Upholding the Humanitarian Principles in Conflict Areas – Challenges and Compromises: The Cases of Syria and Afghanistan

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Abstract
In recent years localising humanitarian aid has been a strategic direction for many humanitarian organisations to give local actors more ownership and make humanitarian interventions more efficient. Nevertheless, in conflict situations localising humanitarian aid can result in a series of dilemmas. This thesis is concentrated around humanitarian organisations' adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in conflict situations. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the discourse of localising humanitarian aid in conflict areas, looking specifically at examples of Syria and Afghanistan. For this purpose, a literature review on the key concepts of humanitarian aid, the humanitarian principles, localisation and conflict was conducted. The challenges of humanitarian interventions were further developed by looking at case studies of Syria and Afghanistan. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews with academic key informants and humanitarian aid workers were conducted and the results were triangulated with the results from the literature review and case studies. The results show that there is still a strong hierarchical structure in the humanitarian aid system that slows down localisation efforts. Both international and local actors face difficulties adhering to the humanitarian principles in practice. Those challenges are related to access constraints, donor dependency, counter-terrorism measures, pressures from governments and influenced perception. Nevertheless, there is a need for both local and international actors to provide humanitarian assistance. Therefore, local actors should be treated as partners and not be used as subcontractors to deliver programme activities for international humanitarian organisations.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

<u>Summary</u>

The four core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are the guiding foundation of humanitarian aid but in high-intensity conflict situations, this is not always the case.

This thesis sets out to start, deepen and contribute to the localisation discourse by looking at the challenges in adhering to the humanitarian principles when localising humanitarian responses in high-intensity conflict areas. Humanitarian aid focuses on helping those in need and alleviating human suffering (principle of humanity) by providing humanitarian assistance based on needs alone (principle of impartiality) while remaining a neutral (principle of neutrality) and autonomous process (principle of independence).

The study used a mixed-methods approach divided into three main steps: literature study of the concepts of humanitarian aid, humanitarian principles, localisation and conflict, case studies on the high-intensity conflicts of Syria and Afghanistan as well as interviews of key academic informants and humanitarian workers. The research discovered that the complexity of the current humanitarian system bridging the humanitarian-development nexus, the complexity and changing environment of conflict situations as well as donor dependency and counter-terrorism measures makes it impossible for organisations to fully adhere to the humanitarian principles in high-intensity conflict situations. The findings show that in practice humanitarian organisations compromise between the humanitarian principles to fulfil the humanitarian imperative of helping those in need, also known as the principle of humanity.

Furthermore, in conflict settings, humanitarian aid is rarely localised due to the quickly changing dynamics of these contexts in question. The use of remote management and risk transfer is here shown to be one of the causes of the challenges for principled humanitarian assistance when localising humanitarian aid. Risk transfer can become ethically inappropriate when local actors are not included in the decision-making process and security measures are not fully provided.

The results show that both international and local organisations face challenges when adhering to the humanitarian principles in practice, such as access constraints, donor dependency, counter-terrorism measures, pressures from governments and influenced perception. However, they still remain vital to the provision of assistance as international actors can in some cases provide an outsider value while local actors can present the learning capacities to provide principled humanitarian assistance.

List of Abbreviations

ACBAR   Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development

ARCS   Afghan Red Crescent Society

ECHO   European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

ICRC   International Committee of the Red Cross

IFRC   International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

INGO   International Non-Governmental Organisation

MSF   Médecins Sans Frontières

NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

RCRC   Red Cross Red Crescent

SARC   Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society

UN   United Nations

UN OCHA   United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

US   United States

WHS   World Humanitarian Summit

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Motivation

Grounded in universal humanitarian principles, for centuries the humanitarian global sector has worked towards saving lives, helping those in need and alleviating human suffering created by social and economic insecurities, disasters, and conflicts. Currently, humanitarian aid is not only focused on responding to the various needs resulting from disasters, conflicts, and other problems but also on strengthening the capacity and thus the resilience of vulnerable communities. This contemporary humanitarian focus has drawn the attention towards the subject of localisation as the key to long-term sustainable and effective humanitarian aid. The 2016 Grand Bargain, an agreement between humanitarian organisations and donors with the goal of making humanitarian action more effective stated that humanitarian action should become "as local as possible and as international as necessary" by providing local and national responders with the necessary tools and support (IASC, 2016, p. 5). Now, many organisations have adopted the approach of localisation as part of their strategic direction.

Despite the increased interest, there is still a lack of systematic research analysis to develop effective technical and functional capacity strengthening for intervention and assistance in conflict areas – as expressed in the World Disaster Report and Few et al.'s Synthesis Report (IFRC, 2015; Few, et al., 2015). Conflict areas present a high degree of complexity and are often excluded from localised capacity development initiatives, despite their significant vulnerability (Schweizer, 2004). Indeed, humanitarian interventions in conflict areas are entangled with a series of challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles with significantly diverging views that will be discussed in this thesis.

This thesis will focus on challenges arising from localising humanitarian aid in conflict areas with regards to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The World Disasters Report raises the question over what, when and to what degree compromises need to be made over these humanitarian principles in conflict areas (IFRC, 2015, p. 166).

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the discourse of localising humanitarian aid in conflict areas. When operating in conflict areas difficulties in adhering to the humanitarian principles arise from logistical and operational challenges in humanitarian aid. Indeed, these difficulties surface when the humanitarian imperative of saving lives and helping those in need are entangled with the safeguard of the humanitarian principles in conflict situations. Therefore, this thesis' main objective is to investigate the challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles when localising humanitarian aid in conflict situations. The challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles are primarily investigated from the perspective of humanitarian organisations as access to communities and community members in conflict areas is very limited and restricted. The research will primarily focus on the following questions:

What challenges, in as far as upholding the humanitarian principles, arise from localising humanitarian aid in high-intensity conflict areas?

Over what, when and to what degree compromises need to be made over the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence in conflict areas and how are they applied in practice?

1.3 Outline

Chapter 2 presents the methodology used in this thesis. It starts by presenting the research strategy, comprising the data collection for both primary and secondary data, the data analysis and limitations. In addition, each following chapter will begin with a description of the methodological approach used. Chapter 3 continues with a literature review, explaining the various key concepts utilised in this research in relation to humanitarian aid, the humanitarian principles, localisation and conflict. Chapter 4 presents the case studies of Syria and Afghanistan and provides an overview of the contextual situation as well as of principled humanitarian responses in each country. Chapter 5 goes on to present the results from the interviews with academics and international and local humanitarian actors. Chapter 6 is a synthesis and analysis of the literature, case studies and the results from the interviews. This chapter firstly looks at the challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles when localising humanitarian aid in conflict areas. Then, it analyses and explains the various compromises that need to be made over the humanitarian principles and their application in practice. Chapter 7 presents a conclusion of the results and offers recommendations to advance the research on the subject and put forward the basis to strengthen principled humanitarian aid in conflict areas.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research Strategy and Approach

The research was predominantly carried out using an inductive approach, based on triangulation of data sources. The inductive strategy allows to describe the activities and characteristics of the social phenomena behind the origin of the challenges adhering to the humanitarian principles as well as to establish a limited generalisation of the findings set in time and space (Blaikie, 2010). The conceptual framework provides a basis for the analysis. Additionally, an abductive strategy was used as a supporting strategy to better comprehend possible reasons, meanings, motives and intentions behind the behaviours and actions that conflict with the humanitarian principles (ibid.).

The study was divided into three main steps: literature study, case studies and interviews. Data sources thus include secondary data from the literature and the case studies and primary qualitative data from the interviews. The use of mixed methods in this research supports a rigorous inquiry of the research question by drawing on the strengths of qualitative methods and allowing the cross-validation of findings from the different sources (Harwell, 2011). A literature study of the localisation of humanitarian aid in conflict areas was undertaken in parallel with a discussion of the humanitarian principles at play (humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality). This allowed the identification of existing gaps in the literature. In the following step, these gaps were further explored and validated by looking at case studies and identifying possible challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles that arise in practice. The focus lies in the inter-relation between the humanitarian principles and the complications and dilemmas that arise when trying to implement them in conflict situations. Finally, semi-structured interviews were used to interrogate the case studies and findings from the previous step. More elaboration on the different approaches undertaken for each main step can be found at the beginning of their respective chapters.

2.2 Research Methods

2.2.1   Data Collection

Secondary Data Collection - Literature Review and Case Studies

Secondary data was collected through a mixed-method desk-based study comprising a literature review on the topics of humanitarian aid, localisation, conflict and ethics. The relationship between these different concepts was investigated throughout a wide range of documents to develop an understanding of the growing relationship between the concepts throughout time. Additional secondary data was gathered for the case studies that were carefully chosen by using the objective selection criteria described in chapter 4.

The secondary data is divided into grey literature and peer reviewed academic literature. Grey literature has been treated differently from academic literature. The information originated from the academic literature can to some extent be generalised while the grey literature was used to provide highly contextual and operational details and insights.

Primary Data Collection - Semi-Structured Interviews

Twelve in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely through Zoom, Teams and Skype to collect primary qualitative data (Blaikie, 2010). Triangulation of data from different interviewees bringing in views from different conflict areas was carried out in the results and analysis part. The qualitative interviews provided another layer of humanitarian actors' interpretations on the difficulties in upholding the humanitarian principles in conflict areas previously considered in the research (Blaikie, 2010). In addition, the interviewees' experiences and perceptions of the processes and changes around localising humanitarian aid in conflict areas were collected and discussed (ibid.).

Two interview guides were developed before the start of the interviews to be in line with the purpose and research questions of the thesis and to ensure the comparability between the interviews (Appendix 1). Since the interviews targeted academic key informants and humanitarian workers the questions slightly differed between the two parties. The interview guide was structured in six sections beginning with background information about the interviewee. It continued with questions about the interviewees' conceptual understandings of humanitarian aid, localisation as well as the humanitarian principles. The third section touched upon the changes in perception of humanitarian aid and the possible reasons for this change. The next part was centred around the localisation agenda and its applicability in conflict areas, followed by the appropriateness of risk transfers for dangerous humanitarian aid interventions.

The last part of the interview guide focused on the humanitarian principles and how their application in conflict areas can be challenging.

Interviewees were selected through purposeful sampling, ensuring their expertise within the research topic as well as to assure diversity in terms of their backgrounds, work, gender, age and ethnicity (Creswell, 2013). An adequate number of interviewees was considered to ensure data saturation (Palinkas, et al., 2015). The interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study and informed consent was a prerequisite for participation.

2.2.2 Data Analysis

To answer the research question, it was necessary to first understand the current situation of localising humanitarian aid in conflict areas and how it became what it is today as well as the existing challenges that can arise in relation to the humanitarian principles. For the analysis of secondary data, literature was explored to observe the potential linkages between the key concepts (localisation, humanitarian aid, humanitarian principles, conflict areas). The literature chosen informed the framework for the case studies which in turn provided contextual understanding and guided the design of the interview guides (Bowen, 2009).

The analysis of the qualitative primary data comprised the recording and transcription of semi-structured interviews. Open-ended coding was used to find emerging themes and sub-themes. The interview transcripts were uploaded to the programme NVivo, which facilitated coding processes through the use of "nodes". Through NVivo, themes, sub-themes and quotes were identified to allow better visualisation of the data and comparison between interview responses as well as to compile references about specific themes (Bryman, 2012).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Chapter 3 presents a literature review on the key concepts of the research: humanitarian aid, localisation, conflict and ethics. This helps provide a general description of past and present information on the concepts and provides the building blocks to understand the research standpoint. The concepts introduced below present several definitions and meanings. Thus, this chapter shows this thesis' interpretation of the concepts.

3.1 Approach for the Literature Review

The information for the literature review was based on a variety of data collected using the following electronic data sources: Google, Google Scholar, JStor and the Lund University library database. Google was predominantly used to find reports and conference papers while scientific articles were searched through the other engines. The use of grey literature was used to provide insight into specific cases. The literature review started with a keyword search of the following four main concepts: "humanitarian aid", "localisation", "conflict" and "ethics". It was followed by a division of keyword search terms for each concept for further scoping (Figure 1). To better link the concepts with each other, parts of the literature found through the keyword search for one concept was also included in the other concepts.
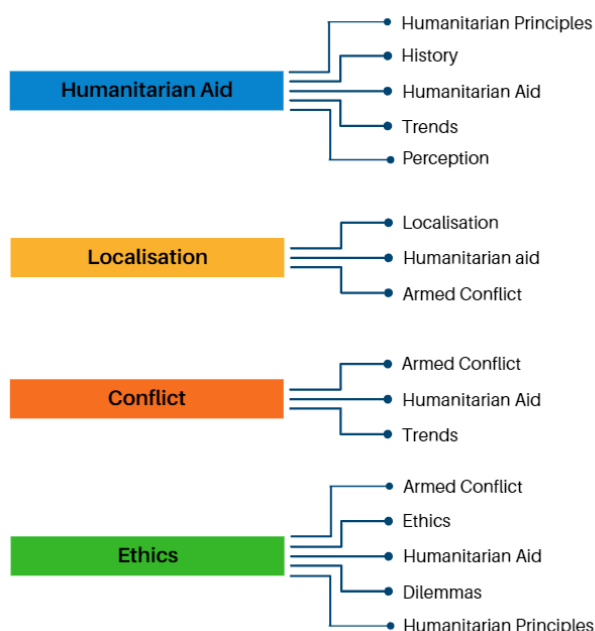
Figure 1: List of key words used for the literature search of each main concept

For more specific data, such as the one utilised to create the figures or for definitions, a specifically narrowed search on the subject was used. Reference lists from the literature found through the keyword searches were used to discover useful documents. Additionally, recommendations and shared resources from academic professionals and humanitarian organisations' staff assisted the literature search process. Special caution was given to applied assumptions, scientific methods, quality and context of selected secondary and tertiary data.

3.2 Humanitarian Aid

3.2.1 A Little Bit of History

The concept of humanitarian aid was instigated in the 1860s by Henry Dunant's book - *A Memory of Solferino* - based on the atrocities he witnessed during the battle of Solferino between French and Austrian soldiers (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). Dunant saw the need to create a community formed of voluntary societies charged with assisting the wounded during war regardless of their nationality or alliance. Dunant also expressed the idea of creating international conventions to protect the wounded and medical personnel as well as the ideological essence of the current humanitarian principles. His ideas were widespread in 1863 with the creation of what is now known as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – see Figure 1 (ibid.). The statutory foundation of ICRC was made official during the first Geneva Convention in 1864, highlighting the neutrality of the movement as well as setting the preliminary norms and rules to protect aid actors and services in future conflicts. In 1965, the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement proclaimed the creation of its seven Fundamental Principles – four of which are now the four humanitarian principles (Slim, 1997).

Presently, Dunant's thinking has grown to become the humanitarian aid system, which main function is to "save lives and alleviate suffering of a crisis affected population" (UNHCR, 2018, p. 2). A short timeline of key humanitarian events is presented in Figure 2. Humanitarian aid responds to the needs arising from a multitude of crisis types ranging from natural hazards to man-made ones, including armed conflict (ALNAP, 2018).

