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SİYASET BİLİMİ VE ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ANABİLİM DALI



**SHRINKING SPACE, A BARRIER TO THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF LOCALIZATION?
THE STRUGGLE OF THE LOCAL SYRIAN NGOs IN THE
SYRIAN RESPONSE**

Ahmad Alkhalil

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

GAZİANTEP - 2023



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Ahmad Alkhalil

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**Daralan Alan, Yerelleşmenin Uygulanmasına Bir Engel mi?
Suriye Yanıtında Yerel Suriye STK'larının Mücadelesi**

Ahmad Alkhalil

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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ÖZET

Bu tez, Suriye insani krizine derinlemesine eğilmekte ve artan zorluklar arasında yardım dağıtımını ve toplum desteği alanında yerel sivil toplum kuruluşlarının (STK'lar) kritik rolüne odaklanmaktadır. "Daralan alan" kavramını ve bu kavramın insani yerelleşmeye yolculuk üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Uluslararası ilişkiler çerçevesi ve Güç Bağımlılığı Teorisi kullanılarak, yerel STK stratejilerini şekillendiren güç ve bağımlılık dinamiklerinin karmaşıklığını çözümlenmektedir. Araştırma, yerelleşme bağlamında STK'ların deneyimleri ve stratejileri hakkında derinlemesine anlayış kazanmaya odaklanan nitel bir yaklaşım benimsemiştir. Veriler, çeşitli yerel ve uluslararası STK'lardan, uzmanlardan ve politika yapımcılardan oluşan 21 ana bilgi sağlayıcı ile yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Ek veriler, STK raporları, politika belgeleri ve ilgili akademik literatür dahil olmak üzere ikincil kaynaklardan toplanmıştır. Araştırma, fonlama kısıtlamalarından düzenleyici zorluklara kadar Suriyeli STK'ların karşılaştığı engelleri vurgulamakta ve yerel güçlendirme için yenilikçi stratejilerini altını çizmektedir. Ayrıca, etkili yerelleşme için ortaklıkları destekleme ve yeniden şekillendirme konusunda uluslararası kuruluşlar, hükümetler ve bağışçılar da dahil olmak üzere dış aktörlerin hayati rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Tez, yerelleşme gündemini güçlendirmeyi hedefleyen Suriyeli STK'lar, BM ajansları, bağışçılar, ev sahibi hükümetler ve devlet dışı silahlı gruplar için stratejik önerilerle sonuçlanmaktadır. Bu öneriler, Suriye bağlamından türetilmiş olup, çeşitli kriz durumlarında daha etkili, adil ve sürdürülebilir insani yanıtlar için küresel olarak geçerli içgörüler sunmaktadır. Buradaki bulgular ve tartışmalar, politika yapımcılar, STK çalışanları ve bağışçılar dahil olmak üzere insani sektördeki paydaşlar için hayati öneme sahiptir. Bu çalışmalar, yerel STK'ların karşılaştığı karmaşıklıkları daha derinlemesine anlamayı sağlar ve zorlu bağlamlarda önemli işlerini desteklemek için bir çerçeve sunar. Genel olarak, bu araştırma, zorlu ortamlarda insani yerelleşme üzerine yapılan tartışmalara önemli bir katkı sağlayarak, yanıt etkinliği ve sürdürülebilirliğini artırmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yerelleştirme Stratejileri - Yerel Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları (STK'lar) - Suriye Çatışması - Daralan Sivil Alan - Uluslararası İlişkiler - Güç Bağımlılığı Teorisi.

**HASAN KALYONCU UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE EDUCATION INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**SHRINKING SPACE, A BARRIER TO THE IMPLEMENTATION
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Ahmad Alkhalil

MASTER THESIS

Advisor

Doç. Dr. Cenker Korhan Demir

ABSTRACT

This thesis delves into the Syrian humanitarian crisis, focusing on the critical role of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in aid delivery and community support amidst escalating challenges. It investigates the concept of "shrinking space" and its impact on the journey towards humanitarian localization. Utilizing a transnational relations framework and Power Dependence Theory, the study dissects the complex dynamics of power and dependency that shape local NGO strategies. The research adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on gaining in-depth insights into the experiences and strategies of NGOs in the context of localization. Data was primarily collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 key informants from various local and international NGOs, experts, and policy makers. Additional data was gathered from secondary sources, including NGO reports, policy documents, and relevant academic literature. The research highlights the barriers faced by Syrian NGOs, from funding constraints to regulatory challenges, and underscores their innovative strategies for local empowerment. Furthermore, it emphasizes the crucial role of external actors, including international organizations, governments, and donors, in supporting and reshaping partnerships for effective localization. The thesis concludes with strategic recommendations for Syrian NGOs, UN agencies, donors, host governments, and non-state armed groups, aiming to reinforce the localization agenda. These recommendations, derived from the Syrian context, offer insights with global relevance, advocating for more effective, equitable, and sustainable humanitarian responses in diverse crisis situations. The findings and discussions here are crucial for stakeholders in the humanitarian sector, including policymakers, NGO workers, and donors. They provide a deeper understanding of the complexities faced by local NGOs and offer a framework for supporting their crucial work in challenging contexts. Overall, this research contributes significantly to the discourse on humanitarian localization in challenging environments, targeting enhanced response efficacy and sustainability.

Keywords: Localization Strategies - Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) - Syrian Conflict - Shrinking Civic Space - Transnational Relations - Power Dependence Theory.

ÖNSÖZ

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TABLE OF CONTENT

ABSTRACT	II
ÖNSÖZ	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	III
TABLE OF CONTENT	IV
Abbreviations and Figures:	VI
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>VI</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>VII</i>
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 <i>Statement of the Problem</i>	4
1.2 <i>Research Design and Research Question</i>	5
1.3 <i>Structure of the Thesis</i>	6
1.4 <i>Empirical Framework: Contemporary Türkiye and Syria, and the emergence of local Syrian NGOs</i> 7	
1.4.1 <i>Türkiye: Civic Space and Civil Society</i>	7
1.4.2 <i>Syria: Civic Space and Civil Society</i>	8
1.4.3 <i>The emergence of local Syrian NGOs/ first responders</i>	11
2. CHAPTER 1: CIVIL SOCIETY, SHRINKING SPACE, AND LOCALIZATION 13	
2.1 <i>The Concept of Civil Society</i>	13
2.1.1 <i>Definitions of Civil Society</i>	13
2.1.2 <i>Critical Remarks on the Concept of Civil Society</i>	15
2.2 <i>Non-Governmental Organizations</i>	16
2.2.1 <i>Characteristics of NGOs</i>	16
2.2.2 <i>NGOs in Relation to Other Actors</i>	17
2.2.3 <i>Differences between International and Local NGOs</i>	20
2.3 <i>Regulations on Civil Society</i>	21
2.3.1 <i>Recent Developments of Regulations in Civil Society</i>	21
2.3.2 <i>Government Regulations on Civil Society</i>	22
2.4 <i>Grand Bargain and Localization</i>	24
2.4.1 <i>The Grand Bargain and its Origins</i>	24
2.4.2 <i>The Grand Bargain 2.0</i>	27
2.4.3 <i>The Concept of Localization</i>	28
3. CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	32
3.1 <i>Transnational Relations Perspective in International Relations</i>	32
3.2 <i>Power Dependence Theory</i>	35
4. CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	38
4.1 <i>Research Design</i>	38
4.2 <i>Data Collection and Analysis</i>	40
4.3 <i>Limitations of the Research Design</i>	43

5. CHAPTER 4: LOCALIZATION BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THEM	45
5.1 <i>Transnational Relations – The Environment of NGOs</i>	46
5.1.1 International Level – Donor Dynamics and Regulations	46
5.1.2 National Level – Regulations from the Host Country.....	50
5.1.3 Local Level – Challenges in Syria	54
5.2 <i>Power Relations – Strategies of NGOs.....</i>	57
5.3 <i>Achieving Localization – Support to NGOs.....</i>	66
5.3.1 Partnership	66
5.3.2 Capacity Strengthening	68
5.3.3 Financing.....	69
5.3.4 Coordination	71
5.4 <i>Discussion of the Main Findings</i>	73
5.4.1 Adaptive Strategies in Navigating the Complex Syrian Crisis	73
5.4.2 Navigating Regulatory Challenges in Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Crisis	73
5.4.3 The Imperative of Equitable Collaboration.....	74
5.4.4 Empowering Local Communities	75
5.4.5 Navigating Complexity and Charting a Path Forward: The Vision of NGOs in the Syrian Crisis.....	75
5.4.6 Advocacy, Collaboration, and Unifying Localization Efforts	76
5.4.7 Building Capacity, Accountability, and Collaborative Resilience.....	77
5.4.8 Managing Risks, Ensuring Safety, and Thriving Amid Conflict	77
5.5 Cross-Cutting Themes: Empowering Local Actors in Humanitarian Responses	78
5.6 Assessing the Challenges and Limitations of Humanitarian Localization.....	80
5.7 <i>Summary of key findings</i>	82
6. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	85
6.1 <i>Conclusion</i>	85
6.2 <i>Recommendations</i>	89
6.2.1 For Local Syrian NGOs:	89
6.2.2 For UN Agencies, Donors & INGOs:	91
6.2.3 For Host Government Türkiye:.....	92
6.2.4 For Local Non-State Armed Groups in Northwestern Syria:.....	93
6.2.5 For Other Contexts/Countries:	94
6.3 <i>Recommendations for Further Studies.....</i>	95
7. References.....	97
8. Annexes.....	107
8.1 <i>Annex 1: Information and Interview Guideline</i>	107
8.2 <i>Annex 2: Codes</i>	108
8.3 <i>Ethical Approval and Compliance:.....</i>	111
ÖZGEÇMİŞ.....	112

Abbreviations and Figures:

List of Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ICNL	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LDC	Least Developed Countries
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWS	Northwestern Syria
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PTT	Posta ve Telgraf Teşkilatı, (National post and telegraph directorate of Türkiye)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: UNHCR Türkiye: Provincial Breakdown Syrian Refugees in Türkiye - December 2022' (UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP)2022)</i>	3
Figure 2: The Status of Civic Space. Source: Civicus (n.d. a).....	22
Figure 3: The Grand Bargain 2016 - 2020.....	25
Figure 4: The Grand Bargain 2.0. Framework.....	28
Figure 5: The Grand Bargain's Commitment on Localization.....	30
Figure 6: A state-centric interaction pattern (left) and transnational interactions and interstate politics (right) (Nye & Keohane, 1971: 333).....	33
Figure 7: Power Operations in Emerson's Power Dependence Theory (Emerson, 1962: 35ff)	37
Figure 8: Characteristics of Interviewees	41
Figure 9: Distribution of Interviewees by Type of Organization	41

1. INTRODUCTION

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) provide crucial support for addressing societal demands and responsibilities. They bring specialized expertise, agility, and flexibility to respond swiftly to emerging needs. Operating at the community level, they engage with local populations and advocate for marginalized groups. NGOs also innovate, bridge the gap between governments and communities, and foster cross-sectoral collaborations. Their role in advocating for policy changes enhances the overall effectiveness of government efforts, ensuring a more comprehensive response to societal needs.

Since the early 2000s, a global trend has emerged as an increasing number of governments, regardless of their democratic or authoritarian nature, have introduced both legal and illegal measures that constrain civil society's participation in the civic space. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as the "shrinking space," is driven by a range of factors and occurs not only in authoritarian regimes but has expanded to democratic states. Governments may perceive foreign influence as a threat to their sovereignty or view NGOs as competitors for international funds (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019: 1). Other reasons include concerns related to anti-terrorism laws, security, nationalism, economic interests, and protectionism. These measures often affect countries where civic space was once more open, and civil society organizations (CSOs) actively operated (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014: 1). Civic space is not simply curtailed, but also re-shaped and the actors responsible for this underlying process are much more complex than is commonly supposed; international influences – not just domestic repression – add powerfully to these forces (Sogge, 2019).

Individuals experience physical threats escalating to violence, groups are stigmatized or defamed, and regulating laws affect the whole sector of CSOs such as NGOs in their work (Van der Borgh & Terwindt, 2012: 1070). These regulations include measures and laws on registration processes for NGOs, the alignment of NGOs to the government's priorities, or funding measures affecting organizations (Terwindt & Schliemann, 2017: 7).

The prevailing literature concerning government restrictions primarily approaches this topic through the neoliberal framework of human rights and democracy, underscoring its significance in fostering inclusive development (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Unmüßig, 2016; Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019). In contexts marked by fragility, such as post-conflict settings, the promotion of an inclusive civil society is increasingly recognized for its role in reconciliation and as a preventive measure against future conflicts (Carothers, 2016).

Notably, much of the analysis and discourse surrounding responses to government restrictions originate in the global North, while the perspectives of local and international NGOs directly affected by these restrictions remain largely underexplored (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019: 6). Consequently, there is a dearth of comprehensive country-specific studies, which are pivotal in contextualizing coping strategies and elucidating the best approaches to navigate government regulations within distinct national contexts. Thus, it is imperative to shift our attention toward local viewpoints to glean valuable insights and enhance our understanding of this complex issue.

Therefore, for this thesis, the context of Türkiye, focusing on the response of local Syrian NGOs to the Syrian conflict is chosen. Because Türkiye hosts, almost four million refugees¹, the largest Syrian refugee population in the world, who live outside of camps (UNHCR, 2022), some under challenging and precarious circumstances (3RPSYRIA, 2021), require coordinated humanitarian action and development cooperation to address the needs in protection, access to services (health, education, labor market), and to promote resilience. (cf. Figure 1)

Local NGOs were founded to address the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees inside Türkiye and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in northern Syria, besides the already active Turkish governmental institutions and organizations the number of registered NGOs increased from 88,646 in 2011 to 101,458 in Türkiye in 2023 (ICNL, 2023) (Sunata & Tosun, 2018: 686). However, NGOs face new laws and regulations, difficulties in achieving and renewing registration, receiving work permits, and containment on civil society (Bilge, 2019). International donors and organizations contribute with regulations (e.g., counter-terrorism legislation) and funding priorities for specific programs or geographic locations to the containment of civic space.

¹ As a point of clarification, it is essential to acknowledge that the Turkish government designates the displaced individuals from Syria as 'people under temporary protection' rather than 'refugees' within a juridical context. However, in this study, we refer to them as 'refugees' in a sociological sense, emphasizing their forced displacement and the challenges they face, without negating the specific legal status recognized by the Turkish government.

UNHCR Türkiye:
Provincial Breakdown of Syrian Refugees in Türkiye
 as of 03 December 2022



Figure 1: UNHCR Türkiye: Provincial Breakdown Syrian Refugees in Türkiye - December 2022' (UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP)2022)

NGOs confront financial challenges across the world. In 2023, 360 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance worldwide (UN Secretary-General António Guterres, 2023). This number tripled since 2016 (125 million people in need worldwide) when a group of experts appointed by the UN Secretary-General identified and examined three important and interdependent aspects of the humanitarian financial challenge which encompass reducing the needs, mobilizing additional funds through either traditional or innovative mechanisms, and improving the efficiency of humanitarian assistance. To improve the efficiency of humanitarian assistance, it was decided that a 'grand bargain' between the big donors and organizations in humanitarian aid is needed. The term "grand bargain" was initially proposed by the former UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing in its report titled "Too Important to Fail: addressing the humanitarian financing gap" as one of the solutions to address the humanitarian financing gap (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary-General, 2016). One component of the grand bargain is to increase support for national first responders, which is also known as localization. In 2014, only 0.2 percent of international humanitarian assistance was reported as channeled directly to local organizations. To understand why international humanitarian funding is often directed through

‘fundermediaries’² like UN agencies or international NGOs, we can look to the complexities of crisis settings and the need for careful partner selection. As highlighted in the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary-General (2016: 19), these complexities may arise from the political environment, which demands accountability to the humanitarian principle of neutrality, as well as the perceived lack of capacity or strict rules and regulations that can make national NGOs ineligible to directly receive and manage funds.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Syrian conflict, ongoing since 2011, has necessitated cross-border operations for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to regions within Syria that remain inaccessible from the central operational hub in Damascus. Local Syrian and Turkish NGOs have been instrumental in spearheading these operations and are critical in providing aid to the crisis-affected population. However, this operational landscape has been significantly impacted by evolving factors, including shifting donor priorities driven by international crises in places such as Ukraine and Afghanistan, recurring deliberations on the UN cross-border resolution, and regulatory changes instituted by the Turkish government, among other influences. These factors collectively contribute to the constriction of civic space, thereby challenging the localization agenda within the humanitarian response. To foster and advance localization effectively, it is imperative to comprehensively comprehend the existing barriers and limitations. Equally important is gaining insights into the strategies already employed by local NGOs to adapt to this evolving environment. This research seeks to understand *how local NGOs navigate the multifaceted challenges posed by these shifts and, in turn, what tailored support mechanisms can be devised to facilitate and promote localization within the Syrian humanitarian response.*

This research aims to investigate and analyze the evolving operational landscape of local NGOs in the Syrian humanitarian response, with a primary focus on cross-border operations, and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and limitations they face. The research also aims to uncover the adaptive strategies utilized by local NGOs to address these challenges and based on these findings, propose tailored support mechanisms that promote and facilitate

² Fundermediaries are organizations that act as intermediaries between funders such as foundations or donors and nonprofit organizations receiving grants or funding. They streamline the grant-making process, manage funds, provide technical assistance, and facilitate collaboration. High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary-General, 2016: 17, 19)

localization. The specific objectives are to 1) identify and analyze the specific barriers and limitations faced by local NGOs involved in cross-border humanitarian operations in Syria, and examine the changing environment, including donor landscape, UN resolutions, and government regulations, and its impact on the operational space for local NGOs, 2) explore the strategies employed by local NGOs to cope with and adapt to the evolving challenges in the humanitarian response context, 3) assess the extent to which local NGOs are supported in their localization efforts and identify areas for improvement in support mechanisms, and 4) provide recommendations for enhancing the localization agenda in humanitarian response, particularly in the context of the Syrian crisis, and to consider broader implications for humanitarian efforts in diverse contexts affected by crises.

1.2 Research Design and Research Question

The focus on the local perspective in this research offers the advantage of country-specific results and results that are transferable to other contexts. Therefore, this research contributes to the scientific discourse by analyzing the following question: *How do NGOs cope with and overcome localization barriers and limitations in their response to the Syrian crisis?* To answer the research question three sub-questions were identified:

- What are the localization barriers and limitations and to what extent are local NGOs influenced by the changing environment in which they operate (e.g., regulations in their operating area, regulations in their country of registration, and donor regulations)?
- Which strategies do NGOs use to cope with their reshaped environment?
- To what extent are local NGOs supported in promoting localization?

The research will contribute to international research on the ‘grand bargain’ by identifying barriers and limitations in implementing localization, caused by shrinking space, and thus achieving equitable cooperation between international NGOs and their local partners. By using the case study of local NGOs operating cross-border from Türkiye for the Syria response, a local perspective is chosen. The results gained from the case study can be then used and adapted to different contexts, where a shrinking space is impacting the civic space and the implementation of localization.

The Transnational Relations perspective, associated with scholars like Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye and Harold K. Jacobson, who have contributed to the study of transnational actors and their impact on global politics, offers a comprehensive perspective to examine how

NGOs address localization barriers and limitations in their response to the Syrian crisis. This perspective focuses on the role of non-state actors, international networks, and the influence of globalization in shaping the dynamics of humanitarian and civil society efforts. It allows for an exploration of how NGOs operate transnationally, collaborating with a multitude of global and local actors. By understanding the influence of these networks and the impact of globalization on their strategies and operations, this perspective aids in analyzing the broader context in which NGOs operate. It helps uncover the significance of interdependence, information diffusion, and the role of international governance structures in overcoming localization challenges effectively.

On a micro level, Emerson's Power Dependence Theory (1962) offers valuable insights into how NGOs navigate power dynamics and dependence in their relationships with various stakeholders involved in their responses to the Syrian crisis. This theory underscores the concept of dependence as a fundamental aspect of social relationships, emphasizing the importance of control over resources as a source of power. By understanding power imbalances and the role of resource control, deeper insights into the strategic management of dependence by NGOs and their utilization of sources of power can be achieved. It helps in uncovering the dynamics of resource exchange, negotiation, and interdependence within the complex web of actors involved in humanitarian efforts. This micro-level analysis facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how NGOs address localization barriers by leveraging power dynamics and strategic resource management.

In essence, both theories provide analytical frameworks to delve into the complexities of how local NGOs navigate localization barriers in the context of the Syrian crisis. Transnational relations perspective illuminates the broader context of global interactions and partnerships, while Emerson's power relations theory homes in on the power dynamics and dependencies that influence local NGOs' responses. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive understanding of the strategies, negotiations, and agency exhibited by local NGOs as they address limitations and contribute to the humanitarian response in a transnational setting.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured as explained hereafter: Chapter 1 introduces the topic and focuses on the conceptual background, with a sub-chapter on civil society and an understanding of civic space which is the sphere for the work of NGOs. The characteristics of NGOs, their differences, and their relation to other actors will be given in Chapter 1.2. The following sub-chapter (1.3)

deals with regulations on civil society, particularly regulations initiated by governments and international actors, and their relevance for development. Sub-chapter 1.4 will elaborate on the concept of the Grand Bargain and the localization approach. The second chapter provides the theoretical concept by presenting the transnational relations perspective by Nye and Keohane (1971) and the Theory of power dependence by Emerson (1962) and chapter 3 introduces the methodology applied within this thesis. In chapter 4, the focus is on answering the main research questions and its three sub-questions. Firstly, chapter 4.1. analyses the operating environment of local NGOs and how changes, like state restrictions and donor regulations, affect their humanitarian space, using the perspective of transnational relations. Building on this analysis, the created mapping of transnational relations will be analyzed using the Power Dependency Theory to understand power positions, means of power, and strategies of the main actors involved. After understanding the operating environment and strategies to cope with the reshaped environment, Chapter 4.3, analyzes the support local NGOs receive in promoting localization, using the categories of partnership, capacity strengthening, financing, and coordination. This is followed by a discussion of the main findings in Chapter 4.4 and a conclusion and recommendations in Chapter 5.

1.4 Empirical Framework: Contemporary Türkiye and Syria, and the emergence of local Syrian NGOs

In the upcoming sections, Türkiye's civic space and civil society as well as Syria's civic space and the emergence of the civil society is shortly touched upon as a brief background for the contemporary situation in Türkiye and Syria. Both are the basis for comprehending the status quo in the civic space of local NGOs operating cross-border from Türkiye in northwestern Syria.

1.4.1 Türkiye: Civic Space and Civil Society

In the early 1990s, Türkiye's formal civil society was underdeveloped, with limited avenues for organization beyond state structures. While trade unions had gained prominence, newer forms of civic engagement, such as NGOs and associations, were limited. Informal civil society engagement existed in the form of neighborhood assistance and strong extended family networks, particularly in rural areas (Seyrek, 2010).

Since the 2000s, Türkiye's formal civil society has flourished, playing a vital role in the country's democratization. The non-profit sector has grown substantially, with a 50 percent

increase in the number of civil society organizations. As of June 2023, there were 101,458 registered associations and 6,074 foundations, alongside various informal groups and initiatives, focusing on social services, education, sports, religion, and rights-related issues. Additionally, international NGOs have established a significant presence in the country, fostering global collaboration (ICNL, 2023).

Türkiye's democratization journey, particularly as an EU accession candidate, led to reforms enhancing civil society autonomy. Key milestones include the 2004 association law, which expanded civil society's independence, and the 2008 law on foundations, further improving the legal environment (ICNL, 2023).

However, the civil society landscape witnessed significant changes following the Gezi protests of 2013. These changes included a reduction in civic space, exemplified by the introduction of a security law in 2015. Subsequently, the attempted military coup in 2016 resulted in further restrictions, leading to the closure of several civil society organizations (Diner, 2018). Despite the lifting of the 'state of exception' in 2018, civil society protections have not improved as expected. In 2020, legal and political challenges persisted for civil society. Türkiye still lacks a concrete definition of civil society and a comprehensive legal framework for regulating civil society's relationship with public institutions (Third Sector Foundation of Turkey, n.d.).

1.4.2 Syria: Civic Space and Civil Society

Syrian History and Conflict, and the Suppression of the Syrian Civil Society

The Syrian Arab Republic gained independence in 1946, ending the French mandate established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Sykes-Picot Agreement between Great Britain and France (Hitti, 1959: 240ff, 248f; Lund, 2012: 15f; van Dam, 2017). Following independence, socialist and communist parties, including the Baath Party, saw increased support. The Baath Party assumed power after the coup of March 8, 1963, and another coup in 1970 led to Hafiz al-Assad, an Alawite and Baath Party member, becoming Syria's president. This shift resulted in greater influence for Alawites in administration and the military, generating tensions with the Sunni population due to issues such as corruption and nepotism (Hinnebusch, 2001: 29, 42ff, 61ff, 68; van Dam, 2017: 25ff). Tensions escalated in 1982 when a violent crackdown on an uprising in Hama triggered sectarian violence, making a peaceful transition from minority-based rule unlikely (Lund, 2012: 16ff; van Dam, 2017: 49ff).

In later years, Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father in 2000, shifted the regime's loyalty base towards the upper-middle class and national economic groups, implementing market reforms that disadvantaged the rural (Sunni) population and fueled dissatisfaction with the Alawite regime. Meanwhile, religious minorities in similar socio-economic situations aligned more closely with the regime (Balanche, 2018: 31f; Lund, 2012: 18ff).

