Funding choices and the agility of small-scale organizations in providing services to refugees in Lebanon

A study focusing on the micro-level

Aspasia Anagnostou, 12029178
Supervisor: Dr. Courtney Vegelin
Second Reader: Esther Miedema
MSc International Development Studies, University of Amsterdam
25 June 2019
Word Count: 21.658
Abstract

Lebanon hosts more than 1.5 million Syrians and approximately 230,000 Palestinians, assuming a great share of responsibility in responding to the needs and human rights of people fleeing war. The role of humanitarian organizations in addressing those peoples’ needs is extremely vital, especially considering the weak economic state of the country and its sensitive geopolitical position. This research explores the agility of small-scale humanitarian organizations in realizing their true mission vis-à-vis the funding choices they make. It aims to address a general lack of qualitative data incorporating feedback from small organizations providing services to refugee populations. The focus is centred upon the experiences of humanitarian staff that are engaged with raising funds for organizations. Semi-structured qualitative interviews and observations expose the coerciveness of the humanitarian apparatus, where it is not free choice that leads to funding modalities, but rather a coercion to adapt to limited opportunities. The general scarcity of funds for small-scale organizations and the superiority of TNGOs in procedures for partnerships hint to a challenging process of gathering funds for small-scale organizations. While in this reality the significance of private funds cannot be underestimated, this research proposes that to ensure the utmost agility for small-scale organizations, their humanitarian workers must be relieved as much as possible from the burden of claiming and managing funds through appropriate partnerships with TNGOs. The research supports that with the current funding mechanisms, small-scale organizations, which according to contemporary debates are the central agents of change, are overwhelmed with conflicting accountabilities towards donors and their beneficiaries.

Keywords: funding; agility; small-scale organizations; humanitarian; refugees; Lebanon
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... 2

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................... 5

Acronyms and Abbreviations .......................................................................................... 6

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 7

2. Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 9

   2.1 The paradox of global capacity .............................................................................. 9
       Impacts of humanitarian expertise ........................................................................ 10
       How to increase capacity on the ground .............................................................. 10

   2.2 Agile on the ground ............................................................................................... 11
       The humanitarian supply chain (HSC) ................................................................. 11
       The concept of agility ......................................................................................... 12
       Reporting for agility: trust or deception? ........................................................... 13
       A model solely for the big players? ...................................................................... 15

   2.3 Institutional Isomorphism .................................................................................... 16

   2.4 Conceptual Scheme ............................................................................................. 17

   2.5 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 18

3. Research questions ...................................................................................................... 20

4. Methodology & Reflections ......................................................................................... 20

   4.1 Unit of Analysis ..................................................................................................... 20

   4.2 Methods ................................................................................................................ 21
       Interviews ................................................................................................................. 21
       Observations ........................................................................................................... 21
       Sampling strategy .................................................................................................. 22

   4.3 Challenges & Limitations ..................................................................................... 23

   4.4 Ethical Reflections ............................................................................................... 23

   4.5 Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 25

5. The chain of supply .................................................................................................... 25

   5.1. The availability of funds for small-scale & newly-founded organizations .......... 25

   5.2 The fallacy of choice ......................................................................................... 28

   5.3 The ‘NGO paradigm’ in Lebanon ......................................................................... 32

   5.4 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 33
6. Adapting to a non-agile supply chain ......................................................... 34
   6.1 Ideas & funds that prompted the initiation of activities .......................... 34
   Family, friends & savings ........................................................................... 35
   A need for liquidity detached from objectives ............................................ 38
   Flexibility or a lack of focus? ................................................................. 38
   Networking .............................................................................................. 41
   6.2 Inter-agility .......................................................................................... 42
   Inconsistent expectations & the significance of reporting ....................... 43
   Trust and the need for a fair dialogue ...................................................... 44
   6.3 Responsiveness to emergency ............................................................ 46
   6.4 Conclusion ......................................................................................... 47

7. Conclusions and recommendations ......................................................... 48
   7.1 Accounting for the scarcity of funds .................................................... 48
   7.2 Coercion to adapt ............................................................................... 50
   7.3 Trust & agility .................................................................................... 51
   7.4 Freedoms of private funding ............................................................... 53
   7.5 A dubious paradox ............................................................................. 54

8. References .................................................................................................. 56

9. Annex ......................................................................................................... 60
Acknowledgments

I owe a big thank you to my supervisor, Courtney Vegelin, primarily for the support and the encouragement she gave me throughout this research experience. Without enough contacts to approach a rather sensitive research topic, I will be majorly thankful to all my participants who devoted part of their time for the purposes of this research. Equally grateful, I am to all those who did not manage to participate because of their limited resources and devoted presence on the field. I wish to finally thank my family and Carlotte Teunissen, my dear friend, who stood by me throughout all my first, second and third thoughts as a researcher in Lebanon.
### Acronyms and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department of International Development (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO</td>
<td>European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHA</td>
<td>Global Humanitarian Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>Humanitarian Supply Chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFIs</td>
<td>Non Food Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNGO</td>
<td>Transnational Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, it is estimated that more than 5.6 million people have left Syria in the search for safety, of whom 1.5 million currently reside in Lebanon (UNHCR Operational Portal, 2018). As a first country of entry from Syria, Lebanon is the country hosting the largest amount of Syrian refugees in proportion to its population, assuming a great share of responsibility in responding to the needs and human rights of people fleeing war. According to 2017 reports, Lebanon has received more than 1 billion dollars in order to serve the needs of refugees (UNOCHA FTS, 2017), yet the national policy over the refugee issue has been characterized as an uncoordinated, ‘policy of non-policy’ (see Oxfam Discussion Paper, 2015) that strives to remain neutral or rather absent from the Syrian issue even at the level of providing protection to refugees.

While the country has not committed to serve the needs of refugee populations, as it is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention (Shuayb et. al, 2014), it is also under a financial turmoil that would eliminate its capacity to do so (see World Bank 2018). The 2015 ‘garbage crisis’ is indicative of the state of affairs and the skewed ability of the state to provide basic services even for its own citizens (Fakhoury, 2017). When it comes to the refugee issue, financial inadequacies are not the sole cause of the state’s neglect. Lebanon shares a long history with Syria that stretches from the beginning of the civil war and ended somewhat sharply with the assassination of the Lebanese president, Rafiq Hariri, in 2005 and the subsequent division of the country into two alliances: pro and against the Syrians (ibid.). Due to this bloody track record with Syria, public sentiments about Syrians have always been relatively negative (see Whitaker, 2001). Palestinians, who make up the second largest population, are also targets of racism as they are considered the culprits for Lebanon’s 15-year-old civil war (see Moor, 2010).

The economic situation coupled with factors of geopolitical sensitivity, have obvious repercussions for the treatment of refugees in Lebanon. Currently, 70% of Syrians in Lebanon live below the poverty line (UNHCR Operational Portal, 2018), 60% remain unregistered, carrying the stigma of being illegal, while discrimination in the working sector is not only allowed, but legally prescribed (Khawaja, 2017). Refugees are not welcome, to the extent that they have to pay rent for residing in camps with deplorable conditions (Rainey, 2015).

The international community has therefore an important role to play in Lebanon and this justifies the choice to place humanitarian organizations centrally in this research. While current debates consider small organizations as the most basic (if not sole) agents for real community engagement,
the proliferation of NGOs in situations of crises raises concerns of efficiency.¹ At the same time, claims about humanitarian assistance being based on donors’ interests instead of need on the ground have received increased attention in academia (Hoeffler et. al, 2011). This research aims to investigate this claim, by exploring the agility of small-scale and newly-founded organizations in providing services to refugees, and how this is affected by organizations’ funding choices. The focus is founded upon a general neglect in academic literature to account for the opinions of humanitarian workers of small-scale organizations about the efficiency of the humanitarian apparatus. This foundation is justified by the current debate on the importance of small-scale organizations as agents for change (see Rycroft et al., 2019). In a recent conference of the Overseas Development Institute the reality of humanitarian assistance was presented through the allegory of a sinking ship that it too hard to navigate. The life-saving boats that can save the journey are small organizations, but the ship’s mechanisms have become so complex that it is impossible to mobilize them (ibid.). This research is focused on presenting the perspective of the humanitarians who work on those small scale organizations in Lebanon and draw conclusions about how their work on the ground can be best facilitated.

With an aim to give a voice to such opinions of new practitioners on the field concerning funding and the agility it enables, the study will approach the humanitarian apparatus as a supply chain that hosts multiple actors, and needs to be agile to remain relevant on the ground. For the purposes of the study, ‘private funding’ will refer to funding that is not in any way associated with the government sector and not regulated by a third party.

The analysis will begin by outlining the theoretical approach of the research. This will be followed by the research questions and methodology. Subsequently, the empirical data will be presented and analyzed in two chapters, where the first serves to present the context and deconstruct the concept of choice (section 5), while the second is more analytical and specific to the issue of agility (section 6). The paper concludes with the findings of the research and propositions on how different actors of the humanitarian supply chain can be conditioned to do what they do best.

¹ According to Daleel Madani, a Lebanese database including all organizations active in the country, since 2011, the year marking the beginning of the Syrian crisis, more than 800 organizations have been registered.
2. Theoretical Framework

The following sections aim to present the theoretical lens upon which the study is founded. With due reference to leading authors in humanitarian assistance, I accumulate different theories and stances over the topic, to present a holistic approach to the issue of agility of humanitarian organizations in providing services. The first section analyzes the paradox of global capacity, referring to an anomaly that counteracts the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Following this, through the concept of agility I incorporate the argument into the scheme of the humanitarian supply chain (HSC). Finally, to situate the debate into the humanitarian apparatus where big organizations take the lead in determining the mainstream strategies and ways of functioning, the theory of institutional isomorphism is analyzed. For the purposes of a schematic representation of the dominating forces that determine small organizations’ agility, the chapter is concluded with a conceptual scheme.

2.1 The paradox of global capacity

NGOs have been characterized as ‘the preeminent, if not sole, organizational forms that can implement the (global) commitment to “bottom up” development’ (Kamat, 2004, p. 155) and as ‘bridges to future’ (Banks et al., 2014, p. 713). At the same time, they have frequently been criticized for depoliticizing the development discourse (Corbridge, 2007), ‘coalescing with global capitalist interests’ (Kamat, 2004, p. 156) and being ‘donor darlings’; being more attentive to money than need (Koch et al. 2009). Given the plethora of organizational structures and modus operandi of NGOs, all these arguments seem perfectly plausible. All the while, attributing those arguments to specific types of NGOs is a difficult venture; as Bank et al. (2014) suggest a differentiation among NGOs is impossible because of the multiplicity of structures in the sector.

However, Balboa (2014), in agreement with several other authors (Anheier, 2005; Risse-Kappen, 1995; Salamon et al., 1999) proposed a definition for Transnational Non-Governmental Organizations (TNGOs), which at least for the purposes of this study, serves as a useful distinction ‘from the rest’. According to the authors, while TNGOs share many characteristics which can in theory reinforce their role as agents of change, the humanitarian apparatus as is, destines them to failure on the ground. Balboa (2014) calls this ‘the paradox of global capacity’, referring to the oxymoron of an unfortunate equation: the more TNGOs invest in ensuring access at the local level, the less capable they are to implement the policies they propose on the ground. As in the case of the TNGO studied by the author, often the normative lead that TNGOs want to have collides with their potential on the field.
Impacts of humanitarian expertise

It is important to note here that this normative lead is framed with such sophistication and positioned with such prestige in the humanitarian apparatus that TNGO workers are awarded with outrageous salaries to justify it. Those salaries are irrelevant to the local standard, but just like the functioning of the TNGOs, they are not context-specific, but rather operate in terms of the global competition. As Mosse describes (2011), the disproportionate remuneration for humanitarian workers exacerbates the chasm between the recipients of assistance and the experts and this naturally, has effects on the possible impact of the former (see also Shrestha, 2011 as cited in Bondokji, 2016). While this dimension is not incorporated in Balboa’s paradox of global capacity, I find that it also serves to explain the ‘failure on the ground’ that the author refers to (Balboa 2014, p. 282). The high remuneration of the workers of TNGOs is seen here as an important factor contributing to a sophisticated conceptualization of humanitarian work that is counterintuitive, especially for field positions where workers have extensive interactions with refugees. It is a paradox in itself that humanitarian workers receive disproportionate amounts of money for the local context, but at the same time are meant to serve people that can barely afford to live in a sheltered tent. This paradox can naturally induce beneficiaries to feel like money is made at the cost of their suffering, which is, a rather reasonable argument.

How to increase capacity on the ground

While a direct solution to this overestimation of humanitarian expertise would be setting a maximum standard of remuneration per country (see Kopinak, 2013), Balboa (2014) proposes ‘bridging leadership’ as a strategy to increase TNGO capacity on the field. In essence, this means the successful transfer of capacity from the global to the local sphere and according to the author, it is possible through: (1)’in-depth inter-cultural and cross-cultural (ICCC) understanding; (2) commitment and discipline to act as intermediary; and (3) enough power in the organization to influence or change how work is done (Balboa, 2014, p. 276). This approach agrees with Banks’ et al. (2014) proposition on the general need of NGOs to become agents of more ‘deeply networked social action’ (Banks et al., 2014, p. 713).

