SECURE ACCESS IN VOLATILE ENVIRONMENTS — SAVE

Improving the evidence base on delivering aid in highly insecure environments

COMPONENT 2: ENABLING ACCESS AND QUALITY AID IN INSECURE ENVIRONMENTS

UPDATED LITERATURE REVIEW

William Carter, Senior Research Associate

I.   Introduction

During the inception phase for the SAVE programme (October 2013-March 2014), the research team conducted a review of relevant documents (in English, Spanish, French and Arabic) in order to build on and deepen the literature review commissioned by DFID and conducted by Schreter and Harmer in 2012. In mid-2015, the team built on that work and summarised the recent literature, given the changing pace and importance that practitioners and policy-makers continue to give to access issues. Whilst general guidance on access has since been offered in a practitioner manual ('Humanitarian Access in Situations of Armed Conflict. Practitioners' Manual', 2014) and polemics about its situation in the MSF report *Where is Everyone?* (Healy & Tiller, 2014), several other advances in research and guidance have also been made in specific aspects relevant to what enables access and improves the operational quality of aid in insecure environments. These are reviewed below.

The summary below is organised first by thematic area and then by country. The thematic areas are sub-divided by those which focus on issues enabling access, those that look at aspects pertinent to the 'quality of access', and those that further understanding about what improves the operational quality[1] of aid in insecure environments. The countries are those of the SAVE programme's case studies: Somalia, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Syria.

While it focuses on documents published since 2013, it also refers to a few older documents where relevant to understand recent trends in thinking. It seeks to summarize the main conceptual and practical developments reflected in the publically-available literature, as well as to take note of a few significant practitioner initiatives related to access; it does not seek to examine 'grey literature' or relevant agency evaluations, although some have been shared with the SAVE team in confidence and has shaped our understanding of the operating environments. It is intended that this review places Component 2's emerging country-level

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[1] The 'operational quality' of aid refers to the effectiveness of approaches and practices of aid operations in the field. It is distinct from 'technical quality,' for which there is much sector-specific literature, such as technical standards for WASH programming, health interventions, etc.

findings in context of the wider literature as well as to inform the selection of topics for the Component 2 toolkits.

II.   Thematic issues

a. Enabling access in insecure environments

i.   *Access negotiations*

Significant evidence was collected regarding negotiations for humanitarian access over the past three years, particularly with **non-state armed groups**. In 2012 MSF published a book featuring vignettes from a selection of country programme's experiences of such negotiations (Magone, Neuman, & Weissman, 2012). This was followed by an ODI research programme into the subject focusing on case studies from Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia, which eventually culminated in a 'key lessons' report (Jackson, 2014) as well as reflective paper on the history of non-state armed group engagement (Jackson & Davey, 2014). Individual agencies have also published works on their experiences of engaging non-state armed actors (Bongard, 2013; Keogh & Reuijters, 2012), and institutions have dedicated general reports (Grace, 2015) or special editions ('Humanitarian Exchange - Special Feature on Humanitarian Negotiations', 2013). The literature has often focused on the nature of communications with covert networks of dangerous armed groups, their behaviours and interests, the risks of negotiation, agency approaches and strategies, and experiential learning.

Whilst negotiations with non-state armed groups has had some good coverage, **negotiations with state actors** appear to have been somewhat overlooked, with the exception of the recent re-publication of the CDI practitioner manual on humanitarian access ('Humanitarian Access in Situations of Armed Conflict. Practitioners' Manual', 2014). The examination of state's legal obligations to provide access to conflict affected populations is covered generally by ODI (Svoboda, 2015), and also related obligations to protect healthcare facilities was outlined in a special edition of the International Review of the Red Cross as part of the ongoing Healthcare in Danger campaign (Bernard, 2013). However, one emergent concept, particularly from within the Red Cross movement, is the notion of 'humanitarian diplomacy' (Maurer, 2014), which focuses on an expanded skillset more directed towards influencing formal state and civil society institutions for both protection and access purposes; it strays, perhaps, into field advocacy that sometimes aims for attitudinal change more than the negotiated outcomes of agreements and decisions. Whilst it has not been regularly applied in insecure contexts, one of the key functions it aspires to has been strategic diplomacy for the preservation of principled humanitarian action, and so may be drawn upon more in the future, in insecure contexts.

ii.   *Law and access in complex environments*

With the onset of international terror and counter-terror operations, many key donor nations have developed **counter-terrorism legislation**; detention and prosecution of

people suspected of financing 'terror networks' abroad, and the fact that many insecure environments included areas controlled by these proscribed groups meant that there were significant financial restrictions and heavy accountability demands for agencies operating there. The past three years have featured a consolidation of literature on this subject (Adelsberg, Pitts, & Shebaya, 2013; Burniske, Modirzadeh, & Lewis, 2014a, 2014b; Fraterman, 2014; Mackintosh & Duplat, 2013; Metcalfe-Hough, Keatinge, & Pantuliano, 2015; Pantuliano, Mackintosh, Elhawary, & Metcalfe, 2011). This appears to have been particularly problematic for aid in Somalia during the 2011 famine ('Somalia in Crisis', n.d.), although work has yet to be published on Syria, and to a lesser extent Afghanistan, given the proscribed groups operating there.