The Arab Spring or Arab Awakening in 2011 represented ideas, discourses, demonstrations, changes, and revolutions within the Arab world motivated by long-suppressed popular demands for political inclusion and economic justice. Due to the adaptation to local contexts, the mass protest movements have different releases and routes, even in Syria (Heydemann & Leenders, 2011: 647f). In March 2011, influenced by the “Arab Spring” movements, peaceful demonstrations against the Syrian regime started from Daraa in the south and very soon spread over the country calling for political reforms, better economic conditions, and freedom. Movements and demonstrations were popular and not organized or influenced by “oppositional” political parties. Syrians lived for decades under the totalitarian rule of the Baath Party and the Assad family, which responded to the demonstrations by using deadly force against civilians. Like many authoritarian states in the Middle East and influenced by the eastern socialist countries, for decades the Syrian regime has not allowed the Syrian civil society to operate or exist. Moreover, all unions and syndicates were annexed and linked to the Baath party and/or to government institutions since the military coup in 1963 and the power takeover by Hafez al-Assad in 1971 (Khalaf, Ramadan & Stolleis, 2014).

Before 2011, no civil society organizations were permitted in Syria, and oppositional opinions and actions not in line with the Syrian government were prevented and monitored by the intelligence service. Some exceptions were given to organizations linked to the Assad family, Iran, or the United Nations (UN) presence, though still under the eyes of the Syrian intelligence, to support the Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) and after 2003 to support Iraqi refugees in Syria. Some semi-governmental organizations like the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other local NGOs close to the regime were allowed to operate and implement most of the UN activities, which poses questions of neutrality. Since the political power was centralized in the capital of Damascus, other governorates or areas of Syria had less knowledge and experience in political and civil society processes (Alsarraj & Hoffman, 2020; Khalaf, Ramadan & Stolleis, 2014).

After 2011, with wide geographical areas across the country obtained out of regime control, non-state local governance structures emerged and civil society organizations, local initiatives, and political movements developed independently internally and with support from the Syrian diaspora in Europe, the US, Gulf countries, and Türkiye. In conjunction with the beginning of the revolutionary movement in Syria, the international community began to interact with these movements on various levels (Al Achi, 2020).

On the political level, many countries, led by the USA, the European Union, Türkiye, and many Arab countries, have supported the Syrian peaceful popular movement and revolutionary demands, and these countries have taken steps, including withdrawing their embassies from Damascus, the suspension of Syria's membership in the Arab League, and other measures that aimed to put pressure on the regime in Damascus and to give legitimacy and to support the Syrian opposition abroad. The international community supported formations of the Syrian political opposition abroad and helped them to hold many conferences in Morocco, Türkiye, Qatar, and France, starting from the formation of the Syrian National Council to the formation of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. Furthermore, local councils and the formation of the Syrian Interim Government were supported, which concerned areas controlled by the opposition forces (Yacoubian, 2021).

On the humanitarian level, many international humanitarian organizations rushed to provide relief aid in Syria, including in areas controlled by the regime in Damascus, as well as the areas controlled by the Armed Opposition Groups in the south of Daraa, in the countryside of Damascus, the countryside of Homs, and the northwest in Aleppo and Idlib, as well as in north-eastern Syria in Ar-Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, and Al-Hasakah. As a result of political tensions and international pressure, relief organizations were forced to work in different modalities, including across borders from neighboring countries to Syria, prompting the United Nations to adopt a UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR 2165/2014) authorizing the passage of humanitarian aid across borders from Türkiye, Jordan, and Iraq (United Nations Security Council, 2014).

Since strategic interests and motivations of primarily external states increasingly influenced the course of the conflict, it is soon in its 12th year with more than 500,000 victims, 6.2 million internally displaced persons, 5.7 million refugees worldwide, and 11.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance (end of 2018; UN OCHA, 2019: 8).

1.4.3 The emergence of local Syrian NGOs/ first responders

As the Syrian Conflict escalated and evolved, local communities found themselves facing a dire humanitarian crisis. Basic services such as healthcare, education, water, and sanitation were disrupted or entirely unavailable in many areas. Traditional institutions and governance structures crumbled under the weight of the conflict's complexities. It was in this vacuum of assistance that local individuals and groups rose to the occasion, forming what would become the backbone of the local humanitarian response: local Syrian NGOs. (Bosman, 2012; ICVA, 2021)

The urgency of the situation compelled local Syrians to organize rapidly and effectively. Local NGOs sprouted from grassroots initiatives that were often rooted in pre-existing community networks, whether they were based on kinship, neighborhood associations, or shared experiences. These nascent organizations embodied the principle of self-reliance, as local individuals felt an immediate responsibility to alleviate the suffering of their communities. Many of these individuals had no formal training in humanitarian work, yet their intimate knowledge of the local context gave them a unique advantage in identifying needs and implementing relevant solutions. (Khalaf, Ramadan & Stolleis, 2014)

One hallmark of local Syrian NGOs was their ability to adapt swiftly to changing circumstances on the ground. The conflict's fluid nature meant that conditions could shift rapidly, requiring nimble responses. Unlike larger international organizations that often faced bureaucratic hurdles, local NGOs could make decisions rapidly and mobilize resources with greater speed. This agility allowed them to reach affected populations faster, making them particularly effective in providing timely assistance during critical phases of the conflict (Peer2Peer Support & IASC, 2019; ICVA, 2021).

Local Syrian NGOs possessed an unparalleled understanding of the cultural, social, and political intricacies within their communities. This contextual knowledge was an invaluable asset in navigating the complex terrain of aid delivery. They understood local norms, languages, and power dynamics, which enabled them to establish trust and rapport with affected populations. This trust was pivotal in ensuring that aid was not only delivered but also received and utilized effectively by those who needed it the most.

The emergence of local Syrian NGOs was also a response to the gaps left by the broader international humanitarian system. While international organizations struggled with logistical

challenges, security concerns, and bureaucratic processes, local NGOs were uniquely positioned to access areas that were difficult for others to reach. Their intimate familiarity with Syria's geography and sociopolitical dynamics allowed them to operate in contexts that would have otherwise been inaccessible. This localized access was crucial in assisting communities trapped in conflict zones or those experiencing restricted movement due to security concerns. (ICVA, 2021: 9f)

In essence, the emergence of local Syrian NGOs was a testament to the agency and resilience of local communities in the face of adversity. These organizations became beacons of hope, embodying the spirit of community-driven response and demonstrating that even amid the harshest circumstances, individuals had the power to effect positive change. As we proceed, we will explore the factors that motivated the creation of these local NGOs, shedding light on their significance not only within the humanitarian landscape but also within the broader narrative of the Syrian Conflict.

2. CHAPTER 1: CIVIL SOCIETY, SHRINKING SPACE, AND LOCALIZATION

This chapter deals with the conceptualization of this thesis, encompassing relevant definitions and concepts to familiarize the reader with the topic of 'shrinking space.' It will explain the realm of civic actors, definitions, and characteristics of civil society (organizations). Parts that influence the analysis will be pointed out. Following this, the discussion proceeds to NGOs, the primary actors of this thesis. Among various organizations, NGOs constitute one group of CSOs and belong to the civic sector. Thus, they merit closer inspection. Their relation to Western institutional donors and the governments of countries in which they operate will be described; distinctions between national and international NGOs will be made, and their relationships explored. To address the research questions, the analysis will show that the characteristics of and relationships between NGOs are important for their interactions with other actors and the overall strategy of NGOs. Subsequently, the focus will shift to describing government regulation of civic space, followed by an elaboration on the concept of the “grand bargain” and localization, which are central topics of this thesis.

2.1 The Concept of Civil Society

This research deals with the civic space in which CSOs, including NGOs, are operating and which is regulated by the government and perceived as restrictive by CSOs. Therefore, definitions of civil society according to a Western understanding are outlined. However, critical remarks and different understandings of civil society are pointed to as well.

2.1.1 Definitions of Civil Society

The concept of civil society is context-dependent and evolves. It is commonly defined as a distinct sphere, distinct from both the state and the economic market, often referred to as the "third sector" (Chandhoke, 2007: 608; Anheier & List, 2005: 54; Lewis & Kanji, 2009: 64f.). According to the OHCHR (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner), it comprises "individuals who voluntarily engage in forms of public participation and action around shared interests, purposes, or values," often coming together in groups, such as civil society organizations, to pursue their objectives (OHCHR, 2008: vii). These voluntary groups encompass a wide range of entities, including "all non-state, non-market, non-household organizations and institutions, ranging from community or grassroots associations, social

movements, cooperatives, labor unions, professional groups, advocacy and development NGOs, formal non-profits, social enterprises, and many more" (Banks & Hulme, 2012: 22f.).

Alscher et al. (2017: 6) distinguish two primary categories within civil society: the organized sector, characterized by structured entities like associations and foundations, and the unorganized sector, which involves the spontaneous emergence of groups that have the potential to develop more structured modes of operation. Clarke (1998: 40ff) offers insights from both liberal and radical perspectives on civil society. The liberal viewpoint, influenced by thinkers like de Tocqueville, perceives citizens as playing a role in holding the government accountable and voluntarily establishing equilibrium between the state and the market. This perspective aligns with the preferences of Western institutional donors. Conversely, the radical perspective concentrates on the power dynamics between civil society and the state, drawing significant influence from Gramsci, where "civil society can be seen as the site of struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces" (Lewis & Kanji, 2009: 128).

Mary Kaldor holds the view that civil society and the state have always been linked, and she sees civil society as a counterbalance of the state and argues that civil society cannot exist without a state (Kaldor, 2003: 7). She focuses her explanation of civil society on the negotiation of social contracts between political and economic centers of power and individuals (Kaldor, 2003: 44f.). John Keane's definition combines many of the aspects mentioned above. He states that civil society is "a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be non-violent, self-organizing, self-reflexive, and permanently in tension with each other and with the state institutions that "frame", construct and enable their activities" (Keane, 1998: 6).

To sum up, the civic space is the realm in which various forms of organizations that belong neither to the government nor the economic market meet and interact. Often, their objectives serve as a counterbalance to the government and economic actors, and the issues the actors work on benefit society. In a Western understanding, the CSOs belong to a democratic society. However, civil society does not mean democracy or democratization per se, but the freedom to carry out certain activities that are linked to a democratic understanding, like engaging in activities that influence society (Chandhoke, 2007: 613). Some aspects of the concept are debated and will be regarded in the next sub-chapter.

2.1.2 Critical Remarks on the Concept of Civil Society

To understand the complexity of civil society, additional aspects and alternative definitions of civil society will be selectively discussed and briefly presented. Mary Kaldor asks if groups promoting the use of violence or acting violently themselves belong to civil society (Kaldor, 2003: 9f). And Lewis and Kanji (2009: 127f) reveal that CSOs do not inevitably contribute positively to society, since their aims might also include ideas and approaches that violate human rights. Thus on one side, since they do not respect international and social conventions on human rights, one could conclude that they do not belong to the civil society (Kasfir, 1998: 10).

The Handbook on Civil Society by the OHCHR defines civil society as an institution that upholds and safeguards human rights (OHCHR, 2008). Alscher et al. emphasize that the majority of Civil Society Organizations operate within the framework of human and civil rights, the rule of law, and democracy, with a primary goal of ensuring enduring political rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of association (2017: 6). Conversely, one can argue that these groups while belonging to civil society, pursue the same core values as other entities within society. In a diverse societal landscape, it is unfeasible to represent the concerns and needs of every individual, but collectively, civil society plays a vital role in effecting social change and development by facilitating the exchange of diverse ideas and the negotiation of compromises for coexistence.

Nevertheless, criticism surrounds the concept of civil society for its perceived Westernization and Eurocentric nature, which might not encompass elements considered in non-Western environments like Middle Eastern societies. The definition of Arab civil society and what qualifies as a Civil Society Organization raise questions, illustrating a conceptual disarray. Civil society terminology is employed by public officials to further their mobilization and modernization initiatives, by Islamists seeking a legal share of public space, and by independent activists and intellectuals striving to expand the boundaries of individual liberties (Yom, 2005: 18). According to Western political scientists and liberal Arab research institutions, civil society should be secular in ideology, civil in conduct, legally recognized, and supportive of democratic reforms. However, it's worth noting that the growing influence of religiously motivated political ideologies in certain contexts can pose challenges to this definition (Bellin, 1994).

These observations merit consideration, especially when operating within a non-Western environment. While there are organizations that align with the Western interpretation of civil society, the context is significantly shaped by non-Western civil society entities, influencing the dynamics among the actors involved.

2.2 Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs, integral members of the civil society organizations³ cohort, have emerged as significant players in the realm of development. They serve the dual purpose of supplementing state responsibilities as service providers while also challenging government actions, such as holding authorities accountable for human rights violations. In the context of this thesis, the primary focus is directed towards NGOs, as the research question underscores their strategies for coping within constrained operating environments. As a result, this section will delve into the characterization of NGOs, highlighting distinctions between international and national NGOs and delving into their interrelationships. The examination of NGOs' interactions with governments and Western institutional donors takes center stage, gaining particular significance when assessing the operational environment and power dynamics among actors engaged in the humanitarian response for northern Syria.

2.2.1 Characteristics of NGOs

Much like the multifaceted nature of civil society expounded upon in the preceding chapter, the concept of non-governmental organizations also exhibits a diverse spectrum of dimensions. Scholars have scrutinized the emergence of NGOs, offering a plethora of perspectives, nuanced insights, as well as critiques on the modus operandi of these entities (Korten, 1987; Feldman, 1997; Vakil, 1997; Fisher, 1997; Clarke, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Uvin, Jain, and Brown, 2000; Bebbington, 2004; Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Banks & Hulme, 2012). NGOs are an integral component of civil society, simultaneously contributing to the construction and fortification of civil society organizations. They play a pivotal role in the discourse surrounding civil society, spearheading the establishment of networks and alliances within this domain (Lewis & Kanji, 2009: 139; Banks & Hulme, 2012: 21). Central to the identity of NGOs is their formal organizational structure marked by a certain degree of institutionalization. To operate within a

³ Organizations that are not affiliated with the government make up civil society, which includes educational institutions, religious institutions, professional organizations, advocacy groups (business sometimes is covered by the term civil society and sometimes not) labor unions, community groups, NGOs, indigenous groups, philanthropic organizations, and faith-based organizations, are encompassed under the term "civil society organizations".

country, they are required to register with the government. They exist as private entities, distinct from governmental bodies, and are characterized by their not-for-profit orientation, setting them apart from market-driven actors. NGOs maintain a degree of self-governance, granting them the ability to manage and oversee their operations, often founded through voluntary efforts and frequently featuring voluntary participation (Lewis & Kanji, 2009: 10). Vakil further underscores their commitment to "improving the quality of life for disadvantaged people" (1997: 2060), predominantly geared towards instigating social, political, or economic transformations closely linked to development endeavors. In essence, their overarching objective is to contribute to the "social good" (Silliman, 1999: 24). NGOs predominantly secure their funding from diverse sources, encompassing private and public contributions, or the sale of goods. Private donations are typically solicited from individuals or private foundations, whereas public funding is derived from governmental channels (Paul, 2000: 5).

Historically, the terminology 'NGO' was introduced in the wake of the United Nations' establishment in 1945, denoting non-state organizations that engaged in consultative roles regarding UN activities (Lewis & Kanji, 2009: 8). Silliman (1999: 24f.) further elucidates the multifaceted roles of NGOs, which encompass "formulating and implementing social and development programs, promoting social justice and rights, protecting the environment, monitoring the government, and undertaking numerous other functions". This delineation of NGOs' functions serves to elucidate their roles and operational parameters, which are pivotal in comprehending their interactions with other stakeholders, a subject explored in the subsequent section and analyzed further in Chapter 2 within the context of Türkiye and Northwestern Syria.

2.2.2 NGOs in Relation to Other Actors

NGOs are situated in a construct of dependencies with other actors that influence their frame of work, their opportunities, and their limitations. Other actors that NGOs mostly depend on are institutional donors, as they are NGOs' main funding source and the governments of the countries in which they work. As NGOs can be divided into national and international non-governmental organizations the differences in their characteristics and roles are outlined as well. In Chapter 4, these relations will be analyzed in the context of Türkiye and Syria, bearing in mind the empirical framework highlighted above.

NGOs in Relation to Western Institutional Donors

Over time, the significance of NGOs within the civil sector has evolved, influenced by trends in the growth and decline of democratic states, and the impact of globalization on networking opportunities. During the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, a policy shift marked a democratization wave challenging authoritarian regimes. "Strengthening civil society" was seen as the linchpin for democratization, good governance, and development, particularly concerning CSOs and NGOs (Banks & Hulme, 2012: 24; Lewis, 2001: 2f.; Howell et al., 2008: 83). This strengthening encompassed various CSOs, with NGOs playing a pivotal role. Literature from the turn of the century outlined the assumed benefits of these groups, including increased political participation, enhanced accountability, and a new development discourse, particularly in Middle Eastern societies (Yom, 2005).

Citizens harnessed civil society organizations as allies against state repression, using them to exert pressure on and challenge authoritarian governments. These CSOs played a key role in introducing democracy and capitalist markets, often supported by Western institutional donors with a development agenda emphasizing human rights and democratic promotion (Lewis & Kanji, 2009: 129f.; Chandhoke, 2007: 612). However, in contrast to the democratic surge of the 1990s, the mid-2000s witnessed a "democratic recession" and the rise of hybrid regimes, including semi-authoritarian governments (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014: 22). Recognizing that endeavors to implement the Western agenda in authoritarian and hybrid regimes yielded only limited success, there was a growing inclination to bolster civil society (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014: 23).

Policymakers saw NGOs as critical implementers of good governance, democratic expansion, human rights, and public participation—integral components of a successful neoliberal economic policy. NGOs, as close partners of Western governments, were viewed as flexible, innovative, and effective organizations close to grassroots movements, capable of identifying the needs of the population (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014: 22). This allowed Western governments to indirectly promote their agenda, implement their ideology, and expand their influence, sometimes disregarding national sovereignty (Chandhoke, 2007: 608f.). While NGOs operate autonomously from the governments funding them, questions about their independence have been raised (Howard et al., n.d.: 31f.), with criticisms often likening this dynamic to a new form of colonialism (Kaldor, 2003: 9).

As NGOs steadily proliferated towards the end of the previous century, scholars referred to a "quiet revolution" led by NGOs (Silliman, 1999: 28; Clarke, 1998: 52).

Globalization increased the importance of NGOs and offered opportunities for global networking (Kaldor, 2003: 6). NGOs were seen as the "political and social counterpart of the process of globalization" and played a role in facilitating economic globalization, which had consequences for global South countries, including issues related to free market prices and trade agreements with the global North (Kaldor, 2003: 9). CSOs, including NGOs, not only provided services but also acted as watchdogs overseeing the state and the economy, holding them accountable.

NGOs' Engagement with Host Governments

The relationship between NGOs and the governments of the countries they operate in is often complex and depends on the type of government in place. Working with democratic governments is typically more straightforward for NGOs compared to authoritarian or hybrid regimes (Keane, 2003: 863). Banks and Hulme note that this relationship can range from overt cooperation and collaboration to hidden tensions or open hostility (2012: 6). Tensions may arise from the government's perception that NGOs and governments compete for international donor funding (Fisher, 1997: 452). States might feel that their sovereignty and authority are undermined when international financial resources are directed to NGOs instead of being channeled through the government (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014: 8; Silliman, 1999: 24). NGOs and other CSOs challenge the state's power by advocating for specific rights, holding governments accountable, representing marginalized groups, monitoring government actions, shaping policy and legal frameworks, and providing services in times of need. They play a crucial role in promoting transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights by participating in governance, conducting independent research, and engaging in international advocacy (Baldus et al., 2019; Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019). However, states often feel challenged by NGOs and civil society organizations due to their ability to erode state control, engage in advocacy and activism, exert international pressure, fill gaps during crises, raise public awareness about sensitive issues, and influence laws and policies. By creating an alternative power center, NGOs can question and sometimes oppose state actions, making them potential sources of contention and challenges to government authority. Consequently, states may perceive NGOs as a threat to their power and legitimacy and take measures to restrict the space for NGOs and other civil society actors to exert their influence (Civic Space Watch, 2023: 23ff).

However, governments have the autonomy of their countries' legislation and the (legitimate) power to change, adapt, and develop frameworks that regulate the cooperation with NGOs (Fisher, 1997: 451f.). Civicus, a global network of CSOs and activists, elaborates on country examples of space for civil society (2015), criticizing that Middle Eastern and North African countries have changed, or are in the process of changing. As depicted in the previous sections, NGOs, and their role in international development, and thus their power and impact, have changed massively from their emergence up to the present. Moreover, governments passing laws to regulate the work of NGOs is not a new phenomenon but has been more common since the proliferation and the growing importance of NGOs (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014: 1; Civic Space Watch, 2023: 23ff). By implementing NGO regulations, governments want to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently, that NGOs follow government priorities, and that governments create ownership⁴ and thus gain power. The monitoring of NGOs' finances and sectors of work for coordination can lead to conflicts between the government and NGOs (Fisher, 1997: 451; Lewis & Kanji, 2009: 26f.). NGOs will always remain dependent on their relationship to the government that sets the rules for civil societies' room of maneuver. Clark concludes that NGOs can "oppose, complement or reform the state, but they cannot ignore it" (Clark, 1992: 152).

2.2.3 Differences between International and Local NGOs

In the scope of this research, distinguishing between national and international NGOs holds substantial significance due to their differing roles and available resources, which assume a central role in Chapter 4. Banks and Hulme establish a differentiation between NGOs headquartered in the Northern Hemisphere and those originating within the countries where they operate (2012: 3f.). Concerning their relationships, Hailey underscores a North-South divide: International NGOs maintain close ties with institutional donors from whom they secure funding. In contrast, local or national NGOs possess in-depth knowledge of their country, culture, and language, resulting in fewer cultural barriers, but often face funding challenges, especially from Western institutional donors (Hailey, 2000: 403). Collaboration within a North-South framework often exhibits disparities, as INGOs frequently exert control over funding and decision-making processes, transforming them into donors rather than partners. This dynamic leads to a highly uneven relationship and a dependence of local NGOs

⁴ Ownership, frequently used in the discourse of development politics, is defined as the transfer of responsibility to the target group of the project to ensure sustainability and enhance participation. The wording is used by governments implementing NGO frameworks as it mirrors how Western governments approach their project target groups.

on INGOs (Lewis, 1998: 508; Lewis & Kanji, 2009: 21). Banks and Hulme advocate for INGOs to function as catalysts for enhancing the bargaining power of local organizations, empowering them to become effective advocacy actors (2012: 25). The landscape of NGOs has evolved significantly in recent years, with some southern-based NGOs securing international funding and reducing their dependence on INGOs for project implementation. This transformation is often attributed to their valuable resources, including well-trained staff. In light of increasingly restricted working environments instigated by governments, NGOs must strategize on how to collaborate effectively, leveraging their strengths to positively influence their position in negotiations on civic space.

This chapter has shown that NGOs are often in the middle of institutional donors and governments of the countries they work in. Both put regulations on NGOs that need to be fulfilled. This can hamper the relationship. In addition, differences were crystalized between local NGOs and INGOs which influences their relationship.

2.3 Regulations on Civil Society

This chapter provides an overview of the regulations on civil society and the concrete measures by governments to restrict civic space.

2.3.1 Recent Developments of Regulations in Civil Society

The trend toward a restricted or closed civil society cannot only be observed in authoritarian or hybrid regimes in the global South but also in democratic states within the European Union or North America (Civicus, 2019: 12; Carothers, 2016: 2). Restrictions on civic space, the sphere in which activities of CSOs take place and actors of civil society collaborate, are not a new phenomenon, however, “shrinking space” has become a buzzword since the early 2010s. CSO representatives, human rights defenders, international experts, and social scientists argue that the space for civil society is decreasing with intensity and globality that is reaching a new dimension (Carothers, 2016: 5). Whereas literature from the early 2010s manifests an increasing, but an uncertain trend in the decrease of civic space, more recent literature by Brechenmacher (2017: 91) states a “new political reality” of government restrictions on universal human rights such as freedom of association, expression, and assembly.

Civicus observes and categorizes countries according to how open or restricted they are regarding operations in the civil society (cf. Figure 2; Civicus, n.d. a). Moreover, Civicus provides emergency funding for CSOs that are facing new restrictions and is an international advocacy player for the importance of civil society (Civicus, n.d. b). According to the data collected by Civicus and analyzed in the “Civil Society Atlas by Bread for the World,” only four percent of the global population lives in a civic space categorized as ‘free’. Moreover, civil society is “under serious attack” in more than half of the world’s countries. (Civicus, 2019: 6). Regarding civic space, recent years have been characterized by attacks against refugees, particularly in Mexico and the Mediterranean; an increasing criminalization of protection and rescue at sea; attacks against minorities such as women, indigenous peoples, environmentalists, and land rights activists; as well as censorship on independent media and attacks on journalists (Civicus, 2019: 9).