1859
Henry Dunant witnessing the battle of Solferino

1864
First Geneva Convention

1991
General Assembly resolution 46/182 (3 humanitarian principles

2005
Humanitarian Reform

1863
Foundation of the ICRC

1965
Proclamation of the seven Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross

2004
General Assembly resolution 58/114 (independence principle established)

2016
World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain

Figure 2: Timeline of key humanitarian events

3.2.2   *Why Talk about Humanitarian Aid?*

Since the turn of the 20th century, the humanitarian aid system has grown exponentially (Figure 3) with an increase in the number of emergency appeals and financial contributions as well as a rise in field staff and activities (Hoelscher, Miklian, & Nygård, 2015). In Figure 3, data provided by the World Bank shows that global humanitarian aid saw a decrease of 7% between 1990 and 2000 followed by an increase of around 200% between 2000 and 2018 – from US$59.3 Billion in 1990 to US$55.2 Billion in 2000 and US$165.8 Billion in 2018 (The World Bank, 2018). Such growth reflects the undergoing transformations in humanitarian aid to adapt and adjust to the increasing number of affected people (Reis & Bernath, 2017). Nonetheless, the global humanitarian financing gap widens as humanitarian needs have consistently worsened due to the growing complexity, frequency and impact of disasters, especially in conflict areas (Jackson & Zyck, 2017). In the past decade, humanitarian needs were driven by conflict and violence with armed conflicts becoming more violent and dangerous for vulnerable populations and humanitarian workers (ALNAP, 2018). In 2021, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) estimates that around 235 million people will require humanitarian assistance and protection while conflicts intensify and their effects continue (UN OCHA, 2021a). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic worsens the situation as it has shown to prolong violent conflict and constrain humanitarian responses worldwide (ibid.).
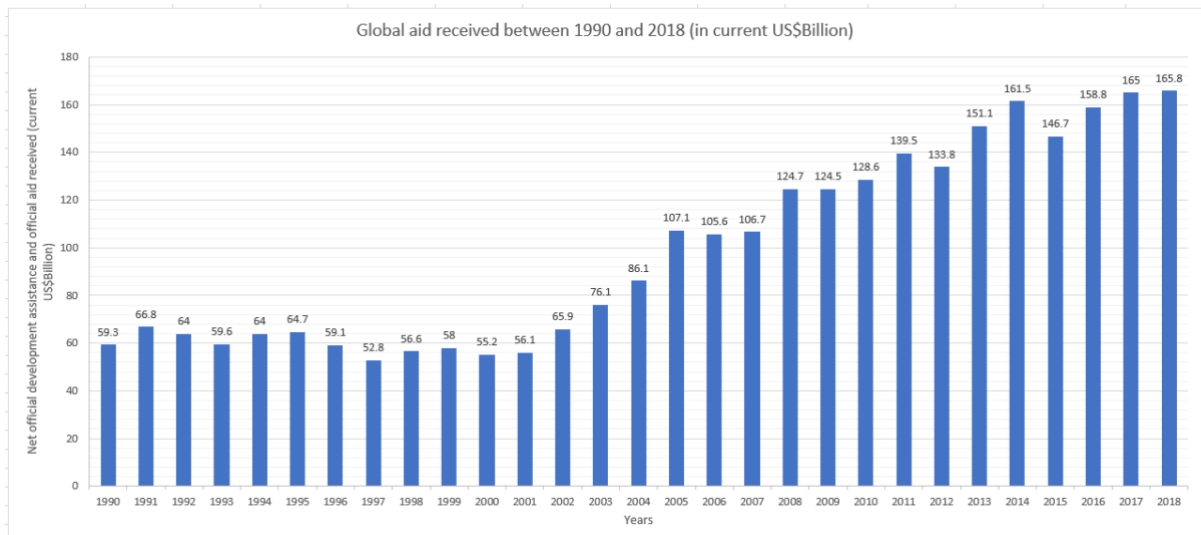
Figure 3: Global budget of the humanitarian sector from 1991 to 2018 (adapted from The World Bank, 2018)

3.2.3 The Newest Direction

The 2016 consultations in Istanbul during the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), originated the most recent system's transformation (Reis & Bernath, 2017). The current aid system highlights the necessity to strengthen local capacities and subsequently the preparedness and resilience of vulnerable populations, bridging the gap between the humanitarian and development sectors (IFRC, 2015). The Grand Bargain, launched during the WHS, stated that humanitarian operations should be "as local as possible and as international as necessary" to solve the inefficiencies of the current system and head towards effective long-term sustainable humanitarian aid (IASC, 2016, p. 5). This statement directed the attention of the humanitarian community towards localising humanitarian action through the provision of tools, support, training and staff to local responders (ibid.).

3.2.4 The Humanitarian Principles

Humanitarian assistance reaches people in need through multiple channels and entails a range of actors which share a set of underlying principles, norms, goals and values (ALNAP, 2018). They include international humanitarian organisations, local and national actors, governmental agencies and others – view Figure 4. In this thesis, when the term International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) is used it includes all international humanitarian actors such as United Nations (UN) Agencies and the RCRC Movement.

Humanitarian aid and the actors involved are primarily guided by the humanitarian imperative of aiding those in need and alleviating human suffering (IFRC, 1994), while committing to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Moreover, organisations can only provide aid if requested by the country in need (UN OCHA, n/a). This is in accordance with the principle of sovereignty which focuses on the states' duties towards its citizens as the primary responsible entity for safeguarding their population and ensuring that needs are met (UNHCR, 2018). Nonetheless, exceptions can be made when human rights are being violated, then it is justified through the argument of the moral duty or moral imperative to intervene (Matthewman, 2012).

Figure 4: Different actors possibly involved in humanitarian aid activities (adapted from ALNAP, 2018)

The humanitarian community signed its formal compliance to the three first humanitarian principles – humanity, neutrality and impartiality – during the resolution 46/182 of the 1991 General Assembly (UN OCHA, 2012a). The latest was endorsed during the General Assembly resolution 58/114 of 2004 (ibid.). The importance and commitment to the four humanitarian principles can be found both at the organisational and institutional level of humanitarian organisations. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the existence of additional

humanitarian principles created and implemented by specific humanitarian organisations, such as the seven Fundamental Principles of the RCRC Movement (ICRC, 2015). Nonetheless, in this thesis the focus will remain on the four main humanitarian principles – humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence (Figure 5) - as they are the most widely used and commonly shared amongst humanitarian actors.

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.

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.

Figure 5: The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence (adapted from UN OCHA (2012a))

3.3 Localisation

3.3.1 What is Localisation?

In recent years, the international humanitarian reform has placed localisation at its centre stage in efforts to address the inefficiencies and unequal power distributions within the humanitarian system (Roepstorff, 2020). As localisation gains importance in the humanitarian world, diverse interpretations and differing views have appeared (IFRC, 2015). The purpose of localisation, its scope and the different terms that constitute it remain of ambiguity.

In this thesis localisation will be defined as a "process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership of local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses" (Fabre, 2017, p. 1). This approach relies on the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) categorisation of localisation into four areas: Partnership, Capacity Strengthening, Financing and Coordination (IFRC, 2018) since it is closely tied to the commitments made in the Grand Bargain (IASC, 2016).

3.3.2 The Importance of Localisation

There are several reasons and benefits that explain organisations' strive towards more localised approaches in humanitarian aid. Firstly, localisation empowers local actors and institutions to be more involved and become "agents of change" (IFRC, 2015, p. 142). Local actors are more likely to stay on site after a humanitarian intervention has ended and therefore have the possibility to make long-term changes and reduce humanitarian gaps (Debarre, 2018). Additionally, local actors often benefit from easier access to the crisis-affected areas while having deeper knowledge and insights of the local context (IFRC, 2018; Fabre, 2017).

Secondly, the localisation approach could potentially provide more equitable opportunities for partnerships between international actors and local actors and addresses some of the problematic issues in their power relations and dynamics (Wall & Hedlund, 2016). Local actors now have the possibility to have a greater influence by being able to prioritise actions in preparedness, response, mitigation and recovery efforts (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018).

Thirdly, localisation efforts are cost-effective since hiring local staff is much cheaper than employing an international aid worker (Reis & Bernath, 2017). Consequently, the localisation approach is also a way for donor agencies trying to close the humanitarian financing gap mentioned in the previous section. Also, localisation increases the capacities of countries obtaining international aid which makes these interventions more cost-effective in the long term (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018).

3.3.3 Localisation Dilemmas

Since localisation approaches have widely been praised for their vast arrays of benefits these approaches have been expanded into a variety of contexts (IFRC, 2015). However, there are also critiques to the localisation agenda.

As mentioned above there is certain vagueness to the terminology and purpose of localisation depending on the actors or organisations. Consequently, localisation is often used as an umbrella term opening the possibility for stakeholders to pursue their own agenda with regards to their understanding of the term (Schenkenberg, 2016). Furthermore, opponents of the localisation approach criticise the cost-benefit approach regarding investments by donor governments as overlooking the more altruistic rationality behind humanitarian aid (de Castellarnau & Stoianova, 2016, p. 11).

Although localisation has expanded into multiple environments it cannot be applied flawlessly into every context. Schenkenberg (2016) points out that localised approaches in conflict areas ignore the ambiguities that put local actors at the forefront of the conflict. Localised approaches in conflict regions go along with a series of dilemmas which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Morrison (2017) calls for strategic support mechanisms as one solution to pursue the localisation agenda even in conflict settings. These support mechanisms are sorely needed, seeing a general upward trend in humanitarian aid workers killed, wounded or kidnapped since the 1990s (Figure 6). The overwhelming number of assaults on local personnel compared to international staff reinforces the argument of putting local actors in the front line of the conflict. The dilemmas of localisation show that although localisation has great benefits, applying the concept in conflict areas is challenging.
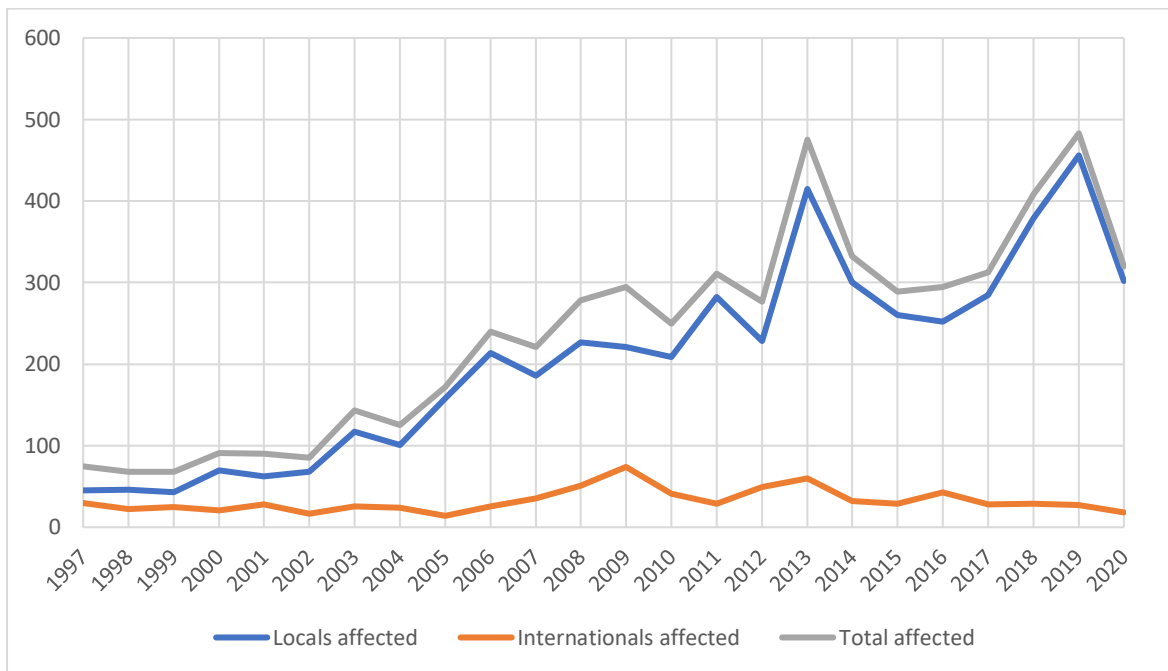
Figure 6: Humanitarian aid workers killed, wounded or kidnapped from 1990 to 2020 divided into local and international actors (adapted from AWSD (2021))

3.4 Conflict

Before diving deeper into challenges adhering to the humanitarian principles in conflict areas it is important to get an overview of this thesis' framing of conflict and how the perception of humanitarian aid in conflict areas has changed over time.

3.4.1   Definition and Complexity of Conflict

This research concentrates on humanitarian interventions in conflict settings. Humanitarian interventions here are defined as interventions by international and local actors that deliver aid in accordance with the humanitarian principles (IFRC, 2015, p. 152). In conflict regions, humanitarian interventions are fraught with greater complexity than other interventions. They are often characterised by a lack of access to the population in need, a lack of basic infrastructure as well as insufficient or overburdened aid organisations (van Voorst & Hilhorst, 2017).

Conflict itself is also a complex subject, which entails a variety of meanings and can originate from a diversity of reasons. The different terminologies used for defining conflict are often overlapping, vague and problematic to characterise in practice (Eckstein, 1965). Distinctions are made based on the length of a conflict, the reasons why a conflict takes place or the means by which it is fought (ReliefWeb, 2008). The different meanings given to conflict show a blurry delimitation between conflict and closely linked concepts.

In this thesis, the focus will be on armed conflict rather than conflict as political tension, or disputes over rights. Armed conflict is defined as "a dispute involving the use of armed force between two or more parties" (ReliefWeb, 2008, p. 10). In other words, the thesis does not deal with conflict that could be resolved or is being resolved through peaceful or democratic means.

This definition was chosen as it encompasses most of what has previously been mentioned in addition to the characteristics of contemporary conflicts: deeply rooted conflict, the rise of violence, ethno-religious cleavages, damage to social and private infrastructures and properties, use of weapons and armed forces as well as bodily harm, death, displacement or suffering of civilians (IFRC, 2015).

3.4.2 Conflict Zones

Conflict zones define the geographical location in which conflict is present. In this study, we utilise the division of conflict settings presented by Van Voorst & Hilhorst (2017), as it will help narrowing down the literature search and defining the case studies. The authors categorise conflict settings into three separate cases: high-intensity conflicts, low-intensity conflicts and post-conflict settings. Figure 7 presents the various characteristics of each category. This study will focus on high-intensity conflict areas.
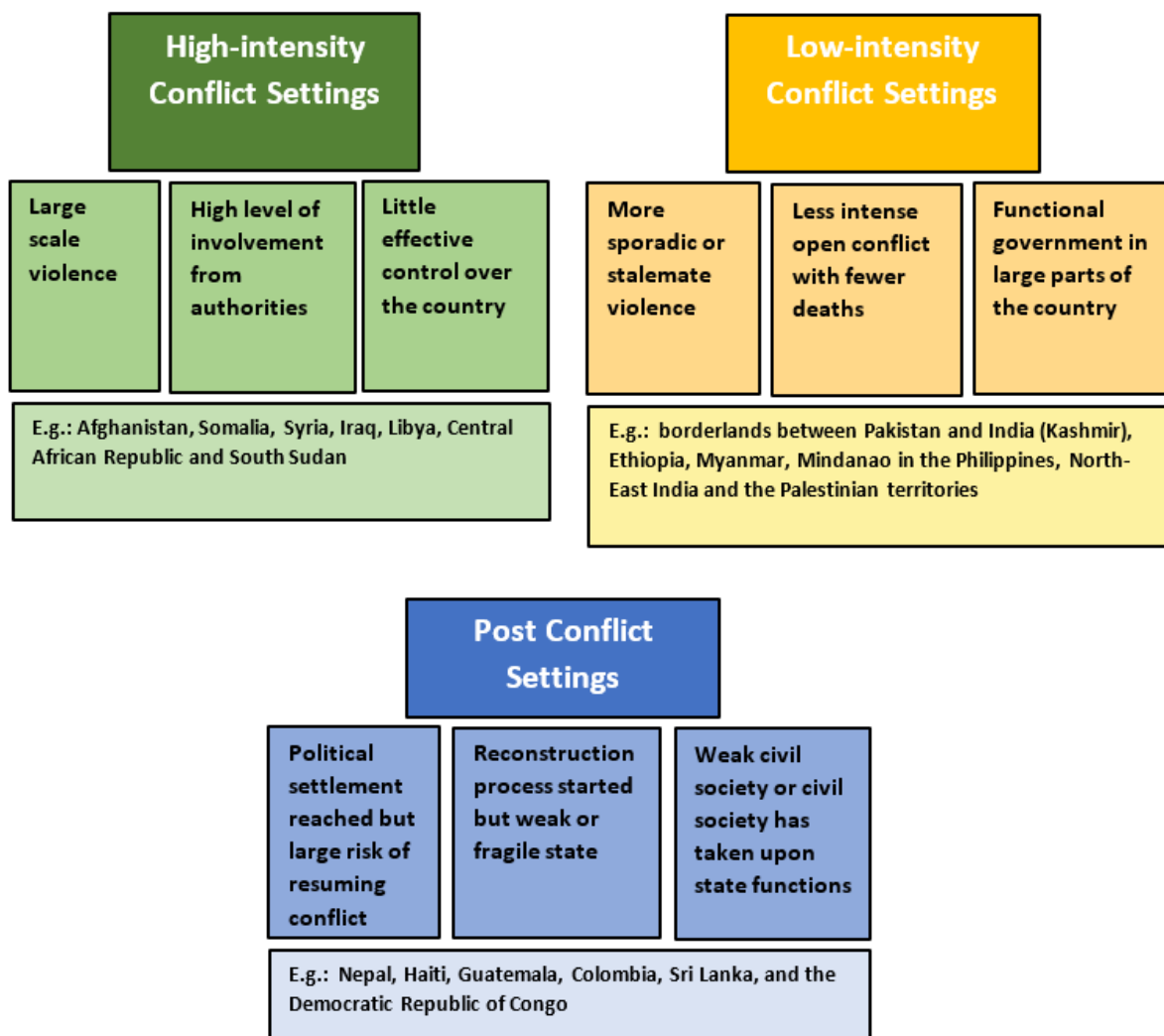
Figure 7: Characteristics of high-intensity, low-intensity and post conflict settings (adapted from van Voorst & Hilhorst (2017))

3.4.3 The Logic of Contemporary Conflict

According to Kaldor (2013, p. 2), the way conflicts are conducted has changed in recent decades going from international to internal conflicts with the involvement of new actors, purposes, methods and forms of finance. The number of armed conflicts has grown over the past decades (Pettersson & Öberg, 2020). As can be observed in Figure 8, there was a decline in the number of armed conflicts after the Cold War followed by a rise since 2005.

