ya de mucho tiempo, pero bueno, ellos [el gobierno], han tratado de pasar, de criminalizar nuestro trabajo. A mi me prohibieron la entrada a mí a nivel personal, a mi equipo no" (interviewee 6).

9. "The resources are finite and due to the great difficulties they [donors/INGOs] have encountered to enter Venezuela, they have decided to help other countries, in the surroundings, like Colombia, and they have focused their aid on the many Venezuelan migrants"

"Los recursos son finitos, y las grandes dificultades que han conseguido para entrar en Venezuela, que han decidido ayudar a otros países, de los alrededores, tipo Colombia y han enfilado sus ayudas a los migrantes venezolanos que son muchos" (interviewee 5).

10. "Look, the truth is that it is rewarding to be able to help, but it is nevertheless also worrying knowing that it is insufficient, our humanitarian needs do not correspond to the humanitarian aid that is entering"

"Mira la verdad, es gratificante poder ayudar pero sin embargo también es preocupante el saber que es insuficiente, nuestra necesidad humanitaria no se corresponde con la ayuda humanitaria que esta entrando" (interviewee 4).

Page 30

11. "To be honest, what we are seeing is that it is aggravating every day and then the challenges get bigger, you see? Because it's no longer only what we did, but it is as if everything was made more difficult for us, the state doesn't, it doesn't solve the day by day problems of people"

"De verdad que lo que vemos es que se agrava cada día y entonces los desafíos son mayores, entiendes? Porque ya no es solamente lo que haciamos, sino que es como que si todo nos los hicieran más difícil, el estado porque no, no resuelve los problemas del día a día de la gente" (interviewee 6).

12. "We have knowledge of that in the last 3 months, a big part of the INGOs have left the country, due to not getting accreditation and for not getting their visas renewed. Others almost operate in clandestine because they haven't been given safe conducts or visas. So that is terrible, because no new partners are arriving that can contribute to the humanitarian aid"

"Tenemos conocimiento que en los últimos 3 meses, una buena parte de las ongs internacionales qse han ido del país, por no tener acreditación y por no renovado de us visas. Otras operan casi que en la clandestinidad, porque no les han dado el salvoconducto o la visa. Entonces eso es terrible, porque no llegan nuevos socios que puedan aportar para la ayuda humanitarian" (interviewee 4).

13."The gasoline is totally, totally scarce, we don't have access to gasoline of course that makes the mobilization for the humanitarian actors very difficult"

"La gasolina esta totalmente, escaseando totalmente, no tenemos acceso a gasolina por supuesto esto hace muy difícil la movilización de los actores humanitarios" (interviewee 3).

14."It is very discretionary of the militaries themselves that are attending the gas stations, that is, it is as likely that they supply you as that it is that they don't. (...) we have asked UN OCHA, (…) for that those who carry out humanitarian work be issued a kind of safe conduct or some kind of permit, well something that assures that the pumps will serve us with gasoline"

"Es muy discrecional de los propios militares que están en las estaciones de gasolinas, es decir, puede que te surtan como puede que no te surtan (…) nosotros le hemos solicitado a UN OCHA, (…) que a quienes desarrollamos labores humanitarios se nos sean expedidos una especie de salvo conducto o una especie de carnet pues, algo que permita que las bombas nos surtan de gasolina" (interviewee 4).

15."We have a very complex situation where we don't have access to water, 70% of the populations are being affected by the topic of water"

"Tenemos una situación bastante complejo donde no tenemos acceso a agua, 70% de las poblaciones están siendo afectadas con el tema de agua" (interviewee 3).

Page 31

16.   "(...)we think it is unfortunate that the humanitarian aid has been so highly politicized in Venezuela. Basically, to be able to access your benefits, it is sometimes complicated because there is a great fear of retaliation by some state corpuses to be able to receive certain aid. (…) beneficiaries with whom we are in the community request to not be named for receiving certain aid for fear to get, or that they take away the benefits that they are given in the communities (…)" (interviewee 3).

"(…)creemos que lamentablemente en Venezuela se ha politizado muchísimo la ayuda humanitaria. Básicamente, para poder acceder hacia tus beneficios, se complica a veces un poco porque se teme mucho a represalias por parte de unos organismos del estado a poder recibir ciertas ayuda. (…)beneficiarios con las que estamos en la comunidad solicitan no ser nombrados al recibir cierto tipo de ayuda por temor a recibir o a que se le quiten beneficios que se les dan en comunidades (…)" (interviewee 3).

17. "We continue doing what we know how to do, reinforcing the care measures, that is, we take care of ourselves, our team, and take care above all that we can continue operating because to confront or face openly the government can involve that we stop operating and that would be to abandon the people"

"Nosotros seguimos haciendo lo que sabemos hacer, extremando las medidas de cuidado, es decir, nos cuidamos a nosotros, a nuestro equipo, y de cuidar sobre todo que podamos seguir operando porque confrontar o enfrentar abiertamente al gobierno puede suponer que dejemos de operar y eso seria abandonar a la gente" (interviewee 4).