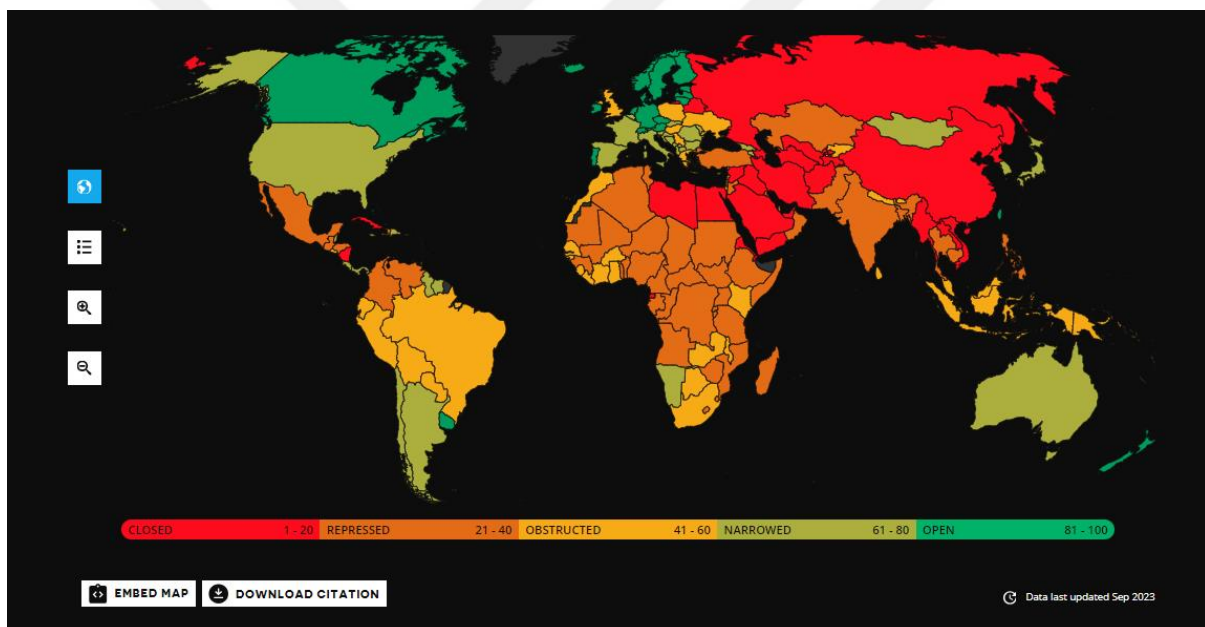


Figure 2: *The Status of Civic Space*. Source: Civicus (n.d. a).

2.3.2 Government Regulations on Civil Society

Civil society is either limited as a whole in a defined space like a country (e.g. via government regulations) or in part, where only certain groups are affected by restrictions (e.g. human/environmental activists, journalists, minority groups like indigenous people). Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2012: 1070) specify five categories of restrictions against civil society groups and individuals of a group:

- 1) **physical harassment and intimidation**, including violence (e.g., threats or killings which are treated with impunity by the perpetrators)
- 2) **criminalization through investigations and prosecution** (e.g., preventive terrorism lists)
- 3) **administrative restrictions** such as NGO regulation and burdensome registration and re-registration procedures
- 4) **stigmatization and defamation** of specific actors or the whole NGO sector
- 5) **limited space for dialogue** (e.g., participation at round tables or stakeholder meetings is not granted to CSO actors).

In this thesis, the third aspect of restrictions against civil society, namely administrative restrictions, will be observed in the empirical case study of NGOs operating from Türkiye in northwestern Syria. A variety of measures by governments fall within the category of administrative restrictions, from complex and time-consuming registration and re-registration processes over regulations on funding, especially foreign funding to ad-hoc measures by government agencies (Bilge, 2019; Boztaş, 2019). This is consistent with Brechenmacher's statement that administrative restrictions are mostly an element of the difficulties faced by civil society, but not the only one (2017: 92).

The factors that drive regulations by governments on civic space are manifold. Among them is mistrust in institutions evoked by colonialism and Western interventions aiming at imposing their ideology. The funding of civil society organizations by Western donors and the associated undermining of the government's authority is another argument for regulations. Moreover, the power of civil society shown in the Arab Spring evokes the fear of loss of power for powerholders and drives regulations. Imposing restrictions on NGOs is a questioning of Western power and dominance since almost all members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC)⁵ contributing to the Official Development Assistance (ODA) are exclusively Western countries (Alscher *et al.*, 2017: 5; OECD, 2019). These elements go along with a “democratic recession and authoritarian resurgence” (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019: 1). As stated earlier, not

⁵ The OECD-DAC publishes a list of countries that receive Official Development Assistance (ODA) including the Least Developed Countries (LDC) and classified by their Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (OECD, 2019).

only are authoritarian and semi-authoritarian states actively repressing civil society, but democratic states are also at the forefront.

Furthermore, the worldwide rise of populist movements, driven by a desire to preserve traditional and protectionist structures, amplifies this trend. Additionally, the growing influence of non-Western actors like China and Russia, both in the decision-making processes of UN institutions and their global economic engagement without imposing governance and accountability conditions, has further implications (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019: 2). Economic objectives, such as the pursuit of natural resource wealth, often lead to the persecution of environmental activists or the displacement of entire communities (Brechenmacher and Carothers, 2019: 2). Moreover, evolving technologies, including social media, have a substantial impact on the relationship between governments and the civil sector, prompting a call for regulation. The proliferation of disinformation, the influence of technology on electoral outcomes, and the deployment of surveillance techniques exemplify these shifts (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019: 2). In conclusion, the regulation of NGOs walks a fine line between a government's legitimate right to oversee NGO activities and the potential exploitation of this right to suppress the open and active tendencies of civil society.

2.4 Grand Bargain and Localization

This chapter introduces the ‘grand bargain’ and its origin at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016. After elaborating on the achievements and critics of the grand bargain, the discussion of the Grand Bargain 2.0 follows. Lastly, it concludes with an in-depth presentation of the concept of localization.

2.4.1 The Grand Bargain and its Origins

During the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul in May 2016, the largest donors and humanitarian organizations committed to getting more means into the hands of people in need and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. The urgency to complement efforts to shrink needs and broaden the resource base for humanitarian action was emphasized by the report “Too important to fail – addressing the humanitarian financing gap” which highlighted a funding gap of US\$ 15 billion despite an increase in humanitarian funding: the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) recorded US\$ 2 billion in 2000 and US\$ 24.5 billion in 2014 raised globally for humanitarian action, the humanitarian needs of 125 million people are neither acknowledged

nor addressed. (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary-General, 2016: 1f). The High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary-General, who published the report, had the task to bring “the world’s attention to the rapidly growing numbers of people in dire need: only if they are seen and heard will we honor the pledge to leave no one behind and achieve the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)” in preparation of the first WHS. Individuals from international and national governments, the private sector, and civil society came together, conducting research with the goal “to ensure that the resources are found to meet the needs of those who are the most likely to be left behind: the people whose lives are crushed by conflicts, earthquakes, typhoons and all manner of disasters” (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary-General, 2016: 1). The Panel concluded with the need for a systematic change in humanitarian aid delivery, and greater efficiency and called on donors and implementing organizations to come together in a Grand Bargain.

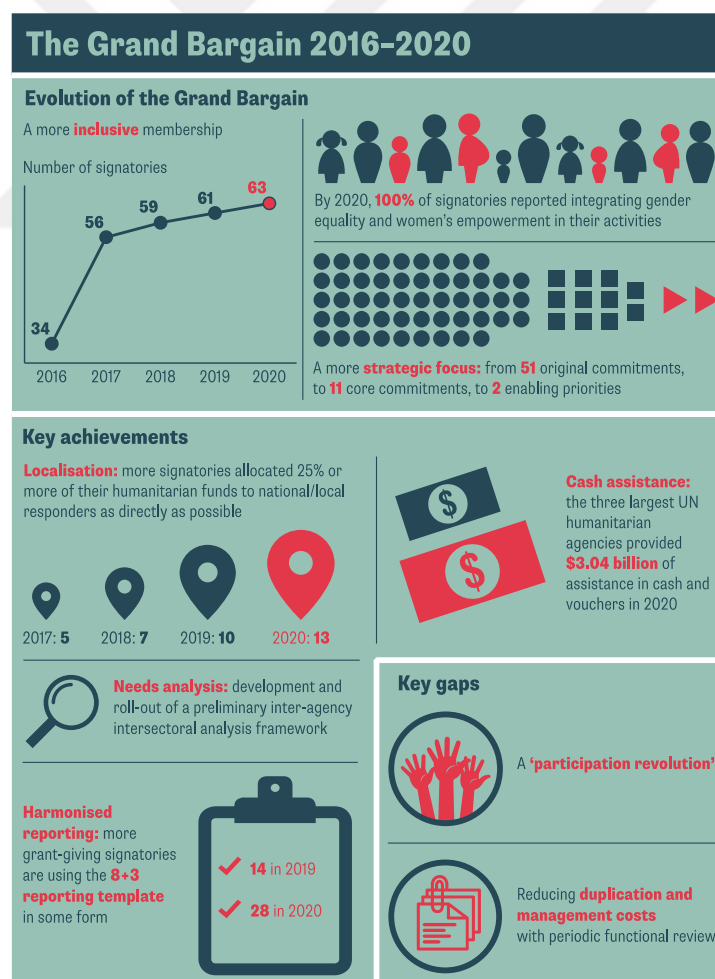


Figure 3: The Grand Bargain 2016 - 2020

The unique agreement – the ‘grand bargain’ – signed in 2016 includes 66 signatories (25 donor states, 12 UN agencies, 2 Red Cross / Red Crescent movements, 2 Inter-Governmental Organizations, and 25 NGOs). 10 workstreams under the Grand Bargain caucuses to implement 51 commitments. The 10 workstreams were: (1) greater transparency; (2) more support and funding tools to local and national responders; (3) increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming; (4) reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews; (5) improve joint and impartial needs assessment; (6) a participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions that affect their lives; (7) increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding; (8) reduce the earmarking of donor contributions; (9) harmonise and simplify reporting requirements; (10) enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors (ICVA, 2022: 4,9).

Challenges and Critics of the Grand Bargain

Despite the achievements of the grand bargain, successfully mobilizing key stakeholders over time and the comparatively light bureaucratic footprint, independent evaluations of the Grand Bargain identified also challenges and critics of its implementation. The complexity of its commitments posed a formidable obstacle, requiring coordination among diverse stakeholders such as donors, UN agencies, and NGOs. This complexity sometimes led to uneven prioritization and implementation of its various components. Additionally, the increased emphasis on transparency and accountability, while critical, resulted in heightened reporting requirements that added administrative burdens for humanitarian organizations. Balancing short-term emergency response with long-term development goals also presented a challenge, along with the need to ensure meaningful local and national ownership of humanitarian interventions, necessitating the navigation of power dynamics and capacity gaps. (Metcalf-Hough, Fenton & Poole, 2019; NEAR, 2023)

Despite its intentions, the grand bargain faced criticisms on several fronts. Detractors pointed to its lack of binding commitments, leading to concerns that some signatories might not fully fulfill their pledges. Another criticism centered on the limited involvement of affected communities in decision-making processes, potentially resulting in interventions that do not align with local needs. Furthermore, while designed to improve funding efficiency, the Grand Bargain encountered cases where pledged funding levels were not met by donors, impacting the ability to deliver effective assistance. Critics also cautioned against a potential culture of risk aversion that might discourage innovative approaches and longer-term solutions.

Additionally, concerns were raised about the empowerment of local organizations; some argued that the grand bargain's localization principle fell short of adequately supporting and enabling local actors. Amid these critiques, ongoing dialogue remains essential to refine the Grand Bargain's approach and address its challenges. (Metcalf-Hough, Fenton & Poole, 2019)

2.4.2 The Grand Bargain 2.0

Five years after the grand bargain 1.0 process was initiated, the follow-up process – grand bargain 2.0 – is running. The grand bargain is an agreement between aid organizations and donors: donors are required to make scarce aid funds available as flexibly as possible and not for a specific purpose and in return, aid organizations commit to transparency and visibility of the use of the funds. The ten workstreams, which achieved some major and minor progress, were adjusted under the grand bargain 2.0.

The structure of the 2.0 process has been partly changed. Instead of ten areas of work, the signatories focus on two basic priorities: 1) quality funding with transparency and visibility, and 2) strengthening the role of local responders and giving affected people a greater say in relief efforts. Five workstreams out of the 10 are following up on the process: (Workstream 1) Greater transparency, (Workstream 2) Local and national responders, (Workstream 5) Needs Assessment, (Workstream 6) Participation revolution, and (Workstream 9) Harmonized and simplified reporting.

A key shortcoming of the first round, a largely technical approach to mostly political hurdles, has been addressed by the new approach through policy committees ('caucuses'). Cash coordination, the role of intermediaries, and quality funding are the current three caucuses. The caucuses attempt to overcome key hurdles in the reform process through clear problem definition, tight timelines, and negotiations mainly at the high-level representative level. A new component is also ten national reference groups to ensure a link back to crisis contexts. As the process can build on the preparatory work, it was only agreed to run for two years instead of the previous five (ICVA, 2022; Metcalf-Hough, Fenton & Manji, 2023). The Figure-4 titled 'Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework' outlines the strategic objectives, enabling priorities, outcome pillars, workstreams, political caucuses, national reference groups, and cross-cutting issues of the grand bargain 2.0 reform process. It aims to enhance humanitarian efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability, emphasizing equitable partnerships, transparency, and local engagement. Workstreams such as 'Greater transparency,' 'Local and national responders,' and 'Harmonized and simplified reporting' represent specific focus areas. Political caucuses address critical

issues like cash coordination and quality funding, with designated timeframes. National Reference Groups promote local engagement, while gender and risk-sharing are integrated throughout the process, providing a visual framework for understanding the Grand Bargain 2.0's objectives and priorities (IASC, 2021).

Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework

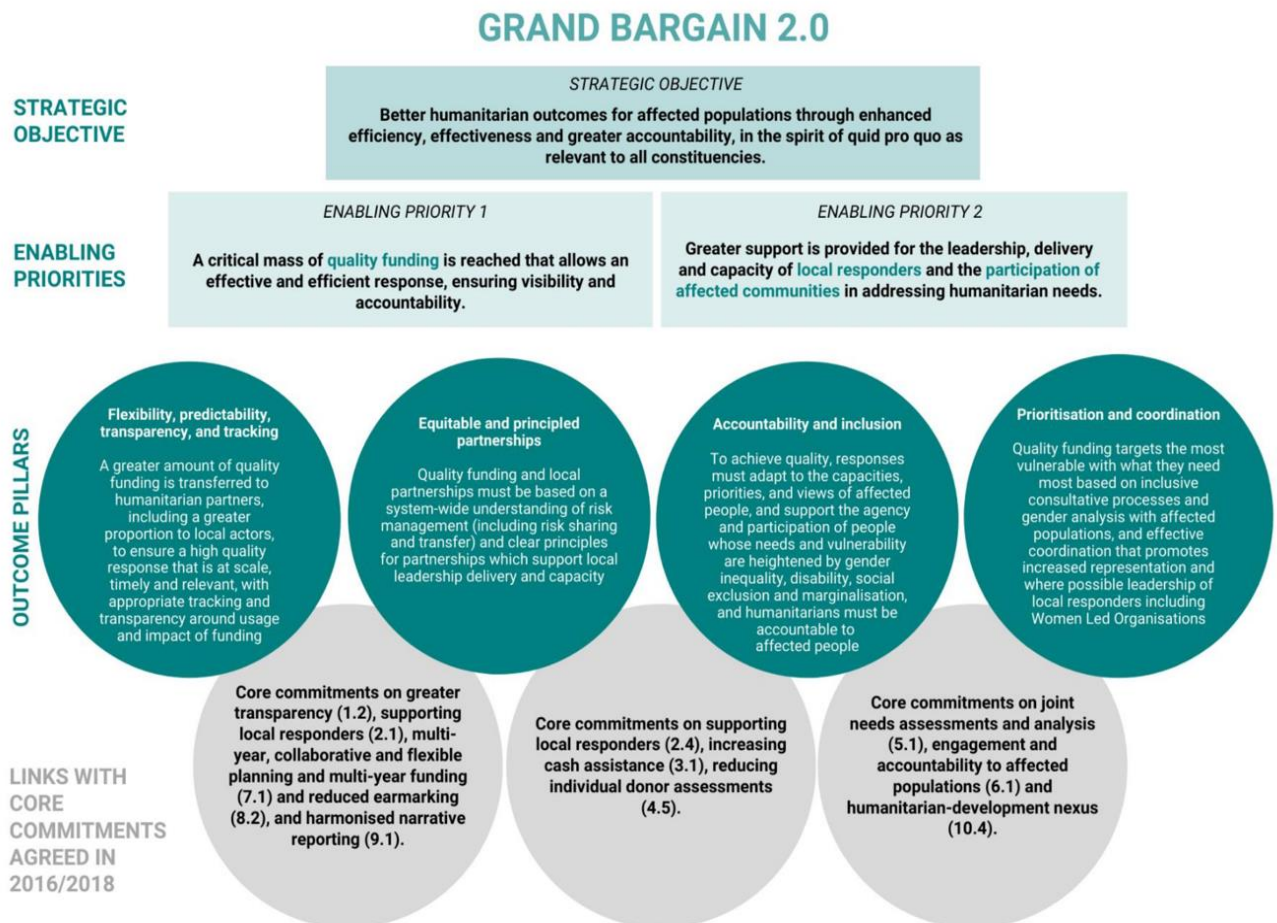


Figure 4: The Grand Bargain 2.0. Framework

2.4.3 The Concept of Localization

The second workstream of the Grand Bargain: ‘more support and funding tools to local and national responders’ is widely known under the concept of *localization*. Aid organizations and donors are committed to making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary, recognizing that international humanitarian actors play a vital role in achieving this objective (Agenda for Humanity, 2016: 5; ICVA, 2017). The following six commitments were agreed on (Agenda for Humanity, 2016: 5):

“(1) Increase and support multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders, including preparedness, response, and coordination capacities, especially in fragile contexts and where communities are vulnerable to armed conflicts, disasters, recurrent outbreaks, and the effects of climate change. We should achieve this through collaboration with development partners and incorporate capacity strengthening in partnership agreements.

(2) Understand better and work to remove or reduce barriers that prevent organizations and donors from partnering with local and national responders to lessen their administrative burden.

(3) Support and complement national coordination mechanisms where they exist and include local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms as appropriate and in keeping with humanitarian principles.

(4) Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.

(5) Develop, with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and apply a ‘localisation’ marker to measure direct and indirect funding to local and national responders.

(6) Make greater use of funding tools which increase and improve assistance delivered by local and national responders, such as UN-led country-based pooled funds (CBPF), IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), and NGO-led and other pooled funds.”

According to the workstream, these commitments are summarized in four components: partnership, capacity strengthening, financing, and coordination, which can be arranged circularly. Starting with partnership, which focuses on removing the barriers to partnership and incorporating capacity strengthening into partnership agreements, followed by capacity strengthening to invest in institutional capacities and to reinforce instead of replacing, continued with financing, which intends to channel 25% of humanitarian finance as directly as possible to local actors and to use more pooled funds, until coordination to support and complement local mechanisms and to involve local actors in international mechanisms. The analysis of the implementation of localization and its barriers will follow these four components (IFRC, 2021: 7).

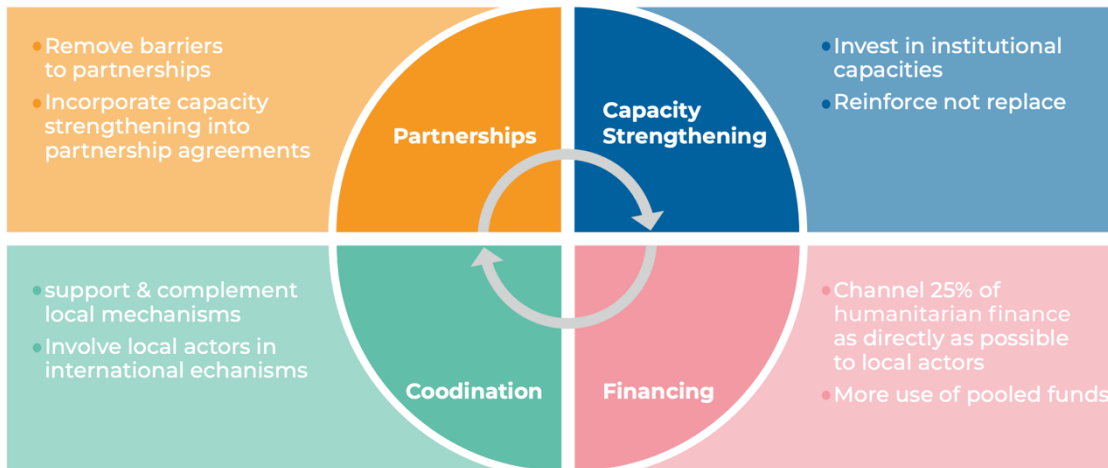


Figure 5: The Grand Bargain's Commitment on Localization

Operating humanitarian aid as locally as possible and as internationally as necessary arose out of the importance of local actors due to changes in the humanitarian landscape. International organizations may find it increasingly difficult to enter crisis-affected areas, because of assertive host governments, high levels of insecurity, or both. Remotely managed humanitarian operations have become the standard for many organizations, and in these cases, local organizations and individuals have been contracted to deliver much-needed assistance, including in cross-border operations, like the case study of this thesis (Kipfer-Didavi, 2018: 77ff; Schenkenberg van Mierop, 2018: 62ff).

The Charter4Change and the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) represent vital initiatives in the humanitarian sector that advocate for a transformative shift toward a more locally led and accountable approach to aid. The Charter4Change embodies a commitment by international non-governmental organizations and donor governments to reconfigure the dynamics of humanitarian assistance. By emphasizing principles such as local leadership, strengthened capacities, and harmonized practices, the Charter4Change seeks to empower local organizations and grant them a central role in decision-making and implementation. In tandem, the NEAR network stands as a global coalition of local and national NGOs, uniting voices to reshape the humanitarian landscape. NEAR underscores the significance of localization by fostering partnerships that transcend traditional power imbalances, advocating for policy changes, and facilitating capacity-building initiatives. Both the Charter4Change and NEAR epitomize a concerted effort to address the limitations of the traditional humanitarian paradigm, promoting collaboration, equity, and effectiveness in humanitarian responses.

Critics of the concept of localization

“Not everything that is labeled ‘local’ is actually local”, is one of the main criticisms of the concept of localization. Ed Schenkenberg emphasizes that the Grand Bargain commits to channel 25% of the humanitarian finance as directly as possible to local actors without defining this broad term and determining the characteristics of local actors and what would qualify the actors to receive the money. For instance, the Grand Bargain itself refers to ‘local responders’, while others refer to ‘local capacities’ or equate the term ‘local actors’ with local NGOs, which results in a wide range of very different institutions and individuals, groups, and communities, from government authorities at various levels to private businesses and national NGOs to community-based networks. The blind support of this multitude of local actors should not be considered equivalent to localization, instead political and economic empowerment for people affected by crises, their self-groups, and local aid organizations, who are rooted in the local society, work along lines of participation and can take decision independently is an important step towards achieving greater human dignity and adherence to the humanitarian principles (Schenkenberg van Mierop, 2018).

Example: “What looks international from the outside may be very localized in reality, with the reverse also being true. The Haitian branch of CARE, for example, has been in the country for more than five decades and is registered as a local NGO. In Iraq during recent research, UN and international NGOs referred this author to two organizations that they described as ‘local’, which were actually either run by expatriates or by people (born and/or) raised in Western Europe. At the same time, an Islamic NGO registered in the UK, and therefore referred to as an international NGO, was run entirely by Iraqis and has been in the country since 1991.” (Schenkenberg van Mierop, 2018: 64)

Following up on this debate, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee proposed several categories, including National NGOs/ civil society organizations, Local NGOs/CSOs, Red Cross/ Red Crescent National Societies, National governments, local governments, and local and national private sector entities.

3. CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis aims to identify the strategies that NGOs, who are operating in Syria from Türkiye, use to cope with government regulations that hamper their work and negatively influence the civic space. To answer the research question “*How do NGOs cope with and overcome localization barriers and limitations in their response to the Syrian crisis?*” an elaboration of the conceptual background led to the use of a theoretical framework based on transnational relations perspective by Joseph S. Nye, Jr., and Robert O. Keohane (1971) and Power-Dependence Theory by Richard Emerson (1962).

3.1 Transnational Relations Perspective in International Relations

In the dynamic field of International Relations, Constructivism emerged as a pivotal theory, particularly in the aftermath of the Cold War. This theoretical framework distinguishes itself by emphasizing the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping global affairs. Unlike theories that predominantly focus on materialistic changes, Constructivism offers a unique perspective by attributing the end of the East-West conflict to shifts in ideological paradigms rather than solely to changes in material structures. This approach has been instrumental in understanding the evolution of international politics in the post-Cold War era, highlighting how ideational factors influence state behavior and international outcomes (E-International Relations, 2018). The same applies to human rights politics. Any explanation of the rise of human rights politics, “must take into account the political power of norms and ideas and the increasingly transnational way in which those ideas are carried and diffused” (Sikkink, 1998: 517). Therefore, going beyond a state-centric view of world affairs, and examining how structures, institutions, and actors in international relations are socially constructed. Including non-state actors is of great importance, and against the background of globalization, and the exchange of communication, movement of information, transportation (including material and personnel), finance, and travel, the transnational relations perspective will be used as an analytical tool (Nye & Keohane, 1971, Soetjpto & Yuliestiana, 2020).

Transnational relations perspective offers a comprehensive framework to analyze the multifaceted interactions that define our interconnected world. In an era defined by unprecedented interconnectedness, the traditional paradigms of international relations have given way to a more complex and multifaceted framework known as transnational relations perspective. This approach responds to the challenges posed by a world where actors, ideas, and influences traverse national boundaries with unprecedented ease. It casts a spotlight on the

intricate web of interactions that extend beyond the realm of state-to-state diplomacy, acknowledging the growing importance of non-state actors, global networks, and shared challenges that shape our global landscape.

Some global exchanges are initiated and sustained entirely, or almost entirely, by governments of nation-states. However, besides these 'interstate' engagements, there are other types of relations involving non-governmental actors, namely transnational interactions. These are defined as 'the movement of tangible and intangible items across state boundaries when at least one actor is not an agent of a government or intergovernmental organization' (Nye & Keohane, 1971: 332). Thus, at the heart of transnational relations approach lies a departure from the traditional state-centric focus. This perspective recognizes the significant influence wielded by non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, transnational social movements, and diaspora communities. These actors have risen to prominence as powerful agents of change in international affairs, often operating across borders and impacting issues ranging from human rights and environmental conservation to economic development and cultural exchange. Transnational relations approach underscores the dynamic role played by these actors in shaping policy agendas, influencing public opinion, and challenging established norms.