Regarding new actors, there is a recognisable shift from states' armed forces towards a combination of complex linkages between state and non-state actors (Kaldor, 2007). Also, the purpose of contemporary conflicts is centred around identity, be it ethnic or religious, whereas previous goals of conflict were geopolitical or ideological - democracy, communism and others (Mello, 2010; Kaldor, 2013). Furthermore, the particularity about the method of contemporary conflicts is that it is concentrated around the control of the population; therefore, the target for violence has changed from enemy forces towards the local population (Stoddard, et al., 2017). Finally, in the past, conflicts were financed by states while now financial means come from kidnappings, smuggling or 'taxation' of humanitarian aid to name a few (Kaldor, 2013; Terry, 2011).

Figure 8: Number of armed conflicts from 1990 until 2019 (adapted from Pettersson & Öberg (2020))

3.4.4 *The Changing Perception of the Humanitarian Sector - from Saints to Villains*

Humanitarian aid organisations seem to play an increasing role as a third party in conflict situations (Wood & Sullivan, 2015). The perception of humanitarian organisations, their actions and staff has changed throughout the years and thus has also the attitude towards them (ibid.). At first, humanitarian assistance was perceived as a charitable action with the sole intention of helping those in need (Abu-Sada, 2012). However, the perception and respect towards humanitarian organisations have eroded in the past few years. Distrust has grown as the humanitarian sector is increasingly perceived as having a political or hidden economic agenda (Dijkzeul & Wakenge, 2010). Such shifts originate from the undesirable outcomes and failures of humanitarian interventions throughout the years. Subsequently, this would mean that the moral positioning of humanitarian assistance is sometimes in debate and viewed as defiling the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence (Dijkzeul & Wakenge, 2010; Slim, 1997).

In addition, in armed conflict, humanitarian principles can be seen as bringing order and support without distinction to the different actors of a conflict environment (Slim, 1997). On the contrary, the work of humanitarian organisations and the principles they follow can be perceived as suspicious by the warring parties, as their actions oppose the logic of war and thus the cause behind the conflict and violence (ibid.).

The ambivalence towards humanitarian response could be one of the main causes for the widespread persistence and increase of violence against aid workers (Figure 6). Although trends show a rise of attacks on aid workers in conflict regions, there is no systematic evidence to understand the reasons behind it (Hoelscher, Miklian, & Nygård, 2015). Moreover, it is important to consider the rise of aid workers in the field when observing the upsurge in attacks (Hoelscher, Miklian, & Nygård, 2015).

Finally, aid workers are currently the victims of increased criminality in conflict areas (Jackson & Zyck, 2017). The most common types of violence faced by aid workers are abductions and kidnappings; and not death or injury by firearms or explosives (ibid.). Thus, aid workers are seen as having some value that criminals can take advantage of, whether for economic gains or to send a message. The upsurge of violence and the increased complexity faced by humanitarian actors in conflict have created a shift in the manner and methods used by humanitarian organisations. They are now mostly working remotely with local partners in hopes to reduce the operational and individual risks of their staff (Howe & Stites, 2019).

3.5 Ethics of Humanitarian Aid

Ethics in humanitarian aid are guided by the humanitarian imperative of helping those in need and alleviating human suffering (IFRC, 1994). The adherence to and guidance provided by the humanitarian principles is crucial when distinguishing humanitarian action in complex emergencies from the activities of development, government, military agencies and other stakeholders (UN OCHA, 2012b; ALNAP, 2018; Reis & Bernath, 2017). Thus, by following the principles, in theory, humanitarian activities and their conduct should not entail any intervention that could be considered inappropriate in domestic affairs. Consequently, the humanitarian principles are key to gain and preserve safe access to areas and populations affected by armed conflict (UN OCHA, 2012a). However, dilemmas in conflict areas arise when trying to implement these four principles (Figure 3).

Under international humanitarian law aid organisations do not have an automatic right to enter conflict regions. The access of aid organisations in conflict areas needs to be negotiated with the parties at war (O'Callaghan & Leach, 2013, p. 296). Focusing on international aid organisations, the lack of access in armed conflict often obliges these organisations to work remotely delegating their tasks to local aid organisations. This "risk transfer" poses a series of challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles as it questions the independence as well as impartiality of a humanitarian intervention. On the one hand, local actors have better access to off-limit areas for international staff (NRC & HI, 2016). Nonetheless, local actors are more susceptible to intimidations fearing repercussions on their family or relatives living in these conflict areas (Schenkenberg, 2016, p. 15).

When international organisations are operating in armed conflict their neutrality can be questioned by various parties. The involvement of international organisation can sometimes be seen as political and can occasionally be reinforced by seeking protection from military armies (Broussard, et al., 2019). Contrarily, Schenkenberg (2016) mentions that international organisations radiate a sense of safety for local populations in conflict regions overseeing potential breakings of international humanitarian laws.

Additionally, differing views exist on the concept of neutrality and its feasibility in practice as in armed conflict neutrality can be questioned by warring forces or the local population (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). For example, neutrality can be viewed as an excuse for humanitarian organisations to not take actions in certain contexts, as a synonym of abandonment, indifference or as a lack of courage (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). Furthermore, some debate

whether it is morally acceptable to remain neutral and not take actions during mass atrocities such as the Holocaust (Labbé, 2012). The action of not taking sides can be seen as equivalent to accepting or even agreeing with the ideas, values and atrocities occurring during conflict (Labbé & Daudin, 2016).

The actions and responsibility that different actors are meant to undertake during conflict can often become blurry and confusing. The perception different actors have on their humanitarian responsibilities can thus have a major impact on the provision of it (NRC & HI, 2016). As it is the case with the principle of humanity, often referred to as the "humanitarian imperative", which represents the ethical foundation and sole aim of most humanitarian organisations (Schweizer, 2004, p. 548). This principle encompasses the duty to address human suffering, ensure respect, and protect life and health wherever it is found and for all human beings (UN OCHA, 2012a). The principle of humanity views people as individuals without taking into consideration any other characteristic (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). Thus, under the humanitarian imperative also falls the impartiality principle to eliminate any sort of discrimination and to ensure that no individual should suffer any form of harm.

The relevance of the principles can be questioned when applied to different local contexts as they tend to follow a Western idealism not applicable everywhere around the world. Hence, some question the fairness of international organisations in demanding adherence to the humanitarian principles from local actors when responding in their own domestic country.

Chapter 4: Challenges in Upholding the Humanitarian Principles: The Cases of Syria and Afghanistan

The tensions placed onto the adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality as well as the challenges that may arise, diverge in relation to the operational context. During humanitarian interventions in high-intensity conflict, the safeguard of the four core humanitarian principles can thus become difficult. Chapter 4 presents challenges humanitarian organisations face adhering to the humanitarian principles in the conflict areas of Syria and Afghanistan.

4.1 Approach for Case Study Selection

The case studies were selected through a set of characteristics to ensure that they go hand-in-hand with the subject of this thesis. Figure 9 shows the various filters used to scope and narrow the options. Firstly, the eight countries defined by Van Voorst & Hilhorst (2017) as "high-intensity conflict settings", in accordance with our conflict perspective. Then, the eight countries previously selected were compared to the World Bank (2020) categorisation of countries as high-intensity areas, filtered depending on their access constraints towards humanitarian organisations (ACAPS, 2020) and security concerns for aid workers (AWSD, 2021). A list of four countries remained after applying these selection criteria: Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia and Syria.

The selection process further continued with a literature search on the challenges adhering to the humanitarian principles when localising humanitarian aid in these four conflict areas using Google, Google Scholar, JStor and the Lund University library database. After the literature search, Somalia was excluded due to a lack of literature and data. Libya was excluded since the majority of the literature on the challenges upholding the humanitarian principles dated back to 2011 and earlier. Consequently, it would have been difficult to connect the Libya case to the localisation agenda that gathered more pace, priority and acquired a higher profile in 2016 – a critical milestone for this research. Thus, Syria and Afghanistan were chosen as case studies as they presented a majority of academic research on localisation and the humanitarian principles and were more widely known by the interviewees.
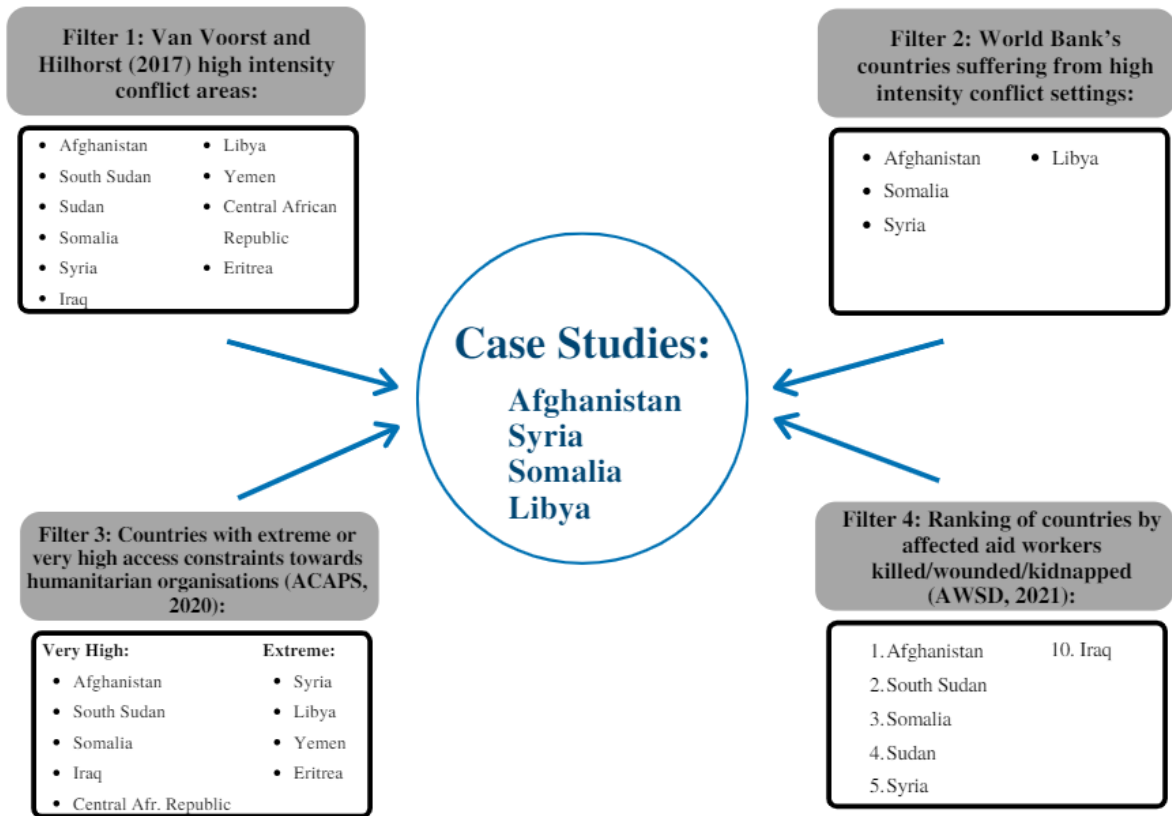
Figure 9: Case Study selection parameters

4.2 Case Study – Syria

4.2.1 The Conflict in Syria

The Syrian Arab Republic is a country situated in the Middle East (Figure 10). Syria has a population of 20,384,316 (CIA, 2021a). Bashar al-Assad has been the president of Syria since 2000, the country is thus a presidential republic but with a highly authoritarian regime (Meininghaus, 2016).

Figure 10: Map showing Syria (in red) (adapted from Google Maps (2021a)

As previously explained, according to Van Voorst & Hilhorst (2017), a high-intensity conflict area complies with a set of characteristics, and so does Syria. Syria has been recognised as one of the most complex crises worldwide for years (UN OCHA, 2020a). The conflict was triggered in March 2011 when protests against the Assad regime broke out and spread across the country, leading to the surfacing of various political and armed opponents (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). This has resulted in the fragmentation of the country, now ruled by numerous parties notably the government, Syrian rebel groups, the Islamic State, Kurdish forces and Hezbollah (Svoboda, Barbelet, & Mosel, 2018). In addition, many international actors have intervened: Iran and Russia supporting Assad, the United States (US) with other partners combating the spread of the Islamic State, as well as several nations backing up Syrian rebels (Svoboda, Barbelet, & Mosel, 2018).

Since the civil war erupted in 2011, the country has seen its economy plummet and its infrastructures have been highly damaged, reducing government services and causing devastating effects for civilian society (UN OCHA, 2020a). The economic deficit and the shortage in services, paired with extreme levels of violence have highly increased the vulnerability of the populations, with an estimate of 11 million people in need of assistance (UN OCHA, 2020b). This has resulted in an even further increase in violence with nearly six million deaths and increasing population movements (SOHR, 2020; UN OCHA, 2020a) – view Figure 11.
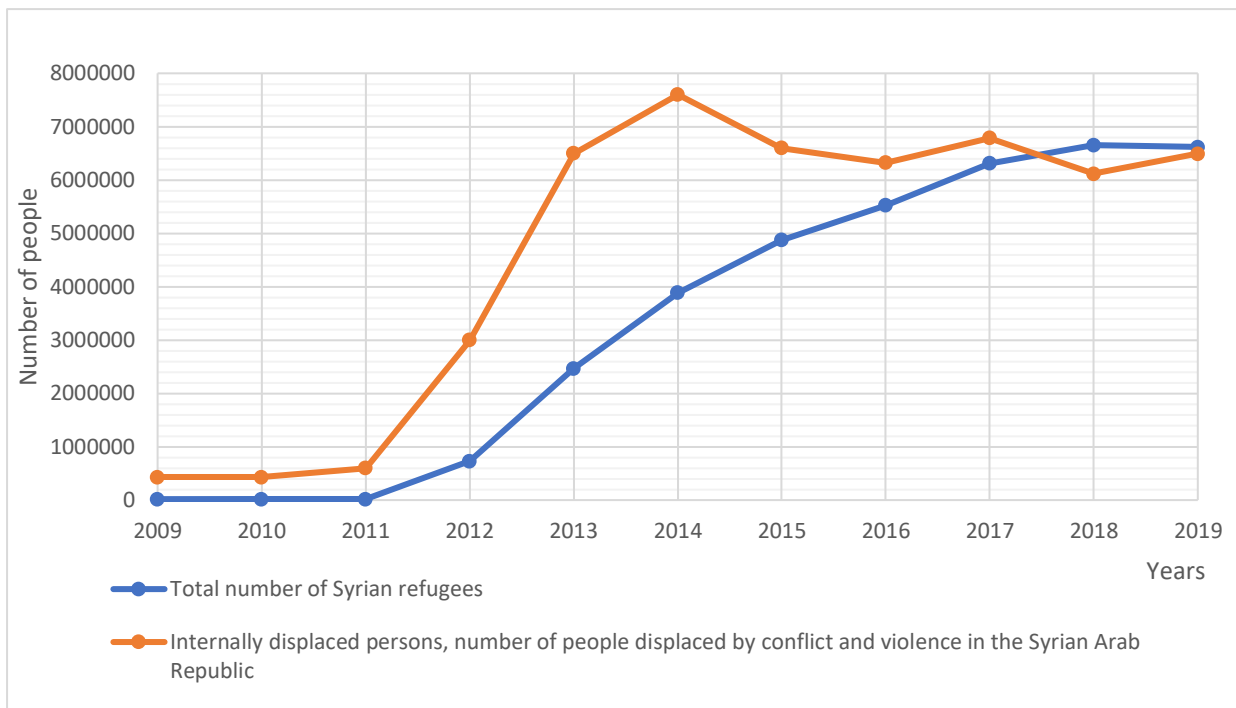
Figure 11: Total number of Syrian refugees and internally displaced people in Syria due to conflict and violence between 2009 and 2019 (The World Bank, 2020a; The World Bank, 2020b).

4.2.2   Access Constraints in Syria

The humanitarian response to the Syrian conflict started with a few actors in 2011 and grew into a large-scale humanitarian intervention with a peak of 54 international humanitarian organisations and 175 Syrian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in 2014 (Stoddard, et al., 2017). Because of the high restrictions by the Syrian government, until the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2139 in 2014, international humanitarian organisations operated illegally through cross-border operations with the help of Syrian NGOs (UN Security Council, 2014). Bypassing the law and working in secrecy led to difficulties in communication and coordination efforts especially of INGOs (Stoddard, et al., 2017).

Humanitarian access is also constrained by other armed forces mentioned before, as well as by continuing conflicts and violence across the country (NRC & HI, 2016). The violations of humanitarian law by the conflict parties and access constraints led to the creation of operational hubs by INGOs in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq (NRC & HI, 2016). Consequently, making negotiations for principled humanitarian assistance very challenging (Bernard & Policinski, 2019, p. 878). Even after ten years of conflict, humanitarian access restrictions remain, leading to substantial response gaps that need to be addressed through constant negotiations with the different parties (UN OCHA, 2020c).