18. "Talk to other organizations. But overall, they are all at the same conclusion, you are going to arrive to the same conclusion, which is that the people are afraid to do things because they are afraid that the government takes it away from them. They expropriate it, they put you in jail, tell you, you cannot do that anymore"

"Para que hables con otros organizaciones. Pero a la larga todos en la misma conclusión vas a llegar a la misma conclusión que es que la gente tiene miedo de hacer cosas porque tiene miedo de este gobierno que las quiten. Se expropie, te meta a preso, te diga no va a hacer eso mas" (interviewee 5).

19. "We encounter, for instance, to access the hospitals many barriers. The first barrier, the issue of security; in the hospitals we now have different types of armed forces. That is, we have the national Bolivarian police, the regular security officers of the hospital, we have something called militia, which is a force that the state created (…)"

"Nos encontramos, por ejemplo, para accesar a los hospitales con muchas barreras, no? La primera barrera, el tema de seguridad; en los hospitales ahora tenemos distintos tipos de fuerzas. O sea, tenemos a la Policía Nacional Bolivariana, Los oficiales de seguridad normales del hospital, tenemos algo que se llama miliciano, que es una fuerza que el estado creo (…)" (interviewee 6).

20. "Supporting our teams in the topic of resilience and support to them financially, emotionally, because unfortunately in Venezuela, many people are breaking, many people are under a stress (…)"

"Apoyando nuestros equipos en ele tema de la resilencia y el apoyo a ellos mismo en cuanto a lo económico, a lo emocional, porque bueno lamentablemente en Venezuela, mucha gente se esta quebrando, mucha gente esta bajo un estrés (…)" (interviewee 4).

Page 32

21. "shock of these organizations (…) that had come to search for economic aid to help their villages and suddenly they are told 'we are also talking with the

government'(...) And they need to negotiate with the government, but then those organizations that are very small tells you, it is that I do not want the government to see me. Because it is going to look for me and it is going to take everything I have away"

"el choque de estas organizaciones (…)se vienen como sea para buscar esa ayuda económica para ayudar a sus pueblos de repente te diga 'estamos también hablando con el gobierno' (…)y ellos necesitan negociar con el gobierno, pero entonces esas organizaciones que son muy chiquitas te dice, es que yo no quiero que el gobierno me vea. Porque me va a buscar y me va a quitar todo lo que yo tengo (interviewee 5).

22."(...) in several meetings, we found ourselves with our backs against the wall, because it seemed that the entry of aid was being negotiated with the government, and many organizations were affected, (…) they did not feel comfortable that the government was going to benefit (…)"

"(…)en varias reuniones, nos vimos contra la pared, porque parecía que se estaba negociando con el gobierno la entrada de la ayuda, y muchas organizaciones se vieron afectadas, (…) no se sentían a gusto que el gobierno se iba a beneficiar (interviewee 5).

23."they, the very agencies of the UN have their hands tied"
"las propias agencias de las naciones unidas están amarradas de manos" (interviewee 4).

24."(…) we all try to do it together and we really see, we have many barriers and in order to reach the people, we need the support, a lot of support"

"(…)todos tratamos de hacer en conjunto y de verdad vemos, tenemos muchas barreras y para para poder llegarle a la gente, pues necesitamos el apoyo Este, muchísimo apoyo" (interviewee 6).

Page 33

25."We try in every possible way to provide support to them [other organizations]"

"Tratamos en todo lo posible, de brindarles apoyo" (interviewee 5)

26."(…) that makes us having to support our own teams more and establish, networks with others, work with others, present projects together, search for financing"

"(…)eso hace que tengamos que apoyar mas a nuestros propios equipos y bueno establecer como te digo, redes con otros, trabajar con otros, presentar proyectos juntos, buscar financiamiento" (interviewee 4).

27."Thanks to all the work that has been formed with the women (…) and that they have been trained, they have organized committees, not us, they themselves (...)"

"Gracias a todo el trabajo que hemos armado con las mujeres (…) y que ellas se han capacitado. Hemos organizado comités, no nosotros, Ellas mismas (…)" (interviewee 6).

28."not take part in what can be the high conflictive situation that we are living in"
"es no tomar parte en lo que puede ser la alta conflictividad que estamos viviendo" (interviewee 4).

Page 34

29.   "(…) We have always had our tendency against the beneficiary (…)we never ask them if they belong to a governmental organization or the opposition, our work is to help and save lives"

" siempre nos hemos manejado hacia el beneficiario (…)nunca preguntamos si pertenecen a una organización del gobierno, o de la oposición, nuestra labor es ayudar a salvar vidas" (interviewee 5).