The two graphics below summarize the distinction between interstate interactions and transnational interactions:

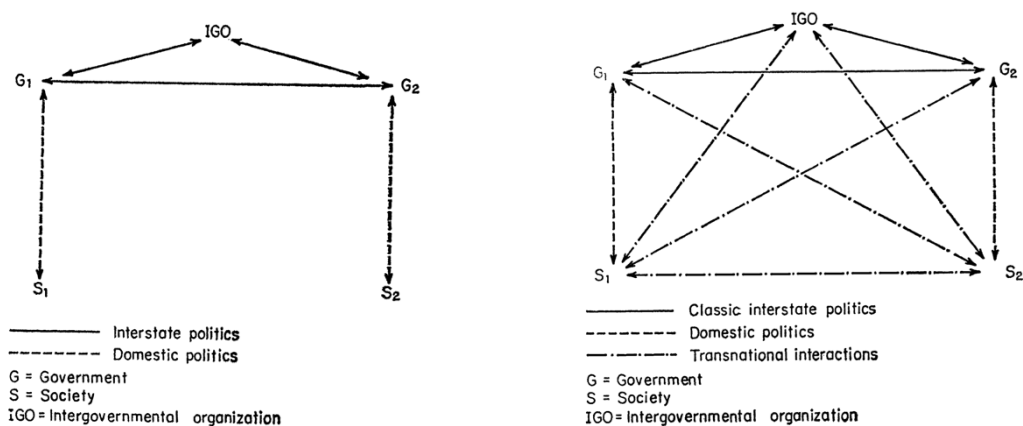


Figure 6: A state-centric interaction pattern (left) and transnational interactions and interstate politics (right) (Nye & Keohane, 1971: 333)

A distinguishing feature of transnational relations perspective is its examination of the diffusion of norms, values, and ideas across borders. The perspective acknowledges that norms, be they related to human rights, environmental sustainability, or governance, often spread through transnational networks and exert influence on state behavior. Additionally, the perspective explores the phenomenon of policy transfer, wherein practices and policies developed in one context are adopted or adapted by other states due to transnational influences and pressures. These dynamics stress the intricate interplay between national sovereignty and global interconnectedness. Transnational relations perspective challenges the dominance of state-centric approaches in international relations. While states remain pivotal actors, the perspective's emphasis on non-state actors, global networks, and shared challenges serves as a reminder that state interactions occur within a broader context of transnational dynamics. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, understanding the mechanisms and implications of transnational relations becomes essential for comprehending the complexities of our globalized reality.

Since the humanitarian response to the Syrian conflict is a construct of transnational interactions, involving governments, non-governmental actors such as individuals and organizations, and societies, a closer look into the perspective is essential for the upcoming analysis. And with this, the following questions arise (Nye & Keohane, 1971: 331):

- Who benefits from transnational relations?
- Who controls transnational relations?
- Who loses in transnational relations?
- To what extent and how have governments suffered from a loss of control, as a result of transnational relations?
- What challenges do transnational relations raise for international organizations and non-governmental actors?

These questions will guide the first part of the analysis, exploring how local NGOs cope with government regulations that hinder their work and negatively impact the civic space. The analysis will be complemented by power relations theories since transnational relations create a control gap, primarily for governments, between the aspiration for control and the capability to achieve it. As power and interdependence are resulting from that (Keohane & Nye, 1987), a

power-oriented analysis of the politics of interdependence drawing on Emerson's power dependence perspective is introduced in the following.

3.2 Power Dependence Theory

In the previous chapter, the relations between NGOs and other actors that influence NGOs' opportunities and limitations were outlined. Scholars define the relationships between actors who interact within a concrete system of action where "games" are used to gain power and reach actors' objectives as power dependencies. An actor uses sources of power, such as resources at the actor's disposal, to strengthen their power position.

Power Relations as a Foundation of Social Interactions

Emerson emphasizes in his theory that power is often wrongly attributed to an actor as inherent. However, this assumption disregards that power is the basis of our social interactions and is dependent on the social relation of one actor with another (Emerson, 1962: 32). A strategic actor is defined as an individual, a group, or another form of organized bodies that follow their strategy while interacting with others (Olaya and Ruess, 2004: 3). About actor B, actor A can be described as powerful, whereas in social interaction with C, A is not considered powerful. Therefore, Emerson points out that the specification, of "power over whom", is necessary to determine the power status of individuals or groups in their relation to each other (1962: 32). Social interactions between actors are characterized by "mutual dependency". Consequently, one actor can influence the outcome of the other actor's goal by either enabling or hindering their counterpart in reaching that goal (Emerson, 1962: 32). As power manifests in dependencies, and actors aim at implicitly or explicitly selling their "terms of trade" to expand their room for maneuver, negotiations are indispensable. Therefore, these power relations are considered exchange or negotiation-type relationships. Negotiation abilities depend on an actor's options and are defined as "mechanisms of integration between [an] actor and the system" (Olaya and Ruess, 2004: 3), or more simply put: "games". Daily social interactions of the actors take place in a socially structured "concrete system of action", which is a part of a social system and influenced by the actors themselves. The exercising of power restructures these areas of action through the actor's individual and collective objectives, which eventually leads to social change (Emerson, 1962: 32).

Strategies

Single actors, or collective actors in the form of organizations, employ strategies, often referred to as 'structured games,' to achieve their goals and accumulate power. While individual objectives can significantly differ from collective aims, Crozier and Friedberg, as discussed by Olaya and Ruess (2004), highlight that an actor's strategy is rarely clear-cut, rendering their actions less predictable. This unpredictability, coupled with the diverse and adaptable nature of strategic approaches, underscores the complexity of organized action (Olaya & Ruess, 2004, p. 2). Moreover, over time, new options emerge, and as actions have implications that cannot always be foreseen it is crucial to rethink options. Likewise, the actor's behavior varies between taking advantage of opportunities and being more defensive regarding keeping or expanding the room for maneuver. Moreover, the actor's behavior is always active, even if no active action is taken, it influences the outcome (Olaya and Ruess, 2004),

Strategic Operations

The relationship between two actors is imbalanced; if not, one actor would not have space for any action, and a power relation would not exist. To influence the power imbalance between two actors (e.g., actor A is more powerful than actor B), Emerson suggests ways that a relationship can be influenced (actor B reacts and expands its space). Regarding the balancing of relations, which does not imply the neutralization of power because balanced relations are nevertheless marked by dependency at different levels, four operations will be listed below, which are all directly applicable to strategies of local NGOs in navigating the limiting and barriers in implementing humanitarian assistance (Emerson, 1962: 39).

Operation 1: Withdrawal; the dependent actor B reduces the unbalanced relation between A and B by a motivational withdrawal. However, actor B considers a withdrawal only under the condition that operation 2, 3, and 4, is blocked by circumstances.

Operation 2: Power Network; connects two or more power-dependent relations, which means the diffusion of dependency into new relations in a network.

Operation 3: Emergence of Status; 'increases [...] the weaker member's power to control the formerly more powerful member through increasing the latter's motivational investment in the relation' e.g., using status recognition (Emerson, 1962: 39).

Operation 4: Coalition; the two-relational networks collapse into one group-person relation, which results in the emergence of a collective actor. However, if deciding on a coalition, standardized role prescriptions, and group norms are required.

Legitimacy within and outside of Organizations

In the outlined forms of collective action, the legitimacy of the actors comes into account as well. Legitimacy is defined as the “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995: 574). As Emerson describes, within an organization “[t]he notion of legitimacy is important, for authority is more than balanced power; it is directed power which can be employed (legitimately) only in channels defined by the norms of the group. A person holding such authority is commissioned; he does not simply have the right to rule or govern – he is obliged to” (Emerson, 1962). In other words, a person, or a small group of people within an organization are nominated to represent the organization or make decisions for the organization. While legitimacy is an important stabilizing factor within the organization, legitimacy outside the organization should not be neglected. Outside the organization, legitimacy is granted by the social environment (Suchman, 1995: 574). Following the example outlined in Moser and Skripchenko's (2018) article on NGOs in Russia, NGOs gain legitimacy through their audiences who judge the NGO's capability to solve relevant issues. The audience includes the NGO's target group (their so-called beneficiaries, institutional as well as private donors, the public, and the state [Moser and Skripchenko, 2018: 594]).

4. CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To understand barriers and limitations and understand how local NGOs already cope with a further changing environment and what tailored support could look like, the following analysis is based on a methodology that draws on the conceptual framework, the theoretical framework, and, beyond that, on the generated data of the qualitative research approach.

4.1 Research Design

The thesis uses qualitative research methods to gain insights into barriers and limitations in implementing localization and thus achieving equitable cooperation between international NGOs and their local and national partners. Qualitative research methods are particularly useful in studying a research topic that is embedded in a sensitive and complex local context or in contexts that have not been or have barely been explored by researchers so far. The objective of qualitative research is to explore a phenomenon and develop an empirically based theory of which the interpretation of the researcher is an integral component (Bernard, 2006: 213ff). In contrast to quantitative methods, which aim to cover a representative sample of the population and find generalizable answers to social phenomena (McDowell, 2010: 158), a qualitative approach allows in-depth insights and follows subjective individual experiences and detailed descriptions of social processes (Starman, 2013: 30). In addition, by using the case study of local NGOs operating cross-border from Türkiye for the Syria response, a local perspective is chosen to then draft recommendations that navigate their actions in a further restricted environment.

Research Questions

This research is contributing to the scientific discourse and is filling a research gap by analyzing the following question: *How do NGOs cope with and overcome localization barriers and limitations in their response to the Syrian crisis?* To answer the research question three sub-questions were identified:

- To what extent are local NGOs influenced by the changing environment in which they operate (e.g., regulations in their operating area, regulations in their country of registration, and donor regulations)?
- Which strategies do NGOs use to cope with their reshaped environment?
- To what extent are local NGOs supported in promoting localization?

In this research, interviewing will be chosen as a method to compile the data since it “provides access to the context of people’s behaviour and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour” and allows for a deeper understanding of contexts in which little is known (Seidman, 2006: 10). This thesis combines the use of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews combine the aspect of openness so that interviewees can emphasize topics on their own, with a degree of structure, to not lose sight of covering the central aspects of the research project. Another advantage of the semi-structured approach is the comparison of the resulting qualitative data due to the interview questions (Bernard, 2006: 210ff). Once this approach was adopted, both unstructured (open-ended questions and the possibility for follow-up questions) and structured questions (a set of theory-led questions) were formulated for a flexible interview guide that takes personal and professional differentiation into account as well. By using this method, not only are explicit answers provided but also the context for the situation around a topic is given, which supports the interpretation (Bernard, 2006).

Therefore, based on the interview guide, participants were asked basic questions about their profession and working experience within the field, and main questions on barriers and limitations in implementing localization (cf. Annex 1). All seven questions were designed to be reinforced by examples. Before the process began, I presented the research topic, the main research questions, and my background to the respondents. In doing so, the emphasis on the interviewees’ knowledge as a basis of this thesis became clear. Moreover, the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees were assured – an indispensable prerequisite for sensitive research contexts. In addition, I asked the interviewees for permission to record the interview or take notes, which also presents a precondition for data collection in sensitive contexts (Bernard, 2006: 215).

Sampling and Field Access

For the analysis and data collection, an appropriate sampling technique was designed. Actors who are active in the civic sphere in NW Syria were identified as the target group for the research topic since they are directly affected by the further reshaped environment; thus, their coping strategies are to be analyzed.

With the interview requests that were sent to more than 25 persons working with NGOs working cross-border in Syria, the perspective of humanitarians as antagonists got into focus. The interview request included a summary of the topic, the main research question and

objective, and the interview questions, to inform about the author’s concern (cf. Annex 1). Simultaneously, interviewees with proper knowledge of the research topic were chosen. In addition to targeted interview requests, NGOs and specific staff that were suggested by interview partners were contacted as well. Finally, the sample was representative of NGOs that operate on various levels, from the local to the international, and the profession of the interviewees, i.e., project manager, liaison and security manager, and executive directors of organizations (Bernard, 2006: 149ff).

Finally, the main interview partners are local NGOs and INGOs' representatives, who aim to broaden the civic space. Moreover, institutional donors were considered interview partners since they build the link between the civic sphere and the government and because their relations impact NGOs. Therefore, interviews with local NGOs operating across northwestern Syria registered in Türkiye were conducted. Moreover, interviews with international NGOs and UN agencies with a focus on how they support national or local implementing partners were conducted.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

In the follow-up phase of the data collection, interview requests were sent to NGOs in April 2023. Of the 25 contacted NGOs, 21 answered. Therefore, I conducted 21 semi-structured interviews: 10 interviews online via Microsoft Teams⁶ and 11 interviews in person in Gaziantep, Türkiye (April and September 2023).

The table below provides a detailed overview of the interviewees and the names of the NGOs they are working for. However, the statements and insights given by the interviewees might not reflect the organization's stand on specific topics. A total of 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted, comprising of International Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Non-Governmental Organizations, and United Nations Agencies.

NGO Name	Location	Type (NGO/INGO/UN Agency)
The Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS)	Gaziantep, Türkiye	INGO
The Pacific Asia Resource Center	Gaziantep, Türkiye	INGO
The International Association for Relief and Development	Gaziantep, Türkiye	INGO

⁶ Microsoft Teams, which is a proprietary business communication platform developed by Microsoft, as part of the Microsoft 365 family of products.

Save the Children	Gaziantep, Türkiye	INGO
Institute for the Study of War	Gaziantep, Türkiye	INGO
Chemonics International	Gaziantep, Türkiye	INGO
Save The Children - Sweden	Berlin, Germany	INGO
Relief International	Gaziantep, Türkiye	INGO
United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF	Gaziantep, Türkiye	UN Agency
The International Organization for Migration - UN IOM	Gaziantep, Türkiye	UN Agency
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - UN OCHA	Gaziantep, Türkiye	UN Agency
The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women - UN Women	Gaziantep, Türkiye	UN Agency
Let's Work Together	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO
SHAFAK	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO
Midmar	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO
Peace Hands	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO
The Research Management Team	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO
Syrian Expatriate Medical Association SEMA	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO
IYD International Humanitarian Relief Association	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO
Trust - Consultancy & Development	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO
Elaf for Relief and Development	Gaziantep, Türkiye	NGO

Figure 8: Characteristics of Interviewees

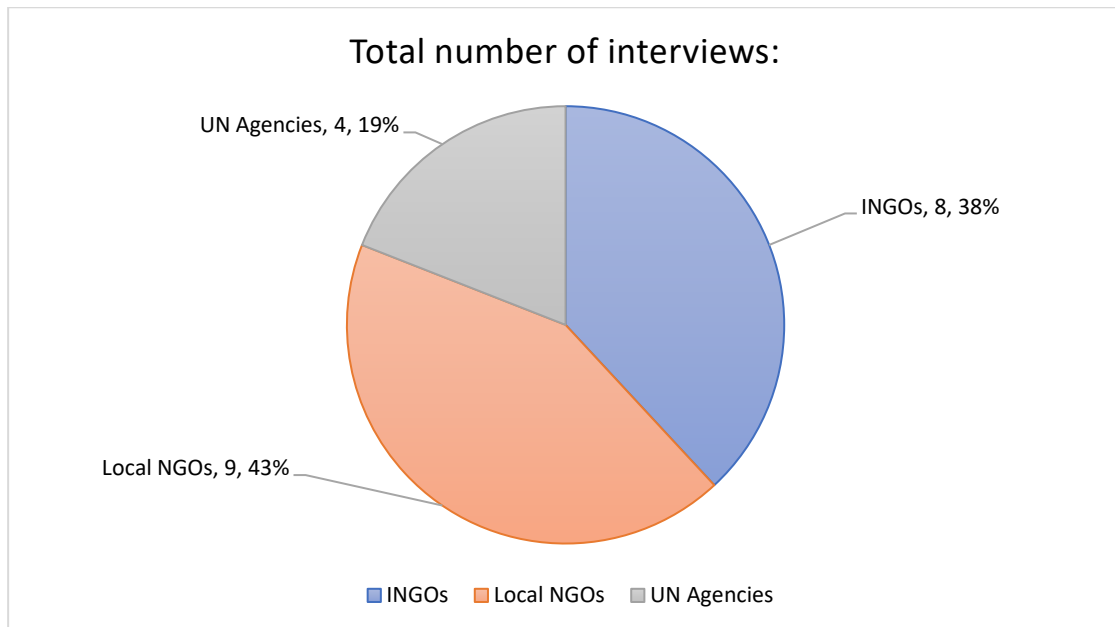


Figure 9: Distribution of Interviewees by Type of Organization

The Positionality of the Interviewer and the Interviewees

While the qualitative method offers an effective way to collect sensitive data, it also implies the reflection of positionality in the preparation, during the interview, and in the follow-up process. The positionality was reflected, owing to observations in the field, impressions, and feelings, i.e., personal experiences of violence within the Syrian war among the interviewees (Bernard, 2006: 226f). At the same time, the positionality of the interviewees and the accuracy of data must be considered as well because most interviewees are personally interwoven with the conflict due to their nationality, personal experience, attitudes, remaining family members within Syria, or due to their interest in maintaining their job (Bernard, 2006: 245f).

Data Analysis

Directly after the interview was conducted, a transcript of the record was prepared, which has the advantage of not losing information and having detailed information on the interviewee's statements. Therefore, information can also be interpreted in an embedded context (Bernard, 2006). In the next step, the data was compiled in MAXQDA, an analysis program, and coded. As an analytical approach, axial coding was chosen first. In contrast to line-by-line coding in which all parts of the transcript are considered and compared, axial coding only regards aspects that are relevant to the research question (Bernard, 2006). Therefore, main categories will be built that are aimed at reflecting on the aspects that are of importance for the analysis. These categories are partly congruent with the questions of the guidelines used during the interviews and of the theoretical framework. Next, selective coding will be conducted to identify the key concepts and select the categories that are important for answering the research question (Bernard, 2006). In the process, the 21 conducted interviews and the theoretical framework (chapter 2) played a significant role in the creation of the codes (cf. Annex 2).

In the analysis of the interviews conducted for this study, several key analytical codes have emerged that provide valuable insights into the challenges and strategies of NGOs operating in the context of the Syrian crisis. These codes have been constructed to align with the central themes of this analysis, which include the transnational relations perspective, power relations theory, and support provided for NGOs in regard to partnership, financing, coordination, and capacity building with the ultimate goal of achieving localization. Under the sub-title "Transnational Relations - The Environment of NGOs" (chapter 4.1) the analytical codes shed light on how NGOs interact and cooperate with international actors, navigate complex regime structures, and engage within global governance networks. In the context of "Power Relations - The Strategies of NGOs" (chapter 4.2), the codes illuminate the power dynamics at play,

emphasizing resource dependence, centrality within networks, control and compliance with donor regulations, and the negotiation and bargaining power of NGOs. Lastly, under the subtitle 'Achieving Localization - Support to NGOs' (chapter 4.3), the codes help us understand the strategies employed by NGOs to overcome localization barriers, particularly their interactions with international actors such as INGOs, UN agencies, and donors. These analytical codes serve as a foundational framework for the in-depth analysis, allowing us to uncover the nuanced and intricate relationships between NGOs and their environment, the dynamics of power, and the pursuit of localization in the complex landscape of humanitarian and development work.

4.3 Limitations of the Research Design

While the research design has been carefully developed to address the research questions effectively, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations that influenced the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Firstly, the research design encountered several notable limitations in its execution. The Türkiye-Syria earthquakes in 2023 significantly disrupted data collection, hampering access to key individuals and organizations, including UN agencies, INGOs, and local NGO staff in Gaziantep. Consequently, the unavailability of some additional insights affected the depth and comprehensiveness of the data gathered.

Furthermore, the study had a limited geographical scope, primarily focusing on NGOs operating from Türkiye in response to the Syrian crisis. While this specific emphasis allowed for an in-depth exploration of this group, it might not fully capture the challenges and coping strategies employed by NGOs in different regions or engaged in diverse humanitarian crises, thereby potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Thirdly, temporal constraints presented additional challenges as data collection was confined to a specific timeframe in 2023. The dynamic nature of the Syrian conflict and the ever-evolving NGO landscape might not have been fully accounted for, as the study's temporal constraints could limit the applicability of the findings to other time periods.

Furthermore, the study aimed to delve into the influence of various regulations, including donor regulations, on NGOs. However, obtaining detailed information regarding these constraints sometimes proved difficult due to confidentiality agreements and the sensitive nature of relationships between NGOs and donors, potentially leading to gaps in the analysis.

Additionally, the volatile nature of the Syrian crisis introduced security concerns, making some interviewees hesitant to share sensitive information, and potentially resulting in self-censorship or causing certain individuals or organizations to refrain from participating, thus limiting access to unfiltered data.

The variability of NGO operations was another limitation, as while common themes and trends were captured, the specific and unique challenges faced by individual NGOs might not have been fully represented, impacting the breadth of the findings. Lastly, the research primarily focused on cross-border coordination with NGOs operating from Türkiye. While this approach was informative, it might not have fully addressed the complexities of cross-border coordination with NGOs in other countries, crucial for a comprehensive understanding of localization dynamics. These limitations are important to consider when interpreting the findings of this research. While the study provides valuable insights into the coping strategies of NGOs facing localization barriers in the Syrian crisis response, it is essential to recognize the boundaries and potential constraints of the research design. The findings should be contextualized within these limitations to ensure a more accurate understanding of the study's implications.

5. CHAPTER 4: LOCALIZATION BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THEM

The Syrian conflict, which erupted in 2011, has given rise to one of the most consequential humanitarian crises of the 21st century. With its close proximity to the epicenter of the crisis, Türkiye has assumed a pivotal role in responding to the plight of millions of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. The Turkish government alongside NGOs and local communities has mobilized extensive resources to provide essential services and support to the Syrian refugee and IDP population. (3RPSyria, n.d.) Amidst this intricate and evolving landscape, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations have emerged as indispensable actors, offering a range of services and initiatives to address the multifaceted challenges faced by the Syrian population in Türkiye and Syria (Dixon et al, 2016).

This chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of localization in the context of Syrian civil society organizations operating from/in Türkiye. Localization, a concept gaining increasing recognition in the humanitarian and development sectors, signifies the process of devolving power, resources, and decision-making to local actors. In this specific context, it pertains to Syrian non-governmental organizations operating within Syria from Türkiye and their efforts to address the ongoing Syrian conflict. The exploration of localization barriers and the strategies deployed to overcome them is pivotal in comprehending the evolving landscape of humanitarian and civil society responses.

To comprehensively address the primary research question regarding *How do NGOs cope with and overcome localization barriers and limitations in their response to the Syrian crisis?* this chapter employs a structured approach, focusing on three sub-research questions. The first sub-question assesses the degree to which local NGOs are influenced by the changing environment in which they operate, considering factors such as the impact of local regulations in their operating area, the complexities of adhering to regulations in their country of registration, and the specific requirements imposed by donors (chapter 4.1). The second sub-question delves into the creative strategies adopted by NGOs to cope with their reshaped environment, encompassing innovative approaches, partnerships, capacity building, and more (chapter 4.2). The third sub-question explores the extent to which local NGOs receive essential support for promoting localization, examining the role of international organizations, donors, and the local government in facilitating or hindering their localization efforts (chapter 4.3). By addressing these sub-questions, this chapter aspires to provide a nuanced and comprehensive

analysis of the multifaceted landscape of humanitarian response to the Syrian conflict. In the concluding section, the main findings and results will be discussed, along with their implications, practical recommendations, and avenues for future research, offering a valuable contribution to the understanding of localization dynamics in humanitarian and development work.

5.1 Transnational Relations – The Environment of NGOs

Local non-governmental organizations, crucial in humanitarian and development efforts, navigate complex environments. This analysis uses the transnational relations approach, as articulated by Nye and Keohane (1971) and adapted by Soetjipto and Yuliestiana (2020), as an analytical tool to examine the influence of various factors on local NGOs. Specifically, it analyzes how regulations in the NGOs' operating area, country of registration, and donor regulations impact their actions and strategies. This approach helps in understanding the interplay between external factors and the agency of local NGOs, shedding light on their challenges and opportunities in localization efforts.

5.1.1 International Level – Donor Dynamics and Regulations

Donor Dynamics, Priorities, and Competition for Scarce Resources: Local NGOs in Northwest Syria are significantly impacted by the evolving priorities of donors. As donors allocate resources to various crises worldwide, including Ukraine and Afghanistan, there is a notable reduction in available funds for projects in NWS. This shift poses a considerable limitation on the financial support that local NGOs can access to effectively implement localization efforts.

Donor preferences and priorities play a pivotal role in determining funding availability and the successful implementation of projects by local NGOs. The alignment of project goals with donor interests becomes a critical factor influencing project feasibility. Donor funding strategies often prioritize lifesaving and life-sustaining humanitarian assistance over broader stabilization and development projects in north-western Syria. This prioritization limits the scope of activities that local NGOs can undertake to support localization and empower local communities, creating constraints on their ability to address long-term needs effectively. As one of the respondents state; “... *the interest of international donors in Syria is a problem as well. Because the fund is not stable. You can find the change in each year which is not a healthy environment for localization or for working for the long term.*” (I8)

Furthermore, donor regulations can impose stringent rules and procedures on local NGOs, particularly in sectors like education. Some donors may advocate for specific activities or approaches that may not align with local priorities or needs, potentially resulting in a mismatch between donor expectations and on-the-ground realities. In such instances, local NGOs may find themselves with limited influence in decision-making processes related to donor-funded projects, further complicating their localization efforts.