Nevertheless, to become involved in ‘networked action’ one needs to be available and willing to do so. While TNGO workers remain committed in safeguarding their organization’s global capacities, their capacities on the ground become eliminated, but so does their relation to the field. Ensuring the ‘global capacity’ that Balboa (2014) describes, presupposes a lot of office hours, meetings with high officials and high remunerations; which naturally necessitate a distancing from the field and a
customization of the need into the bureaucratic standard that is required of them. In this context, TNGOs are more engaged with ensuring upward accountability (global capacity), rather than downward (Andrews, 2014).

In other words, the process of ensuring access to the local level and which assumes the development of a positive reputation towards the donor undermines the actual impact that organizations may have on the ground. The interdependence of the two elements suggests the urgent need for equilibrium where humanitarian action interacts meaningfully both in the upstream and in the downstream. In order to further extend the argument of conflicting capacities of the major drivers of humanitarian assistance, the following section is going to represent the relationship as a supply chain, where the concept of agility aims to counteract the aforementioned paradox.

2.2 Agile on the ground

The humanitarian supply chain (HSC)

The main difference between commercial supply chains and humanitarian supply chains (HSCs) is that the former are driven by a rather systematic factor of demand. In contrast to commercial supply chains, HSCs are volatile both because of the uncertain supply of funds and because of the changing needs on the field (Oloruntoba and Gray, 2006). According to Bhattacharya et. al (2014), humanitarian supply chains are: reactive, temporary and have specific purposes that require preparedness, response and collaboration, while resources have to be planned as early as possible. Precisely those differences between HSCs and commercial supply chains constitute the major risk that is implied in the sector: humanitarian assistance being supply, rather than demand-driven (see Hoeffler et. al, 2011, Koch et. al 2009, Lewis 2010, Kopinak 2013; Bebbington 2005).

Arguably, the coexistence of multiple actors into a supply chain may increase the risk of supply-driven humanitarian assistance; it is natural to assume that the longer an HSC, the more inflexible it may be. In fact, in a somewhat typical supply chain, the final implementing agency (local partners) receive the funding after its allocation to three intermediaries: an international agency (which in the case of refugee emergencies is mostly UNHCR), international NGOs (which hold all the prestige required for the funding of large sums of money) and sometimes local NGOs (Oloruntoba and Gray 2014). This explains the incorporation of the concept of agility into HSCs, for the same reason it became relevant to commercial supply chains in the beginning of the millennium: the need of coordination and communication between the various intermediaries, which in the case of commercial supply chains emerged as a result of a growing market (see van Hoek et. al, 2001).
The concept of agility

In the context of humanitarian assistance, agility is extremely challenging because of the dynamic nature of the sector; it requires ‘dynamic sensing, dynamic speed and dynamic flexibility to respond to the disaster-prone area demands, which are highly nondeterministic’ (Dubey et. al, 2015, p.70). An early definition by Maskell, which was not meant to necessarily apply to the humanitarian field, describes agility as ‘the ability to thrive and prosper in an environment of constant and unpredictable change’ (Maskell, 2001, p. 5). Sheffi (2004) later described the concept as the ‘responsiveness to unexpected needs’. Considering Munslow and Brown’s proposition about the necessary transition from relief to development (‘the relief to development continuum’) (Munslow and Brown, 1999, p. 210), responsiveness does not always relate to unexpected needs. In a concrete example, a relief program that aims to alleviate extreme poverty through small cash relief is practically ineffective if it is not followed by vocational training programs or employment programs for refugees. Therefore, the approach of this research disregards the factor of unpredictability in Maskell’s (2001) definition and equally the ‘unexpectedness’ that Sheffi refers to.

The model provided by Charles et al. (2010) appears to be more suitable as a theoretical understanding of agility for the purposes of this study, as it accounts for the completeness that is missing from the previous definitions. The authors deconstruct agility in three criteria: flexibility, responsiveness and effectiveness that are further analyzed into different indicators. The important component that makes the model most relevant to the approach of this research is the criterion of effectiveness, which accounts for the completeness and reliability of programs and consequently addresses the aspect of the ‘predictable need’ described earlier. This conception of agility permits a broad understanding of what organizations might regard as necessary in terms of assistance and suitable in terms of funding choices.

This approach implies that, agility enables the maneuverability on both ends of the supply chain. According to Oloruntoba and Gray (2014), in order to achieve an agile HSC that is responsive to the changing needs on the ground, it is necessary to have a ‘lean and efficient upstream’ process that ensures accountability and coordination with the donor and at the same time an ‘agile and effective downstream’ that enables the adjustment of services to the context (Olorontuba and Gray, 2014, p.117). Arguably, without the former, it is impossible to assume the latter, at least to the extent that adjustment to changing needs on the field would require more funding and/or the consent of the donor to shift to different services. As such, the elements of flexibility, responsiveness and

---

2 Charles et al. (2010) account for four sources of uncertainty: foreseeable uncertainties, residual risks, complexities and unknown unknowns.
effectiveness (see Charles et al., 2010) must be present throughout the HSC, from the donor to the recipients of assistance and vice versa.

**Reporting for agility: trust or deception?**

As the paradox of global capacity theory would support, HSCs lean towards the side of the upstream, so long as this is the prerequisite for assistance. As Konyndyk suggests, the ‘power dynamics and organizing structures (of humanitarian assistance) make it fundamentally supply-driven: oriented heavily toward the prerogatives of the institutions that finance and operate the traditional humanitarian system’ (Konyndyk, 2008, p.1). This perception which agrees with the paradox of global capacity claims and the general approach of this research, implies that organizations are at risk of being more focused on pleasing the donor, and less on pleasing their beneficiaries. In the same line they might be inclined to (knowingly) represent ‘positive’ impact to the donors, as a strategy to ensure the continuation of funding.

As Riddell and Nino-Zarazúa (2016) argue, the process of ensuring the continuation of funding for a project might obstruct organizations from addressing the real needs on the field and this paradox justifies the relevance and significance of the concept of agility in the humanitarian context. While evaluations and assessments are often conditioned upon funding and have to be carried out by external consultants, the significance of this process can arguably, undermine the whole rationale of an operation (Kopinak, 2013). Importantly, even when circumstances on the field might have changed, organizations might be inclined to work on predetermined targets associated with funding for the sole purpose of ensuring its continuation. The process is largely based on monitoring and evaluation; bureaucratic procedures that require a lot of resources from organizations (see Chandra & Kumar, 2001). Oloruntoba and Gray (2006) name this the ‘marketing of the humanitarian service’ and argue that it may have to target ‘the supplier/donor, who has to be convinced that humanitarian action is taking place’ (Oloruntoba and Gray, 2006, p. 116).

Arguably, the easiest way to do so is through marketed (e.g. quantified) outcomes. The quantification of organizations’ results is a step closer to the recognition of impact, as quantified outcomes are more robust and can be easily appreciated by donors (Banerjee, 2007). However, as underlined by Riddell and Nino-Zarazúa (2016), with reference specifically to educational programs, ‘development agencies which focus only on demonstrable short-term impact may well be contributing, unwittingly, to an undermining of long-term impact on the education systems and their deepening development, to whose progress they are trying to contribute’ (Riddell and Nino-Zarazúa 2016, p. 23). Therefore, ‘donor-darlings’ (Koch et. al 2009), who are focused to a large extent on
pleasing the donor by demonstrating good impact, might not be solely benefiting from funding that they acquired unlawfully, but, most importantly, they might be obstructing the development of the sector overall.

The idealization of results is not necessarily criticized as a product of bad faith, but is considered to be a (willful) strategy to acquire the trust of the donor and consequently ensure that they will continue to fund the organization. According to Zaheer et al. (1998), trust in an inter-organizational context translates to ‘the expectation that an actor (1) can be relied on to fulfil obligations, (2) will behave in a predictable manner, and (3) will act and negotiate fairly when the possibility for opportunism is present’ (Zaheer et al., 1998, p. 143). The first and the second limbs of the definition refer more strictly to reasonable expectations; in the context of funding to humanitarian organizations this implies that donors trust organizations in fulfilling their role. Further extending the argument, it also entails that humanitarian workers do not feel the need to impress by manipulating their results or presenting quantifiable outcomes which risk eliminating real lessons learned for the long-term development of the sector (see Nino-Zarazúa, 2016). A trusting relationship with the donor also implies that humanitarian workers are confident enough to present failure to their donors and are not overwhelmed by the fear that this will result in a discontinuation of funding (see Stephenson and Schnitzer, 2006). Reflecting on the concept of agility presented by the previous authors, trust is proportional to agility, in so far as it allows the reflection of the reality of the needs on the ground, permitting this way the agile move of HSCs in the dynamic environment of the field, where the impact of operations cannot be always foreseeable.

In particular, the third parameter of trust presented by Zaheer et al. (1998) points out to the agility that can be achieved through negotiations. In the context of funding in humanitarian assistance specifically, the definition would imply that donors trust organizations in that they will not mobilize funds for different purposes than already agreed upon, when possibilities or emergencies might incline them to do so. Instead it presumes that in those situations, humanitarian workers will negotiate fairly (i.e. be honest to the donor) and respond in effect to the changing needs on the ground, only after receiving their consent.

So far, trust has been presented as a positive element in the organization-donor relationship that can contribute to the agility of operations and HSCs. However, especially given the fact that it is complicit to interpersonal trust, inter-organizational trust can result in abusive relationships (Zaheer et. al, 1998) or even corruption. In the context of humanitarian assistance, excessive levels of trust can either translate to donors enabling too much freedom to organizations that the latter abuse, or even worse, that this trust allows both to engage in wasteful funding. Nevertheless, excessive trust
can be enjoyed solely by organizations that have deep networks in the sector. Arguably, this is a benefit that mostly refers to organizations that have a long track record of operations and often receive recognition globally.

**A model solely for the big players?**

The advantage of organizations that enjoy the trust of donors is a natural symptom of their overinvestment in their global capacity and further contributes to their ability to be agile in the humanitarian supply chain. Deductively, organizations that do not have the funds to invest in their global capacity are found further outside the picture. On the contrary, they are able to invest in their local capacity and build their relationship with the community and thus their ability as agents of change. The argument fits with the paradox of Balboa (2014) and the dichotomy between organizations of global capacity and organizations of local capacity is further exacerbated by the latter’s general exclusion from the humanitarian apparatus. As Kopinak (2013) suggests, the ‘failure to support and generally include local stakeholders due to insufficient analysis of local situations, culture and capacities before program implementation’ constitutes one of the biggest challenges of humanitarian aid.

The lack of inclusion of small organizations is just one aspect that affects their limited agility within supply chains. Large NGOs have high leverage in negotiations with donors and hold the expertise to devise different mechanisms to ensure agility, even when this is not directly permissible through funding contracts. At the level of donors, agility is only recently discussed in the form of ‘adaptive programming’ (Debyrshire and Donovan, 2016). This concept has been particularly embraced by DFID and concerns the design, implementation and contracting for projects that are adaptable to the dynamic reality on the field. According to DFID, ‘the key practical challenge of adaptive programming is reconciling the need for flexible plans which respond to complex and changing contexts on the one hand, with the need for strong accountability for donor funds on the other’ (*ibid.*).

While adaptive programming is a promising concept to give an end to the rigidity of humanitarian assistance, it concerns exclusively organizations that are in direct communication with donors. It is just one example of how global-capacity organizations are able to navigate the system of funding with much more ease than smaller organizations invested in the local context. Nevertheless, they do represent the dominant model of organizational functioning, as the recipients of the largest
proportion of institutional funds (Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, 2015). As the most widely funded and credible agents in the humanitarian assistance apparatus, global-capacity organizations are likely to dominate the scene, not only actively but even by passively presenting themselves as the most supported humanitarian agents. The spread of one dominant model of functioning in the humanitarian sector will be further incorporated through the theory of institutional isomorphism.

2.3 Institutional Isomorphism

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) introduced the theory of institutional isomorphism, to conceptualize this very process where small organizations (un)willingly imitate structures and mechanisms of larger ones. According to the authors, competition and bureaucratization, although playing a role in affecting the structure and modus operandi of organizations, they are no longer the driving forces. Instead, what drive organizations in being similar in structures and procedures are organizational fields that are initially framed by a specific set of organizations and moving by time towards homogenization, regardless the entries of new organizations in those fields. The theory suggests that the process of mimesis occurs because of (1) normative factors that have come to characterize the profession of the humanitarian worker, (2) mimetic factors that arise from a sense of uncertainty that small organizations are faced with when encountered with mainstream bureaucratic procedures and finally (3) coercive factors which concern the situations of pressure to abide by the dominant rules or model. It is important to note here that this mimesis can increase the efficiency of a given organization until a certain threshold, after which imitation processes serve to solely increase legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1973).

Arguably, this legitimacy can be a major driving force for organizations that do not possess a track record, especially given the high professionalization of the sector (see Mosse, 2011). Similarly to how organizations’ structures and procedures tend to be imitated, so do professional positions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This mimetic process is partly explained by the fact that the sector is dominated by graduates of specific studies, specific universities with specific curricula (normative isomorphism). ‘To the extent managers and key staff are drawn from the same universities and filtered on a common set of attributes, they will tend to view problems in a similar fashion, see the same policies, procedures and structures as normatively sanctioned and legitimated, and approach decisions in much the same way’ (DiMaggio and Powell, p. 153). Larson (1977) claims that this represents a collective struggle to control the sector. No matter the root cause, the ensued problem that
DiMaggio and Powell reasonably represent is that the common origin of workers shapes a certain working culture with strict perspectives and one-dimensional solutions to humanitarian issues.