30.   "we understand that to be able to support and be able to reach the beneficiaries we have to maintain that process and that neutrality throughout whole the process"

"entendemos que para poder apoyar y para poder llegar a los beneficiarios tenemos que mantener ese proceso o esa neutralidad en todo el proceso" (interviewee 3).

31.   "the emergency does not distinguish between political colors"
"la emergencia no distingue color politico" (interviewee 4).

32.   "that this principle could allow us to pave the way for reconciliation"

"que sea un principio que permita abonar el terreno para la reconciliación" (interviewee 4).

33."It is not that easy [to comply with neutrality], maybe because when you are going to provide the aid they label you and they categorize you to be on one side or the other"

"No es tan sencillo, quizás porque cuando también vas a acercar la ayuda te tildan o te etiquetan de un lado o de otro" (interviewee 3).

34. "[neutrality] affects us, because in previous years we were working in several communities (…) and unfortunately we could not continue because they would not let us in, the political issue is complex"

"[Neutralidad] Nos afecta, porque en años anteriores estuvimos trabajando en varias comunidades (…) y lamentablemente no pudimos continuar porque no nos dejan entrar, el tema político es complejo" (interviewee 5).

35. "(…)our allies in the communities are not political actors in order to avoid that the list of persons who receive aid is biased towards that only the ones that receive the help are from specific political tendencies"

"(…)de que nuestros aliados en las comunidades no sean actores políticos para evitar que puedan los listados de las personas que reciban la ayuda estar sesgados hacia que puedan recibir solo los de determinadas tendencias políticas" (interviewee 4).

Page 35

36. "(…)not yet have the humanitarian channels been opened so directly that they can cover the needs of the population"

"(…)no aun todavía no se han abierto canales humanitarios de manera tan directa para poder cubrir las necesidades de la población" (interviewee 3).

37. "maybe neutrality, what it allows us is to have some kind of shield because the community itself recognize us as an actor that in fact have never politicized the aid, and that converts us as well into a shield towards the state itself because it is the communities themselves that in fact attest that well, here they helped everyone"

"quizás la neutralidad lo que nos permite es tener una especie de escudo porque la propia comunidad nos reconoce como que somos un actor que efectivamente no ha politizado la ayuda, y eso se convierte en nosotros también como un escudo frente al propio estado porque son las propias comunidades las que efectivamente dan fe de que bueno aquí se ayudó a todos" (interviewee 4).

38. "(…) people poorly understand what we refer to as humanitarian aid"

"(…) gente entiendo un poco a que nos referíamos a ayuda humanitarian" (interviewee 3).

39. "Basically I believe that the difficult decisions have been at certain times to moderate the response to the state to precisely preserve the operability of the humanitarian space. (…) to not confront [the state], rather try to assume a mediation role so that they in fact don't suppose sanctions, punishment, persecutions and well that has been complicated, because well we protect rights"

"Fundamentalmente yo creo que las decisiones difíciles han sido en determinados momentos moderar, quizás, la respuesta frente al estado para preservar precisamente la operatividad del espacio humanitario (…) de no confrontar, si no tratar de ejercer un rol de mediación para que efectivamente no supongan sanciones, penas, persecución y bueno pues, eso ha sido complicado, porque bueno pues, nosotros defendemos derechos" (interviewee 4).

Page 36

40. "And sometimes, the humanitarian and human rights they seemed like... even within the humanitarian space itself they see it as two sperate things. We don't, (…) So, that relation, has been a bit difficult

"Y a veces, lo humanitario y derechos humanos parecieran... incluso dentro del propio espacio humanitario lo ven como dos cosas separadas. Nosotros no, (…) Entonces esa relación, ha sido un poquito difícil (interviewee 4).

41. "It was not always like that, earlier yes we had a lot of contact on ministerial level, on governmental level but since we started defending rights, it seems like they do not invite us to meetings anymore"

"No siempre fue así anteriormente si teníamos muchísimo mas contacto a nivel de ministerios, a nivel de gobierno pero desde que iniciamos esta defensa de derechos quizás ya no nos invitan a las reunions" (interviewee 3).

42. "The relation to the government is neither good, nor bad, to be frank it is a relation that is not even based on respect, it is fundamentally based on the fear of coercion of the organizations"

"La relación con el gobierno no es una relación buena ni mala, para serte franco, es una relación que ni siqueira esta basada en el respeto si no fundamentalmente en el miedo a la cohersión de las organizaciones" (interviewee 4).

Page 37

43. "(…) the organizations, many of them, we already start to feel a bit not comfortable with the high level of bureaucratization, to fill and fill forms and we feel that the help is not coming"

"(…) pues las organizaciones muchas de ellas ya comenzamos a sentirnos un poco no muy a gusto por la alta burocratización, de llenar y llenar y llenar formatos y sentimos que no llega la ayuda" (interviewee 4).