Adding to that, local NGOs frequently contend with international NGOs and UN agencies for limited funding resources, intensifying the challenges they face. Despite their close community ties and swift responsiveness, local organizations may encounter difficulties in securing adequate support from international actors. In the arena of humanitarian and development work, local NGOs find themselves in constant competition with international non-governmental organizations for access to the limited pool of funding provided by international donors. This competitive landscape poses a particular challenge for local NGOs, as INGOs are often perceived as meeting higher standards. Donors, seeking to ensure the effective use of their funds, frequently favor INGOs, which may have a more extensive history of engagement in the sector and a proven track record of meeting donor requirements. This preference for INGOs can lead to local NGOs facing greater hurdles in obtaining the financial resources necessary for their critical projects and initiatives. One interviewee said: *“I think the biggest barrier here is that the donors are not willing to change the way they work. I mean, how many years do we already have humanitarian work? I think it's like 100 years or so, why we don't change the way we work, and I think donors are not willing to take the risk. To get like projects to local organizations and, let them try to implement it themselves, even though they've been implementing partners for years. So, they have very high due diligence requirements, very high-risk measures that local organizations cannot really comply with, and I think then also a big problem here is the competition between INGOs and like local organizations, obviously, INGOs can much more comply with donor regulations than local organizations.” (I17)*

Consequently, it exacerbates the barriers they encounter in pursuing localization efforts. Local NGOs must not only demonstrate their capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance effectively but also compete on a global stage where they are often in competition with larger and more resourceful INGOs. While this competition can drive innovation and spur improvements within the humanitarian sector, it can also perpetuate a cycle in which local

NGOs struggle to access the funding required for growth and expanded operations, ultimately impeding their progress toward localization objectives (I17, I21).

Another critical challenge for local NGOs is the absence of flexible funding. Donors tend to prioritize project-based funding over unrestricted funding which would allow local organizations to develop their capacities and respond more effectively to the changing humanitarian landscape. This funding gap hinders their ability to implement localization. (I9, I10, I17), as stated by one interviewee: *“So many Syrian organizations and even the big ones like the White Helmets don't have enough flexible funding to develop their organizations and to develop their capacities. All of them very much know what their gaps are and what they need to do to have better chances and localization, but they don't have the money to actually do that, because they're all focused on project budgets, and they don't have flexible funding for the organization.” (I17)*

Navigating Donor Regulations: Additionally, the shifting landscape of donor regulations and attitudes significantly impacts local NGOs. Major donors, including UN agencies and foundations, impose strict policies and high-risk measures that may not align with the capacities of local organizations. The donors' resistance to embracing more flexible and localized approaches presents a formidable challenge for local NGOs. Some donors, like DG ECHO, impose restrictions on direct funding, making it challenging for local organizations to access funds directly. For instance, requirements such as registering in the European Union can exclude many local entities from direct funding opportunities. Moreover, local NGOs frequently encounter high funding standards established by donors such as the EU and US. These stringent standards often demand comprehensive financial documentation, such as 3-5 years of financial records. Navigating these requirements poses a significant hurdle for many local NGOs, given the complex context in which they operate and their limited resources. In addition to financial documentation, donors may specify certain capacity, financial management, and reporting standards that local NGOs must meet to secure funding. Meeting these demands can be particularly challenging for newer organizations or those with limited experience in dealing with international donors. Adhering to these capacity requirements becomes vital for local NGOs seeking to access essential funding for their projects and initiatives. (I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I11, I12, I13, I14, I15) as pointed out by one interviewee: *“Some donors including my organization have a higher funding requirement than the existing local NGOs' capacity, which makes a competition on getting these funds between those older local actors who have longer-term experience who can prove themselves as able*

to handle these funds. Making, on the other hand, the new or smaller NGOs not able to get startup funding in their local communities. The donors do not have the funding strategy to those newly established local NGOs.” (I21)

Thus, local NGOs operating in north-western Syria face the growing challenge of meeting the heightened expectations of donors. These expectations often demand stringent accountability procedures and transparency. Consequently, local NGOs must meticulously adhere to these requirements when implementing projects. Concluding from stringent accountability procedures, local NGOs stress the importance of risk mitigation and sharing among all actors involved, including INGOs and different donors. They believe that risk should not be shifted entirely to local organizations and that there should be a more equitable sharing of responsibilities, as emphasized by one interviewee: *“I would say the biggest constraint is the attitude of donors. So, donors, like the big main donors, but also UN agencies, are not willing to take the risk to work with local organizations. So, their policies and risk measures don't fit local organizations' capacity. So, donors are not willing to change the way they approach the work.” (I17)*

Local NGOs may require support and capacity building to understand and comply with donor regulations effectively. This often involves navigating complex reporting and compliance procedures, which can be daunting without assistance. Thus, they must skillfully navigate the complexity of aligning their operations with diverse donor manuals and expectations, which further compounds the challenges they encounter in advancing effective localization efforts. In this context, donors increasingly expect local NGOs to not only fulfill accountability and transparency requirements but also actively engage with the communities they serve. Demonstrating a commitment to community participation can be a prerequisite for accessing funding and support. Consequently, local NGOs may need to undertake capacity-building efforts to enhance their ability to engage with and be accountable to the communities they aim to assist. (I4, I9, I10, I20) Critical remarks on capacity-building efforts were formulated by one interviewee: *“Usually, when we talk about localization, all the INGOs or UN agencies, they say ‘Yeah okay, let's implement this training here. The five days training for example.’ And after the training, who knows what would happen, I mean, no one follows the organization. What's happening, does this organization have a lesson learned? Or what's the outcome of the training, are they implementing this training or not? So, there should be a very deep understanding of that change of theory, there should be a long-term capacity building program for the local actors, it shouldn't be a very short-term program.” (I9)*

To sum up, the influence of the changing environment directly impacts the ability of local NGOs to engage in localization efforts. When regulations and donor requirements are not aligned with localization principles, it creates barriers for local actors to take a more prominent role in humanitarian response. This misalignment can hinder the empowerment of local NGOs and communities to lead and participate in humanitarian efforts effectively.

5.1.2 National Level – Regulations from the Host Country

Syrian local NGOs operating in Türkiye, are subject to Turkish regulations. These regulations can impact their ability to function effectively.

Navigating Political Complexities: Local NGOs operating in Türkiye must adeptly navigate the intricate web of political dynamics that influence their collaboration with Turkish authorities. Political statements and actions by various political groups in Türkiye hold the potential to impact the level of cooperation and collaboration that local NGOs can establish with the authorities. These political dynamics have a direct bearing on regulations and access to critical resources, thereby introducing elements of uncertainty into the operational landscape of local NGOs. Changes in local regulations in Türkiye can have a direct impact on access to vulnerable populations and the ability to deliver aid effectively. These changes can result in delays, disruptions, or even the suspension of critical humanitarian activities. Requirements and approvals for project implementation, movement, and even money transfers can pose significant barriers to local NGOs, as explained by one interviewee: *“The first one is coming from the Turkish government side, which tries to control the response because of political reasons. That means that local organizations that were established and registered legally in Türkiye suffer from the new rules and regulations which appear sometimes monthly. That means when you try to put your operational system according to those laws, these laws may suddenly change. This change can make you focus more, instead of raising and expanding your programs you will spend most time controlling your operational side.” (I8)*

This intricate political context extends beyond Türkiye’s borders and significantly affects humanitarian work, particularly in areas like Northeast Syria. Türkiye’s political and military objectives in relation to Syria can intertwine with humanitarian concerns, creating complex challenges for facilitating NGO operations. These challenges underscore the need for local NGOs to maintain a nuanced understanding of the evolving political context and engage in strategic advocacy efforts to navigate the complexities and uncertainties that arise from the convergence of political agendas and humanitarian imperatives.

Complex Definitions of Local Actors: The intricate and multifaceted definition of local actors for Syrian organizations under Turkish regulations introduces a layer of complexity to the operational landscape (I1, Memişoğlu, 2018). In these regions, some organizations, initially registered as Turkish entities, actively function as Syrian entities on the ground, which is elaborated by two interviewees:

“Local NGOs cannot register in Damascus, so the Syrian NGOs have to register outside Syria to obtain legal approvals and status and banks. In Türkiye they need to have 16 board members to get registered. In the end, Syrian NGOs' legal status has duplication in their board members, and they exist in more than one organization, besides that, they have to use Turkish names. They are Syrian-mandated NGOs but legally they are Turkish. World Banks use the registration documents as a main aspect for the definition of local NGOs, while OCHA has a different opinion on that, they define local organizations when they were established by Syrians regardless of the other citizenship and the area of establishment.” (I3)

“One day we went to register a network they refused to be registered because the term was related to drug networks in the Turkish culture, they wanted to change the term but then it was reflected to be Alhaea Aloulea in Arabic refers to military coordination in one way or another.” (I3)

This duality in organizational identity creates a unique challenge for local NGOs. Navigating this complexity becomes pivotal, as it directly influences the eligibility for funding and compliance with regulations. Identifying whether an organization falls under the category of a "local actor" can be a convoluted process, given the dynamic nature of these entities. The inherent ambiguity in these definitions underscores the need for a clear framework that facilitates the proper allocation of resources and adherence to regulatory requirements. In essence, the evolving nature of local NGOs, where entities may operate across borders or undergo shifts in their operational focus, adds layers of intricacy to regulatory compliance and eligibility assessments. This complexity underscores the importance of streamlining definitions and regulatory processes to ensure a more effective and efficient humanitarian and development landscape. Regulations may affect the terminology and language used by local NGOs. They may need to adapt their communications to avoid cultural misunderstandings or legal issues. (I1, I3,)

Registration Challenges, Decentralization, and Legal Frameworks: Local NGOs operating in Türkiye may encounter hurdles during the registration process, resulting in complex legal

statuses. These challenges can affect their ability to access funds, open bank accounts, and operate effectively. These dynamic conditions create an environment of uncertainty and hinder their ability to plan and implement humanitarian and development activities effectively. This vagueness and continual change in regulations make it challenging to comply with requirements that are not clearly defined, ultimately hindering the planning and execution of humanitarian activities (Council of Europe, 2018; Expert Council on NGO Law, 2020). Additionally, the process of registering as an INGO in Türkiye can be demanding and time-consuming, too. (I6, I8) To overcome these regulatory obstacles, international NGOs may need to collaborate closely with local partners and empower them to navigate these complexities while maintaining effective operations. Regional disparities in regulations within Türkiye can create challenges.

Local NGOs are subject to the regulations of their country of registration – Türkiye, which may vary widely. Compliance with these regulations is necessary for legal operation, but it can be a complex process, particularly for organizations operating across borders or in conflict-affected areas. Local NGOs operating in Türkiye grapple with a myriad of challenges related to work permits, labor laws, and legal frameworks, particularly in their engagement with Syrian refugees. (I3, I6, I7, I12) Turkish regulations on work permits and quotas for Syrians present a formidable obstacle as local NGOs often require Syrian staff members with a deep understanding of the local context, language, and coordination structures in the region. However, meeting the stringent work permit requirements can be a daunting task, especially when positions necessitate the local expertise that non-Syrians may lack. One interviewee summarizes these obstacles: *“Work permits are very hard to maintain, even for organizations matching the requirements, sometimes it’s hard to fulfill the quota requirement, we work for Syria as civil society activists and organizations which means you need Syrians in the first place who are aware of the context, local language, local coordination structures and so on. For many positions, we cannot fit non-Syrians in them.”* (I15)

Navigating this complex landscape involves overcoming labor and legal challenges that significantly influence the operations and workforce of local NGOs. While the Turkish government mandates NGOs to secure job permits, the legal status and work conditions of Syrian refugees within Türkiye remain inadequately organized (I4, Kirisci & Uysal, 2019; Pinedo Caro, 2020). This lack of clarity and structure creates substantial hurdles for both local NGOs and Syrian refugees seeking access to employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive labor laws specifically addressing the rights and working conditions of Syrian refugees in Türkiye poses a significant limitation on their employment prospects (DRC & Government of Denmark, 2012; Hoffmann & Samuk, 2016; Afanasieva, 2015). This, in turn, presents recruitment and support challenges for local NGOs that rely on Syrian refugees as part of their workforce. Adding to these complexities, Turkish regulations may impose specific prerequisites or limitations on Syrian staff or volunteers engaged with local NGOs. These restrictions can potentially diminish the NGOs' capacity to attract and retain critical personnel (I13, I14). Collectively, these multifaceted labor-related issues create obstacles that hinder the effective functioning of local NGOs in the region. Thus, local NGOs must navigate these intricate challenges to address workforce and legal concerns, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to their operations.

Financial Challenges, Money Transfers, and Audit Requirements: Local NGOs operating in the challenging environment of Syria grapple with a multifaceted set of financial hurdles. These encompass issues related to money transfers and audit requirements, both of which pose significant challenges to the effective functioning of these organizations. The introduction of a singular money transfer method through the Posta ve Telgraf Teşkilatı (PTT), the national post and telegraph directorate of Türkiye, has disrupted the previously streamlined flow of funds to support humanitarian endeavors. This change has introduced inefficiencies and delays, thereby affecting the timely and efficient utilization of financial resources necessary for vital projects in Syria, as elaborated by one interviewee: *“Also, the NGOs including our partners are obliged to transfer all their funds for Syria through the PTT which is the Turkish post office which imposes a lot of constraints on the local partners such as high money transfer fees (1 % of the total amount of any transaction), lengthy of the money transfer process some transactions with high amounts takes a notification period to PTT to one week to get the transaction completed. Also, the PTT has very few branches and only in northern Aleppo which also delays the process, and the partners have to take the risks in transferring the money from northern Aleppo to Idlib areas.” (I21)*

Furthermore, the imposition of fees by the Turkish government on these transfers exacerbates the financial constraints faced by local NGOs, limiting their capacity to address the pressing needs of the affected population. In addition to the financial transfer challenges, local NGOs must contend with complex audit requirements within Türkiye. Government authorities mandate various types of audits, creating a resource-intensive endeavor that

demands specialized expertise and financial resources. Navigating these audit procedures adds yet another layer of complexity for local NGOs, who must allocate valuable time and resources to ensure compliance. This intricate financial landscape underscores the substantial barriers that local NGOs encounter in their pursuit of effective localization and the provision of critical humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations. (I2, I6, I7, I21)

5.1.3 Local Level – Challenges in Syria

Local NGOs operating in Syria must navigate a complex landscape of local authorities, including various armed groups.

Navigating Complex Territorial Control and Governance: Local NGOs face the complex task of understanding and navigating the dynamics and power structures within the communities and regions where they operate. This requires not only adherence to donor regulations but also compliance with local authority expectations and bureaucratic regulations. Additionally, local NGOs must consider the cultural context and local norms when implementing programs and activities, which can pose challenges when these aspects conflict with international norms and standards. These intertwined factors play a crucial role in shaping the operational landscape for local NGOs. (I7, I8, I9)

Furthermore, governance constraints imposed by certain ideologized groups in the region restrict activities related to governance, democratic dialogue, gender equality, and peace efforts that do not align with their ideologies. Consequently, the scope of projects that local NGOs can undertake becomes limited. The intricacy deepens due to the presence of multiple governing bodies, such as the Salvation Government and Syrian Interim Government, often in competition rather than cooperation. These governments can impose constraints on the activities of NGOs and interfere with humanitarian response efforts. These regulations, characterized by bureaucratic procedures, project approvals, movement restrictions, and financial constraints imposed by both Turkish authorities and local entities like the Syrian Salvation Government and opposition groups, can create significant barriers to the operation of local NGOs. This diversity and complexity within the local authority landscape add layers of difficulty for local NGOs, impacting their ability to execute various initiatives, including localization efforts. In this complex environment, local NGOs face a challenging balancing act as they strive to adhere to international humanitarian standards while gaining approval from local authorities to operate effectively. (I13, I15, I21)

One interviewee stated that: *“Part of the biggest challenges in Northwest Syria is that you have multiple governments. There is the Syrian Salvation Government in Idlib which is the political wing of HTS the designated terrorist organization, and there is in rural Aleppo the Syrian Interim Government which is linked to the Syrian opposition coalition in Turkey. Both governments do not talk to each other. Don't coordinate with each other, but they compete with each other, trying to take over each other. One of the problems you might face is that trucks cannot cross let's say from Azaz to Idlib or vice versa unless they have a plate from the other city. So you will see a truck has a series of plates, but each truck has two plates one issued in Aleppo in Azaz and one issued in Idlib. When the driver reaches a certain area which is what they call it crossing point they have to switch the plates of the trucks otherwise they won't be able to cross, this is part of the constraints you have even sort of internal borders between these two areas.” (I14)*

Navigating Counterterrorism Measures and Armed Group Interventions: Local NGOs operating in Syria encounter multifaceted safety and security challenges. The complex security landscape, characterized by the presence of numerous armed groups and the absence of clear regulations, poses significant risks. This environment can restrict the ability of local NGOs to operate safely and effectively. Furthermore, safety and security regulations in both Türkiye and the operating area, particularly in Northern Syria, present formidable obstacles for these organizations. Local NGOs often confront limitations on their operations in high-risk zones due to these regulations, adding to the complexities they face in delivering humanitarian and development assistance. (11, I13, I14)

Moreover, local NGOs operating in northwest Syria encounter multifaceted challenges stemming from counterterrorism measures and interventions by armed groups like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The presence of HTS and its blacklisting by international actors, including the UN, EU, and the US, triggers stringent counterterrorism measures imposed by major donors. These measures have a cascading effect on the operational environment for local NGOs, significantly restricting the civic space, reducing funding opportunities, and impeding the effective implementation of localization initiatives. In addition to counterterrorism measures, local NGOs in northwest Syria must grapple with interventions from armed groups like HTS, further complicating their operations. These interventions raise concerns for donors and create an environment of uncertainty and unpredictability. Compounding these challenges is the absence of a central authority and comprehensive databases in northwest Syria, which hinders coordination and data-sharing among humanitarian actors. The intricate interplay of these

factors underscores the formidable hurdles that local NGOs must overcome to operate effectively and underscores the importance of strategic engagement with diverse stakeholders in the region. (I14, I16, I20) Two interviewees gave their insights:

“HTS which represents the de facto actor controlling big parts of Idlib and surrounding areas in western Aleppo is blacklisted by the UN, EU, and the US which impose a lot of counter-terrorism measures taken by big donors which result shrinking the civic space, the funds, and the implementation of localization.” (I21)

“HTS is trying to balance the existence of the NGOs and other civil actors to obtain more international acceptance but at the same time there are existing military radical groups who do not accept the concept of civil society and NGOs work and agendas. These groups are affecting the NGO's ability to operate in certain locations and implement certain activities.” (I21)

Legal Vulnerabilities and Perceptions: Local NGOs operating in conflict-affected areas like NWS face challenges related to their legal status and perceptions. The government of Syria considers NGOs operating outside Damascus as supporting opposition armed groups, categorizing them as terrorists. This perception disregards the humanitarian needs of the nearly 4 million people in NWS who require assistance. As a result, local NGOs are often seen as operating in a legal gray area, making it difficult to engage in localization efforts effectively. (I12, I21) One interviewee further elaborated on that: *“The government of Syria considers all NGOs operating out of Damascus as terrorists supporting the opposition armed groups and they don't consider the humanitarian context and needs in the NWS, which hosts nearly 4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. The Government of Syria on several occasions, targeted the civilians and the humanitarian aid workers therefore, some of the humanitarian facilities were de-conflicted/ conflict parties were notified about these locations not be targeted, such as health facilities, schools, and aid distribution points.” (I21)*

UN-Cross-Border Operation: Local NGOs encounter significant challenges related to cross-border operations and the renewal of UN resolutions enabling humanitarian aid delivery in Northwestern Syria (Security Council Report, 2023). These challenges are intertwined with political decisions and international agreements, making it arduous for local NGOs to operate in specific areas. The uncertainty surrounding the renewal or extension of these resolutions further exacerbates the situation, compelling organizations to prioritize short-term initiatives

over long-term planning. Consequently, these dynamics have a direct impact on the effective implementation of localization efforts by local NGOs in the region. (I14, I18)

In conclusion, local NGOs operate in a multifaceted environment influenced by a web of regulations and donor dynamics. The perspective of transnational relations provides a valuable lens through which can be assessed the extent of this influence. Through analysis, it has been observed that local NGOs must navigate a complex landscape shaped by regulations in their operating area and country of registration, as well as donor regulations. These factors impact their ability to implement localization efforts effectively. Despite these challenges, local NGOs demonstrate resilience and adaptability, leveraging their deep community connections and responsiveness to address the evolving needs of their constituents. As the global landscape continues to change, it is imperative for stakeholders, including donors and international organizations, to recognize the agency and importance of local NGOs in humanitarian and development contexts. Supporting local NGOs in their efforts to navigate this changing environment is essential for promoting sustainable and locally driven solutions to complex global challenges.

5.2 Power Relations – Strategies of NGOs

In an ever-evolving humanitarian landscape, NGOs have found themselves confronting a reshaped environment that demands adaptability, resilience, and innovative strategies. The complexities of this new reality require NGOs to reduce their dependency on traditional models of international aid and to empower local actors to play more prominent roles. To analyze the strategies employed by NGOs to navigate this transformed ecosystem, we turn to the Power Dependence Theory by Robert M. Emerson. This theory, rooted in the dynamics of power relationships, provides a lens through which we can understand how NGOs are reshaping their approaches to maintain relevance and effectiveness in humanitarian and development contexts.

Contextual Understanding, Cultural Sensitivity, and Empowerment: Local NGOs recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in this diverse humanitarian context. They adapt their strategies to suit the specific needs, capacities, and cultural nuances of local communities. Local NGOs deploy strategies rooted in contextual understanding and cultural sensitivity as they adapt to their reshaped environment, according to the analysis conducted through the Power Dependence Theory by Robert M. Emerson. They emphasize the significance of comprehending and respecting the local context, culture, and norms, ensuring that their interventions align with the priorities and needs of the local community. This approach not

only enhances the relevance of their initiatives but also empowers them to operate effectively within the unique political, humanitarian, and socio-cultural landscape. An outstanding example was provided by one interviewee: *“I think one of the biggest strengths that local organizations and especially in the Syrian response have been that they are very connected to the communities and what you've seen a lot in the earthquake is that when the earthquake hit, the response that was managed mostly by the local organizations, even though a lot of them got very severely affected. They still managed to do a lot of things for their communities, and the INGOs it took a lot of them very long to do something, the UN that was just a disaster. But even though all of them have regional offices, the first responders were the local organizations. And I think that's what a lot of local organizations are pushing on that they are the ones connected to the communities. They are the ones who were there before the crisis during the crisis and after the crisis, which I think is a very important one. Also, now when I hold conversations with donors, for different organizations, all of them are pushing on their community connection, and their ability to empower local civil society to be part of the local civil society. So, I think this deep connection to the community is the biggest strength.”* (I17)

A prime example of this approach lies in their deep understanding of the Syrian context, which significantly strengthens their position. This profound knowledge empowers local NGOs to adeptly navigate local dynamics, cultural intricacies, and regulatory challenges, thereby strengthening their position compared to external expertise. Some local organizations recognize the importance of establishing trust with local authorities in the areas where they operate. This strategy aligns with the Power Dependence Theory by emphasizing the need to navigate power dynamics effectively. By building relationships with local authorities, they aim to facilitate their access to vulnerable populations and overcome regulatory barriers. This blend of contextual understanding and cultural sensitivity is a cornerstone of their strategy, allowing them to maintain their autonomy and influence within the humanitarian sector as they respond to the evolving environment, congruent with the insights of the Power Dependence Theory. (I9, I10)

Strengthening NGO resilience in a shifting landscape, local NGOs employ strategies rooted in risk management and adaptive programming to navigate their reshaped environment. They recognize the importance of implementing risk management strategies to mitigate potential threats to their operations, encompassing political, security, and legal risks. Local NGOs face challenges related to regulations from multiple sources, including Turkish regulations, Syrian regulations, and donor regulations (cf. chapter 4.1). They adapt to these

changes by closely monitoring and understanding the evolving legal and regulatory environment.

Effective leadership is crucial in navigating the changing humanitarian landscape. Some local NGO leaders adapt their leadership styles to respond to evolving challenges, inspire their teams, and build resilience in the face of adversity. This proactive approach fortifies their position by ensuring operational stability and resilience. In addition, local NGOs emphasize adaptive programming, enabling them to adjust their programs and projects in response to shifting donor priorities, local needs, and evolving circumstances on the ground. This flexibility in project design and implementation proves invaluable, aligning their initiatives with the dynamic humanitarian landscape. The synergy between risk management and adaptive programming exemplifies their strategy, which empowers them to adapt, endure, and assert influence while minimizing external risks. (I17, I18)

Advocacy for Localization and Empowerment: Local NGOs play a pivotal role in advocacy efforts and collaboration. They actively engage with international NGOs, UN agencies, and other stakeholders to garner support and foster a deeper understanding of localization initiatives. Advocacy efforts focus on influencing policies and regulations that directly impact their operations. This includes advocating for more favorable regulatory environments, increased direct funding to local actors, and streamlined bureaucratic processes. Concerningly one interviewee reported the lack of understanding of localization, thus more advocacy is required: *“More local actors should be aware of localization which is not the case. I conducted interviews with many senior staff in international NGOs and local NGOs, they don't have an understanding of localization. So how do you expect to design strategies to enhance localization when you don't start with an understanding of localization when you don't know how it is much when you don't empower or target all local actors just focusing on just a small part of one of the local actors, NGOs, for instance. So, the strategy is first to big deal about it by all people to have a good understanding of localization, and to define our stakeholders, clearly that these are the stakeholders. These are the local actors, we mean in our localization, you need to target all of them, and then you need to have a good strategy to develop their capacities of course capacities of other local actors other than NGOs, are very weak, very, very weak for many reasons. They need to assess their needs, but not as implementers but as strategic decision makers and it is completely different from the current capacity development.”* (I16)

Local NGOs strategically employ advocacy and showcase success as they navigate their reshaped environment, analyzed through the Power Dependence Theory by Robert M. Emerson. Recognizing their extensive experience and capacities, they advocate for recognition and graduation from sub-implementer roles to prime-implementer roles in humanitarian responses. This proactive advocacy aligns with their strategy, strengthening their position and emphasizing their pivotal contributions. Additionally, local NGOs harness the power of storytelling by sharing success stories and examples of effective localization from Syria, as stated by one interviewee: *“We are inspired by local initiatives like the civil defense work and how they can get funds from international community organizations, and we look forward to seeing similar success stories with other organizations.”* (I13)

These narratives serve as potent advocacy tools on a global scale, highlighting the impact of their initiatives and the importance of empowering local actors. The combination of advocacy for graduation and showcasing success amplifies their influence and underlines their unique value within the humanitarian sector (I03, I9, I21).