While mimetic behaviors between workers might occur as a result of a common academic background, they can also happen because of uncertainty. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) claim that the insecurity that organizations might have in respect to specific bureaucratic procedures is bound to drive them towards imitating the practices of larger organizations with higher credibility. The authors call this process ‘mimetic isomorphism’ and claim that unclear mechanisms and objectives, as well as general environments of uncertainty can spur the process. The results are not necessarily negative, as the observation of practices of other organizations can be a learning process. Similar to normative isomorphism however, there is a risk of simplistic adaptation of dissimilar or ineffective practices.

Lastly, according to the authors, there is a dimension of institutional isomorphism that is much less of an option than the two other forms. Coercive isomorphism, as the name suggests, is a result of a situation that organizations might find themselves in, where their tendency to imitate structures and procedures is a result of informal and formal pressures from institutions upon which they are dependent (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). In the context of humanitarian organizations, these can be NGOs, but also donor organizations with hierarchical structures. In order to more convincingly claim their support, organizations are bound to replicate the organizational structure of those institutions, without this necessarily meaning that those structures are the most suitable for the purpose and role of those organizations (Milofski, 1981).

2.4 Conceptual Scheme

In order to represent the theoretical framework more holistically, the following scheme visualizes the relationships between the paradox of global capacity, agility and institutional isomorphism. The paradox is visualized in the middle of the scheme, representing global and local capacities in opposing poles. The two peripheral arrows signify the agility which for the purposes of this study is translated into flexibility, effectiveness and responsiveness. The arrows are circling around the two types of capacities to represent the interconnectedness of the two: the more increased the global capacity and the trust with the donors, the easier organizations can receive financial support and simultaneously, the higher the local capacity, the more successful organizations can be in implementing humanitarian programs on the ground.
2.5 Conclusion

Within the wide supply chain of humanitarian assistance, local organizations are found at the further end. This agrees with their limited leverage and credibility in claiming for funds. According to formal fund-tracking records, the proportion of funding allocated to small organizations is negligible (see Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, 2015). TNGOs on the contrary, are awarded with a large part of the funds that, in the context of assistance to refugees, are mainly administered through UNHCR. There is a paradox in the fact that the more organizations invest in been recognized as global experts, the less successful they are in implementing the policies they propose. Balboa et al. (2014) term this the ‘paradox of global capacity’. Humanitarian workers of TNGOs are recognized as experts also in terms of their salaries and this further increases the chasm between them and the people
they are supposed to work for. For the purposes of this research, this theoretical approach serves to strengthen the argument for the significance of local organizations, both for reasons of expertise on the ground but also sustainability. Local organizations, most probably employing local employees instead of international, work for increasing the local capacity to address problems inherent to their location. The employees are not only members of organizations, but also active members of the society and culture they live in. As such, they can approach issues of humanitarian significance with a sensitivity that respects the context and the culture more than any university course or briefing introduction could teach. According to Balboa et al. (2014), there is a responsibility for TNGOs to recognize this in order to increase their capacity on the ground.

The dichotomy between organizations of global capacity and those invested in the local context is exacerbated by the former’s increased ability to be agile in providing services. Benefiting from high levels of trust, large organizations can be more agile with regard to the mobilization of funds. Their expertise in navigating the humanitarian apparatus is another factor contributing to their maneuverability. In contrast, small organizations that are invested on the field and less on their global capacity, do not enjoy the same trust from donors and are thus more susceptible to engage in ‘manipulated’ reporting to prove their suitability in doing the job. Importantly, the quantification of results, which is often a way to produce ‘donor-friendly’ humanitarian outcomes might be obstructing the conclusion of meaningful lessons learnt for long-term development outcomes.

The organization-donor relationship however does not happen in a vacuum, but is to a large extent vulnerable to the whole humanitarian apparatus which is dominated by a specific model for what amounts to a successful organization. Small organizations are weaker throughout the supply chain and this drives them to imitate practices and structures of larger institutions to whom they are dependent for partnerships or even funding (see DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Normative, mimetic and coercive institutional isomorphism can have both positive and negative implications for the efficiency of organizations. However, after a certain threshold this imitation seize to be productive and results solely in the increase of organizations’ credibility.

Generally, although benefiting from the expertise of other organizations can only be positive, this type of processes can be implicitly hindering innovation, as organizations are led by specific predominant models that are not necessarily ideal for the context, or effective for the humanitarian problem at stake. Especially considering the ineffectiveness associated with the paradox of global capacity, small organizations imitating this dominant model could be highly problematic for the development of the sector. Given the aforementioned correlation between global capacity and
agility, it is yet to be discovered whether small organizations in Lebanon manage to be agile in realizing their mission.

3. Research questions
The purpose of this research is not to test the aforementioned theories, but rather to deconstruct the concept of agility of small-scale humanitarian organizations in providing services, vis-à-vis their funding choices. In that regard, the theoretical framework acts as a scheme that guides my approach on the field. It further serves to inform the chosen perspective on the type of processes that affect organizations’ behavior. Ultimately, it will facilitate the answering of the research question, which is deconstructed in the following four sub-questions:

1. How do organizations justify their choice of operation?
2. How do organizations justify their choice of funding and is this really a choice?
3. How do donors’ requirements affect agility?
4. Are small-scale organizations aiming towards the predominant model of TNGOs?

4. Methodology & Reflections
This section frames the research on the basis of its methodological choices and related limitations, in an attempt to provide an account that will enhance its dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These reflections will in turn facilitate the data analysis that will follow and delineate the boundaries of permissible conclusions and generalizations from a two-month long research in Lebanon.

4.1 Unit of Analysis
It is naturally deducted from the research question that the unit of analysis of this research is the agility of small-scale organizations in providing services. The organization is viewed as an autonomous unit that encompasses an ideology, a mission and strategies that reflect the mentality of their workers (Sandwell, 2011). As such, each organization is considered unique, while at the same time, it is recognized that studying specific aspects of humanitarian organizations collectively, can be particularly crucial for identifying impactful patterns for the funding apparatus.

While it is acknowledged that, to a certain extent, organizations function within an ‘aid industry’ (Lewis, 2010), in the approach of this research it was hypothesized that small-scale and newly-funded organizations, are mostly driven by socially conscious goals rather than funds. The research
was premised upon this hypothesis, with an aim to investigate whether funding mechanisms are agile enough to allow those organizations to realize their real vision and mission.

4.2 Methods

Interviews

With a view to acquiring a credible account of each participant’s social reality (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the main research tool was semi-structured interviews that implied a level of foreseeability for the development of the discussion, but also allowed spontaneous diversions that would provide more in depth information about each participant’s experience as a humanitarian worker/fundraiser. In fact, since organizations’ transparency over their funding choices was very limited online, this model of interviewing was rather inevitable: often participants would refer to funding modalities that would not fit the logic of my questions and would thus direct the discussion towards various unplanned themes.

In order to alleviate the consequences of this inescapable unpreparedness on my side, I made sure to establish a good relationship with my participants from our very first communication. In an effort to achieve the utmost credibility, I always clarified the purpose of my research to ensure that participants were not concerned about sharing information for fear of exposure. Although the unavailability of information before the interview led to a lot of spontaneous twists in conversations, I find that it somehow contributed to the richness of the collected data, while it also fits the overall approach of perceiving each humanitarian organization as an autonomous unit.

Observations

In this line of thought, an analysis about the agility of humanitarian organizations in providing services that would be solely based on the accounts of humanitarian workers would be deficient. I decided to triangulate those accounts through field visits in some of the areas of operation of the organizations, where my main aim was to document all available information. These unstructured, non-participatory observations resulted in a rich account of data informing the research about the physical environment of the place of operations, the level of resources available and, in some cases, the power dynamics between workers and beneficiaries.

I soon became aware of the fact that the sum of my experiences in Lebanon could potentially prove to be informative for my research. Intricacies associated with life in Lebanon, like the fact that
foreigners always run the risk of being trapped into paying more for services or goods, or the continuing religious segregation of Beirut started becoming relevant for my research. Especially in a country like Lebanon where economy, religion and politics are structured in anarchical, unregulated and often corrupt ways (Fakhoury, 2017), there is not a single, straightforward way of doing anything. I realized that early on and broadened the scope of my observations in order to be in a position to answer my research questions from an informed angle. The consequent thickness of description that characterizes the analysis aims to justify the findings and conclusions, but also increase the transferability of the research and allow other researchers to apply relevant aspects of methodology to different contexts.

**Sampling strategy**

Whereas observations were extensive and rather unplanned, the interviews were conducted with 15 direct participants, each representing a different humanitarian organization. This sample was selected purposely; following naturally from the research question which specifies a scope for small-scale humanitarian organizations. Due to the lack of local connections, most of this outreach was carried out through ‘Daleel Madani’\(^4\), a Lebanese database that includes all humanitarian organizations, both official and unofficial (unregistered). The filtering of organizations was done by isolating those that had been founded after 2011 (which marks the beginning of the Syrian crisis) and also target refugees as their beneficiaries (‘intervention sectors’). To ensure easier access, participants were also asked to recommend other colleagues who would be of interest for the research and available to participate (snowball sampling) (Bryman, 2012). As it will be elaborated below, the issue of access has been a major challenge for this research. More than 40 organizations were contacted out of which only 18 replied. All interviewees that could be ensured through contacts that were established in Lebanon were approached, including two international organizations that do not directly fit the scope of the research, but nevertheless provided useful inputs about the different funding realities for bigger organizations. Also, Najdeh Association was approached through a common contact and was not founded after 2011, diverting from the rest of the sample participating in the study.

---

\(^4\) Daleel Madani is available at: [https://www.daleel-madani.org/civil-society-directory?fbclid=IwAR1dwCf5KNIPmSoSfY4Q5HTFK5kX1xJnc6PJmtDX3xthu_8tUmShVs7tA](https://www.daleel-madani.org/civil-society-directory?fbclid=IwAR1dwCf5KNIPmSoSfY4Q5HTFK5kX1xJnc6PJmtDX3xthu_8tUmShVs7tA)
4.3 Challenges & Limitations

The issue of limited access constitutes one of the major limitations of the study, which, nevertheless, feeds into the findings of the research and is related to several emerging themes. The small response rate of organizations fits with the general suspicion that characterized many of the interviewees who were surprised by the funding-related information that I could have access to through simple online search. The unwillingness to be transparent should not be overestimated, however, given that the majority of the participants I interviewed could afford very little time for the research due to their limited resources. This meant that many field visits were not possible and that two of the interviews had to be conducted through Skype, which I personally believe had direct implications on the richness of the data.

While time was a limited resource for my participants, it was also problematic for myself, as I was not able to approach possible interviewees through well-established contacts. A more extended period of research would have enabled a larger number of participating organizations and possibly the inclusion of another dimension of analysis, incorporating the perspective of refugees on how their needs are addressed through contemporary humanitarian interventions (as was originally foreseen). I personally consider this a major limitation of the research that poses issues of fairness. At the same time, I acknowledge that attempting to document peoples’ perspectives in two months could be an overestimation of my capacity as a new researcher.

The trade-off of this choice is that the communities of the beneficiaries have not in any way been reflected in the research. Regardless, the ontological and educative authenticity in a period of two months would, under all circumstances, be very limited. In terms of my actual participants, I believe that discussions prompted a rethinking of their initial motivations in becoming involved with the humanitarian sector, motivations that I believe, can be easily forgotten. Discussing about the flexibility that the industry provides to humanitarian workers to actualize their vision was also a reminder to people that those two are separate (and actually have to be for those who are in pursuit of change in the world of international protection).

4.4 Ethical Reflections

With a rather sensitive topic as my focus, I systematically followed procedures that would ensure the ethical quality of my work. In line with Bryman (2012), I focused on four main principles: (a) voluntary participation, (b) informed consent, (c) safety in participation, (d) confidentiality, and (e) trust.
In order to ensure that my respondents’ participation was entirely voluntary I always made sure to contact directly the person I was willing to interview. This was most often done through email, or alternatively through a WhatsApp message, where I would clarify that I am carrying out a purely academic research on how funding allows organizations to be flexible in providing services. At times, I was asked to provide some basic research questions that could help participants to prepare before the interview. Throughout the process I was fully transparent on my purposes and I believe that this was my ultimate guarantee that people who participated knew exactly what was expected from them. While I did not provide informed consent forms, I regarded this first written correspondence as consent to be part of my study.

In hindsight, I realize that the full disclosure of my research aim might have cost me to lose many participants. However, ensuring that those who participated were well aware of the research subject was of primary importance to me. In order to secure that peoples’ input or opinions would not have consequences on their career or reputation, I decided to use nicknames. A detailed table with the participating organizations, their role and the corresponding code names of the participants is included in the Annex. However, to keep the research applied and real, I kept the original names of the organizations. Keeping this element in the research functioned as a reminder to refrain from exaggerated conclusions that would also not fit with the short period of two months devoted to the research.

As already mentioned, along the process of ensuring the interviews I underlined the fact that this research will only serve the purposes of my Master’s thesis. In that regard, in case my thesis is published in a journal I will do so only after I receive my participants’ consent anew. This strategy serves to ensure participants’ protection and is founded upon the trust that I originally aimed to establish.