4.2.3 Remote Management and Risk Transfers

Because of the extreme access restrictions, but also out of security concerns for international staff, the approach to humanitarian aid by INGOs in Syria heavily relies on remote management practices (Howe & Stites, 2019). Although often being tied to the localisation agenda, the remote management approach of INGOs in Syria began in mid-2013, before the Grand Bargain (Howe & Stites, 2019). Nonetheless, the effects of remote management remain the same, frequently putting local actors at risks causing an "unethical risk transfer to local NGOs" (Egeland, Harmer, & Stoddard, 2011, p. 25). Also, INGOs in Syria are accused of neglecting the risk for local NGOs by not providing them with sufficient security training leaving them ill-equipped for the response to the high-intensity conflict (Elkahlout & Elgibali, 2020).

Another problem with remote management practices is that they are often not planned in advance and with no real guidelines when, how and for how long remote management should be used (Stoddard, Harmer, & Renouf, 2010). With the crisis in Syria lasting almost a decade now, organisations are still heavily relying on remote management practices (Duclos et al., 2019). Such practices undertaken by several humanitarian organisations created complications in the monitoring of principled assistance and in safety provision (NRC & HI, 2016). Rendering it very difficult to determine whether humanitarian responses in Syria fully adhere to the humanitarian principles.

4.2.4 Perception and Adherence to the Humanitarian Principles in Practice

The four core humanitarian principles are used by almost all organisations as a compass to guide humanitarian aid around the world, especially in conflict settings (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). The principles are linked in complex manners and are all meant to be followed simultaneously without distinction or priority. Nevertheless, these principles are sometimes idealised as absolutes causing a lack of understanding of the compromises and dilemmas that they involve (Haver, 2016). This could be one of the reasons why organisations so blindly and ferociously claim to unceasingly adhere to the humanitarian principles.

"The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence underpin all areas of the response, across all geographical locations throughout the humanitarian programme cycle" (UN OCHA, 2020, p. 79).

However, recurring debates exist around whether these same organisations and others, continuously adhere to the principles without exceptions. As it will be further presented later on, in reality, there are many difficulties that exist during conflict that require compromises and extensive negotiations (Haver, 2016). This is especially the case in Syria, which is considered globally by many humanitarian entities, including OCHA (2020c) itself, as one of the most difficult areas for humanitarian response.

The adherence to the humanitarian principles during conflict situations also comprises the various local actors involved. Subsequently, it is expected that local entities follow the same four core humanitarian principles as INGOs. Such view has been heavily reinforced through the localisation agenda, placing local actors as well as local capacity at the heart of humanitarianism. Nonetheless, many question the capacity of Syrian NGOs to adhere to and apply the humanitarian principles (Schenkenberg, 2016). However, Syrian organisations have played a vital role in the provision of humanitarian aid around the country (Svoboda, Barbelet, & Mosel, 2018) and it has been shown that they have rapidly acquired the knowledge and skills necessary for principled humanitarianism (NRC & HI, 2016). Additionally, when stating the lack of capacity of certain organisations for principled humanitarianism, some factors fail to be revealed. Firstly, even international organisations intervening in Syria, which supposedly have the necessary capacity, sometimes fail to adhere to the humanitarian principles (The Syria Campaign, 2016). Furthermore, in Syria different types of organisations exist ranging from faith-based charities to diaspora organisations and locally-based INGOs (Svoboda, Barbelet,

& Mosel, 2018). Their capacity to implement the humanitarian principles depends on their specific technical, contextual and political characteristics, showing that the lack of local capacity is a statement that cannot be generalised (NRC & HI, 2016). The question prevails whether or not it can be demanded from local actors in armed-conflict situations to adhere to the four core humanitarian principles when international actors themselves do not.

4.2.5 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." (UN OCHA, 2012).*

As defined by Van Voorst & Hilhorst (2017), situations of armed conflict are often characterised by large scale violence with little effective control from the government, lack of infrastructure and logistics as well as difficult access.

In the case of Syria, the government still upholds major influence on the humanitarian practices in the country, especially since 2015 due to its increase in military capacity (Haid, 2019). The Syrian government not only holds military control but also access, policy and implementation control over humanitarian interventions around the country. For example, humanitarian organisations need to request permission from the state and follow their demands to conduct any type of field assessment, constraining their ability to properly undertake such task and affecting results (Haid, 2019). Therefore, the government ultimately interferes with humanitarian assistance by refusing support to large portions of the population in opposition-held areas so vulnerable communities find themselves without the aid they need (Meininghaus & Kühn, 2018). Thus, upholding one humanitarian principle can entail concession on another, showing the importance of negotiations (Haver, 2016).

Moreover, some humanitarian organisations working in Syria are hesitant to speak up against brutalities by the Syrian government, fearing that their hardly negotiated access could be lost (Hayes, 2016, p. 31). The reluctance of humanitarian organisations to openly confront the Syrian government contradicts the humanitarian principle of humanity.

4.2.6 Neutrality

> *"Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature"* (UN OCHA, 2012).

The humanitarian principle of neutrality has been the most contested one throughout the years due to the unrealistic expectations of completely adhering to the principle with no exception (Schweizer, 2004).

Firstly, differing views on the morality of the principle of neutrality work against humanitarian organisations (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). International organisations, such as ICRC, remain neutral by engaging with all sides of the Syrian conflict (Bernard & Policinski, 2019). However, as previously mentioned, as some actors consider neutrality to be unachievable, it has caused unwillingness to cooperate with such INGOs (Schweizer, 2004). In such cases, a dilemma arises between cooperating solely with the actors that are willing to do so, following the principle of humanity, or not engage at all, adhering to the principle of neutrality but dismissing humanity. In these circumstances, a critical decision has to be made. Many organisations working in Syria choose to engage with the side that is willing to do so (Bernard & Policinski, 2019). At the same time, organisations hope that the other side will come around and give them permission to operate in their territory, reaching all vulnerable people in the conflict (Bernard & Policinski, 2019).

Secondly, in Syria, it is said that the principle of neutrality is impossible to achieve due to the complexity and nature of the conflict (NRC & HI, 2016). From a localisation perspective, it is believed that local actors inevitably have or are perceived as having partnerships, ties and links with domestic entities and sometimes are affiliated with certain ideas, political groups or communities (Schenkenberg, 2016). Such ties can have an effect on the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. For example, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society (SARC) has been heavily criticised for its failure to adhere to the principles of neutrality and impartiality (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015). The affiliation with religious or political groups can also result in some groups being denied services due to a specific characteristic instead of taking into consideration the severity of their needs. It could be for this reason that it has been noted that non-Syrian organisations might be more recurrent at adhering to the principle of neutrality (NRC & HI, 2016).

Finally, since the turn of the 21ˢᵗ century, the humanitarian system is evolving to adapt to the constantly changing environment it finds itself in. Currently, humanitarian aid often not solely focuses on responding to the effects of crisis but also on understanding and addressing their root causes. To adapt to such shift, humanitarian responses also encompass some elements of long-term development action and sustainability, bridging the humanitarian-development nexus (IASC, 2016). In armed conflict, such as in Syria, this transformation can be conflicting with the humanitarian principles, especially of neutrality and independence. The Syria Trust is a good example of a humanitarian agency focusing both on humanitarian interventions and development actions (Bosman, 2012).

4.2.7   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 distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions."* (UN OCHA, 2012).

In conflict areas, principled humanitarian aid can face difficulties to provide humanitarian action on the basis of needs alone, discriminating or not prioritising the most vulnerable. International humanitarian aid is often guided by a different set of criteria like the possibility of generating media attention (NRC & HI, 2016).

As seen in section 4.2.3, due to the extreme access constraints in Syria, humanitarian aid is only delivered to areas where access has been successfully negotiated, leaving large parts of north-western and north-eastern Syria without any humanitarian assistance (ACAPS, 2020, p. 7). The restricted access of humanitarian organisations in Syria shows that it is virtually impossible to deliver humanitarian aid solely on need. Consequently, the humanitarian aid delivery in Syria cannot be seen as impartial since it is not prioritising the most urgent cases of distress. Because of airborne attacks often targeted towards hospitals and the rejection of humanitarian aid, the most vulnerable in Syria live in areas that are not controlled by the Syrian government (The Syria Campaign, 2016). Nonetheless, humanitarian aid especially from the UN is targeted towards government controlled areas which opposes the principle of impartiality (ibid.).

Furthermore, as local organisations in Syria find themselves at the heart of the conflict, they are also affected by it (Elkahlout & Elgibali, 2020). Thus, their actions and judgments might be guided by the violence they have suffered. In addition, local staff also face social pressure which can lead them to favour a community more than others. Therefore, some Syrian local actors are intentionally or unintentionally carrying humanitarian actions not based on prioritisation of needs alone.

Another critique connected to impartiality is that donors like the UN provided large amounts of funding to the SARC without having systematic information on what the money was spent on (The Syria Campaign, 2016; NRC & HI, 2016). The close ties of the SARC to the Syrian government, previously mentioned in the neutrality section, question if humanitarian aid is delivered impartially in the areas controlled by the government (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015).

4.2.8 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" (UN OCHA, 2012).

According to Meininghaus (2016, p. 1558), in conflict areas, challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles related to independence are inevitable since humanitarian organisations are either willingly or unwillingly influencing the governance system. Being involved in hiring local staff, working closely with local organisations, negotiating access and delivering humanitarian aid can be seen as depending on the political environment humanitarian organisations operate in.

In addition, some Syrian organisations do have political ties and affiliations that cause their humanitarian interventions to lack neutrality, impartiality or independence (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015). For example, the Syria Trust was created to join together a number of key Syrian humanitarian organisations, all founded by Asma al-Assad (the president's wife) which creates some type of political relation affecting the principledness of these organisations (Bosman, 2012). Nonetheless, there are other Syrian entities that make a conscious effort in distancing themselves from any groups or actions that could affect their adherence to the

humanitarian principles (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015). However, it is important to point out that Syria's complex environment makes it almost impossible to achieve this.

Furthermore, in practice in Syria, independence is impossible as humanitarian organisations are highly donor-dependent (NRC & HI, 2016). The lack of autonomy is highlighted by strong accountability requirements and the higher degree of vigilance and involvement from donors (Howe, 2016). This causes organisations to focus on reporting and achieving goals rather than on the needs themselves (NRC & HI, 2016). A particular characteristic of Syria's funding is the participation of a large number of non-western donors from neighbouring countries. As Howe (2016) clarifies, a number of UN agencies expressed concerns regarding those donors' activities and adherence to the humanitarian principles, such as funds used and requirements as well as their independence from their country's political and religious groups. Additionally, in Syria, humanitarian independence is highly affected by the extreme focus on counter-terrorism measures, restricting the flexibility of humanitarian actions in the country (NRC & HI, 2016). Counter-terrorism actions create barriers in partnerships and access to vulnerable areas controlled by terrorist groups (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). Thus, restricting the autonomy and reach of INGOs around Syria.

4.3 Case Study – Afghanistan

4.3.1 The Conflict in Afghanistan

Afghanistan also complies with Van Voorst & Hilhorst's (2017) characteristics for a high-intensity conflict area. It has for years been recognised as one of the most complex crises in the world, alongside Syria, as Afghanistan suffers from an enduring chronic humanitarian

Figure 12: Map showing Afghanistan (in red) (adapted from Google Maps (2021b))

emergency situation (Stoddard et al., 2020). The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a country situated in Central Asia (Figure 12) which had 37 million inhabitants in 2021 comprised of different ethnicities (CIA, 2021b). Since the beginning of the conflict 40 years ago, the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban took over the country and started their totalitarian regime, originating violence as well as various political and armed struggles. In 2001, the Taliban were driven out of power when the US invaded a significant portion of the territory (Bacon & Byman, 2021). However, the Taliban persist and the US invasion marked the beginning of the international conflict known as the War in Afghanistan (Narang & Stanton, 2017).

This ongoing war has had devastating consequences on the country's economy, infrastructure and access to basic services, further increasing the need for humanitarian aid (UN OCHA, 2020d). The violence and severity of the conflict combined with the consequences of parallel hazards, such as Covid-19, put an estimated 18.4 million people in need of assistance in 2021 – almost doubling 2020 figures (UN OCHA, 2020e). Additionally, the conflict has caused over 100 000 deaths from 2009 to 2019 and triggered high levels of population movement (Figure

13). In 2019, the number of internally displaced people and the number of refugees each nearly reached three million, totalling six million people – see Figure 13 (The World Bank, 2021). Even though humanitarian needs are on the rise, the harsh and complex conditions, as well as the high levels of insecurity for aid workers, have caused a significant decline in humanitarian presence in Afghanistan over the past twenty years (Stoddard et al., 2020; AWSD, 2021).
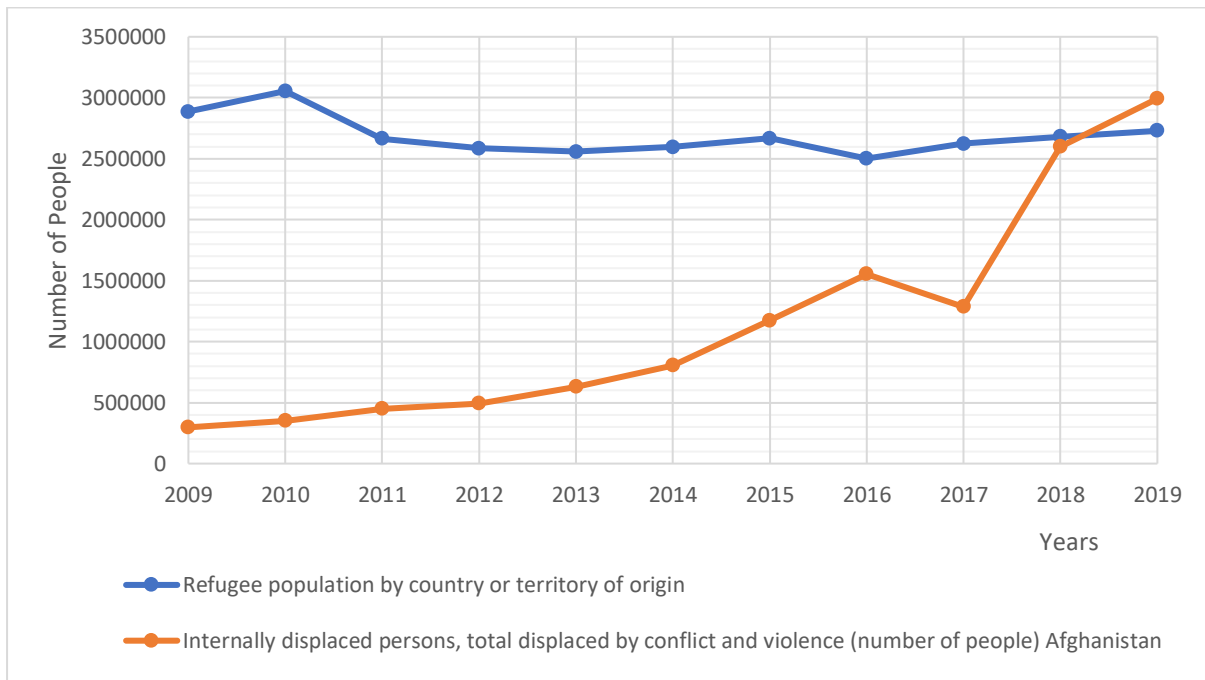
Figure 13: Total number of Afghan refugees and internally displaced people in Afghanistan due to conflict and violence between 2009 and 2019

4.3.2   *Access Constraints in Afghanistan*

According to ACAPS (2020), Afghanistan is classified as a country with very high access constraints. These constraints are related to administrative restrictions from the government, like the issuance of visas for international staff, but also terrorist groups are restraining the operational space of humanitarian actors (Stoddard et al., 2020). Humanitarian organisations have problems negotiating access in areas where the Taliban hold territory, as organisations are requested to pay taxes to them to work in Taliban territories (UN OCHA, 2020e). One challenge resulting from this taxation is the extreme secrecy humanitarian organisations in Afghanistan operate in, to not be associated with financing terrorists. The secrecy created a lack of communication between the NGOs present, but also with the local population which was not involved in needs assessments (Stoddard et al., 2020). Nonetheless, after consultations between the humanitarian actors, progress has been made on the taxation issue (ibid.)

Although access is restricted, the UN creates the appearance of being physically present by hiring local partners and extending their branding (Stoddard et al., 2020). On the other hand, the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) is present in almost every province seemingly with no limitations in access (Stoddard & Jiliani, 2016). Nonetheless, the capacity of the ARCS to provide humanitarian aid is limited since they rely solely on resources from the RCRC Movement (ibid.) Consequently, the ability of the ARCS to remain impartial is better granted in this case.