Local NGOs, INGOs, and UN Agencies collectively emphasize the importance of unified strategies, objectives, and targets for localization within the humanitarian sector. This concerted effort ensures that all stakeholders align towards common goals and consistently report progress. Furthermore, localization initiatives have gained prominence as more INGOs, and UN agencies adopt strategies rooted in empowering local actors. Localization, involving the shift of power and resources to local actors, including grassroots organizations and civil society groups, has evolved into a core strategy. NGOs increasingly acknowledge that empowering local actors is fundamental for enhancing their engagement in humanitarian and development efforts, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable responses to crises and development challenges. One interviewee stated the way forward: *“We try to go directly to the source of funds to obtain the fund directly without having any INGOs over us. That's the general strategy because we know that we need to improve our capacity to improve our team. We tried also, in many projects to partner with a grassroots organization, community-based organization, to implement in the field to improve their capacity and also, help them overcome some barriers usually financial and legal regarding their registration.”* (I14)

Local NGOs actively participate in localization initiatives and dialogues, forging collaborations with international actors like UN agencies and INGOs. Together, they shape localization agendas, share best practices, and ensure their voices carry influence in decision-

making processes. This alignment with localization initiatives not only characterizes their strategy but also empowers local NGOs to make significant contributions to the evolution of the humanitarian sector while applying the insights of the Power Dependence Theory. (I3, I14) The importance of localization initiatives is emphasized by one interviewee: *“I can say that it recognized the importance of involving and empowering local actors, including individuals, communities, civil society organizations, and local government, in all stages of the Interaction. So, it's the shift of traditional top-down approach of delivering assistance, which often relies heavily on the act on external actors.” (I9)*

Lastly, the local organizations acknowledge the importance of transparency and accountability in localization efforts. They strive to promote these principles within their operations and encourage open, inclusive, and accessible decision-making processes and funding mechanisms.

In summary, advocacy is an integral component of the strategies employed by local NGOs as they address the challenges posed by a changing environment and work to overcome the barriers encountered in implementing localization. These strategies align with the Power Dependence Theory by Robert M. Emerson, which offers valuable insights into their dynamic interactions with external actors and their efforts to strengthen their positions within the humanitarian sector.

Networking, Partnerships, and Building Alliances: Local NGOs recognize the power asymmetry within the humanitarian sector. They often establish strong relationships and alliances with international organizations and UN agencies to secure resources, funding, and technical support. Also, local NGOs actively engage in various collaborative efforts to strengthen their positions within the humanitarian sector, especially in the context of implementing localization. They often collaborate with international organizations and networks to enhance their access to resources and opportunities. This strategic approach aligns with the Power Dependence Theory, where local NGOs may rely on partnerships with more resource-rich international actors to maintain their operations and expand their reach. Moreover, these partnerships provide local NGOs with access to resources, information, and expertise, which is crucial for overcoming the barriers they face (I3, I10, I18), as pointed out by one interviewee: *“Sometimes there are some conferences, meetings, and workshops by the UN, INGOs some of them every month. It is very important support for us as an information exchange platform and sometimes standardizes some methodologies or intervention*

approaches. Also, Syrian staff members in the international NGOs or UN agencies represent significant support for us in our position as they can deliver our voices to higher levels.” (I15)

There is a pivotal role of coordination mechanisms in fortifying localization efforts. Local NGOs leverage these platforms to articulate their needs, advocate for their interests, and foster collaboration with international actors. Engaging in such mechanisms provides local NGOs with the opportunity to exert influence over decision-making processes. They aspire to play a more substantial role in decision-making within the humanitarian sector, actively shaping policies, and strategies to ensure their perspectives are not only heard but also considered. This dual strategy aligns with the Power Dependence Theory by Robert M. Emerson, strengthening local NGOs' positions and advancing their objectives in an evolving humanitarian landscape. Participation in task forces and interagency committees, such as the Interagency Standing Committee and the Grand Bargain, strengthens local NGOs' positions. They use these platforms to advocate for localization and link it to broader humanitarian objectives. Additionally, engagement in forums like the Grand Bargain and participation in task forces focused on localization provide local NGOs with opportunities to contribute to shaping policies and practices in the humanitarian sector. By aligning themselves with more powerful actors through these alliances, local NGOs can enhance their capacity to influence decision-making processes and gain access to funding opportunities. These collaborative strategies become essential as local NGOs adapt to the changing environment and navigate the challenges of localization implementation. (I3, I4, I6) One interviewee highlighted the importance: *“Localization cannot be implemented within the organization, it needs a network of collaboration, and collective efforts mentality, because local organizations exist in some small areas, not very big areas, so localization requires more network, there are some groups of global networks, who work together to implement and work who need to more know about how localization be better implemented and adopt new strategies.” (I4)*

Some local organizations advocate for the creation of platforms that can amplify the voices of local actors and communities. These platforms would enable local organizations to lead and collaborate effectively, reducing their reliance on external actors. Local NGOs employ strategies grounded in community engagement and local leadership as they navigate their reshaped environment, analyzed through the Power Dependence Theory by Robert M. Emerson. They actively engage in open dialogues with local communities to identify needs and priorities, involving residents in decision-making processes and project planning. This

inclusive approach bolsters their position, ensuring that programs align with local realities and needs while reinforcing the bond between local NGOs and the communities they serve. (I6, I7)

Moreover, local NGOs prioritize local leadership, granting key roles and leadership positions to local Syrians in project implementation. This deliberate approach minimizes dependence on external actors and empowers local individuals and organizations to take the lead in all project phases. The synergy between community engagement and local leadership exemplifies their strategy, which is designed to amplify their influence, reduce reliance on external actors, and enhance their autonomy within the humanitarian sector, as supported by the insights of the Power Dependence Theory. (I9, I20)

Leveraging UN Partnerships and Seeking Funding Independence: Local NGOs strategically employ partnerships with UN agencies to enhance their adaptability and influence within their reshaped environment, analyzed through the Power Dependence Theory by Robert M. Emerson. UN agencies are often viewed as more flexible partners than INGOs, enabling local NGOs to navigate negotiations with Turkish and Syrian authorities, obtain approvals, and mitigate operational restrictions effectively. Local NGOs leverage UN support, notably through mechanisms like the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF). This support empowers organizations to access direct funding from the UN, bolstering their capacity to implement programs independently. The UN's role in promoting localization aligns with the Power Dependence Theory, as it empowers local actors to assume more significant roles in humanitarian responses, underlining the synergy between flexibility and empowerment as crucial components of their strategy. (I8) One interviewee pointed out that: *“Well, basically UN agencies like to say they prefer to go directly with local NGOs. They don't prefer to have INGOs in the middle as the middleman. But with INGOs, the situation is a little bit different. Many INGOs have no access so they push local NGOs. Some INGOs have access and they have no local partners. They implement directly, which usually puts this sort of pressure on the locals because they don't have the same capacity as the internationals, they don't have the same experience. They don't have the same financial resources. While UN agencies prefer to do the opposite. For example, if you go across all UN agencies or the majority of UN agencies, you will see that 90% of their partners in the Northwest are local NGOs based in Turkey. Like INGOs prefer to coerce implementing partners. So even the term is a little bit more supportive with the UN agencies because they consider us as a comparative partner while non-UN and or INGOs consider us some sort of supplier or vendor or service provider doing bidding because they don't have access to the area.”* (I14)

To strengthen financial resilience local NGOs, address the challenge of donor dependence by employing two interconnected strategies: diversification of funding sources and resource diversification. Diversifying funding sources involves engaging with multiple donors and fundraising strategies, reducing vulnerability to external environmental changes. They seek to reduce their reliance on intermediaries like international NGOs (INGOs) by directly engaging with donors, both traditional and non-traditional, and advocating for direct funding. By doing so, local NGOs aim to gain more control over project design, resources, and decision-making processes. These strategies reflect their efforts to cope with a changing landscape, enhancing their autonomy and diminishing their dependency on intermediaries, which aligns with the Power Dependence Theory's insights into power dynamics within the humanitarian sector. Simultaneously, resource diversification entails seeking funding from various donors and exploring partnerships with private sector entities to enhance financial resilience and adaptability. These strategies, guided by the Power Dependence Theory by Robert M. Emerson, empower local NGOs to effectively cope with the reshaped environment, reducing dependency on specific donors and ensuring their commitment to localization initiatives.

Capacity Building and Information, Data Collection, and Accountability: Local NGOs recognize the importance of capacity building as a vital strategy to thrive in a rapidly changing environment. Capacity development involves acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to compete effectively and adapt to evolving circumstances. This includes improving their capacity to manage projects, efficiently access resources, and successfully comply with various regulations imposed by donors and authorities. By building their capacities, local NGOs can become less dependent on external actors, which ultimately strengthens their position within the humanitarian sector. Moreover, local NGOs recognize the importance of strengthening local governance structures and capacity. They aim to empower local actors, including syndicates and civil society organizations, to take on a more significant role in addressing community needs. This approach aligns with the idea of reducing dependence on external actors, as emphasized in the Power Dependence Theory (I1, I4, 21) and is emphasized by one interviewee: *“The capacity building by providing support resources to build the capacity of the local actors, including community leaders, organizations, individuals, to enhance their skills, knowledge, technical expertise in the response. And also, to mention the funding and resource allocation to ensure the funding mechanism, prioritize and support local organizations and initiatives. This can also involve redirecting resources towards local actors,*

providing flexible funding mechanisms, and promoting partnership between international and local organizations.” (I9)

In addition, local NGOs capitalize on their extensive local access and strong reputation in the region. Their deep-rooted presence and relationships bolster their influence and ability to navigate the complex humanitarian environment. Besides that, local NGOs recognize the value of information and data collection on the ground. This enables them to furnish evidence-based arguments when engaging with international NGOs, UN agencies, and donors. Information, in this context, becomes a source of influence, empowering local NGOs to shape decision-making processes. Moreover, local NGOs invest in robust data collection and reporting systems to demonstrate their effectiveness and accountability. Accurate data serves as a compelling tool to justify their roles as first responders and showcase their impact. This commitment to data-driven accountability resonates with donors and humanitarian coordination bodies, further enhancing the capacity of local NGOs to navigate and thrive within the evolving humanitarian landscape. (I9, I11, I14) One interviewee states that: *“One of the most important things is the evidence-based approach, and this should be implemented through data and information management, like to how we can improve the data collection, the analysis and sharing mechanism, and also to ensure that local actors have access to timely accurate information for decision making and to support the evidence-based.” (I9)*

In conclusion, the strategies employed by NGOs to cope with their reshaped environment, as analyzed through the lens of the Power Dependence Theory, reflect a paradigm shift in the humanitarian and development sectors. Localization initiatives, direct funding to local partners, capacity-building efforts, advocacy and policy influence, partnerships and networks, contextualization of approaches, inclusivity in decision-making, resource diversification, transparent reporting and accountability measures, and cross-learning and knowledge sharing have emerged as key strategies. These strategies collectively aim to reduce dependency on traditional international actors, empower local organizations, and foster self-sufficiency. They challenge existing power structures, promote equity, and create a more balanced humanitarian ecosystem. As NGOs continue to evolve in this new environment, the principles of localization, partnership, and capacity development will remain essential guiding principles. Through these strategies, NGOs aim not only to survive but to thrive in a humanitarian landscape that is continuously reshaping itself.

5.3 Achieving Localization – Support to NGOs

The promotion of localization in humanitarian and development efforts has become a critical objective in recent years, with a growing recognition of the value and expertise that local NGOs bring to these contexts. The interviews conducted shed light on the extent to which local NGOs are supported in their endeavors to champion localization across various dimensions, including partnership, capacity strengthening, financing, and coordination. These insights provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities faced by local NGOs and the progress made in integrating their perspectives and priorities into the humanitarian and development sectors.

5.3.1 Partnership

Partnership emerges as a central and crucial theme across the interviews, underscoring its pivotal role in the localization agenda. There is a unanimous recognition of the vital role played by local NGOs in humanitarian and development work, with them being regarded as the first responders who possess a unique understanding of the specific needs and context of their communities. However, despite the recognition of local NGOs' importance, several challenges persist in achieving meaningful partnerships. Some international non-governmental organizations may not always provide local NGOs with equal decision-making power within partnerships, leading to an uneven power dynamic that can hinder the full realization of localization, which was also summarized by one interviewee: *“The partnership relationship after several years between the Syrian organizations and their donors still has a lot of power inequality and power dynamic, the partnership itself should indicate equal rights for both parties, they both have objectives, and they support each other to achieve these objectives but the reality is a lot of the time the Syrian organizations are just used as a mechanism to implement the project, the whole strategy could be amended any time by the donor and they have to just go for it. A lot of the time they suggest or have based on their work on the ground insights on how to improve the projects, but these are not well received by the donors, and that could be seen in many situations. For example, during the escalation of hostilities when there is a huge IDP movement a lot of the organizations would modify their existing projects in certain ways to respond but the donors take a lot of time to check in detail everything before they say no. This delays the whole response process usually, and the reason for that is the lack of trust so such issues need to be identified and this relationship and the existing power dynamics need to be changed, the low side in this agreement should be equal it is not a matter of you implement for me and I dictate on you.” (I2)*

INGOs also play a critical role, but the level of support provided by them varies. Some INGOs are actively championing localization efforts, internally prioritizing localization and dedicating resources to support local NGOs. However, there are cases where there is a disconnect between INGO headquarters and field offices regarding the importance of localization. This disconnect can hinder effective partnerships, as field staff may not prioritize localization efforts. Also, international donor organizations recognize the nuances between diaspora organizations and local initiatives. They acknowledge that both types of entities have distinct advantages and challenges. Diaspora organizations benefit from international connections and donor trust, but they may struggle with issues of accountability and representation. On the other hand, local organizations possess a deep understanding of the local context but may lack capacity and resources. To address these dynamics, many organizations adopt a balanced approach by partnering with both diaspora organizations and local initiatives, recognizing their respective strengths and limitations.

UN agencies, such as UNOCHA, acknowledge the importance of local actors in humanitarian response and emphasize the need for effective collaboration. While they highlight the potential of UN agencies to work closely with local NGOs due to their flexible engagement approach, it is noted that the actual level of partnership and collaboration depends on the commitment of UN leadership in each context. In cases where UN leadership prioritizes localization, it can lead to more meaningful partnerships. UNOCHA, as a key player in humanitarian coordination in north-western Syria, emphasizes the importance of local actors' involvement in decision-making structures, recognizing that local NGOs should have a significant voice in shaping humanitarian responses. Achieving more balanced and inclusive collaboration is deemed essential, not only by recognizing local NGOs as valuable partners but also by giving them meaningful roles in shaping the strategies and interventions that directly affect their communities. Also, UNICEF in Gaziantep recognizes the importance of building strong and sustainable partnerships with local actors, including national NGOs. Efforts are made to engage local NGOs in humanitarian coordination structures and platforms, demonstrating a commitment to collaboration.

Local NGOs are increasingly advocating for greater influence in shaping policies and decision-making processes to ensure that humanitarian and development strategies align closely with the actual needs and perspectives of affected communities. Despite the challenges, many INGOs and UN agencies are actively working on enhancing their partnerships with local NGOs. This includes efforts to ensure that local actors are at the forefront of humanitarian and

development activities, as one interviewee mentioned: *“We are engaging in policy discussion, and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the importance of localization and influence of decision-making process at the global, regional, and local levels.”* (I9)

In summary, partnerships are not only crucial but also dynamic, with UN agencies and INGOs playing pivotal roles. While the commitment to localization is evident, it is essential to address challenges, promote local ownership, and ensure meaningful engagement to fully realize the potential of partnerships in advancing localization efforts.

5.3.2 Capacity Strengthening

Within the framework of promoting localization, capacity strengthening emerges as a pivotal and undeniable element. The interviews with a diverse array of stakeholders underscore the concerted efforts being made by various international non-governmental organizations to actively bolster the capabilities of local entities. These insights reveal the multifaceted nature of capacity-strengthening initiatives aimed at fostering localization.

Notably, INGOs, as illuminated in the interviews, are at the forefront of this commitment to capacity building. They often spearhead comprehensive capacity development programs designed to benefit an array of stakeholders, including local NGOs and local first responders. These programs underscore the resounding importance of empowering local actors with the knowledge and skills essential for driving localization. One interviewee pointed out that: *“UN agencies basically the way that they operate is sort of a really suitable to support local actors by the flexibility to engage with them directly being the fact that they're not direct implementers so they have to work with local actors however when it comes to capacity sharing, and capacity building, I would say INGOs are way far more advanced when it comes to that. They really work with their partners to build their operational capacity and program capacity. UN are not on the same level, you know, they're more following the implementation, providing some guidance around that, but not as needed or as it should be.”* (I1)

Interviews reveal that UNICEF, in particular, stands out for its acknowledgment of the pressing need for capacity strengthening among local actors. Their approach places emphasis on critical components such as coaching, mentoring, and secondment of key staff. The importance of capacity-building is emphasized by one interviewee: *“Strengthening local actors’ capacity is key to localization, especially through alternative modalities such as coaching and mentoring, ideally given priority as part of preparedness strategy.”* (I20)

The significance of this approach lies in its recognition of the imperative to shift from short-term, project-based interventions to a focus on long-term sustainability. This transition includes building capacity in diverse areas ranging from finance, logistics, and administration to fundraising and reporting. Furthermore, interviews emphasize a growing call for increased allocation of funds to national and subnational civil society organizations to cover their overhead and support costs. This financial boost is seen as integral to enhancing their institutional capacity and, in turn, fostering effective localization.

In parallel, UNOCHA's role in building capacity among local actors is acknowledged in the interviews. They have actively embarked on initiatives aimed at addressing this imperative, albeit with room for improvement. The extent of capacity-building support provided to local NGOs, the interviews note, can vary significantly based on factors such as funding availability and organizational commitment. While some organizations allocate substantial resources to equip local NGOs with essential skills and capabilities, others may extend more limited support in this regard.

In synthesis, interviews collectively underscore the central and indispensable role of capacity strengthening in advancing the cause of localization. These insights mirror a shared recognition among a myriad of organizations involved in humanitarian and development efforts. This recognition, rooted in the experiences and observations articulated in the interviews, underscores the pivotal role of capacity strengthening as an agent of empowerment, aligning local actors to spearhead localization effectively.

5.3.3 Financing

The extent to which local NGOs receive financial support exhibits wide variation within the humanitarian and development landscape. Recognizing the vital role of local NGOs in driving effective localization, some donors and organizations prioritize direct funding to empower them to take the lead in initiatives. This approach allows local NGOs to access resources without intermediaries and exercise more control over project implementation. Pooled funding mechanisms, such as country-based pooled funds, have emerged as valuable tools in providing direct financing to local NGOs. Examples like The Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) and AFNS (Humanitarian multi-donor Pooled Fund established in October 2022) have allocated funds directly to Syrian organizations, marking significant steps toward localization. However, it's important to acknowledge that defining a 'local' organization can be complex, leading to questions about how financing aid is distributed and to what extent it genuinely

benefits local actors. Nuances arise from distinctions between diaspora organizations and truly local entities. One example was made by one interviewee: *“There is a lot of support from INGOs to implement projects, but like, there's also a lot of competition like for example, one of the biggest means of localization in the Syrian response right now is the pool funds held by OCHA but also the AFNS fund. And a lot of times they compete with NGOs for access to this funding. So, when it comes to funding for local NGOs, it's very hard for them to access funding and even those they can access they still compete with INGOs, which doesn't really make sense, and also with UN agencies, they also apply for the same funds.”* (I17)

Building the capacity of local NGOs to manage funds effectively is crucial for ensuring the successful implementation of projects. This encompasses financial management, reporting, and compliance with donor requirements. Training and support in this area are essential to enable local NGOs to handle funds efficiently.

While some donors are committed to localization and have taken steps to provide direct funding to local NGOs, achieving broader buy-in from the donor community is essential to mainstream localization efforts. The current landscape sometimes channels the majority of funding through international non-governmental organizations and UN agencies, resulting in limited direct financing for local NGOs. Donor regulations, such as those from the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), can present obstacles to the implementation of direct funding mechanisms. UN OCHA's ongoing advocacy for changes in donor regulations is crucial to facilitate increased direct funding to local actors and further promote localization. Highlighted by one interviewee: *“We do have a lot of promotions for localization, so we have different tools to kind of highlight and promote localization. So, we have first of all the funding which we do through the pool fund, country-based pool fund, and usually, it's a really good tool to start you know working from a perspective that it's sort of a direct funding to local actors. Others will, we have another thing that we're working with, structure itself and representation on the coordination structures and making sure that we do have local actors in place.”* (I1)

In conclusion, financing, including direct funding and capacity building to manage funds effectively, plays a pivotal role in supporting local NGOs in their efforts to promote localization. While progress has been made, challenges and complexities persist, emphasizing the need for continued advocacy and broader donor commitment to mainstream localization efforts.

5.3.4 Coordination

In the realm of promoting localization, coordination emerges as a fundamental and indispensable aspect. It serves as the linchpin that ensures humanitarian and development efforts are not just efficient but also effective and well-aligned. The interviews with various stakeholders underscore the critical role played by coordination mechanisms, such as the OCHA and the NGO Forum, as catalysts for localization.

One prominent observation from the interviews is the pivotal role of UN OCHA, which bears significant responsibility for coordinating humanitarian efforts. What stands out is UN OCHA's commitment to including local actors in these coordination structures. The interviews illuminate how UN OCHA recognizes that the active involvement of local actors is paramount for effective localization. In essence, UN OCHA emerges as a bridge-builder, addressing the gap that often exists between international organizations and local NGOs. According to one interviewee: *“Most of the initiatives done to strengthen localization come from the networks and INGOs and donors, and states, UN agencies, but the main contribution coming from the Coordination mechanisms. For example, OCHA leads the UN efforts, NGO forum interaction, led international NGO efforts, The donor working group strengthens the donor efforts, if you want to overcome challenges it will be easily reflected to each individual organization or entity, but if you want to strengthen localization it should be in collective efforts, So, we can consider the existing coordination structures support the implementation of localization.” (I3)*

Nevertheless, the interviews also reveal that challenges persist in the institutionalization of localization policies. These challenges can be influenced by shifts in leadership within organizations and varying interpretations of what localization truly entails among diverse stakeholders. Consequently, it becomes apparent that ensuring all stakeholders share a common perspective on localization remains an ongoing priority for UN OCHA and other coordination bodies. One interviewee emphasized this in particular: *“That’s what makes it tricky, because when you want to implement localization you need a clear definition for it, up to now there are many classifications, terms, ideas, and concerns, about localization, some see that as providing it to local entities while others looking to it as having locals who influence the decision making. And so on.” (I3)*

Local NGOs, as highlighted in the interviews, also receive varying degrees of support in terms of coordination from international NGOs and other UN agencies. Effective coordination mechanisms are pivotal as they ensure that resources are allocated efficiently, and

that duplication of efforts is minimized. However, interviews also draw attention to persisting issues, particularly power imbalances within coordination mechanisms and the need for increased representation of local NGOs in decision-making forums.

In summary, coordination stands not only as an indispensable pillar but also as a catalyst for localization efforts. The interviews affirm the critical role of coordination structures in facilitating the meaningful involvement of local actors. Nevertheless, the findings underscore the necessity for ongoing efforts to refine coordination mechanisms and align perspectives comprehensively. This approach will ultimately bolster the meaningful participation of local actors in shaping humanitarian and development strategies, ensuring they genuinely resonate with the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

Overall, the interviews reveal a complex landscape of support for local NGOs in promoting localization. While there is a growing awareness of the importance of local actors and efforts to enhance their role, challenges persist. The need for more streamlined and unified objectives for localization, as well as continued advocacy and collaboration, is evident. As the humanitarian and development sectors evolve, it is imperative to ensure that local NGOs are not only supported but also empowered to lead and shape their communities' responses, thereby achieving the true essence of localization. A list of five principles was stated by one interviewee: *“And for localization, it's more about participatory and collaborative approach because it seeks to build existing capacities, knowledge, and resources within the affected community to ensure that humanitarian interventions are effective, sustainable, and respectful for the local priorities needs, and aspiration. And mainly there are five, I can say, five principles that localization includes the first of all the local leadership and decision-making, which is recognizing and respecting the leadership and decision-making of the local actors, then the partnership and collaboration with the local actors and international organizations and other stakeholders, then the capacity strengthening, and this is how we can invest and build the capacity of the local actors. Then we can also see contextual understanding and cultural sensitivity are very important in considering the local context, culture, and norms. And finally, which is the most, which I can see is the most important principle that can highlight the local localization, which is accountability and transparency. And this is how we should promote both of them in diameter and action to ensure that decision-making and the funding mechanism are open, inclusive, and accessible to all stakeholders.” (I9)*

5.4 Discussion of the Main Findings

In the context of the Syrian crisis and within the broader humanitarian landscape, this research specifically examines the strategies adopted by local Syrian NGOs. It delves into their methods of coping with and overcoming barriers to localization, particularly in their interactions with and support of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and United Nations agencies. This focus sheds light on how local NGOs navigate the complexities of the humanitarian ecosystem, highlighting their unique roles and contributions in supporting the efforts of INGOs and UN bodies, while also striving to overcome challenges specific to their localized context.