Especially given the sensitive nature of my topic, gaining the trust of my participants appeared essential for ensuring their truthful contributions. I counted a lot on my friendliness and engaged a lot in small talk so that participants could get to know about me before the start of the interview. With some of my participants we had common work experiences (Borderless, Salam), while two of them followed the same university studies as I did (Oxfam and TKS). I also volunteered with 26 Letters and Mishwar and attempted to connect two organizations that could potentially collaborate for a partnership (Borderless with Catalytic Action). I am confident that the level of trust that I established, not only increased the credibility of this research, but will ensure the continued contact with some of those people that I consider to have honest humanitarian values.
4.5 Data Analysis

With more than 15 interviews conducted and a rich account of observations, the amount of data accumulated could probably lead to several discussions and conclusions. In order to maintain the focus on the agility of organizations in providing services, different themes were created and the transcriptions were coded with an aim to categorize the information. This led to two major findings:

1. that in order to analyze choices, it is first necessary to refer to the potentials that small-scale organizations have in aiming for those choices, and
2. that there are different reasons that render the concept of agility in funding important (innovation, adaptability and responsiveness) (see Charles, 2010). The empirical chapters are mainly structured upon those findings and even though the themes are not elaborated, this structure aims to facilitate the discussion and conclusions that follow later.

5. The chain of supply

5.1. The availability of funds for small-scale & newly-founded organizations

At a first level of analysis, the availability of funds determines the provision of humanitarian services. Considering the plethora of funding programs and modalities, the significance of this statement should not be overestimated. As it will become evident later throughout the analysis, private funding can often cover for many of the gaps that conventional funding does not. However, in respect of participants’ opinions on the significance of funding trends in shaping the type of services provided to refugees, this section will outline some of the basic, key moments that have defined the flow of funds in Lebanon since the Syrian crisis.

According to Association Najdeh, the first three years since the eruption of the Syrian crisis (2011-2013) saw a massive wave of funds directed mainly towards emergency services. This translates into support for food, non-food items (NFIs), shelter, but also cash for work; a program that was successful throughout the region, but was paused after some years of operation. After 2013, donors’ interests shifted towards protection services, mainly legal protection, while basic needs were now covered through unconditional cash transfers. This indeed coincides with a global move towards cash assistance which according to UNHCR ‘provides greater dignity of choice to refugees and other

---

5 For specific reference to the functions and roles of the participating organizations which are mentioned, please refer to Annex 1.
6 Interview 4, February 11 2019.
people of concern’ (UNHCR Strategy for the Institutionalization of Cash-Based Interventions 2016-2020) and was highlighted during the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain (see Agenda for Humanity). However, due regard must be made to the fact that the initial emergency assistance was directed towards the whole population, while cash assistance is administered only towards people that fulfil certain vulnerability criteria.

This naturally reduces the number of beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance and reflects the shrinking of funds since 2015, where a significant increase was observed (see FTS, 2019), despite the increase of people fleeing Syria for security (UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response). As the representative of Borderless noted, ‘when you look at the situation, on a big scale, you actually see that things are becoming worse and not better. Because the funding is been cut. [...] as the crisis moves on, people are less interested. It happens with every long war or situation in the world’. In fact, in the first years of the crisis, organizations could easily accumulate funds. As Stephan put it, back in the days ‘it was enough to say, hi I’m working with Syrians’, and this would ensure a great amount of funding. Arguably, this could explain the number of NGOs in Lebanon, which, according to a 2006 study, exceeds 15,000 (see AbouAssi, 2006). At the same time, the reduction of donors’ interest mentioned earlier reflects an effect of normalization of tragedy; a naturalization of a situation that initially moved and mobilized the public, but donors as well. While the state of emergency in Lebanon lasted for only the first years of the Syrian crisis, humanitarian support has not managed to elevate people out of the dependency of assistance. This normalization that Rosa described is therefore an issue complicit to the lack of integration of Syrians in a country where discrimination based on ethnicity is legally prescribed.

Currently, funding for small-scale organizations is difficult to access and as it will become evident in later parts of the analysis, most small-scale organizations in Lebanon are struggling to insure survival. This struggle is even more pertinent in areas that host smaller amounts of refugees and have not been the epicenter of attention for donors. According to many of the participants, the attention of donors has been largely placed upon the Bekaa valley and specific areas around Beirut and Tripoli. Considering the proportion of the refugee populations over the Lebanese, which according to ECHO is 30% (ECHO, 2019), it is natural that the population is not concentrated in what could be termed in Europe as ‘hotspots’. According to reports, 81% of Syrians live independently, an estimation of the number of Syrian people residing in Lebanon is impossible, since the government banned UNHCR from registering individuals in 2015. Although, the ban was partially waived in 2017, individual residence permits continue to cost annually 200$ for a significant amount of people who are unable to afford it (Human Rights Watch, 2017). 

---

7 An estimation of the number of Syrian people residing in Lebanon is impossible, since the government banned UNHCR from registering individuals in 2015. Although, the ban was partially waived in 2017, individual residence permits continue to cost annually 200$ for a significant amount of people who are unable to afford it (Human Rights Watch, 2017).
8 Interview 7, February 27 2019.
9 Interview 14, March 15 2019.
10 Interview 4, February 11 2019 and Interview 8, March 1 2019.
outside of camps and this is often in the poorest and most underprivileged areas from the times of the civil war (Rainey, 2015). Areas like Mar Elias and Ouzai in Beirut that were the center of the battlefield in times of conflict, receive little attention from donors, and small-scale organizations interviewed there operate pretty much like activists.¹¹ This reintroduces the issue of normalization; areas that have been historically underprivileged do not easily attract funding.

Along with the quantity and fixed locality of funding, a third funding trend that emerged from participants’ contributions, but also from analyzing the type of projects that actually received conventional funding concerns the modality of available funds. Funding was often delivered in the form of materials or labor costs only for beneficiaries. At times, this funding did not even pass through the organization, but was directly administered from donors. As Rosa clearly suggested ‘donors […] want to donate things and not money’.¹² For Borderless, those were two different projects for the delivery of laptops to enable the teaching of computer classes. Mishwar received money to buy musical instruments for the purpose of a music class. Tight Knit Syria received materials required for knitting, like balls of yarn and Mdawar machines to enable a faster production of glass bottles. While all those projects seem disparate, the common denominator for those organizations was that they were provided with the primary equipment to be able to function, but not with the required liquidity to be able to survive. While beneficiaries were financially supported for the period of the projects and this support was considered a huge economic and also moral boost, the founders of the organization were not. At times, this issue created animosity between donors and organizations. As Aya mentioned, coordinating a knitting project where more than 15 people were essentially employed to do knitting work was particularly stressful and could only be done wholeheartedly with the ethical support of her two colleagues and family. Clearly, this kind of funding modalities cannot concern organizations whose founders do not have their own financial means, at least for a small period of time.

The self-evident conclusion of participants’ narrations is that, during the time of the research, there was a justifiable relative scarcity of funds in Lebanon. As the Syrian crisis wages in its eighth year, donors’ attention has shifted away; potentially to more recent emergencies like the crisis in Venezuela for example. The availability of funds can also be said to be dependent on the location of activities, as it was generally observed that specific areas in Lebanon receive more attention from donors.¹³ Finally, funding fueled to small humanitarian organizations is to a large extent attached to the purchase of specific things and not to the coverage of general expenses. Those realities have

---

¹¹ Interview 7, February 27 2019 and Interview 12, March 13 2019.
¹² Interview 7, February 27 2019.
¹³ Interview 4, February 11 2019 and Interview 6, March 1 2019.
specific implications on the chances that organizations have in actually choosing the type of fund that best suits their operation. The following part is going to further explore the issue of choice, in an attempt to accurately reflect participants’ perceptions on the agility of organizations in accessing funds.

5.2 The fallacy of choice

To refer to the funding of small humanitarian organizations as a choice presumes a level of freedom that might misrepresent the reality in Lebanon. The acquisition of funds for small-scale organizations in Lebanon is so coercive in nature that ‘choices’ amount to choices for survival over dissolution. Ultimately, the decision for funding lies upon donors and organizations often apply for many projects in order to increase their probabilities in being awarded a fund. But even the projects they apply for cannot be claimed to be chosen per se; their limited resources do not allow them to detect all projects they could possibly be eligible for. Clearly, there is a certain level of coercion-to-adapt due to the type of funds that are available and the limited capacity of organizations to respond to them. Moreover, as it was mentioned earlier, donors’ interest in funding humanitarian organizations working with refugees in Lebanon is being limited, as the situation is no longer considered an emergency.

The size of an organization is a crucial determinant for the access to funding. Small-scale organizations are not eligible to even apply for funding from certain donors.¹⁴ Humanitarian actors like ECHO or UNHCR prefer larger organizations first and foremost for purposes of administrative expediency. As Aya from TKS submitted: ‘big donors might not want to choose small organizations because this would create more work for them. Fueling bigger sums of money to large organizations is much easier’.¹⁵ She further noted that specific donors, like the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, often have a precondition that organizations have managed an x (rather large) amount of money the previous year. While this can be interpreted as a systemic failure of mainstreaming and further marginalizing grassroots organizations, it is also a way to ensure that large sums of money are only fueled to organizations that have the capacity and the expertise to manage them appropriately. The trade-off in this system is that funds that concern small-scale organizations are, naturally, not mainstreamed, but published by various donors. This is particularly problematic for small-scale organizations which do not have the luxury of staff and time to be invested in fund-hunts. According

¹⁴ Interview 8, February 6 2019. An example can be found in a recent call of UNOCHA: https://www.unocha.org/yemen/eligibility
¹⁵ Interview 2, February 6 2019.
to Aya, there is more than 100 websites that she would need to check on a daily basis in order to be sure that she has exhausted the possibilities of detecting a good funding opportunity for TKS. Due to the limited capacity and the hectic reality of the field, this fund-seeking is mostly carried out in the late night hours that should normally be off work. This can also be explained by the complexity of proposal writing which was a common complaint for most humanitarian workers who also emphasized the difficulty of having to apply and comply with the different formats and requirements of donors. Although small organizations are most often interested in small grants, the administrative burden is not lesser than what would be required from much more experienced and bigger organizations like Oxfam, NRC, or HIP.

Arguably, this overstretching of resources alludes to a regime of coercive fund-seeking and a mentality of ‘whatever works’. As Basmeh from Action for Hope characteristically stated, ‘we approach everybody, so those who respond are the ones we deal with’. Essentially, fund-seeking can be equated to job-seeking: the necessity for money forces compromise. In the context of Lebanon specifically, where the needs of beneficiaries are systematically neglected due to the geopolitical reasons outlined earlier, the level of compromise might be especially high. Organizations are often pushed to work on projects that are more driven by donors’ offer to fund and less by the needs on the field, or even the expertise of the staff. The contribution of Stephan from Salam provides a very grounded approach to the issue: ‘You are working in a specific field, but the interest is more for another field. And somehow you have to survive... like find a way to bring money to the place to pay for people. Not because you want to continue getting paid but just because you need to have... like the attention back here. Or you move your vision to fit with what the need is in the ground. So somehow you need to survive for this period. So some people may be doing things they don’t believe in, or it's somehow not fit with their mission or their interest, because eventually it's a humanitarian... Like you said you want to work on education but if someone is offering for you to work on relief, providing the basic assistance, yeah okay, my objective is to help these people and make the situation better... So yes, we can do it for two months or three months. For help, and yes because it’s gonna support the organization somehow.’

In line with Stephan’s description, it could be said that what forces organizations to adapt to donors’ offers is the scarcity of funds for the activities they normally carry out. Other participants claimed that those ‘donor-driven’ operations are a clear manifestation of how humanitarian organizations

---

16 Interview 7, February 27 2019 and Interview 13, March 13 2019.
17 Interview 13, March 13 2019.
18 Interview 14, March 15 2019.
‘chase the money’ and ‘lack any real motivation’\(^{19}\). In the grand scheme of things, it could be contested whether this ‘real motivation’ that Tom referred to is an actual parameter for successful projects. As Stephan suggested, even when organizations opt for projects that deviate from their original mission or purpose, they still follow a humanitarian imperative and provide assistance to people.

At the same time, small organizations’ adaptation is almost an inevitable course of action because of the simple fact that they are small. Lacking a track record of operations, they also lack credibility against donors and this is a factor that makes them more adjustable and less prone to negotiate. Larger organizations like HIP, or even Action for Hope often engage in direct negotiations with donors to ensure the funding of operations that do not fit the specificity of available calls for proposals. However, this presupposes a certain familiarization with the donor and their requirements. Arguably, this knowledge comes with expertise, but also with appropriate contacts.

As it became apparent from almost all the participants of the study, establishing contacts that will particularly prove useful for funding can be extremely challenging and is often based on luck. The only project that TKS managed to ensure came after a spontaneous telephone communication with the headquarters of UNHCR in Geneva to resolve a question around a call of proposals. Even though TKS was not eligible for the specific project, it was referred to UNHCR Lebanon by a Geneva-based staff and this eventually resulted in their participation in the Made51 program. According to Aya, this collaboration was purely based on the fact that they were referred by UNHCR HQ. She was very well aware of the Made51 program, but never thought of applying to it, because she believed that TKS stands no chances of getting approved. Equally, Tom from Mishwar ensured the funding for two projects after randomly meeting with a representative from Friedrich Naumann Stiftung at a party in Beirut. CROP established a project with the municipality of Tripoli, as its founder was also working with them. Although contacts are difficult to establish, as it will be discussed further below, familiarization with the donor permits a level of trust that is paramount for organizations’ agility throughout projects.