Insecurity for humanitarian workers presents a major barrier to access in Afghanistan as it is the country where humanitarian workers are the most affected by killings, injuries and kidnappings since 1997 (AWSD, 2021). The increased insecurity for humanitarian aid workers since 2010, caused by the terrorist groups, has led to a significant reduction of project activities by INGOs (Stoddard & Jiliani, 2016). From 2010 until 2015 over 100 aid workers per year were directly affected by attacks (Figure 14).
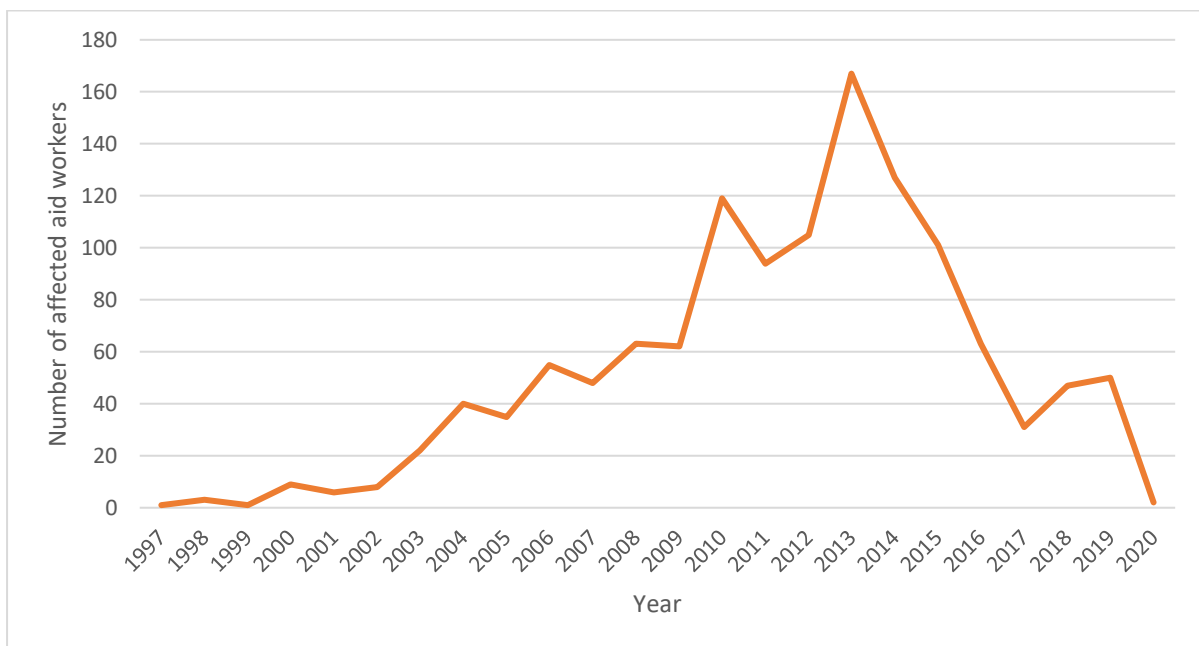
Figure 14: Number of affected aid workers by killings, injuries and kidnappings in Afghanistan (adapted from AWSD (2021))

4.3.3   Remote Management and Risk Transfers

As mentioned in the last section, the majority of NGOs operating in Afghanistan keep an extremely low profile and adapted localisation approaches as well as remote management practices for international actors (Stoddard et al., 2020). The remote management of programme activities led to challenges in the ability to monitor the effectiveness of

humanitarian aid (Featherstone, 2012). These challenges and the longevity of the Afghan conflict contributed to donor fatigue, causing a decrease in humanitarian funding and consequently a reduction of humanitarian organisations' presence (Jackson & Zyck, 2017). Subsequently, initiating a sense of insecurity and vulnerability for local NGOs in Afghanistan (Stoddard et al., 2020).

4.3.4 *Perception and Adherence to the Humanitarian Principles in Practice*

In Afghanistan, the humanitarian principles are seen as a humanitarian tool rather than a goal to strive for (Featherstone, 2012). Organisations recognise and use the humanitarian principles to negotiate and surpass access constraints and gain acceptance around the country to provide assistance to those in need (ibid.). The lack of access by humanitarian organisations in Afghanistan, as previously mentioned, represents a failure in the understanding and use of the humanitarian principles.

In Afghanistan, the complexity of the situation often causes the necessity to partner with armed forces for protection (Williamson, 2011). This leaves local organisations in a secondary role and often perceived as "contractors" (CoAR, 2019). Nonetheless, the long-term characteristics of the conflict paired with the increasing importance of local partners has resulted in the appearance of large NGOs in the country. The size and central presence of these NGOs led to their grouping through the creation of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) (ACBAR, 2015). ACBAR benefits from strong competencies and capacity for staff deployments and principled assistance (CoAR, 2019).

Finally, in Afghanistan international organisations with high capacity to adhere to the humanitarian principles also fail to do so, which will be further developed in the next section. Moreover, the type of organisations providing assistance in Afghanistan are also very varied (UN OCHA, 2021b). Thus, the lack of local capacity cannot be generalised either in this situation. Additionally, in Afghanistan, there is a blurred distinction between the actions of principled humanitarian organisations and those of other stakeholders, such as military actors and private entities (Featherstone, 2012). The overlap of assistance has caused misunderstandings and misperceptions amongst the local population on the goals and principles of humanitarian organisations, leading to their mistrust. However, over the last years, there has been a rapid rise in promoting the awareness and understanding of the humanitarian principles to reduce the population's mistrust (ACBAR, 2015; O'Rourke, 2016).

4.3.5 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."* (UN OCHA, 2012).

In Afghanistan, both the government and the Taliban hold vast amounts of power over the humanitarian provision around the country (UN OCHA, 2020e). The accompanying access restrictions lead to an incapability to deliver basic needs to vulnerable communities (Stoddard et al., 2020). Consequently, humanitarian organisations cannot fully adhere to the principle of humanity because they are unable to alleviate human suffering in places they do not have access. Interestingly, humanitarian organisations are targeted by terrorists because they are seen as a support structure of the Afghan government (Narang & Stanton, 2017). As a result, attacks on aid workers have the goal to force out aid organisations to diminish government support (Narang & Stanton, 2017).

Nonetheless, the airstrike by the US military on a hospital in Kunduz in 2015, killing 14 staff members of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), also shows that humanitarian organisations face the risk of being attacked by other parties of the conflict, not just the Taliban (MSF, 2015).

4.3.6 Neutrality

> *"Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature"* (UN OCHA, 2012).

The neutrality principle is said to be impossible to adhere to in conflict situations as complex as Afghanistan (Terry, 2011). Indeed, most entities have simply rejected the neutrality of humanitarian assistance (ibid.). Some actors even consider neutrality to be unachievable, which has many times caused unwillingness to cooperate or get involved with INGOs during conflict situations (ibid.). In Afghanistan, the Taliban's power has grown to the point that it oversees and controls any social good or service provided to the population by the government or aid organisations (Jackson, 2018). The Afghan government and the Taliban, govern simultaneously (Cordesman, 2018). Thus, humanitarian organisations have to navigate Afghanistan's complex environment by working with both parties in parallel.

4.3.7 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 distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions."* (UN OCHA, 2012).

Humanitarian aid in Afghanistan cannot be seen as impartial. The safety concerns of humanitarian organisations led to the delivery of aid only in areas where humanitarian organisations feel safe to operate, mainly the northern areas (Stoddard et al., 2020; Stoddard & Jiliani, 2016). Moreover, for the continuation of project activities humanitarian aid is highly localised, but also reduced in personnel placed in safer locations (Stoddard & Jiliani, 2016). Therefore, aid delivery in Afghanistan is not based on the greatest need but highly depends on the safety of staff. However, humanitarian organisations are accused of having less appetite for risk-taking and that security concerns are just used as an excuse (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2020).

Another challenge regarding impartiality is the instrumentalisation of aid. Humanitarian aid was used as a political and military tool to fight against insurgents (Williamson, 2011). In this context humanitarian aid cannot be seen as impartial, creating mistrust towards humanitarian organisations.

Being impartial or being perceived as impartial also depends on what type of aid is delivered. Examples of Afghanistan show that medical assistance is perceived as more impartial than the delivery of non-food items (Haver & Carter, 2016). Thus, humanitarian organisations focusing on medical assistance have better access and are less likely to be attacked (ibid.). Controversially, humanitarian aid delivering non-food items or other interventions are sometimes used for entities' own benefits and not solely for the population in need. For example, Taliban leaders started requesting humanitarian assistance and development projects solely for areas under their control (Slim & Bradley, 2013).

4.3.8 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"* (UN OCHA, 2012).

In conflict settings, challenges adhering to the humanitarian principles related to the principle of independence are always present (Meininghaus, 2016). In Afghanistan, entities such as the US have influenced the political landscape and the conflict itself (Donini & Maxwell, 2013). This is because the US and allies integrated humanitarian operations within their "War on terror", combining aid and military-political strategy (Cohen, 2002). Indeed, blurring the line between political, military action and humanitarian assistance causes complications in the safeguard of organisation's independence (Featherstone, 2012).

In addition, some organisations' partnerships cause their humanitarian interventions to lack neutrality, impartiality or independence (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015). For example, in Afghanistan, humanitarian organisations have to comply with the restriction and taxation demands set both by the government and the Taliban, limiting their independence and access (Stoddard et al., 2020).

Furthermore, due to the donor-dependency of humanitarian organisations, independence is said to be unachievable (NRC & HI, 2016). In Afghanistan, donors demand high levels of visibility and accountability to promote organisations' progress. Such actions can undermine organisations' independence and neutrality as well as their staff safety (Featherstone, 2012).

Additionally, organisations in Afghanistan have also shown concerns when following counter-terrorism measures due to the difficulty of controlling and denying the provision of humanitarian assistance specifically to the Taliban members alone (Featherstone, 2012). Thus, restricting the autonomy and reach of INGO's humanitarian interventions around Afghanistan.

Chapter 5: Interview Results

Chapter 5 presents the interview results. This section follows a similar conceptual structure as previous chapters, starting with access and understanding, perception and adherence to the humanitarian principles and continues with the four humanitarian principles. The interviewees were separated into academic key informants and humanitarian aid workers at a local and international level. If an interviewee stated that they wanted to remain anonymous they are mentioned as "interviewee". If several interviewees make a similar point, they are stated as "interviewees" even if they agreed to be cited by name. Citations and quotes are only referenced by name if the interviewee gave their specific approval.

The transcribed interviews were first coded through the use of six nodes in accordance with the structure of the literature review and the case studies: humanitarian aid, localisation, access, perception, adherence to the principles and humanitarian principles. Each main node was then divided into sub-nodes in a second coding cycle (Table 1). Subsequently, after the coding process and analysis, key observations and linkages were identified to provide a foundation for the discussion of the results (Saldaña, 2009).

Table 1: Coding nodes and sub-nodes of the NVivo transcription

Node	Sub-nodes
Humanitarian aid	Development vs. Humanitarian aid
	Assistance to population in need
	Principled
	Funding/donors
	Last resort/support government
Localisation	National staff
	Local context and ownership
	Westernisation
	Organisation's response
Access	Remote management
	Risk transfer
	Negotiations
Perception	Change in perception
	No change in perception
	Responsibility
Adherence to the principles	International actors
	Local actors
	Increase in safety
Humanitarian principles	Humanity
	Neutrality
	Impartiality
	Independence
	Conflict within principles

5.1 Access

5.1.1 Negotiating Access

Interviewees said that in high-intensity conflicts, humanitarian organisations have to negotiate access with both government and rebel non-state armed groups. The interviewees clearly distinguished between local and international actors. Several interviewees mentioned that international actors have higher access restrictions and suffer from more insecurity in conflict environments. An interviewee stated that access for internationals is sometimes not granted because they are seen as too conspicuous and are considered as political and consequently, not impartial and neutral. Another interviewee shared an example of Syria where visas for international actors were not granted because they were seen as supporters of the rebels.

Additionally, interviewees pointed out that local actors are better positioned to negotiate access and deliver services as well as being part of the community, speak the local language and know what kind of aid the local population requires. It was also mentioned that local actors are safer since they have greater trust and acceptance within the local community.

5.1.2 Remote Management

The results showed differing opinions on remote management as a solution in conflict environments. The majority of the interviewees agreed that during high-intensity conflict or when INGOs have lost access, remote management is a necessary solution, preferable to not providing any support.

Kimberly Howe (Director at the Feinstein Research Programme on Conflict and Governance) mentioned that internationals do not spend much deliberation on what remote management actually entails and that activities are often not adapted to remote management. Several interviewees saw remote management as a chance to give more power and ownership to local actors. Thomas Garofalo (Country Director for the International Rescue Committee in Libya) revealed that Libya's conflict led to national staff taking over more activities and responsibility to encourage localisation. Furthermore, Roger Hearn (Deputy General Secretary at Save the Children Denmark) mentioned that during high-intensity conflict and restricted access for INGOs, innovative partnerships were established in the early stages of the Syrian war.

"Remoteness can be really debilitating and difficult, but it can also encourage it sometimes unwittingly, this drive for localisation, which is a net positive" (Thomas Garofalo).

Nonetheless, several interviewees also talked about the difficulty of both monitoring activities when doing remote management and knowing the situation on the ground when you do not have staff there. Kimberly Howe was more in favour of supporting local actors to do the response rather than INGOs doing remote control completely directing programme activities remotely.

5.1.3 Risk Transfers

The general attitude of interviewees towards risk transfers for dangerous assignments from international to local organisations was that they were ethically inappropriate. Abby Stoddard (Partner at Humanitarian Outcomes) elaborated that local partner organisations are often thrown into a situation without the training, equipment and funds to provide the necessary security. Kimberly Howe stated that if INGOs are not going there themselves, the risk should not be shifted towards local actors because then it means that "their lives are worth less than your own".

Michael Mosselmans (Head of the Humanitarian Division at Christian Aid) indicated that in some contexts it is the local actor's choice to place themselves at the heart of the conflict to help those in most need, but international organisations prevent them from going because of security concerns. "It's immoral, it's unethical to send someone else somewhere where you didn't go yourself". He concluded by stating that an organisation's ambition is to share the risk, for example, by investing in the security of local partners so that INGOs feel safer when sending local staff to conflict areas. Contrary, another interviewee stated that "we're not sharing the risk, we're transferring it, let's be intellectually honest with ourselves". Mohammed Mahrousa (Head of Programmes at Bahar NGO) also stated that blame is often transferred alongside risk transfers if something goes wrong: "it's not the INGO, it's the local NGO who messed up".

On the other hand, Mohammed Mahrousa specified that in contexts like Syria there is a natural need to have local actors implementing programme activities as "joint consent provides an ethical cover for risk transfers". Mohammed Mahrousa also argued that local actors are more resilient and therefore accept taking more risks than international actors. On a similar note,

Hugo Slim (Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict at the Blavatnik School of Government) commented that internationals use the risk transfer argument as an alibi to hold power and infantilise local actors by implying an incapacity of consent and moral choice. He added that local actors are adults that can take moral responsibility during a crisis and are often the most vocal, capable and willing to take risks. Roger Hearn saw the perception of a growing risk for humanitarian staff as overblown and that increased attacks on humanitarian aid workers come from increasing numbers of actors in the field, leading to a rise in the likelihood to get in harm's way.

Other interviewees highlighted that INGOs transfer risks to local actors because they are less targeted by terrorist groups and safer since some pertain to the community they operate in. Jean-Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission for UNHCR in Libya) mentioned that international staff in Libya have to travel with armoured vehicles and UN armed protection, while local staff are able to "blend in" and access areas with standard vehicles where UN international staff may not have access. Mohammed Mahrousa added that local actors are better positioned to negotiate with local armed parties as armed groups tend to make higher demands to INGOs, changing the terms of the negotiations.

Lastly, several interviewees stated that INGOs should invest more in their local partner's security risk management. Abby Stoddard added that if international organisations are partnering with locals in high-risk settings, they need to "take them under their security risk umbrella, treating the risk and ensuring security risk mitigation to the same extent as they would for their own staff". Gloria Soma (Executive Director at Titi Foundation) mentioned that donors are not funding national partners' security costs and that local NGOs are often used as mediums for implementing programme activities. She added that there was no equal partnership but just business between donors and local organisations.

5.2 Perception and Adherence to the Humanitarian Principles in Practice

5.2.1 Ambiguity and Westernisation of Humanitarianism and its Concepts

Hugo Slim highlighted the patronising nature and colonial roots of localisation, originating from the British Empire to hand power to native populations. He continued that the entire discussion around localisation comes from a standpoint that considers aid as naturally international, while his "default morality would be that aid is naturally local". Another interviewee stated that the drive for localisation and local empowerment comes from internationals lack of access.

When it comes to the power structure of humanitarian aid, several interviewees stated that local NGOs are dependent on the international community for funding and partnerships. Several interviewees also explained that INGOs use local actors as subcontractors to implement their programme activities. Gloria Soma indicated that accessing funding is a challenge for local actors. Mohammed Mahrousa also mentioned that donors usually come from the West and have strong regulations on accessing funding. For the case of Syria, he revealed that "to receive funding from ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) you need to have an operational headquarter in Europe for at least 3 years". Roger Hearn explained that before the conflict started in Syria 10 years ago, part of the local population did not know what international humanitarian aid was.