5.4.1 Adaptive Strategies in Navigating the Complex Syrian Crisis

In the challenging landscape of the Syrian crisis, NGOs have demonstrated remarkable adaptability through a series of key strategies. First and foremost, they exhibit a keen understanding of the ever-shifting political dynamics, allowing them to adjust their approaches and prioritize short-term relief projects when necessary. This flexibility ensures that aid can reach those in need even amid the volatile political landscape. Secondly, NGOs navigate the intricate political terrain of the Syrian crisis by carefully negotiating its complex dynamics. Shifting allegiances, territorial fluctuations, and global geopolitical interests present constant challenges. To maintain operational capacity across diverse territories, NGOs steadfastly emphasize their humanitarian mandate, avoiding overt political affiliations and remaining neutral. Thirdly, they recognize that genuine localization extends beyond immediate relief efforts. NGOs in Syria are proactive in their engagement with communities, going beyond reactive aid delivery. This approach involves the establishment of community centers, the provision of vocational training, and active involvement in long-term developmental projects. Through these holistic localization efforts, NGOs empower communities to become active participants in their own development, addressing and mitigating localization barriers effectively.

5.4.2 Navigating Regulatory Challenges in Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Crisis

Within the challenging operational environments of Syria and Türkiye, NGOs confront a daunting labyrinth of regulatory hurdles. Their mastery of these challenges is evident in several key strategies. Firstly, NGOs excel in compliance, leveraging local expertise to navigate intricate registration processes. They are adept at overcoming bureaucratic hurdles that often

delay or hinder their operations. Secondly, the complex regulatory landscape, both imposed by donors and within their operational environments, poses significant challenges. For NGOs operating from Türkiye, these regulations can introduce operational ambiguities and divert vital resources away from humanitarian efforts. Notably, the difficulty of registering Syrian NGOs in Türkiye and obtaining work permits for Syrian staff serves as emblematic examples of these challenges. Nonetheless, NGOs have demonstrated resilience by fostering collaborative networks, sharing knowledge about regulatory nuances, and engaging in collective advocacy efforts. These collective strategies aim to streamline regulatory processes, ensuring that humanitarian operations remain undeterred despite the complexities of the regulatory maze.

5.4.3 The Imperative of Equitable Collaboration

In the pursuit of advancing localization in their response to the Syrian crisis, local NGOs have adopted a range of strategies while also encountering several key challenges. These strategies encompass a delicate balancing act with donors, where NGOs skillfully harmonize donor support with on-ground realities by engaging in open dialogues and proactive advocacy. To reduce donor dependence, NGOs diversify their funding sources and resources, empowering them to cope with funding uncertainties. Seeking more control over project design and resources, local NGOs engage directly with donors, thereby aligning with the Power Dependence Theory and reducing reliance on intermediaries. Strategic partnerships with UN agencies provide flexibility and empowerment, enabling NGOs to navigate complex operational environments.

Moreover, local NGOs prioritize cultivating trust and mutual understanding with international counterparts to foster more equitable partnerships and shared decision-making. However, the intricate relationship between local NGOs and their donors presents challenges, as donors' short-term project stipulations sometimes misalign with long-term developmental goals. Local NGOs may feel marginalized in decision-making processes, and the emphasis on quantitative metrics can limit their impact. In response, they adapt by diversifying funding sources, proactive advocacy, and emphasizing long-term, community-driven interventions, ensuring financial sustainability and operational autonomy.

The presence of a multitude of international actors in the Syrian crisis introduces new dynamics and challenges. While these entities bring resources, expertise, and global attention, they may compete with local NGOs for funding, despite the latter's deeper local knowledge and connections. Addressing these issues necessitates a more equitable humanitarian

framework that recognizes and values the contributions of local entities, thus mitigating dependency and ensuring greater operational autonomy for local NGOs in the complex humanitarian landscape of the Syrian crisis.

5.4.4 Empowering Local Communities

Local NGOs involved in the Syrian crisis have undertaken a multifaceted approach to empower their response and overcome localization barriers. They are committed to fostering resilient communities through a community-centric approach, actively involving local voices, nurturing community ownership, and engaging local volunteers. This not only ensures the sustainability of their initiatives but also equips communities with the tools to face challenges independently. The establishment of community-based disaster response teams, the cultivation of local leadership, and the empowerment of communities from within contribute to the development of resilient communities capable of thriving amidst uncertainty. Moreover, local NGOs emphasize the importance of contextual understanding, cultural sensitivity, and empowerment. They adapt their strategies to local contexts, respecting cultural nuances and community needs, strengthening their autonomy through a deep understanding of the Syrian context. Community engagement and prioritizing local leadership are central to their approach, reducing dependence on external actors and empowering local individuals.

Leveraging their local access and strong reputation, local NGOs navigate the humanitarian landscape effectively, often collaborating with grassroots organizations and adeptly navigating host country regulations. They also play a crucial role in building local governance capacity and advocating for democratic transformation, creating space for NGO development and localization. Promoting education and awareness within communities is another essential aspect of their efforts, empowering communities and reducing dependency on external assistance. Furthermore, local NGOs advocate for platforms that amplify local voices and promote transparency, enhancing their overall localization efforts in the Syrian crisis response.

5.4.5 Navigating Complexity and Charting a Path Forward: The Vision of NGOs in the Syrian Crisis

As they confront the intricate web of challenges within the Syrian crisis, NGOs recognize the need for nuanced responses. Their strategies are multifaceted, encompassing the preservation of local knowledge, the utilization of local supply chains, and a steadfast commitment to cultural and contextual sensitivities. Collaborative efforts with the diaspora and local

institutions are integral to their approach, acknowledging the importance of diverse perspectives and resources. Looking beyond the immediate response to the crisis, the research unveils the future aspirations of these NGOs. While they are dedicated to addressing current challenges, they also hold a vision for a post-conflict Syria. This vision prioritizes reconstruction, rehabilitation, and long-term development. To turn this vision into reality, NGOs emphasize the importance of sustained international support. This support extends beyond financial assistance, encompassing knowledge exchange, technical expertise, and global advocacy. Such a multifaceted approach is pivotal in shaping the path forward for a more stable and resilient Syria.

5.4.6 Advocacy, Collaboration, and Unifying Localization Efforts

Local NGOs responding to the Syrian crisis employ a range of strategic approaches to navigate the complex localization landscape. First and foremost, they recognize the power of advocacy and collaborative alliances, which enable them to enhance their collective influence, share resources, and advocate for the needs of the affected communities. These alliances prioritize contextual research, incorporate local norms in communication, and actively engage with the Syrian diaspora to amplify their impact. Moreover, local NGOs actively advocate for recognition and graduation from sub-implementer roles to prime-implementer roles in humanitarian responses. They strategically showcase their success stories, aligning with the Power Dependence Theory to emphasize their pivotal contributions and assert their importance. Networking and building alliances with INGOs and UN agencies are essential components of their strategy, securing resources and technical support and strengthening their capacity to overcome localization barriers.

Local NGOs also engage in existing coordination mechanisms to articulate their needs and foster collaboration with international actors. Their aim is to play a more substantial role in decision-making processes and policy shaping within the humanitarian sector. Emphasizing unified localization objectives and the empowerment of local actors, NGOs underline the importance of local engagement in humanitarian and development efforts. In the face of substantial localization barriers in the Syrian crisis, collaboration emerges as a potent tool for local NGOs. They recognize the complexity of their operating environment and actively forge partnerships, both within the international community and among themselves. These collaborative efforts not only amplify their impact but also enable them to pool vital resources and introduce operational efficiencies to navigate localization challenges effectively.

Furthermore, storytelling plays a pivotal role in surmounting localization limitations. By documenting and sharing the narratives of the Syrian populace, NGOs humanize the broader humanitarian discourse, resonating with global audiences and serving as powerful advocacy tools. This ensures that the voices of affected communities are not only heard but understood and acted upon, breaking down barriers and fostering community engagement in the process.

5.4.7 Building Capacity, Accountability, and Collaborative Resilience

Local NGOs responding to the Syrian crisis employ a multifaceted approach to overcome localization barriers. Firstly, they prioritize capacity building to reduce dependency on external actors and advocate for policies and regulations that impact their operations. This dual approach enhances their adaptability and resilience within the ever-changing humanitarian landscape. Also, Information and data collection are instrumental tools for local NGOs. They leverage these resources to shape decision-making processes, emphasizing their effectiveness and accountability. Accurate data becomes a compelling tool to justify their roles and demonstrate their impact. Adaptive responses to changing regulations and leadership challenges are integral to their strategies. NGOs exhibit resilience by flexibly adjusting to these dynamics, ensuring their continued operations in a challenging environment. as well as contextually relevant capacity building is crucial for local NGOs. While they actively engage in capacity-building initiatives, many programs designed by international actors may lack contextual relevance. Addressing this limitation requires a more tailored approach to capacity building that better aligns with the unique challenges and nuances of the Syrian context. Moreover, the research highlights the significance of broadening collaborations beyond traditional NGO partnerships. Collaborations with local governments, community leaders, and private sector entities have played a pivotal role in amplifying the impact of humanitarian interventions. These diverse collaborations enable NGOs to leverage a wider range of resources, local knowledge, and expertise, ultimately enhancing their effectiveness in addressing the Syrian crisis and overcoming localization barriers.

5.4.8 Managing Risks, Ensuring Safety, and Thriving Amid Conflict

Local NGOs operating in the Syrian crisis demonstrate proactive risk management and adaptive programming as essential components of their resilience. They navigate shifting priorities and circumstances effectively, ensuring that their interventions remain relevant and impactful. Safety and security concerns for NGO personnel are recurring themes in the research. Given the volatile nature of the conflict, ensuring the well-being of staff, especially

those operating in conflict zones, emerges as a paramount concern. NGOs have invested significantly in developing comprehensive security protocols, risk assessment frameworks, and real-time communication tools to ensure the safety and security of their teams. Operating in a conflict zone like Syria presents unique operational challenges for NGOs. Ensuring personnel safety and navigating logistical complexities are paramount concerns. The research underscores the strategies of flexibility and collaboration embraced by NGOs in response to these challenges. By forming operational clusters, sharing real-time intelligence about on-ground situations, and adopting flexible intervention models, NGOs ensure the delivery of aid to those in dire need, even amidst the most challenging circumstances. These strategies reflect the adaptability and resilience of local NGOs in their commitment to serving vulnerable communities in the Syrian crisis.

These findings collectively underscore the dynamic and multifaceted strategies employed by NGOs to confront and overcome localization barriers and limitations within the complex landscape of the Syrian crisis. In the sections that follow, we will delve deeper into the interpretations, implications, recommendations, and acknowledge the limitations of these findings. This will provide a comprehensive understanding of their significance and relevance within the humanitarian and development sectors.

5.5 Cross-Cutting Themes: Empowering Local Actors in Humanitarian Responses

In the backdrop of the Syrian crisis, these key findings illuminate a series of cross-cutting themes that are instrumental in reshaping the humanitarian and development landscape. At the heart of these themes lies the growing recognition among NGOs of the imperative of localization, advocating for a profound shift in power structures to empower local actors. This paradigm shift is closely intertwined with the strategies devised by NGOs, marked by adaptability and resilience in the face of evolving regulations and shifting power dynamics. Furthermore, these strategies resonate with the overarching commitment of the broader humanitarian and development sector to nurture equitable and community-driven responses in crisis situations.

The research underscores a fundamental transformation occurring within the humanitarian and development sectors—the rise of localization as an imperative. NGOs, particularly those operating in crisis-stricken regions like Syria, have increasingly come to appreciate the intrinsic value of empowering local actors. This realization forms the bedrock of advocacy efforts aimed at reshaping the prevailing power dynamics within the sector. NGOs

are actively championing the redistribution of power, underscoring the urgency of placing local entities at the forefront of decision-making processes. These findings spotlight a broader commitment to the principles of localization, where equity and community-driven responses are paramount.

NGOs' responses to the Syrian crisis epitomize their innate adaptability and resilience in the face of challenges. These organizations operate within a dynamic landscape characterized by ever-evolving regulations, fluid power dynamics, and intricate operational environments. To effectively overcome localization barriers and limitations, NGOs have crafted strategies distinguished by their flexibility. This adaptability enables them to navigate the intricate web of challenges with dexterity, ensuring that their operations remain highly responsive to the ever-changing context.

Central to NGO strategies is a deep-seated commitment to fostering equitable and community-driven responses. These strategies prioritize the distinctive needs and contextual nuances of local communities grappling with the repercussions of crises like the one in Syria. NGOs acknowledge that effective localization hinges on a profound understanding of the communities they serve. Consequently, their responses are imbued with a resolute commitment to serving these communities, always attuned to their unique circumstances and aspirations.

The research findings underscore the interconnected nature of NGO responses to localization challenges. These strategies are not isolated endeavors but rather integral components of a dynamic ecosystem of responses. Collaboration and coordination among NGOs and various stakeholders emerge as fundamental elements in effectively addressing localization barriers. This interconnectedness emphasizes the collaborative essence of efforts aimed at empowering local actors and nurturing localization within the sector.

While the research primarily delves into the Syrian context, its findings radiate broader implications that resonate within the global humanitarian and development sectors. The emphasis on empowering local actors and fostering equity transcends geographical boundaries. The research findings underscore the global relevance of these principles, underscoring their potential to catalyze transformative shifts in humanitarian and development endeavors on a global scale.

In summary these cross-cutting themes not only provide a holistic academic narrative but also encapsulate the core principles and strategies underpinning NGO responses to

localization challenges within the Syrian crisis. These principles extend their influence on the broader humanitarian and development sectors, paving the way for profound transformations characterized by the empowerment of local actors and the promotion of equity within the sector.

5.6 Assessing the Challenges and Limitations of Humanitarian Localization

The implementation of localization in humanitarian aid, while a strategic shift towards more efficient and relevant aid delivery, is fraught with intricate risks and challenges that merit a detailed scholarly examination. At the core of these challenges is the risk associated with the capacity limitations of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These entities, pivotal in the localization agenda, often face resource constraints, limited expertise, and inadequate infrastructural support. Such deficiencies pose significant risks to their ability to effectively manage complex emergencies and large-scale humanitarian interventions. This capacity gap underlines the necessity for robust support systems and comprehensive capacity-building initiatives tailored to enhance the operational efficacy of these local actors.

A critical risk in the localization framework is the dynamic and often precarious nature of funding. Local NGOs' dependence on external funding sources introduces a spectrum of financial risks, including funding volatility and the imposition of stringent donor conditions. Such financial uncertainties can undermine the long-term sustainability and autonomy of local organizations, potentially compromising their ability to respond effectively to humanitarian needs. Furthermore, the political and security landscape in which these local NGOs operate presents additional risks. In conflict zones or politically sensitive environments, local NGOs are often challenged to maintain neutrality and ensure the safety of their staff and beneficiaries. Navigating these complex political terrains requires strategic acumen, yet the risk of being perceived as partial or aligned with certain factions remains a significant concern.

The pursuit of quality assurance and accountability in localized humanitarian responses introduces another layer of risk. Ensuring that local NGOs adhere to international standards of aid delivery and maintain high levels of accountability to beneficiaries and donors is imperative. However, this is often challenged by the varying capacities and resource limitations of these organizations. Additionally, the complexity of coordinating efforts among diverse

stakeholders, including international NGOs, governments, and donor agencies, poses risks of inefficiencies, duplication of efforts, and potential gaps in service delivery. The coordination challenges are further exacerbated by cultural and contextual nuances, which local NGOs are expected to navigate adeptly. While these organizations are generally more attuned to local contexts, the risk of misalignment with community needs and expectations cannot be overlooked. This necessitates a continuous and nuanced approach to community engagement and cultural sensitivity.

Within the ambit of humanitarian localization, a critical ethical quandary emerges concerning the misrepresentation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as local entities within specific contexts or regions. This phenomenon is not driven by an altruistic intent to serve the community, but rather by a calculated strategy to harness funding opportunities. Predominantly observed in areas characterized by a dearth of NGO representation or where local NGOs are hampered by limited capacity, this practice represents a significant deviation from the ethical tenets of humanitarian aid. These organizations, under the guise of localization, strategically position themselves to intercept funds designated for grassroots entities genuinely integrated within the community fabric. This deceptive appropriation of the 'local' label not only contravenes the principles of authenticity and moral integrity in humanitarian assistance but also diverts essential resources from legitimate local NGOs earnestly dedicated to responding to the exigencies of their communities. The ramifications of this are twofold: it not only undermines the foundational ethos of the localization agenda but also aggravates the vulnerabilities within these communities by redirecting the focus from imperative, need-based assistance to a pursuit driven by financial incentives. It is incumbent upon funding agencies and regulatory authorities to institute robust vetting mechanisms and rigorous oversight to deter such exploitative practices. Ensuring the judicious allocation of funds to bona fide local organizations is pivotal in preserving the integrity of the localization initiative and in actualizing the empowerment of organizations that are genuinely committed to the amelioration of their communities.

Finally, the implementation of localization must carefully consider the broader impacts on societal structures and power dynamics. There is a risk that localization efforts, if not strategically managed, may inadvertently reinforce existing power imbalances or marginalize certain groups. This underscores the importance of a holistic and inclusive approach to localization, ensuring that it contributes positively to social equity and community

empowerment. Additionally, the adherence to international humanitarian standards, while crucial, poses a challenge in ensuring that localized responses are not only culturally sensitive but also align with these global benchmarks.

In summary, the localization of humanitarian aid presents a complex array of risks that require careful consideration and strategic management. These risks, ranging from organizational capacity constraints and funding instability to political, cultural, and coordination challenges, highlight the need for a nuanced, context-specific approach to localization. Addressing these risks is essential to ensure that the localization agenda not only enhances the relevance and efficiency of humanitarian aid but also upholds the principles of sustainability, equity, and quality in humanitarian responses.

5.7 Summary of key findings

All in all, the outcomes of this research bear profound significance in the expansive realm of humanitarian and development endeavors, particularly within crisis contexts akin to the Syrian conflict. These findings illuminate a path forward that not only addresses the immediate challenges confronting NGOs but also redefines the contours of the humanitarian and development landscape itself. One interviewee summarized it accordingly: *“For localization, it's more about participatory and collaborative approach because it seeks to build existing capacities, knowledge, and resources within the affected community to ensure that humanitarian interventions are effective, sustainable, and respectful for the local priorities needs, and aspirations. And mainly there are five, I can say, five principles that localization includes the first of all the local leadership and decision-making, which is recognizing and respecting the leadership and decision-making of the local actors, then the partnership and collaboration with the local actors and international organizations and other stakeholders, then the capacity strengthening, and this is how we can invest and build the capacity of the local actors. Then we can also see the contextual understanding and the cultural sensitivity. And it is very important to consider the local context, culture, and norms. And finally, which is the most, which I can see is the most important commission that can highlight the local localization, which is accountability and transparency. And this is how we should do promote both of them in diameter and action to ensure that decision-making and the funding mechanism are open, inclusive, and accessible to all stakeholders.” (I9)*

The coping strategies delineated in this research usher in a new era of possibilities for enhancing the efficacy and durability of NGO responses to crises. The call for "graduation" and the showcasing of success carries the potential to empower NGOs, elevating them to more influential roles within the humanitarian spectrum. This empowerment, in turn, translates into interventions that are not only more efficient but also highly attuned to the unique needs and dynamics of the communities they serve. Moreover, the strategies promote networking, partnerships, and active engagement in coordination mechanisms, which collectively optimize resource allocation, minimize redundancy, and maximize the overall impact of humanitarian initiatives.

At its core, this framework emphasizes capacity building and advocacy for localization, which stand as pillars fortifying the resilience of local NGOs. Through these measures, local entities become more self-sufficient, capable of adapting nimbly to the ever-evolving challenges of their operating environments. By diversifying funding sources and adeptly managing resources, financial resilience is achieved, mitigating the risks associated with dependency on specific donors and ensuring the continuity of critical operations. Furthermore, the call for direct engagement and funding independence empowers local NGOs to design and execute projects meticulously tailored to the precise needs of local populations, significantly enhancing the efficacy of aid delivery.

The research also underscores the paramount importance of information, data collection, and accountability in promoting transparency and grounding decision-making processes in evidence. These elements result in interventions that are not only more targeted but also profoundly impactful. Additionally, contextual understanding, community engagement, and the elevation of local leadership in projects are essential for sustaining initiatives, ensuring they remain aligned with local realities and priorities. In contexts characterized by volatility and complexity, risk management and adaptive programming serve as indispensable tools, allowing NGOs to navigate challenges while safeguarding the continuity of their operations.

These strategies possess transformative implications for the empowerment of local actors, the pursuit of equity, and the rebalancing of power dynamics inherent to the humanitarian sector. They signify a collective endeavor aimed at rectifying historical imbalances that have long hindered the meaningful participation of local entities.

The advocacy for "graduation" and the showcasing of success symbolize the assertion of autonomy and competence by local NGOs, effectively challenging the established power structures that have traditionally favored international actors. Moreover, the promotion of networking, partnerships, and active participation in coordination mechanisms not only opens doors for local NGOs to exert influence but also facilitates their active involvement in shaping the strategies and decisions that guide humanitarian endeavors.

Capacity building and advocacy for localization stand as instrumental tools for empowering local NGOs to assume more substantial roles within the sector, consequently reducing their reliance on external actors and contributing to a more equitable distribution of influence. Through diversification of funding sources and judicious resource management, local NGOs gain the autonomy to secure funding independently, further enhancing their self-reliance and influence. The resounding call for direct engagement and funding independence disrupts the traditional hierarchical structures within the humanitarian sector, where international NGOs have historically held sway.

Furthermore, the emphasis on information, data collection, and accountability champions the cause of transparency and local ownership, aligning seamlessly with the principles of equity and empowerment. Contextual understanding, community engagement, and the elevation of local leadership accentuate the perspectives and priorities of local communities, affording them a more substantial voice in shaping their destinies. The rallying cry for unified localization objectives and the empowerment of local NGOs collectively signifies the recognition of the utmost importance of local empowerment and signifies a collective shift towards equitable partnerships.

Lastly, the coping strategies unearthed in this research carry monumental implications for the realm of humanitarian and development efforts in crisis scenarios. They chart a course towards responses that are not only more effective and sustainable but also inherently equitable. These strategies propel local actors into leadership roles and, in so doing, contribute to a more balanced and harmonious humanitarian ecosystem, where the distribution of power is more equitable and where local entities are empowered to lead, innovate, and drive positive change.

6. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

In the wake of the Syrian crisis, the critical role of non-governmental organizations in humanitarian response cannot be overstated. Local Syrian NGOs have emerged as vital actors, working tirelessly to provide essential services, alleviate suffering, and rebuild their communities. Yet, despite their invaluable contributions, these organizations have faced a multitude of challenges in their efforts to implement localization in humanitarian response. This thesis has sought to delve into the complex and evolving landscape of these local NGOs, with a specific focus on the concept of "shrinking space," which encompasses the barriers and limitations they encounter, the influence of their operating environments, and the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges.

Rooted in the transnational relations perspective, the analysis has illuminated the dynamics of power, dependency, and interdependence that shape the interactions between local NGOs, international actors, and donor organizations. The concept of "shrinking space" has been a central theme throughout the study, as it encapsulates the gradual constriction of operating freedoms and the increasing limitations placed on local NGOs. These restrictions, often driven by governments' regulations and political dynamics, are instrumental in understanding the context in which local NGOs operate.

The power imbalances inherent in these relationships have profound implications for the localization agenda within the context of a shrinking space. These power dynamics affect funding allocation, decision-making processes, and the extent to which local NGOs can assert their agency in shaping humanitarian response strategies. As such, the theory of Power Dependence has been a guiding framework for understanding how these power imbalances influence the actions of local NGOs and the limitations they face.

Throughout the investigation, led was shed on the various barriers and limitations that local Syrian NGOs confront, which are exacerbated by the shrinking space phenomenon. These encompass multifaceted issues, including restricted access to funding, regulatory constraints, limited capacity, and coordination challenges. The ability to effectively deliver aid within the ever-shifting dynamics of the Syrian crisis has been further complicated by the intricacies of the organizations' operating environments and the policies of their donors. These issues

underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by local NGOs and the imperative to address them.

The study has also demonstrated that local NGOs are not passive entities in the face of adversity, even in the context of a shrinking space. Rather, they employ a variety of innovative strategies to adapt to their reshaped environment, a concept consistent with transnational relations perspective. These strategies encompass local resource mobilization, capacity-building initiatives, and creative partnerships that enable them to circumvent or mitigate some of the barriers impeding their work. Despite the formidable challenges, local NGOs exhibit resilience and resourcefulness, indicating their unwavering commitment to fulfilling their humanitarian mandates.

Furthermore, the degree to which local NGOs are supported in their pursuit of localization is a key aspect of our research, and it aligns with the transnational relations perspective. By exploring the role of external actors, including international organizations, governments, and donors, we have gained insights into the opportunities and limitations of support structures within the context of a shrinking space. Acknowledging the importance of sustained efforts to promote localization, it becomes evident that there is room for improvement in fostering partnerships and enabling local NGOs to take the lead in humanitarian response. The theory of Power Dependence also sheds light on the unequal nature of these partnerships and the need to recalibrate them in favor of local NGOs.

In this concluding chapter, I will reflect on the findings of our research and offer a comprehensive synthesis of our conclusions, considering the intricate web of transnational relations, power dependencies, and the central theme of "shrinking space." Additionally, we will provide recommendations for stakeholders engaged in the Syrian crisis response and, by extension, humanitarian contexts worldwide, drawing on the insights provided by these theoretical frameworks. By doing so, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the localization of humanitarian aid within the context of a shrinking space, and, ultimately, to the enhancement of the effectiveness and sustainability of response efforts in crises such as that in Syria.