Arguably, the use of contacts for accessing funds does not suggest a fair procedure of assessment of organizations. The system of funding itself is permissive of unjust conduct, especially in relation to the procedures followed for partnerships. Calls of proposals that concern larger amounts of money that could not be directly claimed by a small-scale organization, presuppose a relationship or previous acquaintance with the partnering NGO. As Rosa from Borderless submitted, although representatives from NGOs have visited their center in Ouzai multiple times, the topic of a joint

\(^{19}\) Interview 8, March 1 2019.
proposal has never occurred. According to Tatiana from Oxfam/NRC, the choice of the partnering organization is done after a ‘partnership assessment’, which serves to identify organizations that are willing to work on a specific project and also have the capacity to deliver. In reality, small-scale organizations most often lack any sort of access like this, right because they are unknown to large organizations. This is the case for organizations like 26 Letters, which has been operating for the past four years, providing English classes to more than 50 children on a daily basis, without the support of any conventional funding or Tngo.

Partnerships are therefore just another rather inaccessible option for the majority of small-scale organizations that have not managed to establish relationships with TNGOs. Given the complexity of the proposal writing processes, but also the administrative requirements that donors impose upon small-scale organizations during the process of a project, this lack of accessibility is rather unfortunate. As Nayla from Najdeh suggested, TNGOs’ expertise can be particularly helpful and relieving for an organization that is invested on the field. Humanitarian workers with years of experience in proposal writing and reporting can be much more efficient in handling those processes, while small organizations can be more connected to the needs on the field. According to Tatiana from Oxfam/NRC, such partnerships can also be instrumental for capacity building that ultimately aims towards the sustainability of operations. However, the formation of the partnership is a result of TNGO’s initiative, which is rather problematic for the newly-formed and small organizations.

The leading role that TNGOs have in partnership relationships is consistent with their overall superiority in the humanitarian apparatus. Organizations like Oxfam, NRC and HIP participate in annual meetings that rule a country’s funding strategy. Vetted organizations decide upon the priorities of humanitarian assistance that eventually form donors’ investments. Although participants from those big organizations clarified that participation in those procedures is not relevant to the size of organizations, the requirements for acquiring this status presuppose a certain level of administrative capacity. Moreover, the products of those meetings essentially determine the funding that concerns small organizations most, as they are less likely to engage in any kind of direct negotiation for separate funding.

The abstention from such formal procedures is often consciously opted for. As already mentioned, any kind of ‘office work’ leads to less time spent on the field. For organizations like Mishwar, 26 Letters, TKS, Shams, Borderless and Salam which consider themselves as deeply invested in the community, such a trade-off is meaningless. The interaction with the community and the civil society is considered as the most appropriate and sustainable way to exist in the field. This translates into a
great amount of time invested on fieldwork, attempting to approximate peoples’ understanding and needs. Along those lines, the two TKS founders decided to establish the organization together with a local resident from Shatila, Tom’s house is open for coffee or tea to all residents of the Halba settlement and volunteers at 26 Letters and Borderless arrange different weekend activities for the kids. Essentially, those organizations engage in activities that are non-measurable, arranged organically on the basis of what beneficiaries want and are not objective-driven. This means that their impact is hard to translate in reports as much as the level of empowerment that they lead to. Najiba from Shams particularly raised this point explaining how rewarding it is for humanitarian workers to see organic changes in the community. Two of the kids that participated in humanitarian activities were considered by the public school as autistic, as they would never talk. After participating in various activities with Shams, those two kids became amongst the most social of the group.\textsuperscript{20} This raises the problem of mainstreaming; a common defeat in humanitarian assistance which assumes commonalities of ‘refugeness’ on individuals. Another example mentioned by Najiba is characteristic of the dangers of mainstreaming assistance towards populations that could be potential sufferers of PTSD: many of the kids that Shams worked with did not remember their name.

5.3 The ‘NGO paradigm’ in Lebanon

For many, the humanitarian system as is, is not receptive of activities that would require a more qualitative assessment of efficiency. It is for those organizations that conventional funding appears to be an unwise choice. The immediate consequence is that a sharp division is being created between organizations that are invested on the field and have very scarce sources of funding and others that are involved with donors at higher levels and enjoy ample funding opportunities. At various times I was told by workers that TNGOs have such big amounts of money that they struggle to find ways to spend it. Clearly, one efficient way for channeling it is through ‘outrageous salaries’ of more than $10,000 per month; what Tom refers to as ‘resettlement and danger money’.\textsuperscript{21} He also referred to the oxymoron of a Range Rover racing through a refugee camp. These kinds of benefits exaggerate the chasm between the humanitarian worker and the refugee and eliminate the chances for people to escape the dependence to assistance. People like Tom and Walid oppose to this paradigm to such an extent that their funding supply is most often under emergency, and this has direct consequences in their way of living. Again, for those people, the ultimate goal is to be able to abstain from conventional funding, although they have not managed to realize this yet.

\textsuperscript{20} Interview 3, February 7 2019.
\textsuperscript{21} Interview 8, March 1 2019; essentially arguing that the very same funds that are spent on salaries could be used for humanitarian causes.
It is important to note here that this humble way of living and working that some humanitarian workers opt for is not clearly understood by beneficiaries. Especially in Lebanon where there is a long history of humanitarian assistance and people have been used to the continued presence of NGOs, there is arguably, a common suspicion of corruption and abuse. Abed, an 80-year old Palestinian who has experienced the massacre in Shatila with his own eyes and continues to work in education there, mentioned to me early on, ‘humanitarian organizations are like beasts on a dead animal: they leave the bones and drive away’.\(^\text{22}\) I do not imply that this is a common perception amongst refugees, as such a generalization would be oversimplifying, but I propose that even the humbleness of people like Tom and Walid might not be evaluated exactly for what it is. At least, this is what Tom argues: even though people trust him and count on him, he still believes that he is perceived as just another ‘rich NGO guy’. These perceptions, if indeed true, could have great implications on the effectiveness of Mishwar and actually of any humanitarian organization in implementing community activities.

5.4 Conclusion
In reality, all the activities that those organizations implement are possible after certain personal sacrifices that founders have made (by living under extremely scarce resources for example), but also after compromising with funds that are available. As mentioned earlier, although several of the organizations interviewed do not want to be associated with TNGOs or big donors for reasons of ideological positioning, they have, so far, been unable to do so. Therefore, the funding that small organizations end up receiving is not considered an outcome of choice, but rather a consequence of a standardized system of funding where small organizations have little leverage in opting for modalities that best suit them. First of all, small-scale organizations are not eligible for all kinds of funds. They often apply to everything that could potentially concern them, in an effort to maximize the chances of being approved by the donor, who also has the final say about admissibility. After all, in the context of Lebanon, where the humanitarian need is so grave and urgent, any type of activity or focus leads to support towards people who are in need. Lacking the track record and thus the credibility to have leverage with donors, small organizations might be less prone to negotiate with donors. At the same time, they are pressured by limitations of time and staff to such an extent that investing resources in fund-seeking would translate to lesser involvement with the community on the field. The lack of contacts is another factor contributing to a complex of coercive choices about funding projects. Relationships with larger organizations can be particularly useful as they can lead

\(^{22}\) Interview 1, February 5 2019.
to partnerships that alleviate small organizations of this administrative burden associated with fundraising. Due to those challenges, most small-scale organizations are forced to engage with funding modalities that can just relieve them from the financial hardship that restricts their operations. There is such coercion in the process of selecting funds for newly-founded, small-scale organizations that the word ‘choice’ is rather unsuitable. This is not as relevant for TNGOs or bigger local organizations, which have the opportunity to engage in direct negotiations with donors and award their staff with excessive salaries. In fact, the dichotomy between professionalized TNGOs and small organizations struggling for survival is huge, and the wealth of the former affects the way beneficiaries perceive humanitarian workers overall. Small organizations belong to a different economic reality that forces them to survive on scarce resources and adjust to prefabricated funding opportunities. The next chapter will analyze the extent to which this adaptability is also forced in the duration of the projects that the participating organizations were involved with.

6. Adapting to a non-agile supply chain

Small-scale humanitarian organizations working with refugees in Lebanon are essentially cornered over two major funding options: petitioning for private funding or applying for funding through calls of proposals. This observation might seem at risk of simplifying the plethora of different funding modalities and the significance of networks in the process. However, in the context of scarce funds in Lebanon and the lack of useful contacts of most small-scale organizations, funding can most probably be ensured through those two options which are not necessarily exclusive. Private funding can ensure the liquidity that organizations might need to simply survive and, through that, they can ‘save time’ for future applications. Especially in the beginning of projects, most organizations used private funds by counting on the trust they could assume from family, friends and social media. Often this trust could be claimed based on the ingenuity and originality of projects that proposed something innovative and original.

6.1 Ideas & funds that prompted the initiation of activities

Analyzing the motivation that prompted small-scale organizations to start operating can give insights to the common academic argument that humanitarian assistance is donor-driven (see Hoeffler et. al, 2011, Koch et. al 2009, Lewis 2010, Kopinak 2013; Bebbington 2005). Although this parameter of

---

23 However, only one out of the 12 small-scale humanitarian organizations interviewed had engaged in direct negotiations.
organizations’ functioning was clearly part of my research interest, participants were especially eager to share their organizations’ history with me. It appeared as if those stories are part and parcel of their motivation to work under precarious conditions, where there are often humanitarian emergencies and human suffering is encountered on a daily basis.

Family, friends & savings

Aya from TKS is one of the people that passionately presented the organizations’ history that I was already quite familiar with from their website. TKS is now an established knitting organization employing Syrian women in Shatila, but six years ago it was nothing more than a cooperative in a camp for International Displaced People (IDP) in Northern Syria. In 2013, Dana, one of the co-founders of TKS, visited that camp wearing one of her knitted purses. One of the girls in the camp was really excited by the purse and showed Dana a knitted dress she had made. Soon Dana realized that this was just one of the girls knitting in the camp. She bought yarn for the girls and this prompted a ‘knitting craze’, essentially a cooperative that Dana could not have easy access to due to the dangerous situation in Syria. Later on, in 2015, while she was carrying out interviews with women in Shatila, she came across Malak, a Syrian woman who asked her if she could help create a livelihoods program for the resident women. As Aya suggested, it was essentially Malak’s idea to start TKS, before even knowing that Dana had done something similar in Syria. They decided to found TKS together and their first attempt to realize a project was made through financial support from family and friends who learnt what they were doing and decided to help. Of course, as those initial efforts were made with few resources, the amount generated was very small and could only suffice for the purchase of basic materials for knitting.

An equally moving story is presented by an organization called 26 Letters to all the new volunteers who approach the center to teach kids English. 26 Letters, an informal education school in Mar Elias, West Beirut, first started on the steps of the National Museum. Marina, one of the founders of the organization, would often pass by the museum and see Salah, a 12-year old kid who was selling roses on the street at the time. The two became friends and started meeting systematically on the stairs for English classes. After some excruciating events in Salah’s life, it became apparent for Marina that her support should concern more kids and that there was a need to create a safe space for students. Again, 26 Letters started with private funding, a big amount of which originated from the three friends that still run the organization four years after. Since the beginning of their

---

24 Interview 2, February 6 2019.
26 Interview 12, March 13 2019.
operation they have been exclusively counting on donations from private individuals and personal savings that they ensure by interchangeably working in Europe. Essentially they work and volunteer and their lifestyle is as humble as this would permit.

In such operations, where founders work with such scarce funds that they are struggling to survive themselves, work has an activist character. People get invested in a cause to an extent that their life seems like a sacrifice to a higher ideological drive. This is clear in the case of Tom who founded Mishwar in 2016 and since then, has been residing in a remote area in Akkar, where most Lebanese avoid going. Tom is essentially living opposite to the camp settlements that he aims to support and his means of doing that are mainly through educational activities for the youth. He organizes weekly cinema screenings for the kids and as I realized by staying with him for three days, he covers essentially all types of problems that might occur in the camp: from changing light bulbs to buying tools for fixing the water supply. It seemed like Tom provided a lot of value to the lives of people living in the two Halba settlements, a value that he did not necessarily take pride from. The reason he decided to be active in those two camps out of the hundreds existing in Lebanon was mostly a result of luck and contacts. But before attempting to start anything, he told me that he lived with some other guys in what people called ‘the cave’; sleeping on the floor, surrounded by rats and having access to only salty water. He lived there for a month with other Palestinian people; he said that he could not start doing anything before spending some time to understand the situation through his own experience. For the same purpose, before founding Mishwar he worked for Relief and Reconciliation, a German NGO, in a short music project. Only then he started Mishwar with some members of his family, as he aimed to acquire more conventional funds that required legal capacity. However, until then, all his efforts were made possible through his personal savings.

The acquisition of private funding is largely based on winning the trust of people supporting one’s ambitions. Arguably, Europeans visiting Lebanon might have more chances of accumulating funds from a social milieu that perceives their actions as a unique move of personal sacrifice. But even more so, people from a higher socioeconomic class have higher chances of receiving large amounts of money. As Giovanni argued, a big amount from their crowdfunding campaign came from friends and family who wanted to support Catalytic Action in its first steps. The three friends and co-founders were finishing their Master on ‘Building in Urban Design’ at the University College London (UCL), when they decided to visit Lebanon to investigate the opportunity of starting something there on their own. According to Giovanni, the reason they chose Lebanon was firstly, because they

27 Interview 8, March 1 2019.
28 Interview 8, March 1 2019.
29 Interview 10, March 8 2019.
already had a connection to the country as one of the co-founders was Lebanese and secondly, because of the urgent humanitarian need in the country in 2015. They initially visited without any preconceptions and ideas, but only an interest to see how they could be helpful, while at the same time applying for jobs in different parts of the world. Eventually, their first project, Ibtasem, was based on designing and building a playground in Bar Elias in the Bekaa Valley, with kids involved in every step of the process. The innovation that Catalytic Action proposed concerned their grassroots approach in carrying out a project that was inclusive and thus adjusted to the needs of the population at stake. While the private funding they gathered could only cover the financial needs of this first project, it created a precedent that was instrumental for the organization’s future funding. As people shared the project on social media, within less than six months Catalytic Action was contacted by various other NGOs that were interested in supporting financially an infrastructural project in their area of operation.