5.2.2 Changes in Perception

Most of the interviewees stated that the perception of humanitarian aid highly depends on the context, varying over time, geography and from one organisation to another. Hugo Slim indicated that humanitarian organisations are still respected in terms of their values associated with peace, aid and anti-poverty, but that resentment exists if organisations work on more liberal values, like gay rights or gender. A couple of interviews mentioned that the perception of humanitarian organisations by the local population also depends on whether there has been a scandal in that area, like the Oxfam scandal in Haiti, mentioned by various interviewees.

Several interviewees stated that until the 1990s, humanitarian organisations were respected and seen as saving the world. Fiona Terry mentioned that humanitarian organisations operated mostly on the outskirts of conflicts and "to go into the heart of a conflict you had to defy state sovereignty". She continued that by the end of the 1990s humanitarian aid became much more

internationalised and professionalised, following operational approaches from agencies like MSF and the ICRC. Fiona Terry also stated that professionalisation did little to solve the unintended negative consequences and that "humanitarian aid has become an industry running on its own motor, losing sight of what it actually started to do".

Jean-Paul Cavalieri explained that in an increasingly multipolar world with a diversification of threats – including terrorism – the perception towards the humanitarian system has changed; with a growing level of suspicion towards humanitarian organisations and workers gradually becoming targets. He also brought up the confusion between the UN, US and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) in countries that have been long isolated, like Libya, and the risk such confusion may entail for UN workers.

When it comes to more recent changes in perception, Michael Mosselmans mentioned a decrease in trust and public confidence in aid stemming from mistakes that humanitarian organisations have made and the upsurge of right-wing media. Thomas Garofalo pointed out that social media has an effect on how humanitarian organisations are perceived and that misinformation harming the reputation of an agency can easily spread throughout these channels. Gloria Soma instead, saw a positive change in humanitarian aid with dynamics creating a drive for localisation, relating to a change in INGOs mentality.

5.2.3   Adherence to the Humanitarian Principles

The results from the interviews showed differing views on the adherence to the humanitarian principles in a conflict environment. Academic key informants and high-level humanitarian workers were very critical about the ability to adhere to the humanitarian principles. These interviewees mentioned that it is necessary to have some room for interpretation when following the principles, especially as concessions might be necessary between them. Fiona Terry stated that the humanitarian principles serve an aspirational purpose, giving guidance and bringing an ethical dimension. Taking them literally, on the other hand, she considered as very difficult. Kimberly Howe pointed out the idealisation of these principles and that they do not make "any sense for anybody who has worked in a conflict area". Roger Hearn added that there are a lot of myths around the principles and around the true capability of organisations' adherence to them.

Most of the humanitarian aid workers at a country level, international and local, were less sceptical towards the ability to adhere to the humanitarian principles in a conflict environment. These interviewees saw the humanitarian principles as the bedrock of their work and their cruciality for the existence of humanitarianism. An interviewee stated that the principles are generally known and accepted and that humanitarian organisations do not exaggerate their adherence to the principles as otherwise they would not be granted access. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of defining red lines, a bottom line of acceptable compromise to the principles crucial to define the scope of one's engagement. Mohammed Mahrousa added that in protracting conflict "the local actors, even the bad ones, develop skills and understand the red lines and the buffers".

5.2.4 *Comparing Local and International Actors*

The majority of the interviewees stated that international and local actors face just as many issues when adhering to the humanitarian principles. Michael Mosselmans added that it feels racist and colonial to assume that international actors are more principled. Another interviewee pointed out that everybody can adhere to the humanitarian principles if they put themselves into the position of a humanitarian actor. Roger Hearn added that it is not rocket science to grasp the fundamental principles.

Mohammed Mahrousa indicated that local actors are more able to adhere to the humanitarian principles in complex zones since they have better access, more trust and are capable of being more context relevant and sensitive. Other interviewees mentioned that in ethnic conflicts it is more complicated for local actors to adhere to the principles if they are part of one of the ethnic groups combating each other. Several interviewees brought up the close connection of local NGOs with the national government as a challenge for local actors to adhere to the humanitarian principles due to the pressures they may encounter. Fiona Terry mentioned that because local NGOs are subject to such pressure does not mean they cannot resist it.

Kimberly Howe mentioned that the international attitude is that local actors are less able to follow the humanitarian principles. Michael Mosselmans explained that international actors use this argument to control the resources of the humanitarian sector. He also described that international actors can be seen as an extension branch of the donor government and are therefore not capable to adhere to the independence principle. Michael Mosselmans also highlighted that in some contexts it is challenging for international actors to follow the impartiality principle since they are unable to reach the people in need because of security and

access reasons. Another interviewee described that outsiders bring a value, which should not be confused with being Western, meaning that outsiders are more able to be neutral and impartial and negotiate with both conflict parties. Nonetheless, Hugo Slim mentioned that as warring parties usually dictate which areas international actors can operate in, an outsider might not always benefit from this given value.

A few interviewees opened a discussion about the future reduction on the distinction between local and international actors. They also highlighted that a lot of local actors that started working for local NGOs were later recruited to work for an INGO.

"The differentiation of principledness between the local staff and the international actors is less than what people pretend it is" (Michael Mosselmans).

5.3 Humanity

5.3.1 Responsibility

The majority of interviewees agreed on defining humanitarian aid as the provision of necessary assistance to populations in need, specifically focused on alleviating suffering and saving lives. Several interviewees highlighted that humanitarian aid should be seen as the last resort, only needed when the system itself does not have the capacity to endure the burden caused by a shock and when people's lives and wellbeing are at stake. Consequently, interviewees said that help is brought externally to fill the gap left when the government cannot respond to the needs of their population.

Various interviewees expressed the importance that humanitarian aid is needed when key political players do not uphold their responsibility towards their citizens. Several interviewees emphasised the fact that humanitarian aid should only hold a secondary responsibility and not be considered an end in itself. Jean-Paul Cavalieri explained that in theory humanitarian action is only a support and not a substitute of a country's authority. He added that in conflict areas, the UN is sometimes used as a scapegoat by the warring factions and political constituencies to relieve them of their failure to agree on a peaceful solution and attend their citizens' needs.

Moreover, another interviewee pointed out that when humanitarian aid searches to create structural reforms in a system it can sometimes interact and perpetuate conflict, inequalities and vulnerabilities. The interviewee added that humanitarian action can occasionally look to critique and create change in a country's government instead of simply assisting in filling in

the gaps. Nonetheless, Roger Hearn explained that in Syria the government still upholds its control and influence in the country and humanitarian system.

5.3.2 The Dangers of Speaking Out on the Atrocities of Conflict

The hesitance to speak out in public was mentioned by a few interviewees. Hugo Slim explained that humanitarian organisations believe that keeping quiet on the atrocities of the conflict allows them to remain neutral. Another interviewee mentioned that the ICRC rather discusses matters with the warring parties behind closed doors to be perceived as neutral and independent. However, it was said that other entities such as the UN and MSF tend to speak out and are thus perceived as less neutral, especially in Syria.

5.3.3 Humanity or Principled Assistance

Humanity was seen as the heart of humanitarian aid by several interviewees. Hugo Slim explained that all humanitarian action is guided by the principle of humanity and that "*all understanding of humanitarian aid commits to humanity and impartiality*". Furthermore, several interviewees considered helping people in need as a positive action no matter who they are and that not helping would be morally unethical. Fiona Terry indicated that humanitarian action always entails both negative and positive consequences as there are always "winners" and "losers".

5.4 Neutrality

5.4.1 The Morality of Neutrality

Several interviewees agreed that the neutrality principle is difficult to follow and that its challenges vary depending on the context. An interviewee provided the Rwandan genocide as an example for the absence of neutrality, as the conflict did not present a neutral middle ground.

Additionally, various interviewees highlighted the unethical morality behind an organisation's decision to not speak out or take sides when confronted with the atrocities of a conflict. Michael Mosselmans explained that in a complex situation like Myanmar's persecution of the Rohingya people, it was ethically correct for organisations to pick a side and speak out against the atrocities and oppression occurring in the country.

Finally, Fiona Terry argued for the removal of neutrality during the General Assembly of 2000 after witnessing the events of the Rwandan genocide as the humanitarian principle of neutrality placed genocidaires and their victims on an equal footing. She subsequently realised that neutrality is not a moral position but is simply a posture to adopt to avoid giving a pretext to belligerents to block humanitarian access.

"Sometimes it is necessary to shake the hands of mass murderers if it means you can save lives" (Fiona Terry).

5.4.2 The Impossibility of Neutrality

Most interviewees concurred that INGOs nowadays can no longer be neutral as they have to comply with the demands of the local authorities, donors and counter-terrorism legislation. Roger Hearn highlighted that INGOs do not possess a privileged position in high-intensity conflict, such as Syria, where local authorities can dismiss organisations from working in the country. Interviewees also believed that humanitarian law and donor's demands cause INGOs to partner with one side of the conflict and not the other, and thus compromising their neutrality as sides are identified as "right" or "wrong". An interviewee mentioned that in Syria, remaining neutral is nearly impossible as most actors were forced to work with one side or another and were perceived as supporting a particular side of the conflict. Michael Mosselmans went as far as stating that "*nobody in Syria is going to be neutral*".

In addition, Hugo Slim emphasised that INGOs believe in their own neutrality as they trust that if their resources are not manipulated by different parties they remain in control and thus neutral. Nonetheless, he specified that to some extent warring parties still dictate which areas and in what way organisations can operate and therefore, organisations are neither impartial nor neutral. Another interviewee explained that the UN is a political organisation, while the SARC has links with the Syrian authorities. The interviewee added that both are perceived as less neutral by the local population. The same interviewee further described that the alignment of an organisation's actions with the humanitarian principles depends on their mandate and their position both in the humanitarian system and the local context.

Interviewees presented differing views in relation to national and local actors' capacity to remain neutral. A few interviewees explained that it can be complicated for local actors to remain neutral as they belong to the community affected and live at the heart of the conflict. An interviewee added that although local actors have the capacity to adhere to the principles and undertake efficient humanitarian responses, there is still the need of having an outside actor to ensure neutrality. Michael Mosselmans provided an example of a field delegate and a local Syrian surgeon working together in a Syrian hospital located in a rebel-controlled area. The local surgeon stated that he would refuse treating a badly injured Syrian government soldier but that he would rather kill the soldier himself. However, Roger Hearn added that he had never encountered a staff member that did not want to assist a person in need because they pertained to an opposition group. In addition, Kimberly Howe pointed out that there is no evidence showing that local actors have less capacity to adhere to the humanitarian principles.

Finally, Fiona Terry emphasised that organisations can be perceived as taking sides depending on who they are assisting. She provided an example in the Darfur area of Western Sudan, where an organisation was providing assistance, such as food items, to the farmers who had been identified as having the highest needs. However, the pastoralist group, which did not require such resources, viewed the organisation as benefiting and siding with the farmers while punishing the pastoralist.

5.4.3   Humanitarian Versus Development

The humanitarian-development nexus and the difference between humanitarianism and development was brought up by some interviewees. Most agreed that humanitarian aid should not be confused with development as they have different processes with different mandates and

objectives. They explained that humanitarian aid has a short-term angle focused on alleviating suffering and saving lives, while development has a longer-term focus on resilience with more sophisticated mechanisms.

However, Thomas Garofalo noted the grey area between where humanitarian aid ends and development starts. He also mentioned that humanitarian assistance does not solely focus on alleviating suffering and saving lives but also on sustainability. Another interviewee provided the Red Cross as an example of a humanitarian organisation that performs both humanitarian and development work.

5.5 Impartiality

5.5.1   Aid Guided by Safety and Needs

Fiona Terry declared that currently, no humanitarian agency has the capacity to respond to the greatest needs in all areas. Furthermore, a couple of interviewees agreed that organisations are not usually located where the highest needs are found. An interviewee further developed that humanitarian organisations often congregate in areas easy to access and do not venture into hard-to-reach areas where the needs are greatest.

Kimberly Howe added that often the most vulnerable places with the greatest needs suffer the most partiality. For example, she said that when Raka city was under ISIS control, aid organisations refused to go to the area and provide humanitarian assistance although a large part of the population suffered. Additionally, in her previous Darfur example, Fiona Terry declared that to have privileged the principle of impartiality at all cost would have meant giving aid only to the farmers. She stated that doing so might have caused violence between them and the pastoralists and that therefore, the ICRC privileged retaining perceptions of neutrality by providing food to both groups avoiding greater problems.

5.5.2   Access Constraints Hinder Needs-Based Aid

Interviewees agreed on the humanitarian organisations' need to hold a neutral posture during conflict to gain access and trust to work in an impartial manner. Fiona Terry highlighted that impartiality should be the first principle organisations assure. She said that organisations' choices are based on the perspective that all individuals are equal and that humanitarian action

is based on the greatest needs. Otherwise, she added, humanitarian actions would be guided by other considerations, such as ethnicity, gender or other characteristics.

Moreover, interviewees conceded the fact that being perceived as an impartial actor allows organisations to more easily negotiate and gain access to certain areas. Hugo Slim added that INGOs can often be impartial in the areas they are located in, but due to access constraints they cannot be generally impartial around the entire area in need. Thomas Garofalo indicated that in Syria there is an existing presumption that humanitarian actors will not be impartial, which affects security, effectiveness and access.

5.5.3   *Political Influence Affects Impartiality*

Interviewees stated that the local government can highly influence the humanitarian assistance in the country and the impartiality of the response. As previously mentioned by several interviewees, access constraints implemented by the different parties of the conflict can cause challenges to the impartiality of humanitarian actors. Roger Hearn explained that some of the aid in Syria was actually "diverted and used as an instrument of war by the Syrian government". In addition, he explained that the Syrian government would direct organisations' assistance towards areas of their choosing to punish the areas controlled by the rebels. Nonetheless, Mohammed Mahrousa described that terrorist groups in Syria have acquired deeper understandings and tolerance towards the humanitarian principles but such knowledge has also allowed them to better manipulate the system. A couple of interviewees further stated that local actors are more prone to government pressure, leading to violations of the principles of impartiality and independence. It was also added that it is important to consider that local NGOs also have the capacity to resist such pressures.

5.6 Independence

5.6.1   *Humanitarian Organisations Influencing the Local Context*

Roger Hearn stated that organisations increase the local capacity while enhancing local engagement and responsibility. Additionally, Gloria Soma mentioned that in the humanitarian system there is often a top-down relationship between international actors imposing conditions and structures down the chain to local actors. Kimberly Howe presented the US government as an example, as it is a key donor for INGOs undertaking humanitarian actions in the Kurdish

area while at the same time the US remains a close Kurd ally. She explained that consequently, the US started pressing INGOs, the Mercy Corps, Save the Children and CARE International to mainly provide assistance in Kurdish areas.

5.6.2 *Political Ties and Affiliations*

Several interviewees underlined that humanitarian aid is dependent on the receiving country's government, authority and political armed groups due to access, security and other processes. Hugo Slim further emphasised that the independence of aid varies depending on the characteristics of the organisation itself. Mohammed Mahrousa explained that as the vulnerability and dependency of aid in Syria increases so does the amount of humanitarian assistance, which in turn is misused by actors in exchange for access. A couple of interviewees mentioned that INGOs, and even local NGOs, are facing higher access constraints, leading to a decrease in their ability to implement and monitor aid as well as to simply provide assistance. Roger Hearn explained that due to a lack of independence, his organisation decided not to re-enter Syria.

In addition, several interviewees acknowledged that local NGOs will face just as many challenges when trying to remain independent as they can suffer from government pressures. However, they added that they might also present better links and partnerships allowing them more space of manoeuvre. Hugo Slim also expressed the possibility that NGOs' assistance could also be concentrated in one single area controlled by either party. Thus, he said that the organisation could be composed of staff members supporting the authorities in the area of action and would show a dependency on such particular authority.

5.6.3 *Donor-Dependency*

Several interviewees highlighted humanitarian organisations' dependency on external sources, such as funding from donors. Hugo Slim additionally argued that humanitarian organisations are interdependent on their donors, mostly western governments and that organisations' actions are guided by donors' requests and demands. He specified that humanitarian entities find themselves crushed between donors' requirements and the space of action to help those in need. In Syria, Roger Hearn described that decisions were often influenced by donors. He provided

the US-based organisations working near Palestine as an example, which due to the US lobby have no independence in what they can and cannot do in relation to Israel.

Furthermore, an interviewee mentioned that most organisations end their humanitarian assistance and leave when funding runs out, and when the governmental donors decide that such conflict is not a priority anymore. However, an interviewee added that structures such as the IFRC and its National Societies allow them to remain and continue their humanitarian action.