Coping Strategies: Within the challenging context of the Syrian crisis, NGOs have demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in the array of coping strategies they deploy to navigate the labyrinth of localization challenges. These strategies encompass a spectrum of actions, including advocacy for graduation and the illumination of success stories, strategic networking

and forging partnerships, active engagement in coordination mechanisms, diversification of funding sources, direct and purposeful interactions with donors, capacity building, and an unwavering commitment to contextual understanding and cultural sensitivity. In this process, they have harnessed their local knowledge, nurtured their reputations, and leveraged their extensive experience. Moreover, they have actively engaged with communities, fostering local leadership that becomes pivotal in shaping responses tailored to local imperatives.

Alignment with Changing Environment: These adaptive coping strategies are intrinsically linked to the ever-evolving environment in which NGOs operate. The shifting regulatory landscape in host countries, evolving donor regulations, and the broader transformation unfolding within the humanitarian sector have catalyzed NGOs' relentless adaptation. This adaptive journey signifies their recognition of the imperativeness of reducing dependence on traditional international actors and empowering local organizations and communities. It reflects a strategic move towards reshaping the power dynamics inherent in humanitarian response, with local actors assuming more prominent roles. The implications stemming from these adaptive coping strategies are profound, extending their influence beyond the confines of the Syrian crisis. They furnish valuable lessons for humanitarian and development efforts confronted by crises in diverse contexts. These strategies illuminate the potential for crafting responses that are not just effective but also sustainable when local actors are positioned at the forefront.

Power Dynamics: The dynamics of power within the humanitarian sector are not incidental but rather central in shaping the contours of NGO strategies. The insightful Power Dependence Theory, as elucidated by Robert M. Emerson, offers a lens through which I gain valuable insights into how NGOs navigate these intricate power dynamics. Often, these strategies involve the formation of strategic partnerships, alliances, and deliberate engagement with influential actors. At their core, these strategies underscore the paramount recognition of the role played by local actors in humanitarian response, positioning them as central agents of change.

Localization Imperative: Localization has transcended the status of an abstract concept to become the cornerstone of NGO strategies. It underlines the imperative of empowering local actors, shifting resources and decision-making closer to the communities directly affected by crises, and ensuring that humanitarian responses are not only responsive but also contextually relevant and sustainable. In essence, it heralds a paradigm shift within the humanitarian and

development sectors, challenging the entrenched power structures and advocating for equity as a foundational principle.

Dynamic Nature: It is imperative to acknowledge the dynamic nature of these NGO coping strategies. The humanitarian sector is in a perpetual state of evolution, rendering ongoing adaptation and learning as prerequisites for success. The strategies uncovered in this research should not be viewed in a static light but rather as part of an enduring journey towards crafting responses that are more localized, equitable, and effective.

The strategies harnessed and deployed by NGOs in their endeavor to surmount localization barriers within the Syrian crisis paint a compelling narrative of resilience, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to local empowerment. These strategies represent not only responses to challenges but also catalyze positive transformations within the humanitarian sector. As crises continue to persist and evolve, the strategies and approaches adopted by NGOs must evolve in tandem, underscoring the perpetual need for ongoing research, innovation, and collaboration in meeting the ever-changing needs of the communities affected by crises.

Finally in response to the Syrian crisis, NGOs have demonstrated exceptional adaptability, resilience, and ingenuity in their efforts to cope with and surmount the multifaceted challenges of localization. Their coping strategies encompass a wide spectrum of actions, from advocacy and networking to diversifying funding sources and engaging with donors, underpinned by a profound understanding of the dynamic operating environment. These strategies are intrinsically linked to the evolving landscape in which they operate, driven by changing regulations in host countries, evolving donor policies, and a broader transformation in the humanitarian sector. These dynamic strategies reflect the recognition of the need to reduce dependence on traditional international actors and empower local organizations and communities, reshaping the power dynamics inherent in humanitarian response. Localization is no longer an abstract concept but rather the bedrock of NGO strategies, emphasizing the imperative of empowering local actors and ensuring contextually relevant and sustainable humanitarian responses. The dynamics of power within the humanitarian sector, as elucidated by the Power Dependence Theory, underpin these strategies, involving the formation of strategic partnerships and alliances that position local actors as central agents of change. These strategies offer valuable lessons for humanitarian and development efforts in diverse contexts, highlighting the potential for responses that are not

only effective but also equitable. It is essential to recognize the dynamic nature of these strategies within the perpetual evolution of the humanitarian sector, demanding ongoing adaptation and learning as prerequisites for success.

Looking ahead, there is a wealth of research opportunities that can further my understanding of the challenges associated with the shrinking space and the implementation of localization. One avenue of research could explore the comparative experiences of NGOs in different geographical contexts, such as regions with differing political, social, and regulatory environments. Additionally, investigations into the influence of varying degrees of international donor involvement on the capacity of NGOs to navigate shrinking space would be valuable. Moreover, research focused on the impact of technological advancements and digital advocacy tools in mitigating the barriers of shrinking space could provide insights into the future of localization efforts. Geographical foci for such research could include, but are not limited to, conflict-affected regions in the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia, where humanitarian crises are prevalent, and the challenges of localization may be particularly acute. These diverse geographical settings present opportunities to explore the contextual factors that shape the strategies and experiences of NGOs as they grapple with the evolving dynamics of shrinking space and the imperative of localization.

6.2 Recommendations

The insights garnered from this research illuminate a series of strategic recommendations intended to enhance the localization agenda within the humanitarian and development sectors, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings. These recommendations emerge from a comprehensive synthesis of findings, encompassing the challenges faced by local NGOs, their adaptive coping strategies, and the broader implications of these strategies for humanitarian efforts.

6.2.1 For Local Syrian NGOs:

- **Engage in Humanitarian Diplomacy:** Establish communication channels with non-state armed groups to advocate for humanitarian principles. This should be carefully navigated, particularly with groups classified as terrorist organizations, where engagement must align with legal frameworks and international norms. Efforts should focus on negotiating access and ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers, while maintaining a clear stance against any actions that might compromise the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality,

impartiality, and independence.

- **Strengthen Community Ties:** Cultivate trust and strong relationships within the communities you serve. Involving local communities in humanitarian initiatives and ensuring aid reaches those most in need will promote a sense of shared responsibility and act as intermediaries when necessary.
- **Collaborate for Advocacy:** Work with international humanitarian organizations to advocate for the importance of humanitarian principles, guiding the behavior of all actors, including non-state armed groups.
- **Conflict-Sensitive Training:** Provide comprehensive conflict sensitivity training to staff and volunteers to prevent actions that exacerbate conflict dynamics or jeopardize the safety of aid workers.
- **Documentation and Reporting:** Establish robust mechanisms for documenting and reporting violations of humanitarian principles. Ensure that incidents involving non-state armed groups are properly documented and reported to relevant authorities and organizations.
- **Enhance Localization Advocacy:** Emphasize the value of local knowledge and expertise in humanitarian and development initiatives. Actively engage with stakeholders to promote localization.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in building the capacity of local staff and volunteers, focusing on project management, reporting, and compliance with international standards. This strengthens the ability to engage effectively with international partners.
- **Network and Collaborate:** Foster collaborations and networks with other local NGOs to share best practices and collectively advocate for localization. Joint initiatives can amplify the impact of advocacy efforts.
- **Engage in Dialogue:** Actively participate in dialogues with UN agencies, donors, and INGOs to express the specific needs and priorities of local NGOs in localization efforts. Advocate for a more equitable distribution of resources and decision-making power.
- **Conduct Conflict Analysis and Risk Assessment:** Thoroughly analyze conflicts and assess risks to understand the behavior and motivations of local non-state armed groups. Tailor engagement strategies based on this understanding to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian operations.
- **Develop Engagement Protocols:** Create clear protocols for engaging with local non-state armed groups that prioritize the safety and neutrality of humanitarian activities. Ensure that

all staff and volunteers are trained on these protocols.

- **Enhance Negotiation and Mediation Skills:** Build negotiation and mediation skills among staff to facilitate dialogue with non-state armed groups. Emphasize conflict-sensitive communication and conflict resolution techniques.

6.2.2 For UN Agencies, Donors & INGOs:

- **Support Local NGOs:** Provide consistent financial and capacity-building support to local Syrian NGOs to strengthen their ability to engage with non-state armed groups and promote humanitarian principles.
- **Advocate for Principles:** Actively advocate for adherence to humanitarian principles by all parties involved in the Syrian conflict, including non-state armed groups. This advocacy should be accompanied by incentives for compliance.
- **Conflict Analysis:** Conduct rigorous conflict analysis to deeply understand the dynamics and motivations of non-state armed groups in Northwestern Syria. This knowledge can inform engagement strategies that align with humanitarian principles.
- **Flexible Funding Modalities:** Develop flexible funding modalities that allow for direct financing of local NGOs while ensuring transparency and accountability. This approach can reduce the risks associated with indirect funding through intermediaries.
- **Coordination for Accountability:** Collaborate closely to ensure coordinated efforts in holding non-state armed groups accountable for violations of humanitarian principles. Coordination among UN agencies, donors, and INGOs can strengthen the collective response.
- **Increased Financial Support:** Increase financial support for local Syrian NGOs, with a focus on core funding that allows flexibility in program implementation. Encourage longer-term funding commitments to enhance sustainability.
- **Tailored Capacity Strengthening:** Develop capacity-strengthening programs tailored to the needs of local NGOs, encompassing areas such as organizational management, proposal writing, and financial management.
- **Equal Partnership:** Strive for equal partnerships with local NGOs by involving them in the decision-making processes, program design, and strategy development. Ensure that their voices are heard and respected.
- **Localization Strategy:** Develop a clear and comprehensive localization strategy that outlines commitments to supporting and engaging with local NGOs. This strategy should

include measurable targets and indicators to track progress.

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Maintain transparency in funding allocation and utilization, providing clear information on how funds are disbursed and used. Encourage local NGOs to establish robust accountability mechanisms.
- **Training and Support:** Provide training and support to local Syrian NGOs on conflict analysis, negotiation, and mediation skills to enhance their ability to engage with non-state armed groups effectively.
- **Safety Measures:** Develop and implement safety measures and risk management strategies for humanitarian staff operating in areas where non-state armed groups are present. Ensure that staff are well-informed about security protocols.
- **Advocacy and Diplomacy:** Engage in diplomatic efforts at international and national levels to advocate for the adherence of non-state armed groups to international humanitarian law and principles. Collaborate with governments, regional organizations, and the United Nations on advocacy initiatives.
- **Funding for Security Measures:** Allocate funding specifically for security and safety measures to protect humanitarian workers and assets in areas where non-state armed groups pose security risks.
- **Conflict-Sensitive Programming:** Promote conflict-sensitive programming that takes into account the dynamics of the conflict and the behavior of non-state armed groups. Ensure that programs are designed and implemented in ways that do not inadvertently exacerbate conflict.

6.2.3 For Host Government Türkiye:

- **Facilitate Access:** Continue efforts to facilitate humanitarian access to Northwestern Syria, ensuring that local Syrian NGOs and international organizations can provide assistance to affected populations without unnecessary impediments.
- **Diplomatic Engagement with Non-State Armed Groups:** Engage in diplomatic efforts to encourage non-state armed groups operating in Northwestern Syria to respect humanitarian principles. Facilitate dialogue between these groups and humanitarian actors to enhance understanding and cooperation.
- **Legal Framework:** Ensure that the legal framework within Türkiye supports the operations of humanitarian organizations and enables the transit of humanitarian aid to Northwestern Syria in accordance with international humanitarian law.

- **Safety and Security:** Collaborate with humanitarian actors to enhance the safety and security of aid workers operating in areas bordering Northwestern Syria, recognizing the shared interest in ensuring their protection.
- **Awareness and Advocacy:** Raise awareness among the international community about the challenges faced by humanitarian actors operating in the region and advocate for collective efforts to address these challenges.
- **Regulatory Support:** Ensure that the regulatory environment supports the operations of local NGOs and facilitates their engagement with international partners. Streamline bureaucratic procedures related to NGO registration and activities.
- **Recognition of Local NGOs:** Recognize and appreciate the contributions of local Syrian NGOs in addressing humanitarian and development needs within the host country. Encourage partnerships between local NGOs and government agencies.
- **Coordination Mechanisms:** Establish effective coordination mechanisms between the government, local NGOs, and international organizations to ensure alignment of efforts in promoting localization.
- **Access to Resources:** Facilitate local NGOs' access to resources, including training opportunities and funding, to enhance their capacity to engage with international actors effectively.
- **Promotion of Best Practices:** Promote the sharing of best practices between local NGOs and government agencies, creating opportunities for mutual learning and collaboration.
- **Security Coordination:** Collaborate with humanitarian organizations to establish security coordination mechanisms that facilitate the safe delivery of aid and protect humanitarian workers in border regions.

6.2.4 For Local Non-State Armed Groups in Northwestern Syria:

- **Commit to Humanitarian Principles:** Publicly commit to upholding humanitarian principles, including humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, in interactions with humanitarian organizations.
- **Engage in Dialogue:** Be open to engaging in dialogue with humanitarian actors, including local Syrian NGOs, to foster understanding, cooperation, and the safe delivery of aid to affected populations.
- **Respect Humanitarian Space:** Allow humanitarian organizations the space they need to operate independently, free from political or military interference, to ensure aid reaches

those most in need.

- **Protection of Aid Workers:** Guarantee the safety and security of humanitarian workers operating in areas under the control or influence of non-state armed groups. Commit to investigating and addressing any incidents of violence against aid workers.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish mechanisms for accountability within non-state armed groups to prevent violations of humanitarian principles and address such violations promptly.
- **Support for Humanitarian Access:** Facilitate humanitarian access and cooperation with local NGOs to ensure the delivery of aid to affected populations safely and efficiently.
- **Awareness of Localization:** Increase awareness among non-state armed groups about the benefits of localization, emphasizing the positive impact it can have on the communities they operate within.
- **Security Measures:** Collaborate with local NGOs and humanitarian organizations to establish security measures that protect aid workers and ensure the safety of humanitarian operations.
- **Commitment to International Humanitarian Law:** Publicly commit to upholding international humanitarian law and principles, including the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers. Demonstrate a genuine commitment to the safety and security of humanitarian operations.

6.2.5 For Other Contexts/Countries:

- **Learn from the Syrian Context:** Study the experiences and lessons from Northwestern Syria to inform engagement with non-state armed groups in other conflict zones. Emulate best practices for negotiating access and ensuring adherence to humanitarian principles.
- **Flexible Funding and Capacity Building:** Develop funding mechanisms that prioritize direct financing to local NGOs and invest in capacity building to enable them to effectively engage with non-state armed groups in promoting humanitarian principles.
- **Diplomatic Efforts:** Encourage diplomatic efforts at the international level to engage with non-state armed groups in various conflict contexts, emphasizing the importance of humanitarian principles and the safe delivery of aid.
- **Coordination for Accountability:** Promote coordination among UN agencies, donors, INGOs, and local actors to collectively address violations of humanitarian principles by non-state armed groups in different regions.

- **Conflict Analysis:** Conduct thorough conflict analysis to understand the motivations, dynamics, and interests of non-state armed groups in specific contexts, facilitating tailored approaches for engagement and adherence to humanitarian principles.
- **Adaptation of Best Practices:** Adapt successful practices from the Syrian context to other regions and conflicts, recognizing the importance of local NGOs in promoting localization.
- **Peer-to-Peer Learning:** Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchanges between local NGOs from different regions to share insights and strategies for effective localization.
- **International Advocacy:** Engage in international advocacy efforts to promote localization as a global humanitarian and development priority, with an emphasis on the inclusion of local actors.
- **Research and Evaluation:** Invest in research and evaluation efforts to assess the impact of engagement strategies with non-state armed groups on humanitarian outcomes and the safety of operations in different regions.
- **Security Measures:** Share security measures and risk management strategies that have been effective in protecting humanitarian workers and assets in areas with the presence of non-state armed groups.

In conclusion, these recommendations, founded upon the multifaceted findings of this research, offer a roadmap for NGOs, donors, and policymakers to fortify the localization agenda within humanitarian and development sectors. By heeding these recommendations, stakeholders can contribute to more effective, equitable, and sustainable responses to crises, simultaneously empowering local actors to assume central roles in humanitarian endeavors.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Studies

This research opens various avenues for future exploration, each capable of significantly contributing to our understanding of local NGOs in crisis contexts. The following recommendations are proposed for further studies:

In-Depth Case Studies: Conducting detailed case studies of specific local NGOs in diverse crisis environments could yield insights into their unique coping mechanisms and the effectiveness of these strategies. Such studies would offer a granular view of both the challenges and triumphs encountered by these organizations.

Comparative Analyses: Undertaking comparative research to explore coping strategies in different crisis types—like armed conflicts, natural disasters, and health emergencies—could illuminate the adaptability and efficacy of various approaches. This study would enhance our understanding of context-specific strategies in crisis management.

Longitudinal Studies: Research tracking the evolution of NGO strategies over extended periods could reveal how these approaches are modified in response to the shifting humanitarian landscape. Such longitudinal studies are pivotal in identifying enduring trends and effective practices.

Stakeholder Perspectives: Examining the viewpoints of diverse stakeholders, including donors, affected populations, and local authorities, could offer a holistic assessment of the impact and perceived effectiveness of NGO strategies. This research would enrich our understanding of the multifaceted impacts of localization efforts.

Comparative Analysis of Donor Approaches: An analysis of different donor organizations' policies towards funding local NGOs could shed light on prevailing trends and best practices in donor support for localization. This comparative approach would identify areas for enhancement in donor engagement.

Evaluation of Capacity Building Programs: Investigating the long-term outcomes of capacity-building initiatives for local NGOs could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of these programs in fostering organizational autonomy and sustainability.

Power Dynamics within Coordination Mechanisms: Exploring the role of power and representation in coordination mechanisms could deepen our understanding of their influence on the localization agenda. This research might suggest ways to ensure equitable participation within these frameworks.

Donor Regulations and Localization: Further study into how donor regulations affect localization efforts could be instrumental. This research should focus on the impact of specific donor requirements on the strategies and priorities of both local and international NGOs.

Community-Centered Approaches: Investigating the effectiveness of community-driven strategies, such as participatory project design and community-led needs assessments, could assess the efficacy of these approaches in fostering local empowerment and relevance.

Impact on Gender Dynamics: Research into the gender implications of NGO strategies is essential. Understanding how these strategies influence gender equity in humanitarian and development work is crucial for promoting inclusiveness.

Resilience and Adaptation: Studying the role of resilience and adaptive programming in NGO strategies could reveal key factors that contribute to effective navigation of complex and changing humanitarian contexts.

Impact on Conflict Transformation: Investigating how NGO strategies contribute to conflict transformation and peacebuilding in conflict-affected areas could inform more integrated and holistic approaches to localization and peacebuilding.

In conclusion, continuous research in these areas is vital to keep pace with the evolving humanitarian landscape. These recommendations aim to deepen our understanding of how NGOs can more effectively navigate the challenges of localization across diverse crisis contexts, thereby enhancing the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of their responses.

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8. Annexes

8.1 Annex 1: Information and Interview Guideline

Topic: Shrinking Space as a Barrier to Implementing Localization – Case Study: Syrian NGOs operating from Türkiye

Research question: *How do NGOs cope with and overcome localization barriers and limitations in their response to the Syrian crisis?*

The objective of the research: Identify strategies used by NGOs to cope in a restricted environment (e.g., donor regulations, in-country regulations, and regulations and limitation in the country of operation) and implement localization.

Interview Questions:

1. General questions:
 - Could you give a short overview of your background (e.g., since when are you working in the humanitarian/development sector, since when are you working in Türkiye, experiences in other countries)?
 - Could you give an overview of the organization you are working for (e.g., location of headquarter, main donors, strategies in approaching donors, the legal status of organizations)?
2. Barriers and limitations to the implementation of localization:
 - What are the biggest constraints for your organization?
 - What barriers do you face regarding Turkish regulations, Syrian regulations (local authorities), and donor regulations?
 - To what extent are you supported by INGOs and UN agencies, among other actors, to overcome these barriers?
 - To what extent are you supported by INGOs and UN agencies, among other actors, to implement localization?
 - What is your strategy to achieve the implementation of localization? What strengthens your position? Which means do you have?

8.2 Annex 2: Codes

Transnational Relations Perspective (Nye and Keohane):

- **International Cooperation:** instances where interviewees mention cooperation and collaboration with international actors, such as INGOs and UN agencies, to overcome localization barriers. Patterns in how such cooperation influences the ability to implement localization.
- **Regime Complexes:** presence of regime complexes or multiple international regimes governing humanitarian and development activities. How these complex regimes impact the behavior and strategies of the NGOs.
- **Global Governance Networks:** the role of NGOs within global governance networks, how NGOs interact with various international actors and institutions, and how these interactions shape their localization efforts.
- **Power and Influence:** how power dynamics play out between NGOs, donors, and other international actors, and how NGOs navigate power relations to achieve their localization goals.

Power-Dependence Theory (Emerson):

- **Resource Dependence:** the extent to which NGOs are dependent on external resources, such as donor funding, and how this dependence affects their ability to implement localization.
- **Centrality and Dependency:** the centrality of NGOs within their networks, how it relates to their dependence on key actors, including donors and international organizations, and how NGOs leverage their centrality to overcome barriers.
- **Control and Compliance:** the control exerted by donors and other external actors over NGOs and how NGOs comply with donor regulations and the impact on their localization strategies.
- **Negotiation and Bargaining Power:** how NGOs negotiate with donors and international agencies to secure resources and flexibility in their localization efforts and the factors that enhance or diminish their bargaining power.

List of Codes from Qualitative Analysis

Partnership:

- **Power Dynamics in Partnerships** - References to unequal power relationships within partnerships.
- **Decision-Making Processes** - Discussions about who makes decisions in partnerships and how.
- **Trust and Transparency** - Instances highlighting the importance of trust and transparency between partners.
- **Role of INGOs in Partnerships** - Descriptions of how INGOs interact and support local NGOs.
- **Local NGO First Responder Role** - References to the role of local NGOs as first responders in crises.
- **Challenges in Equitable Partnerships** - Challenges faced by local NGOs in forming equitable partnerships with INGOs and UN agencies.
- **Diaspora vs. Local NGO Dynamics** - Comparison of diaspora organizations and truly local entities in partnerships.
- **UN Agencies' Role in Partnerships** - The involvement of UN agencies in forming partnerships with local NGOs.

Capacity Strengthening:

- **INGO-Led Capacity Building Programs** - Details about capacity-building initiatives led by INGOs.
- **UN Agencies' Approaches to Capacity Building** - Approaches taken by UN agencies (like UNICEF) for capacity building.
- **Sustainability in Capacity Strengthening** - Emphasis on long-term, sustainable capacity-building efforts.
- **Operational and Program Capacity Development** - Specific areas of capacity development such as operational and programmatic aspects.
- **Alternative Capacity Building Methods** - Innovative methods in capacity building, like coaching and mentoring.
- **Resource Allocation for Capacity Building** - How resources are allocated for capacity strengthening.

Financing:

- **Direct Funding Challenges** - Challenges faced by local NGOs in securing direct funding.
- **Competition for Funds** - Descriptions of competition between NGOs and INGOs for funding.
- **Pooled Funding Mechanisms** - Discussions about pooled funds and their role in supporting local NGOs.
- **Financial Management and Compliance** - Aspects of financial management and adherence to donor requirements.
- **Donor Advocacy for Localization** - Efforts by donors to advocate for and support localization.
- **Differences in Funding Diaspora vs. Local NGOs** - Nuances in funding diaspora organizations compared to local NGOs.

Coordination:

- **Role of UN OCHA in Coordination** - The involvement of UN OCHA in coordinating humanitarian efforts.
- **Local NGO Involvement in Decision-Making** - The extent of local NGO participation in decision-making processes.
- **Challenges in Institutionalizing Localization** - Challenges in making localization a part of organizational policy.
- **Alignment of Stakeholder Perspectives** - Efforts to align different stakeholders' views on localization.
- **Power Imbalance in Coordination Mechanisms** - Issues of power imbalance within coordination structures.
- **Efficiency and Allocation of Resources** - Discussions about the efficient allocation of resources through coordination.

8.3 Ethical Approval and Compliance:

Ethical Foundations in Research on the Syrian Non-Governmental Organizations in Türkiye

In the realm of academic research, especially when delving into the complex dynamics of local Syrian NGOs within the framework of shrinking civic spaces and the pursuit of localization, ethical adherence is not just procedural but foundational to scholarly integrity. This research, situated at the intersection of political sensitivity and humanitarian action in contemporary Türkiye and Syria, required a heightened ethical vigilance to ensure the credibility of findings and the respectful treatment of subjects, who may be operating in challenging or sensitive environments.

Alignment of Ethical Standards with Empirical Research

The methodological framework of this study, as detailed in Chapter 3, was developed in strict compliance with the ethical standards set forth by Hasan Kalyoncu Üniversitesi. This alignment ensured that the collection and analysis of data, particularly within the complex contexts of Türkiye and Syria, were conducted with the utmost consideration for ethical principles.

Formal Ethical Approval Process

The Scientific Research and Broadcast Ethics Committee of Hasan Kalyoncu Üniversitesi thoroughly reviewed the research proposal, including its methodological approach and participant engagement strategies. In their meeting on January 6, 2023 (Meeting No. 2022-59), the committee granted ethical approval (**Approval Number: E-97105791-050.01.01-29017**), validating the study's ethical compliance in researching a politically and socially sensitive area.

Ethical Research Conduct

The ethical approval underscored the commitment to principles such as voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participant data. These considerations were pivotal in shaping the research design and were diligently observed throughout the study.

ÖZGEÇMİŞ

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