![Figure 2 Picture from one of the playgrounds designed by the community together with Catalytic Action in Basma, Lebanon](https://www.catalyticaction.org/projects/basma-playground/)

So far, private funding has been presented as a means for organizations to start operating. However, various well-established organizations continue to be prominently based on it even years after their

---

30 The picture is retrieved from the website of the organization, available at: https://www.catalyticaction.org/projects/basma-playground/
creation. One of those is Borderless, an organization that started in 2015 to address the schooling needs of kids residing in Ouzai, one of the most underprivileged areas of Beirut. In areas like this, there is no distinction between race; people are generally poor and due to that also immobile. Kids who attend school with Borderless often work in Jnah doing small jobs like selling tissues on the streets or roses. As Rosa clarified, kids that come to the school cannot attend classes elsewhere because they don’t have money for transportation. When I arrived at the center, a Wednesday morning, all classes were packed with kids who were surprisingly silent and respectful. While the classes were going on, the ‘Stitching for Hope’ center was already active with women creating all sorts of knitted products in big amounts. The workshop seemed like an active business and women were very excited to show me their work. As Rosa explained to me later, the ultimate goal for the center is to create the conditions for kids to be able to stop working and follow a complete education. That explains the parallel functioning of Stitching for Hope. Often mothers bring their kids to school and while the kids take a class they practice a skill out of which they can sometimes generate revenue. Both the knitting center and the school started after personal investments and donations from private individuals who wanted to support the intervention. As it was mentioned earlier, the problem is that after a certain period of time, donors lose interest in funding a humanitarian crisis over and over and turn their attention to what is currently considered an emergency.

A need for liquidity detached from objectives

Whereas all organizations are naturally in need of constant liquidity in order to be able to operate, this is even truer for organizations like Borderless and 26 Letters that provide education to kids. For such services it is absolutely necessary that there is a continuity of projects, and most of the times, there cannot be a definable end goal. According to Rosa and Marina respectively, this is one of the reasons that pushes them towards claiming private funds since they started their operations.

Flexibility or a lack of focus?

Undeniably, private funding provides a level of agility that cannot easily be achieved through project-based funds that at the very least restrict operations in terms of time, location and objectives. For certain organizations this agility is explicitly sought. Salam is one of them and provides various types of services in different settlements in the Bekaa valley: educational, medical,

31 Interview 7, February 27 2019.
recreational. As it becomes clear from the website of the organization, its aim is ‘to provide agile, effective, and non-bureaucratic assistance, which fills the gaps where refugees and local communities do not receive sufficient support.’ This is partly possible because of their constant employment of volunteers, who often arrive in Lebanon with their own funding sources. In fact, Salam started as a platform for the coordination of volunteers. In 2006 people were mainly mobilizing around covering the medical needs that arose from the Israel-Hezbollah war. In 2009 they created a library in one of the biggest jails in Beirut. Currently, their focus is on Syrian refugees residing in the Bekaa, still without having a specific focus on the type of activities they offer, an approach that has not been free of criticism.

My personal impression of Salam was positive; a humble office in the middle of nowhere with barely any heating and very few staff working in the office while volunteers were coming and leaving for the nearby settlements. Clearly, Stephan’s descriptions matched with what I would see. However,

---

32 Interview 14, March 15 2019.
33 See https://salamladc.org/mission-vision/
34 In my efforts to approach participants, I was told by a common contact that the approach of Salam is generally contested, ‘but I should find out for myself’.
35 The picture is retrieved from the website of the organization, available at: https://salamladc.org/education/salamat-bus-project/
without this experience, I can imagine myself being suspicious of such a *modus operandi*, specifically because there is no control over the operations. On the other hand, the presence of a demanding donor does not necessarily guarantee the *bona fide* mobilization of funds, as donors are not accountable themselves. To put it frankly, so long as donors are not somehow accountable to the public, claims about corruption concern them as much as they concern small-scale organizations like Salam which use private money to do whatever they want.

Especially in Lebanon, where a staggering amount of humanitarian organizations are unregistered and are by no means accountable to the Lebanese government, corruption is a looming risk. Whereas organizations’ transparency over funding is an unwritten obligation, when organizations are unregistered they are allowed to function with absolute authority and no transparency. One of the organizations I interviewed, HoPe claimed that the fact that they were not registered can be blamed on the delay of the respective bureaucratic procedures that came as a result of the incompetent government for the period of the past few months. Given that they were unregistered, they were very defensive in sharing specific information about their funding sources with me. However, they made it clear that they have been involved in projects with international donors and mentioned a couple of names that I will refrain from mentioning for issues of confidentiality. Still, their start of activities was enabled through private funds. HoPe was started in Aleppo in 2015 by a group of volunteers who provided relief services, mostly NFIs. Their funds were scarce and the organization pretty much dissolved after many of the founding members left Syria.

Two years after, with the help of some private donations from friends in Canada, the organization switched its role to providing workshops on social peace and conflict sensitivity, primarily targeted towards humanitarian workers. According to Bill, since 2015 they have been receiving continuous funding from different donors.

Although a small and fairly recently established organization, HoPe did not share with me concerns about the challenges in acquiring funds. It appeared as if those donors whose information they did not want to disclose would support them continuously. Evidently, the support they receive is adequate enough to allow them to have an office in Ashrafieh, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the whole of Beirut. Also, this support allows them to provide services that can only be termed as having secondary value in a country like Lebanon that hosts more than two million people in need of assistance. In contrast to the rest of the organizations, HoPe did not have a coherent story of establishment; the nature of the activities of the organization when it started are completely different from what they are now. That being said, without having access to the full story of HoPe’s

---

36 Interview 5, February 13 2019.
funding I believe that it is rather unfair to present the above as conclusions, instead of mere observations and assumptions, since my purpose is to depict the truth that the amount of data collected can narrate.

Also, it is true that in Lebanon administration can be dysfunctional; it is not a country where things flow smoothly and the fact that humanitarian organizations are not registered may also be interpreted as another symptom of a failing administration and not a sign of corruption. For Rita it took two years until she was able to register CROP, even though their first project was basically in collaboration with the government. Rita was working with the municipality in Tripoli and at the same time volunteering in various personal initiatives that she started, from distributing NFIs in settlements around Akkar to carrying out women empowerment projects in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. She openly told me that she managed to receive funding from the municipality partially due to her good contacts with the mayors of Akkar and Tripoli. Originally from Akkar, Rita is very sensitive about her place of origin and although she currently resides in Tripoli, she tries to engage with her hometown in ways that are going to boost development in the region. She feels that the youth in Akkar are underprivileged because of the limited amount of opportunities in the region. Her project with the municipality lasted for only two months and was essentially a summer camp to engage the youth residing in Akkar by teaching them new skills.

**Networking**

Nevertheless, without her work network, Rita could not have easily acquired this funding. The importance of contacts in acquiring conventional funding is not only apparent in the case of CROP. Action for Hope, an organization invested in cultural development, especially through music, started after the mobilization of 17 Arab artists who wanted to express the solidarity of the art community with the Syrian people. After visiting camps in Syria and Turkey, the delegation of artists received funds for a pilot program under Al Mawred Al Thaqafy, a pan-Arab cultural organization. This way they were able to access funds from big donors (Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and DOEN Foundation) for more than a year. After this successful first collaboration Action for Hope approached the donors directly and was thus able to acquire funds directly. Their collaboration with Mawred al Thaqafy not only ensured their acquaintance with the donors, but also enabled them to

---

37 Interview 15, March 20 2019.
38 Those two areas have been the battlefield of the most recent conflict in Lebanon between Sunni Bab al Tabbaneh and Alawite Jabal Mohsen (see Naufal, 2012).
engage in a conversation about ‘lessons learned’ from the pilot program and negotiate their activities accordingly.

Probably, the fact that Action for Hope was initiated by 17 famous artists was a determining factor for their almost immediate benefit from conventional funding. For other organizations that immediately started operating on the field, benefiting from big grants comes at a much later stage. For many of the organizations interviewed (TKS, Borderless, Mishwar, Mdawar, Salam), project-based funding and collaborations followed after years of operations based on scarce private funds, while for others it is still a far-fetched goal (26 Letters, Shams). At a first level of analysis, this sequence of events suggests that the conception of the type of services to be provided precedes the acquisition of funds, which in turn hints to a non-donor driven supply chain. However, given that most of the participating organizations resorted to project-based funds, the following section is going to analyze the inter-agility; the agility that organizations experienced in the duration of specific projects.

6.2 Inter-agility

The issue of forced choices was extensively analyzed above and in the context of this discussion, it alludes to the coerced resort to projects that would not necessarily be amongst an organization’s priorities were they to navigate freely in the humanitarian aid apparatus. Small-scale organizations struggle to ensure that first big grant, but as soon as they do, they increase their credibility and thus their chances for acquiring more funds in the future. Although private funding gives them the opportunity to experiment and provide services in the exact way they want, it is also associated with an insecurity that is problematic for most participants. The acquisition of stable support from a big humanitarian donor, at least for a limited period of time, was/is the end goal of many organizations.40

While the stability of conventional funding is generally recognized as very important, a few of the organizations interviewed disregarded this advantage over the major drawback of the fixity of projects. A few of the organizations that have been through the experience of projects claimed that they will be very selective in their future applications (Salam), or even refrain from applying to projects (CYC, Mishwar). For some, the conditions associated with the funds and the reporting

obligations render humanitarian action into a simple employment relationship with the donor (‘It always feels like we’re working for them’).\textsuperscript{41}

**Inconsistent expectations & the significance of reporting**

Reporting is naturally part of project-based funding and it is a cumbersome process even for organizations like Najdeh who have staff especially employed for this purpose. Processes are really specific to each donor and there is not a standard format or reporting periods. According to Tatiana, when NRC was benefiting from four donors for one project, it took donors one year until they managed to reach a compromise in reporting so that the organization would not have to be following four different procedures.\textsuperscript{42} Big funding institutions especially, like ECHO or UNHCR can be particularly demanding in their requirements and inflexible in changing procedures.\textsuperscript{43} That is why TNGOs that are familiar with those procedures often take the lead in communicating with the donor. Reporting comes from the implementing partners on the field, but the ultimate report is polished by the TNGO which holds a good understanding of what is expected from them. As Tatiana (from Oxfam/NRC) suggested, there is a delicate balance between claiming that everything went according to plan and suggesting different approaches towards a humanitarian issue:

‘I feel like donors want lessons learned, I feel like they want to see where things could have been better. I mean, it depends if you say that lessons learned is that we’re providing food aid, and people don’t like the food aid. Like if it’s something really like we completely screwed up I think the donors might be like, maybe I shouldn’t fund them again. But if it’s like our lessons learned is that the ATMs are really far away and some people had to travel a while. So next time we’re going to maybe try to give direct cash. They would like that. If you write back and say there’s like no lessons learned, the donors are like, come on. Yeah, they want to see that you’re critically thinking about the project. But you wouldn’t want it to be like, we completely got this wrong.’ \textsuperscript{44}

Although Tatiana’s suggestion might seem straightforward, arguably, small scale organizations might be more prone to report positively on projects, especially given their relatively weak position over donors. Ultimately, reports act to their benefit; they are one of the tools that can present the story of a project and they can be useful for future funding too: ‘Usually, the reports are very useful in terms of being able to tell the story so that when we want to continue, I mean, work with this donor,'
then they have a good idea about what we do. But in terms of actual reporting, for certain types of projects the measurability of objectives is so unattainable, that it is questionable whether such procedures have a real purpose. Stephan mentioned the example of measuring the impact of ‘dialogue between communities’ and was skeptical about the sincerity of organizations in reporting for such projects.

Trust and the need for a fair dialogue

Results are definitely malleable and as Tom suggested, there is a certain level of trust that donors must have towards their partners, otherwise any kind of operation would be impossible. Especially in remote areas like Halba where Mishwar is active, it would be unrealistic for any donor to fund projects without assuming trust to the partners. Indeed, Tom has often mobilized parts of funding for ‘different’ purposes. While I was there, he was occupied with buying new lamps for the camp, while he clearly had not received any fund for that. But as he suggested later, he often used donors’ money that he would replace retrospectively through private donations; ‘a normal way to use (your) finances’. After all, his spending was always associated with some activities in the camp. He described to me regretfully how they once supported financially a homeless woman with six kids who was living in a tent with no access to water or toilet. Before paying the camp landlord the annual rent for a tent, they approached UNHCR and all organizations that could potentially provide her with cash assistance, but any kind of financial support was denied on the pretext that this case did not meet the vulnerability criteria. Tom eventually paid the landlord, participating, regretfully in a corrupt system, but at least investing for a solution for six minors. As he said, he ‘should use that money for doing stuff with kids. But at the end of the day she has six kids’. The people Tom associates with for funding are understanding of those realities. While they have limited connection to the situation on the field, been based on their offices in Beirut, they have faith in Tom’s judgements and entrust him with even creating his own ‘receipts’ that retailers sign to confirm purchases.