"We adhere more to financial contracts than we do to social obligations because financial contracts can be punitively enforced by taking money away from you" (Anonymous Interviewee 2)

In addition, several interviewees mentioned that organisations are often vigilant of what they say as to not upset donors. An interviewee explained that humanitarian organisations' daily decision-making is driven by the incentive structures created by donors and other decisive institutions and that such incentive structures are guided by the fear of financial repercussions and reputational damage. The interviewee stated that donors do not encourage transparency, thus when organisations encounter difficulties, they choose not to make them public or report them as otherwise "*the hammer of Thor comes down" (Anonymous Interviewee 2).*

5.6.4 *Counter-Terrorism Measures*

Most interviewees stated that organisations' independence is often affected by the limitations of counter-terrorism measures. A couple of interviewees explained that European and US law state that humanitarian actors cannot engage with certain groups such as non-state armed actors, considered as terrorists. They said that breaking counter-terrorism measures would have major impacts on an organisations' reputation and funding and would result in damaging fees. Consequently, it was mentioned that such measures and the difficulty of navigating the legal system also affect the will of assisting in an area controlled by terrorist listed groups, thus not only challenging independence but impartiality as well. Michael Mosselmans explained that organisations such as Christian Aid, often have to pay attention to international counter-terrorism measures and the possible sanctions they might encounter if they do not.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion

Chapter 6 presents the analysis of the results from the interviews in comparison to the findings from the literature review and case studies. Firstly, the challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles when localising humanitarian aid in conflict areas will be analysed. Secondly, the chapter will discuss the complexity of the compromises that humanitarian agencies make over the humanitarian principles in conflict areas.

6.1 Challenges in Upholding the Humanitarian Principles

This section will answer the following question:

What challenges arise, in as far as upholding the humanitarian principles, from localising humanitarian aid in high-intensity conflict areas?

6.1.1 Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian versus Development

The need to separate humanitarian aid and development activities, because of their differences in mandates and objectives, has been highlighted by the literature research as well as by several interviewees. Additionally, the literature also presented the importance of the humanitarian principles to both guide and differentiate humanitarian aid from other activities, such as development and governmental actions (UN OCHA, 2012b; ALNAP, 2018; Reis & Bernath, 2017). Thus, by adhering to the humanitarian principles, humanitarian aid should not entail any changes to development processes or governmental structures.

Nonetheless, findings from the literature and the interviews show that the humanitarian system has evolved throughout the years, bridging the humanitarian-development nexus and shifting towards localisation (IFRC, 2015). For example, the IASC is combining the humanitarian and development sector by stating that humanitarian aid should entail long-term sustainable efforts (IASC, 2016), which can already be problematic in conflict areas. In practice, humanitarian and development are intertwined, creating a grey area between short and long-term initiatives. This is also the case in Syria, where both international and local organisations constantly blur the line between humanitarianism, development, human rights work and peace-building (Svoboda, Barbelet, & Mosel, 2018). Humanitarian assistance in Syria encompasses responding to the effects of the conflicts and addressing their root causes as well as long-term development and sustainability actions. By doing so, humanitarian aid states that the Syrian

society needs to be repaired through humanitarian actions entailing stabilisation and transformative strategies, "good governance, human rights, and, if required, military humanitarian intervention." (Labbé, 2012, p. 4). In Afghanistan, the activities of the humanitarian sector are indistinguishable from the development actions provided by other actors (Featherstone, 2012). This has affected the perception of the local population towards the neutrality and independence of humanitarian organisations, which are seen as supporting the government's agenda, actions, values and ideals (Williamson, 2011). Thus, merging humanitarian and development causes humanitarian interventions to be directly or indirectly linked to someone's political agenda, while the orthodox views of independence and neutrality are blurred (Bernard & Policinski, 2019).

Humanitarian versus Government

As viewed in the literature and in accordance with the majority of interviewees, the goal of humanitarian aid is to save lives and alleviate the suffering of populations in need (UNHCR, 2018, p. 2; IFRC, 1994). In the literature review, it was shown that the primary goal constituted the ethical basis and focus of humanitarian aid, known as the humanitarian imperative or as the humanity principle (Schweizer, 2004, p. 548). Additionally, it was explained that the principle of humanity also has to entail the principle of impartiality to ensure equality between those assisted. Moreover, several interviewees stated that humanitarian aid should be used as a last resort. Consequently, humanitarian aid should fill the gap left when the government itself cannot respond to the needs of their population and help is then brought externally. Therefore, a dilemma arises when considering whom such responsibility should fall upon. It is, first of all, ones' own government responsibility to ensure the safeguard of its citizens, their lives and their human rights. It is only when the government does not have the capabilities or is unwilling to help those in need that humanitarian organisations come into play (Schweizer, 2004). Thus, the moral imperative of humanity primarily falls upon governments and cannot be fully transferred to humanitarian interventions. Therefore, humanitarian aid should only hold secondary responsibility and not be considered an end to itself.

Nonetheless, the literature showed that in conflict situations humanitarian aid undertakes its primary goal and includes not only aspects of development but also the government's roles and responsibilities (NRC & HI, 2016). Van Voorst & Hilhorst (2017) characterise high-intensity conflict, such as Syria and Afghanistan, as enduring little effective government's control. In

such cases, the role of the government can become highly complex and controversial as it can often not uphold the safety of its citizens even though the humanitarian imperative remains the government's duty. Consequently, by following the principle of humanity, humanitarian organisations compromise and temporarily take upon the government's responsibility and duty, while reinforcing the idealism behind humanitarianism. In Syria, however, the government holds large amounts of control and influence over humanitarian assistance (Haid, 2019). In Afghanistan, both the government and the Taliban maintain power and control over humanitarian actions (UN OCHA, 2020e). In these contexts, the complexity of the situation and the role of the government create barriers and challenges to principled humanitarianism for INGOs and local NGOs, ultimately interfering with the humanitarian imperative (NRC & HI, 2016).

6.1.2 Localisation

From the literature review and the case studies presented in previous chapters, authors like Schenkenberg (2016) present the point that local actors have difficulties adhering to the humanitarian principles, especially in armed conflict. Similarly, the findings in this thesis display that local actors are subject to more pressure from their government and can have struggles remaining neutral and impartial if they are part of a community involved in the conflict.

Nevertheless, this thesis' results chapter shows that international actors have just as many issues adhering to the humanitarian principles as local actors do. International actors are considered as political and highly dependent on donors and are therefore in reality not independent or neutral. Also, international actors have higher access restrictions and can be seen as a target in armed conflict which hinders them to access the neediest, contradicting the impartiality principle.

Although not disagreeing with Schenkenberg's (2016) point of combining locally-led and internationally delivered assistance, a more nuanced view of that statement needs to be presented. Several interviewees stated that humanitarian interventions are not locally-led but internationally controlled, which demonstrates that there is still a substantial power imbalance between local and international actors. International actors are often portrayed as being more principled, with little evidence of it, which is a colonial view and should be resented. Such portrayals are a way for international organisations to safeguard their power and position in

humanitarian aid while slowing down localisation efforts. While the value of international actors as a neutral party should not be disregarded, it also needs to be emphasised that local actors have the necessary skills to adhere to the humanitarian principles, as seen in Syria (NRC & HI, 2016).

Furthermore, the reluctance of INGOs to implement localisation practices presents a paradox. On the one hand, INGOs are the ones who started localisation efforts to address the humanitarian funding gap and increase the efficiency of humanitarian operations by involving local actors and therefore, cut costs (IASC 2016). On the other hand, the results from this thesis indicate that INGOs are unwilling to adapt localisation efforts because they do not want to lose their power and influence.

6.1.3 Remote Management and Risk Transfers

Remote management can be viewed as contradicting the ideas and mechanisms of the localisation agenda. Remote management allows INGOs to remotely control and manage the programme implemented by local organisations. However, local organisations should be the ones creating, leading and implementing humanitarian activities while INGOs simply provide their assistance to the local entity if needed. The results from the case studies and from the interviews, project similar views of the use of remote management strategies. INGOs often fail to have strategic approaches in designing remote management activities but need effective monitoring strategies to meet donor requirements (Stoddard, Harmer, & Renouf, 2010; Featherstone, 2012). In conflict areas such as Syria and Afghanistan, it is very difficult to monitor activities because of access constraints. In Afghanistan, this lack of access has resulted in donor fatigue and a decrease in funding and programme activities (Jackson & Zyck, 2017). However, in Syria, UN OCHA (2020c, p. 32) states that it has strong monitoring mechanisms in place, contradicting Howe & Stites (2019) which argue that remote management strategies in Syria are not able to conduct effective monitoring.

For risk transfers, the results from the interviews confirm the results from the case studies, especially in the case study from Syria. In line with Elkahlout & Elgibali (2020), INGOs often do not account for security cost of local organisations when they transfer dangerous assignments to the latter. Nonetheless, another view brought up by the interviewees and not presented in the case studies was that INGOs infantilise local actors in deciding how and where they are allowed to engage. Some interviewees clearly communicated that risk transfers can be

considered as ethically appropriate if they are not imposed but agreed upon and if local actor's opinions on the risk are included and not just assumed.

6.1.4 Power

Analysing the research question of what challenges arise from localising humanitarian aid in high-intensity conflict when following the humanitarian principles, the answer is ambiguous and must be differentiated.

It needs to be emphasised that the research question in itself has a Western or international bias to it as it portrays humanitarian aid as naturally international and the challenges adhering to the humanitarian principles arise when localising it, which was pointed out by Hugo Slim. This already creates a sense of hierarchy between international and local actors. The results from the interviews show that donor requirements play an important role in this hierarchy and that those requirements diminish ownership and agency of local actors. INGOs are in a position of power and hold the resources of the humanitarian sector. These results present a discrepancy with the definition of localisation from chapter 3 that localisation should recognise, respect and strengthen the leadership of local actors (Fabre, 2017, p. 1). Additionally, the literature review also presented localisation as an approach to diminish the hierarchy between international and local actors (Wall & Hedlund, 2016). Even though the Grand Bargain agreement was set in 2016, local actors are still not in the leadership position that they should be in. They are often used as subcontractors to implement project activities and only 10 out of 58 donors and INGOs signed meeting the 25% IASC's target for providing funding to local actors as directly as possible in 2019 (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

When looking at the donors of humanitarian aid one might find the reason why aid is considered to be naturally international in the humanitarian community. Donors that signed the Grand Bargain come almost exclusively from countries that can be considered Western countries (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). Moreover, INGOs and the UN system can also be considered as Western entities being founded and funded mostly by Western countries dictating how humanitarian aid should be done and introducing the humanitarian principles (Gordon & Donini, 2015). The fact that the humanitarian ideals and principles are Western might also be the reason why international actors are considered to be more principled, which was mentioned earlier.

In relation to the view on localisation, the results from the interviews show that power is an important aspect of humanitarian aid and that power imbalances are present throughout the humanitarian system. For example, between donors and INGOs as well as between INGOs and local NGOs. The results show that the humanitarian system is a hierarchical structure where actors try to retain importance by retaining power instead of a support system (Figure 15). This hierarchical structure of humanitarian aid was emphasised more by the interviewees than in the literature review and case studies.
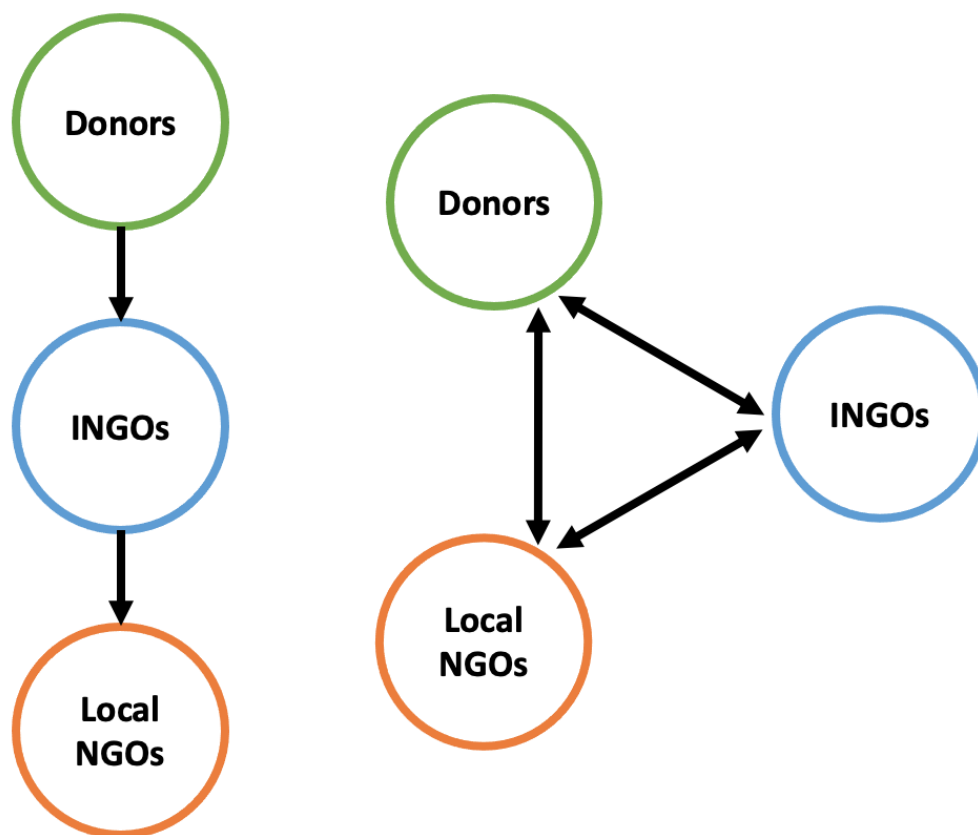

Figure 15: The hierarchical structure of humanitarian aid (left) and the support system it should be (right)

6.2 Compromises

This section will look at the following question:

Over what, when and to what degree compromises need to be made over the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence in conflict areas and how are they applied in practice?

6.2.1   The Importance of Perception

The interviews showed that perception plays an important role for humanitarian organisations. Being perceived in a positive manner by the local population of a country an organisation is supporting, can grant such organisation with better access to the population. Nonetheless, the perception of an organisation in their donor country determines their ability to secure funds. The trust in humanitarian organisations is eroding in some contexts because of scandals like the Oxfam scandal on sexual misconduct in Haiti (BBC, 2019). The scandal also led to a decrease in donations of over £14 Million in 2019 (ibid.). Thus, perception is key to the trust, legitimacy, acceptance and funding of humanitarian responses.

In contrast to the literature review, the interviews revealed greater importance of being context-specific when addressing changing perceptions in humanitarian aid. Nonetheless, one recurring issue in relation to perception is the idealisation of the humanitarian principles by humanitarian organisations and their ability to adhere to those principles. Although the interviews and the literature suggest that principled humanitarian aid in conflict areas is quasi-impossible, many humanitarian organisations state that they always follow the humanitarian principles (Haver, 2016; UN OCHA, 2020c). The case studies of Syria and Afghanistan suggest that the reason behind this idealisation is that humanitarian organisations want to generate trust by stating that they follow the principles to gain access to the population in need (Featherstone, 2012; Hayes, 2016). However, adhering to the humanitarian principles is not the only method that grants access and trust in the local population. For example, Dijkzeul & Wakenge (2010) present how aid is delivered in terms of efficiency and legitimacy creates more trust in the local population than the organisation's adherence to the humanitarian principles.

Interestingly, the interviews revealed that international and local actors at a field and regional level were more idealising of the ability to adhere to the humanitarian principles than high-level humanitarian workers and academics. These results show that there appears to be a

difference between the perceived principledness of humanitarian aid and the reality of the situation. For example, it has been mentioned that if organisations speak out on the atrocities they observe during a conflict, they are indirectly choosing a side, which affects their neutrality. However, this should not be the case as speaking out does not necessarily mean that organisations agree with the actions of any of the parties. Additionally, perception has proven to be a major indicator of an organisations' ability to gain access, trust and partnerships to provide humanitarian assistance in conflict. Nonetheless, such perception is based on assumptions as the humanitarian principles are both too broad and inter-linked to be treated as individual indicators. Thus, the principledness of humanitarian assistance is very difficult to analyse and monitor, leading to an unclear reality of principled humanitarian assistance in conflict.

Consequently, although the humanitarian principles are the bedrock of humanitarian aid, humanitarian organisations need to stop idealising the humanitarian principles and how well they can adhere to them. Originated in 1991 (UN OCHA, 2012a), the humanitarian principles were established during the 1990s in which different views of humanitarian aid existed compared to now. However, the rising complexity of conflicts as well as of the humanitarian system show that adhering to the humanitarian principles is more difficult now. The gained complexity of humanitarian aid, and of conflicts, could be an indicator that humanitarian aid cannot fulfil the unrealistic expectations previously set by the humanitarian principles. This can be seen in chapter 5.2. Instead, humanitarian organisations should talk both about how they will do their best to have principled humanitarianism and the challenges that may arise to better understand the reality of the situation in conflict areas. This would help to get a clearer view on how and what compromises over the humanitarian principles need to be made. Nonetheless, the interviewees also presented that there is no better alternative than being guided by the humanitarian principles because otherwise humanitarian aid would be partial already from the start.