In other occasions such contextual adjustment is impossible. It is true that in Lebanon receipts are a rare phenomenon and this is a problem when organizations claim for compensation from donors. TKS was never compensated the transportation costs they had to incur for purchasing supplies for their knitting project with UNHCR, as the latter were rather inflexible on their requirement for

46 Interview 14, March 15 2019.
47 Interview 8, March 1 2019.
submitting receipts.\textsuperscript{48} UNHCR’s leading role in the process also explains why the organization had to change its supplier. In the beginning, they were buying balls of yarn from a small shop in Hamra (which is actually much closer to Shatila). Since their affiliation with UNHCR for the Made51 program, TKS had to change their supplier, in order to be able to retrieve receipts. Moreover, within the auspices of the Made51 program, their products were designed by a Berlin-based designer that UNHCR chose, while, for reasons of expediency, their only choice was to use leather, instead of the sustainable options that the organization was aiming for. Aya was clear in suggesting that they were appreciative for receiving this funding (that might even be recurring), but was assertive that it was rather inflexible and forced them to change their procedures.

As Tatiana suggested, ‘(donors) have money and power. You know, you don’t have to, but I think if you’re a smaller organization, you might feel more like you need to adapt to what they want. If you’re like Oxfam or NRC, you could go back and say, no, because of x, y, z. We don’t think this is appropriate or we’re willing to do this, but not this. But this is why you can have a bit more of a dialogue.’\textsuperscript{49} In the case of TKS, choosing a sustainable option for their wallets would be ideal, but rejecting the fund for this reason would render the whole project impossible. Often participants described funds they received as useful for their operation, but not ideal. As mentioned earlier, Borderless received two different kinds of funds equipping the school with laptops, one from UN Women and one from Tahki.\textsuperscript{50} However, both did not address the running costs of the school. As Rosa explicitly described, the cost of operation in a country like Lebanon, with such poor infrastructure can be rather high. 26 Letters, even though operating for the past four years, never managed to install an electricity generator and have to cancel classes once a week, when the three hour electricity cut coincide with the teaching schedule.\textsuperscript{51}

Despite benefiting from different projects, funding schemes, more often than not, did not cover organizations’ running costs and most importantly, their salaries. Rosa from Borderless expressed her concerns regarding the issue, underlying the significance of permanent staff when it comes to child education. For organizations like 26 Letters, covering the salaries of teachers is impossible and this results in a continuous alternation of teachers, which is difficult for kids who are in their first steps in education. The Made51 program that TKS followed also lacked a specific amount for the remuneration of staff; during the months of the program staff had to survive on their own resources. It is evident that financial support for small organizations is often so much assistance-oriented that it

\textsuperscript{48} Interview 2, February 6 2019.  
\textsuperscript{49} Interview 6, February 25 2019.  
\textsuperscript{50} Interview 7, February 27 2019.  
\textsuperscript{51} Interview 12, March 13 2019.
disregards the need for remuneration of staff who are leading the process of the operation. When Mdawar acquired funding from Mercy Corps, the original plan concerned the funding of the salaries of four technicians meeting certain vulnerability criteria.\(^{52}\) For Walid however this was counterproductive and that is why he insisted on the revision of the budget so that two of this staff could be entirely focused on the sale of the products produced by the refugees. Like Tom from Mishwar, Walid envisions his organization to become independent from external funds and actually profitable. They both have a vision for sustainability that does not fit the traditions of humanitarian assistance.

### 6.3 Responsiveness to emergency

When it comes to situations of emergency however, humanitarian assistance is undeniably the only option and as the word suggests, the need is sudden, and as quick has to also be the support that follows. Even though the issue of emergencies was not originally foreseen to be researched, the experience of most organizations in the winter emergency in Lebanon in January 2019 after storm Norma, brought the topic into discussion and especially the need for immediate action that found many organizations unprepared.\(^{53}\) While many of the organizations did not have any means to respond collectively, the storm spurred a huge wave of solidarity where volunteers from all over the country gathered to provide help in affected areas, especially the Bekaa Valley.

HoPE was amongst the first participants that mentioned the tragedy, to convey the humanitarian incentives of the workers of the organization who voluntarily contributed to relief efforts as a team, outside the working schedule.\(^{54}\) When asked about the sources of the funds, Bill reassured me that they were private. On this month they had to communicate to donors their engagement with the emergency to explain the unavoidable delay in their targets. Other participants, lacking the respective funds, participated in efforts completely independently of their organization.

However, under those circumstances, the need to collaborate with partners is extremely important to avoid duplication. As Stephan mentioned, at the time of the storm, the needs were so urgent, that even Salam’s ability to cover the gas expenses for five families should be communicated to other organizations. At that point, a lot of the assistance provided came from volunteers instead of the ‘big whales’ as Abid would call them.

\(^{52}\) Interview 11, March 9 2019.

\(^{53}\) Interview 5, February 13 2019, Interview 7, February 27 2019 and Interview 14 March 15 2019.

\(^{54}\) Interview 5, February 13 2019.
This is explained by the bureaucratic labyrinth that presupposes funding for big organizations. In emergencies, ‘responding quickly is always a challenge’\(^{55}\), as organizations have to follow a big chain of reporting before claiming funding from big donors. Stephan’s contribution is characteristic of the reality, suggesting that until donors are going to respond to the winter emergency and provide blankets, organizations will have started to report about the need for livelihoods programs. And the chain goes on and on. As he said, the blankets are always going to be welcome, because people want all the assistance they can get, but this delay in providing relevant assistance is indicative of how cumbersome the system is.

To counteract that, big organizations have the know-how to ensure alternative pathways to funding through sophisticated procedures that they often employ through the organizations’ headquarters. Oxfam for example, has an emergency humanitarian fund at a Headquarter level that can essentially loan money to an emergency operation until they can have it ‘reimbursed’ by a donor. Small organizations lack such procedures and expertise and in case they are encountered with an emergency in their area of operation their most realistic way for responding to the needs of their beneficiaries is by mobilizing private funds.

### 6.4 Conclusion

Private funds are therefore forcefully chosen especially in the beginning of operations, but can also ensure the flexibility of organizations in shifting to different types of services or responding to an emergency. Most small organizations started to operate with the mobilization of private funds, while the two that immediately got engaged with projects managed to do so through contacts. The issue of knowing the right people proves to be extremely important in this context and can even ensure long partnerships with NGOs. In this system, transparency is the only way to avoid corruption, but in the case of Lebanon where a large number of organizations are knowingly unregistered, transparency can be dangerous as it can expose both the unregistered organizations and the highly prestigious ones with whom they collaborate.

In the duration of projects, organizations are faced with different requirements, the most common of which is reporting. While reporting is challenging for even bigger organizations, it can also prove useful for ‘telling a story’.\(^{56}\) In the process, there is adaptability both in terms of adapting to objectives de facto, but also in adapting in theory, especially when it comes to projects with less measurable outcomes. As donors are detached from the field, an important prerequisite is mutual

---

\(^{55}\) Interview 6, February 25 2019.

\(^{56}\) Interview 13, March 13 2019.
trust, which also presupposes a level of adaptation of donors’ requirements to the specific context (e.g. lack of receipts in Lebanon). The system as it is, is sophisticated and requires a level of expertise that is not appreciated by few of the participants who consider the whole sector corrupt and aim to move towards more sustainable ways of operating. While this appears to be an interesting viewpoint from a development perspective, it cannot apply in situations of emergency. According to participants, during the Norma storm that devastated Lebanon, the most immediate responses came from volunteer groups, as TNGO procedures for mobilizing funds delayed their ability to respond quickly.

Having analyzed the accumulated data aiming to the most representative narration of participants’ collaborations to the topic, the following section aims to answer the research question and ultimately present suggestions for more effective humanitarian assistance.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The theoretical approach developed in the beginning of the research is analyzed below incorporating the data gathered on the field. The claims and theories were found to partly apply on the ground, however, they hint to a different approach towards funding along the HSC for the purpose of efficiency. The chapter begins by outlining the challenges for small-scale organizations in gathering funds, attempting to explain the possible reasons for this scarcity. The second section concerns organizations’ coercion to adapt to funding realities in order to be in a position to provide services. Subsequently, the concepts of trust and agility are analyzed and after this the freedoms of private funding. The study concludes with a final chapter that aims to present the ultimate findings of the research, suggesting an alternative way of understanding the efficient HSC.

7.1 Accounting for the scarcity of funds

The vast majority of the small scale organizations that participated in the study were experiencing major challenges in receiving funding. For many, the cause of this shortage was partly based on their limited capacity to follow-up with the funds becoming available. Even though the deadlines for applying were considered generous enough, humanitarian workers found it extremely challenging to follow the publications of all the organizations that could potentially address them. According to Aya, it is more than 100 websites that she should have to check on a daily basis, to be sure that she is up to date. However, for most organizations (including TKS) this is impossible.
Organizations that were invested on the field, struggled to find the ‘office hours’ to devote on fund seeking, let alone submit applications. For those organizations the field is associated with the precarious conditions of refugee camps, or of their small offices in impoverished areas of Beirut. TKS or Mishwar do not have an office in the refugee camps where they are active. Their ‘office’ belongs to the community: one resident of Shatila has offered her house for TKS and Mishwar has built a community tent that they use as a cinema several times a week. But doing office work there is simply impossible, first and foremost because of the lack of internet and a steady electricity supply. As Rosa mentioned to me, applications are an activity of the late night hours. Clearly, small-scale organizations are not able to devote enough resources on funding applications and this could explain part of their financial difficulties.

However, looking at previous practice, the amount of funds allocated directly to small-scale organizations are extremely low. According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance report (2015), in 2015 only 1% of global funding was directed towards local or Southern organizations in crisis-affected countries. This means that the factual eligibility window for the sample studied is significantly small. With very limited chances in being awarded funding directly, organizations’ alternative is to resort to partnerships. However, this is not really their choice. Partnerships are formed after ‘partnership assessments’ lead by the bigger organizations holding the fund. This naturally boils down to the factor of contacts. So long as organizations happen to know the right people, their chances of collaborating with a bigger organization are high. It is important to note here that almost all of the organizations that managed to receive funding from bigger donors or form partnerships, managed to do so through some form of liaison that they had already established with them.  

This does not necessarily hint towards normative isomorphism; it was not shown by any means that humanitarian workers were inclined to move towards a specific profile of work through their interactions. However, the humanitarian establishment as is, is not compatible with the capabilities of small-scale organizations which can barely spend any office hours. Arguably, the model for success could slowly drive those organizations out of the field for the purpose of fund-seeking (coercive isomorphism). Nonetheless, the fact that most organizations are aware of their distinct positionality on the humanitarian apparatus and are critical about organizations that spend little time and resources on the field might function as a fierce driving force for the development of more suited funding procedures for small-scale organizations that facilitate their agility.

---

57 TKS was referred to UNHCR Lebanon through a Geneva-based UNHCR officer, Mishwar met with their future donor in a random event in Beirut and CROP’s manager was working with the municipality and received funding from them.
7.2 Coercion to adapt

In participants’ words, seeking for funding is just like seeking for a job.\(^{58}\) Organizations spread their chances by applying to many offers, wishing that at some point they are going to be lucky. As Basema from Action for Hope mentioned, ‘we apply to everything. So those who respond are the ones we deal with’.\(^{59}\) In the same line, Stephan proposed that, sometimes, all organizations want to do is shift the attention back to their area of operation; back to the people they serve. This means that organizations are often refraining from fixing their agenda to remain flexible vis-à-vis donors’ choice of operations.

These dynamics between donors and small organizations seeking funds suggest that agreements might often be reached with the latter’s compromise – adjustment to what is likely to be funded. Under most circumstances, proposals set a general framework of action, but allow a certain level of creativity for applying organizations in determining their specific operations. The issue is to what extent this creativity is free and spontaneous or influenced by what is likely to receive donors’ attention. Rosa explained to me early on, the general tendency of donors to donate ‘things and not money’\(^{60}\), while her organization had been awarded twice laptops from two different donors to facilitate computer lessons for kids. As 26 Letters shared with me, one of the biggest challenges for them is to present the English classes they give as a project with specific objectives and end goals. In fact, the work of 26 Letters is as target-oriented as that of any national school. However, during the time of the research, the organization was in the process of applying for a fund and, as one of the founders told me, they were planning to figure out a way to invent a plan that would fit an objective-oriented agenda.

Although rather different in practice, the example of Catalytic Action is also indicative of how small organizations are coerced to ‘work after the money’. Catalytic Action, an organization that is also very much invested on the field, is not occupied with issues of funding, as they are only approached by organizations that already possess the funds and are willing to use Catalytic Action’s expertise in building infrastructure with the help of the community. Although this organization has made a choice of abstaining from fund-seeking, their operations (which seem extremely useful within the Lebanese context) cannot be implemented without the support of large organizations.\(^{61}\)

---

\(^{58}\) Interview 2, February 6 2019 and interview 13, March 13 2019.

\(^{59}\) Interview 13, March 13 2019.

\(^{60}\) Interview 7, February 27 2019.