6.2.2 The "Value" of the Principles

The humanitarian system and its various stakeholders acknowledge the importance and commit to the four humanitarian principles – humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence (UN OCHA, 2012a).

Nonetheless, the findings show that the humanitarian principles do not seem to all have the same value. The principle of impartiality was noted to play a primary role in humanitarian response as without it the choices of humanitarian action would not be based on equality but rather on discrimination. Impartiality is the basis of humanity. On the other hand, the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality are tools to achieve the ultimate goal of assisting those in need, thus to achieve humanity (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). Independence and neutrality remain of great importance as tools to reach those in need as they allow to change the perception and trust towards a humanitarian organisation. As previously mentioned, perception can then allow access, provide security and partnerships as well as keep an organisation's perspective intact and keep donors and the public content. For example, as in the case of Afghanistan, organisations utilise the humanitarian principles as a way to gain acceptance and access to previously restricted areas (Featherstone, 2012) and thus fulfil the humanity principle. In Syria, the highly politicised environment makes it very difficult for humanitarian organisations to provide aid impartially, on the basis of needs alone (NRC & HI, 2016). The role of humanitarian aid being seen as a "negotiation chip" clearly highlights the political influence humanitarian aid has in Syria (The Syria Campaign, 2016, p. 24).

Thus, the principles of humanity and impartiality can be said to represent the ethical ideal behind humanitarian aid while the principles of neutrality and independence are the mechanisms to achieve the ethical ideal (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). The question that seems to surface is not whether humanitarian organisations are able to follow the principle of humanity or even to provide principled assistance but rather to understand what are the trade-offs between principles to fulfil as much as possible the goal of humanity.

6.2.3 *Transactional Exchange and Compromises Between Principles*

The principle of neutrality and its feasibility have often been questioned, especially in areas of high-intensity conflict (Labbé & Daudin, 2016). The results from the interviews and some of the literature findings stated that it is morally unacceptable to remain neutral and not take sides during atrocities (Labbé, 2012) as it would be equivalent to not taking any actions and thus go against the principle of humanity. Labbé (2012) provides the example of the Holocaust while a couple of interviewees mentioned the Rwandan genocide and Myanmar's persecution of the Rohingya people. These situations are examples showing that sometimes it is morally unethical to not speak out, take sides and condemn such atrocities. Therefore, as highlighted by an interviewee, there is also an existing conflict between the humanitarian principles and ethics itself.

Additionally, as presented in the literature and by various interviewees, the principle of neutrality is seen by many as unachievable in conflict situations (Schweizer, 2004). The literature review showed that in reality in conflict situations, compromises and extensive negotiations are often required (Haver, 2016). Humanitarian organisations have to give up part of their neutrality and comply with the different demands to gain access, cooperate with several entities and fulfil donor requirements and counter-terrorism legislation. Such compliance is seen as siding or partnering with one of the conflict's sides, and thus labelling the other side as "wrong". Thus, as highlighted by Slim (1997), humanitarian aid and its principles can be perceived as opposing the values and causes behind the conflict and thus as going against one of the parties of the conflict. Van Voorst & Hilhorst (2017) even state that humanitarian agencies always contribute to the conflict in one way or another. Thus, it is extremely difficult to fully conform to the humanitarian principles in a conflict situation. For example, humanitarian organisations in Afghanistan are often seen as a support structure of the Afghan government. However, they are often targeted and attacked by terrorists' groups to force out aid organisations and diminish government support (Narang & Stanton, 2017). The case studies and the interviewees highlighted that both in Syria and Afghanistan adhering to the principle of neutrality is impossible (NRC & HI, 2016; Terry, 2011), due to the complexity of the conflict and that organisations are forced or at least perceived as working with a particular side of the conflict.

It is however important to acknowledge that the principle of neutrality still holds important value due to its usage as a "tool", previously explained. Hence, in conflict areas, neutrality is

traded to help people that would otherwise not benefit from any help and fulfil the humanity principle.

As explained in the case studies chapter, the impartiality of assistance is linked to the type of aid provided. For example, in Afghanistan, medical assistance and food provision are seen as having differing levels of impartiality (Haver & Carter, 2016). In addition, an interviewee highlighted that organisations' neutrality is also linked to the characteristics of the beneficiaries of such assistance. Moreover, local organisations and local staff are found at the heart of the conflict and are thus involved in the conflict in one way or another – previously presented in the localisation section. Subsequently, it could be thought that local provision of assistance is somewhat dependent on the context and how itself, the violence and the conflict are affecting the population. For example, Elkahlout and Elgibali (2020) explain that some staff members would not deliver assistance to groups that had previously harmed them. Thus, the neutrality and impartiality of local actors, in the sense of partnering with authorities and discrimination in the provision of assistance, could also depend on the characteristics of the person in need and its involvement in the conflict. For example, a soldier will be discriminated against if he pertains to the opposition while a civilian with a different ethnic background might not. Therefore, how well staff will follow the principles also depends on the position of their organisations, their actions in the conflict and who they primarily provide assistance to. For example, there will be a difference between health providing organisations and doctors in the middle of a battle than staff providing assistance to civilians.

Therefore, in line with Schenkenberg (2016), localisation cannot be seemingly applied to every context and cannot ignore the ambiguities and characteristics of the conflict context and the actors involved, as they will affect the humanitarian aid and thus the principledness of humanitarian assistance. Moreover, organisations cannot solely base their actions on impartiality but also by adapting it to the context and weighing the consequences of their actions to achieve the principle of humanity with the minimum negative externalities.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This thesis set out to contribute to the discourse on the localisation of humanitarian aid in conflict areas.

The discussion focused on the challenges of adhering to the humanitarian principles that may arise when implementing the localisation approach in humanitarian aid in what is considered high-intensity conflict situations. The focus of this study was centred around humanitarian organisations' adherence to the four humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, which represent the foundations of humanitarian aid. The challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles were studied primarily from a humanitarian organisations' perspective, identifying the major issues and challenges faced by the humanitarian system.

The findings show that as the humanitarian system has changed throughout the years, with the localisation approach and bridging the humanitarian-development nexus, so has the complexity of humanitarian aid and of conflict situations (Jackson & Zyck, 2017; IFRC, 2015). These changes in the humanitarian system have created additional difficulties for principled humanitarianism as the roles and responsibilities of humanitarian organisations expand. The fact that humanitarian aid nowadays is comprised of actions ranging from emergency response and underlying causes to development and sustainability shows that there is still no clear common understanding of the purpose of humanitarian aid. To remain impartial in extremely polarised environments, such as armed conflict settings, humanitarian organisations have to detach their actions from those focused on addressing underlying causes (Labbé & Daudin, 2016).

This thesis has shown that localising humanitarian aid in conflict areas is feasible but rarely implemented. The cases of Syria and Afghanistan present very complex environments with constantly changing dynamics (Stoddard et al., 2020; UN OCHA, 2020a). Nonetheless, the case of Syria and the interviews have shown that local actors are able to quickly learn the skills necessary to provide principled humanitarian assistance.

One finding of this thesis that can be related to why humanitarian aid has not been localised enough is that international organisations are considered to be more principled. However, the results of this thesis suggest that both international and local actors have difficulties adhering

to the humanitarian principles in conflict areas. International actors are dependent on donors and have higher access restrictions which can influence their neutrality, impartiality and independence. However, international actors can bring an outsider value in contexts like ethnic conflicts where they are better positioned to be neutral than local actors. The difficulties of local actors adhering to the humanitarian principles are related to the challenge of being impartial and neutral when local actors are part of a community that is affected by the conflict. Also, local actors sustain more pressures from their government which can influence their independence. Nonetheless, the results from the interviews suggest that local actors are capable of resisting those challenges and pressures.

Remote management strategies of INGOs are rarely strategically thought of but are rather a form of remotely controlling activities of local actors. The dilemma of transferring risks from international actors to local actors is often ethically inappropriate because security costs are not accounted for and local actors are often not sufficiently trained or equipped. However, this argument of risk transfer is often used to refuse to give agency to local actors because INGOs want to retain power.

The complexity of conflict areas makes it impossible for humanitarian organisations to fully adhere to the four humanitarian principles. Organisations give differing values and usages to the humanitarian principles. Trade and compromise between organisations' level of adherence to each individual principle is necessary to most effectively achieve the humanitarian imperative. The findings of this thesis show that humanitarian organisations often try to achieve the principle of humanity and fulfil impartiality through the usage of the principles of independence and neutrality.

7.2 General Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to deepen future conversations and research on the challenges adhering to the humanitarian principles when localising humanitarian aid in high-intensity conflict situations. These are put forward simply as guidance and basis for further reflection and strengthening of humanitarian aid in conflict areas.

This thesis recommends that due to the complexity of the current humanitarian system, comprising both short-term humanitarian activities as well as long-term development processes, humanitarian organisations' roles, values and responses should be reviewed and adapted. The roles and responsibilities of the different actors present during a conflict needs to

be clearly defined to avoid duplication of processes while ensuring separation of humanitarian and development actions; and thus, facilitating a better principledness of humanitarian aid.

In addition, the humanitarian principles are globally known, follow a general agreement and present fair theoretical values. Thus, the core humanitarian principles remain of vital importance in any context but, flexibility towards the application of the principles in complex settings such as armed conflict situations should be understood and taken into consideration. Therefore, the necessary action is to actually have a discussion about the possible challenges and compromises that arise in humanitarian aid in order to compare them, weigh them and learn from them instead of just ignoring them. Indeed, actors within the humanitarian system need to acknowledge that their adherence to the humanitarian principles is highly dependent on the context and admit that complete and utter adherence to the four humanitarian principles is in reality impossible. Meaning that humanitarian aid needs to adapt assistance to the context and weigh the consequences of their actions to achieve the principle of humanity with the minimum negative externalities. Transparency, accountability and evaluation are of vital importance to acquire a clear picture of the realities of the humanitarian system and the principledness of humanitarian aid, instead of a glorified version. This clearer perspective would allow seeing how and what compromises over the humanitarian principles need to be made. Nonetheless, we do take into account the consequences such actions could have on the perception of an organisation.

INGOs need to adapt their humanitarian response and the localising efforts to each context to minimise possible negative externalities, ensure that localisation efforts do not further deteriorate or lead to power imbalances in the country. Also, both international and local actors are needed in conflict areas but local actors should lead interventions and international actors should provide the capacity to enable them.

When it comes to remote management current strategies show that there is a need for a more balanced and constant communication between INGOs and local NGOs for decision-making processes to allow equitable partnerships. For example, risk transfers should be agreed upon and necessary training, as well as funding for security, should be provided if dangerous assignments are transferred from international to local NGOs. Furthermore, since in some instances remote management approaches fail to have effective monitoring and evaluation strategies, tools and trainings could be developed for local actors to take over those tasks.

Nonetheless, it seems that there is little trust of INGOs towards local NGOs which hinders successful localisation approaches.

Local actors should not be used as subcontractors to deliver project activities imposed by INGOs but treated as partners provided with higher agency and power in decision-making. It should also be easier for local NGOs to access funding which means that donor requirements need to be better adapted. Requirements like having an office in Europe for at least three years as it is needed to get funding from ECHO need to change to drive the localisation agenda forward. The results also showed that it is possible to localise humanitarian responses even in conflict areas since local actors are as principled in their ability to adhere to the humanitarian principles as international actors are.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guides

Interview Guide: Academic key informant

Purpose of the interview: The purpose of this interview is to contribute to the discourse on the localisation approach of humanitarian aid in conflict areas. The complexity of conflict areas makes humanitarian principles collide with each other and with the local environment itself. Therefore, the main objective of the interview is to investigate the ethical dilemmas in localising humanitarian aid in conflict situations.

Process and Anonymity: The interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Skype and recorded upon agreement with the interviewee. The possibility of anonymity when recording responses will be emphasised to eliminate the prospect of statements being traced back to the respondents.

Area of focus	Question	Purpose
Background information	• All participants will remain anonymous except if the participant allows it to be quoted directly by name • Name, organisation position, years in position	To put interviewees answers into context
Conceptual understandings	• How would you define humanitarian aid? • How would you define localisation? • Are you familiar with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence?	Interviewees understanding of the main concepts
Changes in perception	• Do you think there was a change in perception of humanitarian aid by the local population over the last decade? o If yes, how did this change manifest itself? • What do think are the reasons behind the change of perception?	Finding reasons for the changes in perception (potentially linked to localisation)
Localisation	• Do you think the localisation of humanitarian aid is feasible and beneficial in conflict areas? • Do you think the localisation of humanitarian aid has properly been adapted to such complex settings? • Do you think working remotely during high intensity conflict is a good solution? Why and why not? • Should local actors support or lead humanitarian interventions in conflict areas? Justify or explain your choice or response?	Get an opinion on how the localisation agenda should be implemented in conflict regions
Conflict and ethics	• What are your thoughts about risk transfers for dangerous assignments from international organisations to local actors. Do you think they are ethically appropriate?	Get an understanding of author's attitude towards risk transfers
Humanitarian principles	• Do you think that international actors are able to adhere to the humanitarian principles in a conflict environment? o Can you provide an example?	Discover differing views on application of

		humanitarian principles in conflict areas
	• Do you think that local actors are able to adhere to the humanitarian principles in a conflict environment? ○ Can you provide an example? • Do you think the humanitarian principles contradict themselves or each other in a conflict setting?	
Snowballing	• Who else do you think we should talk to? Could please recommend one or two people.	To find out about colleagues that could be of value for our research

Interview Guide: Humanitarian aid worker at all levels

Purpose of the interview: The purpose of this interview is to contribute to the discourse on the localisation approach of humanitarian aid in conflict areas. The complexity of conflict areas makes humanitarian principles collide with each other and with the local environment itself. Therefore, the main objective of the interview is to investigate the ethical dilemmas in localising humanitarian aid in conflict situations.

Process and Anonymity: The interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams and recorded upon agreement of the interviewee. The possibility of anonymity when recording responses will be emphasised to eliminate the prospect of statements being traced back to the respondents.

Area of focus	Question	Purpose
Background information	• All participants will remain anonymous except if the participant allows it to be quoted directly by name. • Name, organisation position, years in position	To put interviewees answers into context
Conceptual understandings	• How would you define humanitarian aid? • How would you define localisation? • Are you familiar with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence?	Interviewees understanding of the main concepts
Changes in perception	• Do you think there has been a change on how humanitarian organisations are perceived throughout the years? (both at the international and local level). • What do think are the reasons behind the change of perception? • How was your organisation perceived and how is it perceived now in the local population?	Finding reasons for the changes in perception (potentially linked to localisation)
Localisation	• How did your organisation localise the response in humanitarian aid? (Were there any changes throughout the years? Did new (local) actors get involved?) • Did international staff work remotely during high intensity conflict? Why and why not?	Finding out if localisation agenda affected humanitarian aid in Syria/Afghanistan
Conflict and ethics	• What are your thoughts about risk transfers for dangerous assignments from international organisations to local actors. Do you think it is ethically appropriate?	Get an understanding of organisation's attitude towards risk transfers

Humanitarian principles	• Do you think that local actors are able to adhere to the humanitarian principles in a conflict environment?
	  ○ Can you provide an example?
	• Do you think that international actors are able to adhere to the humanitarian principles in a conflict environment?
	  ○ Can you provide an example?
		Discover differing views on application of humanitarian principles in conflict areas

	• Have you perceived or experienced an increase in safety if the humanitarian principles are acknowledged in conflict settings? (not followed but just known off) • Do you think the humanitarian principles contradict themselves or each other in a conflict setting?	79
Snowballing	• Who else do you think we should talk to? Could please recommend one or two people.	To find out about colleagues that could be of value for our research

Appendix 2: Interviewee Information

Interviewees	Job Title	Interview date (dd/mm/yyyy)
Jean-Paul Cavalieri	Chief of mission for UNHCR in Libya	26/02/2021
Abby Stoddard	Partner at Humanitarian Outcomes	03/03/2021
Hugo Slim	Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) at the Blavatnik School of Government	04/03/2021
Roger Hearn	Deputy General Secretary at Save the Children Denmark (before he was an international programme director at Save the Children)	12/03/2021
Mohammed Mahrousa	Head of programmes at Bahar NGO - Syria	12/03/2021
Kimberly Howe	Director of Feinstein's Research Program on Conflict and Governance at Tufts University in Boston	10/03/2021
Thomas Garofalo	Country Director for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Libya	05/03/2021
Fiona Terry	Head of the Centre for Operational Research and Experience (CORE) of ICRC	11/03/2021
Michael Mosselmans	Head of the Humanitarian Division at Christian Aid in London	08/03/2021
Gloria Soma	Executive Director at Titi Foundation in South Sudan	10/03/2021
Anonymous Interviewee 1	Regional desk for Middle East and North Africa of a national red cross society	16/03/2021
Anonymous Interviewee 2	Global cash and markets advisor of an INGO	12/03/2021