\(^{61}\) Borderless shared with me how they have been trying to receive help for building a playground for the kids they teach. Although officers from UNHCR and ILO have visited their premises and praised their work, the organization has not managed to form any partnership, although constantly trying to do so for the past two years. As Rosa said, most organizations would require them to have the funding.
The limited availability of funds is therefore contributing to a situation where organizations are coerced to adapt and apply for funding in ways that could increase their chances of receiving them. In this way, the sector is formed by donors’ expectations of what can be successful in the field and organizations’ theoretical adjustment. As organizations are committed to serve refugees and do so under difficult circumstances (which partly reflects their socially conscious motivations), they are bound to resort to funding modalities that will increase their chances to serve beneficiaries, even when this does not exactly reflect the way they would choose to present their work and claim for funds.

7.3 Trust & agility

As mentioned above, the challenging accumulation of funds for small organizations is to a large extent a result of the limited direct funding for small organizations. This is a logical consequence of the structure of the humanitarian apparatus: big donors prefer administering few blocks of funds to large organizations, rather than many small ones to smaller organizations. Therefore, it is primarily administrative expediency that drives funds towards TNGOs. At the same time, TNGOs also hold the bureaucratic expertise and familiarity with the donor to respond appropriately to their requirements. They are in other words a ‘safe investment’, in the sense that they can act as guarantors that operations are going to be successful despite the fragile environment that humanitarian operations usually take place in (Rycroft et al., 2019). Even in situations when donors have not previously collaborated with specific TNGOs, the latter’s track record can be a safeguard for increased trust.

On the contrary, small-scale organizations that do not have much experience of handling big funding do not automatically enjoy the trust of the donor to do so. This also explains why the prominent funding modality for the participating organizations was project-based. The relative fixity of projects serves to restrict organizations towards achieving specific indicators through the awarded sums. While organizations have a level of flexibility in writing the proposals, and in fact many of them are willingly aiming towards maintaining the utmost leeway in their proposals62, terms of contracts are often negotiated and outcomes are not always in the favor of the implementing organizations.

As it became evident through a few of the interviews, the context in Lebanon does not facilitate the development of inter-organizational trust. Organizations often find themselves exposed as they have to claim for expenses that cannot be accounted for in receipts. Although this is common in Lebanon,

especially when it comes to transportation, not all donors adjust to this reality. UNHCR for example, appeared particularly rigid in compensating for transportation costs without the retrieval of receipts, even though compensation for transportation costs was in the original terms of its contract with TKS. In other occasions, donors were more lenient, allowing organizations to draft their own receipts to claim compensations.

The rigidity in procedures can be especially frustrating for organizations that did not receive remuneration for their work with the community. Even though this element only appeared in two of the interviews, with TKS and Mdawar, it serves to reflect a whole mentality of the sector that assumes limited trust to small organizations and directs funds solely for the beneficiaries. TKS particularly stressed the challenges that the lack of funds posed upon the organization when the coordinators of the Made51 program had to survive on their own savings, as the program itself did not provide for the remuneration of staff. This scarcity of funding is paradoxical, when one considers the salaries that international staff-working in TNGOs receive.

Arguably, this sharp distinction in remunerations reflects also a power imbalance between small and large organizations. The small-scale impact that small organizations are able to achieve is not appreciated for what it does. Although big organizations have the capacity to coordinate big projects (like WASH) or the leverage to gain access to fragile environments (see Rycroft et al., 2019) by mobilizing their global capacity, their large scale operations imply a risk of mainstreaming which is very problematic in the refugee field. The experience of Shams is very characteristic in this discussion. Their work with two siblings allowed them to talk again, whereas at their school they were considered autistic. As Shams proposed, the mainstreaming of big projects can be particularly problematic in the context of humanitarian assistance to refugees, who might be sufferers of PTSD.

While small organizations have an increased capacity to work on the micro level and provide meaningful support to individuals, the humanitarian apparatus as it is structured does not facilitate their support. For reasons of administrative expediency, it simply does not make sense to attribute funds to multiple actors as this would translate to increased needs in monitoring. The limited funds that are in the end administered to small organizations are in the form of projects, which assume a fixity of procedures that are not always adjusted to the context and can make humanitarian workers feel exposed or force them to incur more expenses. At the same time, the fixity of objectives ignores

---

63 Interview 2, February 6 2019.
64 Interview 8, March 1 2019.
66 Interview 3, February 7 2019.
the long-term impact that the strengthening of communities might have. For practical reasons, organizations are often found to adjust to what is likely to receive funding, even though they do not agree with a short-term-estimation-of-impact for their humanitarian contribution.

### 7.4 Freedoms of private funding

Private funding is the remedy against the fixity of project-based funds and it is this that enabled the vast majority of the small organizations interviewed to begin their operations. As it is not dependent on the amount of experience that organizations hold, it can be the catalyzer for innovation. Some of the most innovative operations, like Catalytic Action’s infrastructure projects that are designed by the community, or Mdawar’s repurposing of glass products through the work of refugees in a country that does not do any recycling would have been impossible without the support from private donors. At the same time, the fact that this private funding was accumulated through crowdfunding campaigns and often appeals on social media, is an indicator that operations began out of workers impartial estimation of how they could best contribute to the needs on the ground. In other words, given that this private funding is petitioned and not pre-arranged, it cannot be said to support donor-driven operations.

To some extent, private funding can be said to be a democratizing aspect in humanitarian assistance: projects are supported with public vote. At the same time however, the amount of private funds that individuals can accumulate are to a large extent dependent on their background. Individuals that come from Europe and suddenly decided to work in a country-neighboring to Syria (e.g. Catalytic Action) are more likely to receive funding than Lebanese people whose social environment is familiar with the situation. However, in this study foreign involvement in humanitarian crises is considered absolutely welcome vis-à-vis the sensitization and the impact it can induce.

Nevertheless, the potential of private funding (within the strict sense that this research defines it) should not be overestimated. Organizations might be able to accumulate funds for their first operations, but crowdfunding campaigns cannot be a permanent solution. As Rosa mentioned, people who donate once are less likely to donate a second time and as the Syrian crisis wages on its eighth year, donations are getting less and less.⁶⁷ Although these private funds provide absolute freedom for workers to mobilize them the way they want, limited amounts translate to limited capacities that could not facilitate emergency operations.

---

⁶⁷ Interview 7, February 27 2019.
7.5 A dubious paradox

The theoretical stance of the research was founded upon the paradox of the global capacity claim, suggesting the contradiction of the inverse correlation between the global capacity and the local. However, as the research unfolded it became clear that the humanitarian supply chain hosts an array of responsibilities and accountabilities that are logically unattainable by one single actor. Small organizations engage in micro-level activities that require a level of personal involvement and thus a localized investment of resources that does not fit with the modus operandi of large organizations. At the same time, large organizations’ reputation and credibility allows them to access funding under difficult circumstances (e.g. Oxfam’s mechanisms for emergency operations) and exercise significant leverage in terms of advocacy; functions that are also not possible for small organizations.

Contrary to Balboa’s theory of global capacity, this research suggests that one of the most difficult challenges ahead of humanitarian assistance, the limited involvement of local organizations (see Rycroft et al., 2019), can be most successfully attained, not through the further widening of TNGOs’ expertise, but through increased support to small organizations. It is therefore the most considerable finding of this research that the humanitarian sector should embrace the dichotomy between small, local organizations and TNGOs and use each one’s advantages in the HSC for the benefit of the whole sector.

The paradox does not lie on the current division between small and big organizations, but on the fact that, in many operations, the actor who collaborates directly with the state, which constitutes the primary culprit for the suffering of beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance, is the same actor that is also mandated to empower them. There is an inherent contradiction in this relationship, as the interests of the beneficiaries are undermined by the institution that directly collaborates with the potential ‘empowerers’.

In more practical terms, a division of responsibilities and accountabilities within the humanitarian supply chain would nullify the ‘prestigious-humanitarian-worker’ argument who receives a monthly salary that contradicts their role in the humanitarian scene. In other words, the contemporary ‘humanitarian expert’, who holds the incredibly valuable asset of claiming and managing funds efficiently can do so for the benefit of small organizations who have much higher impact on the field. It is yet to be recognized that there is no such thing as an international humanitarian field worker.

On the contrary, the expertise that TNGOs are valuable for (the global capacity) can be proven useful for the upward accountability that is the prerequisite of assistance strictu sensu and be at a position to devise mechanisms that increase the overall efficiency of assistance (see adaptive programming).
Whereas the downstream of the supply chain can benefit from a plurality of actors with different, innovative ideas on bringing about social change, the upstream cannot inclusively host myriads of organizations. Small organizations that are largely invested on the field, will not be as ‘globally capacitated’ to follow-up on all the coordination proceedings (which often concern exclusively vetted organizations). This poses also a logistics argument: annual budgets and needs assessments cannot be carried out by thousands of organizations. In the upstream there is a need for simplification, especially considering the bureaucracy-inhibited levels of responsiveness of TNGOs. As one of the participants noted, needs assessments follow a huge chain of organizations until they reach the donor and when eventually assistance is administered, it is welcome, as any kind of help would be, but it is no longer most relevant. The involvement of fewer actors in the upstream could potentially lead to better coordination and harmonization of procedures.

While small organizations are close enough to the community to be experts in acknowledging the needs on the ground, they suffer from a severe lack of funds that almost undervalues their service to the community. Large organizations on the other hand, hold the funding capacity, but are not agile on the ground. This research suggests that to achieve utmost agility for small-scale organizations, funding has to be channeled through bigger organizations which master (global) capacities most efficiently. The consequent long humanitarian supply chain does not diminish efficiency as it was logically assumed in the beginning of the research, but it rather increases it, through the division of responsibilities. Within this chain, small-scale organizations have to be recognized as experts of the field, whose contribution to the local is so important, that they should be relieved as much as possible from the complex requirements of upstream accountability. This relief will contribute to their impartial understandings of the needs on the field, without being affected by funding realities. Moreover, an indirect consequence of such a division could be that competition becomes eliminated amongst organizations competing for global capacity and amongst organizations competing for local.

Increased collaboration between actors devoted to humanitarian work can only improve the ethic of the sector and contribute to operations that are most relevant to the needs on the ground. In the process, trust will develop symptomatically and will be the catalyzer for increased agility.

The sinking ship allegory for humanitarian assistance is dangerous and real, until the captains are decisive enough to steer it towards the safest shores where assistance will no longer be necessary.

---

68 Interview 14, March 15 2019.
8. References


High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary-General: Too important to fail - addressing the humanitarian financing gap, at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/%5BHL%5D%20Too%20Important%20to%20Fail%20-%20Addressing%20the%20Humanitarian%20Financing%20Gap.pdf


57


### 9. Annex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview #/date</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Accronym</th>
<th>Office location</th>
<th>Type of operation</th>
<th>Nickname</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/05-02-2019</td>
<td>Children Youth Centre</td>
<td>CYC</td>
<td>Shatila</td>
<td>Space for Youth and Children for informal education and Gueshouse for visitors</td>
<td>Abed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/06-02-2019</td>
<td>Tight Knit Syria</td>
<td>TKS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Vocational training on knitting</td>
<td>Aya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/07-02-2019</td>
<td>Shams Network</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Recreational activities: theatre, music, excursions to nature</td>
<td>Najiba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/11-02-2019</td>
<td>Najdeh Association</td>
<td>Najdeh</td>
<td>Tariq El Jdideh, Beirut</td>
<td>Generalist: womens’ rights, vocational training, socio-economic support, psychosocial and educational support, mother and child program</td>
<td>Nayla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/13-02-2019</td>
<td>House of Peace</td>
<td>HoPE</td>
<td>Ashrafieh, Beirut</td>
<td>Social peace workshops and conflict sensitivity trainings addressed to humanitarian workers working with refugees</td>
<td>Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/27-02-2019</td>
<td>Borderless</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Ouzai, Beirut</td>
<td>Informal education to children (English, Arabic and computer classes) and vocational training for</td>
<td>Rosa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

69 Tatiana is working in the programme unit of both Oxfam and NRC. This is a very rare arrangement, but is probably based on her years of experience in the sector. As she explained to me, Oxfam wanted a person to be responsible for writing proposals, but could not afford to have her full-time. At the same time, NRC hired her, but required her to move house, as she was living in a ‘dangerous area’ according to the organization’s regulations. She therefore decided to keep both jobs and a middle solution was found for all.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/01-03-2019</td>
<td>Mishwar</td>
<td>Halba, Akkar</td>
<td>Recreational activities for kids and covering dysfunctions in the camp</td>
<td>Tom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/07-03-2019</td>
<td>Humanity and HIP Inclusion</td>
<td>Ashrafieh, Beirut</td>
<td>Programs in health and rehabilitation for the most vulnerable victims of conflict</td>
<td>Dalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/08-03-2019</td>
<td>Catalytic Action</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Infrastructural projects</td>
<td>Giovanni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/09-03-2019</td>
<td>Mdawar</td>
<td>Forn El Chebbak, Beirut</td>
<td>Vocational training on artefacts made of upcycled glass</td>
<td>Walid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/13-03-2019</td>
<td>Action for Hope</td>
<td>Geitawi, Beirut</td>
<td>Music classes to children and young adults</td>
<td>Basema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/15-03-2019</td>
<td>Salam</td>
<td>Bekaa, Northern Lebanon</td>
<td>Mobile teaching class, cinema, yoga, medical support, emergency assistance</td>
<td>Stephan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/20-03-2019</td>
<td>Creating Real Opportunity for People</td>
<td>Tripoli, Northern Lebanon</td>
<td>Summer camp for youth in Akkar</td>
<td>Rita</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>