Whilst legal and socio-legal literature in humanitarian affairs has focused on counter-terrorism legislation, other legal aspects have also affected humanitarian access, particularly for cross-border aid operations. **Sanctions** on specific states, such as Syria, has also sometimes resulted in donor restrictions of import/export of goods-in-kind assistance and other assets (e.g. operational equipment, such as computers and satellite phones). However, there appear to have been no publications focusing on the impact of state sanctions for humanitarian operations. Other aspects of these same insecure environments, particularly regarding peace processes, have however raised some more reflection—for example, International Crisis Group's positioning on UN sanctions adversely affecting the peace process in South Sudan ('South Sudan', 2015).

Also for cross-border humanitarian access, the **refusal of sovereign states** to humanitarian activities along borders they no longer control, such as in Myanmar, Ukraine, South Sudan and Syria, is another aspect of inaccessibility, although it does not appear to have received the same attention as other legal issues such as counter-terrorism legislation or in-country access negotiations by practitioners and researchers. Legal and ethical quandaries of delivering assistance to northern Syria in the first couple of years catalysed some work on what constitutes arbitrary withholding of consent, and what the consequences of withholding of consent are, both for those wishing to provide assistance and for the parties withholding consent (Gillard, 2014; Slim & Gillard, 2013). Further, a specialised handbook was also produced by Conflict Dynamics International on international law pertaining to access (*Humanitarian Access in Situations of Armed Conflict: Handbook on the International Normative Framework.*, 2014).

b. Quality of access in insecure environments

iii. *Risk management*

The concept of risk management for many aid agencies was an expansion from security risks into what has been coined 'enterprise risk management' covering all types of risk, such as legal, financial, programmatic, reputational, fiduciary etc. General overviews of trends of aid work in insecure environment are considered by Fast and also Duffield (Duffield, 2012; L. Fast, 2014), and humanitarian approaches to comprehensive risk management suggested by ODI in 2011 (Metcalfe, Martin, & Pantuliano, 2011), although a more recent, considered and critical examination of **risk management** developments is offered in an ODI paper,

Paradoxes of Presence: Risk Management and Aid Culture in Challenging Environments (Collinson & Duffield, 2013). It looks at how aid agencies have become increasingly '**bunkerised**' over the past decade (Egeland, Harmer, & Stoddard, 2011) and also coincided with increased remote management approaches, which together have weakened their strategic engagement and decision-making, undermined acceptance and compromised the ability to effectively report on and monitor programmes; this suggests that whilst security risks had been offset, it was at the cost of other risks—particularly the overall operational quality of their intervention. They proposed a more holistic understanding of risk management, to look at balancing risks across all categories, and not simply security.

One emergent feature of risk management for aid operations in insecure environments, is the ability to manage **fiduciary risks**, for ethical, legal and financial reasons. The ethical imperative to ensure that the diversion of aid from its intended beneficiaries is minimised, particularly in insecure contexts with reduced agency oversight. Although few works have openly researched the issue, operational guidance to safeguard against aid diversions was produced in late 2014 (Hees, Ahlendorf, Debere, & Lawday, 2014). Moreover, as mentioned in the section above on counter-terrorism legislation, there has been a growth in the complexity, scope, and number of legal regulations and subsequent policies from donors and governments, which have particularly affected aid operations in areas where proscribed non-state armed groups operate. Aid agencies are left grappling with how best to adapt new, externally imposed, counter-terrorism policies, particularly: anti-bribery and anti-corruption; anti-fraud and anti-money laundering, and; anti-terrorism financing ('An Analysis of Contemporary Anti-Diversion Policies and Practices of Humanitarian Organizations', 2014).

Nonetheless, given the breadth and depth of available literature **security risk management** appears to still be most prolific aspect of risk management, perhaps due to the momentum of ongoing professionalization of the humanitarian security management sector. Strategic analysis about the future of humanitarian security in fragile contexts is offered (Armstrong, 2014), as well as more practical guidance, for example about properly resourcing security risk management (Zumkehr & Finucane, 2013), which has become a tension particularly with increased needs for protective security measures and duty of care requirements. 'Acceptance' as a humanitarian security strategy has become a key focus in the sub-sector, with NGO such as Save the Children and also country security coordination platforms prompting reflection and driving lessons-learning initiatives on the topic (L. A. Fast, Freeman, O'Neill, & Rowley, 2013), with others advocating the potential for acceptance-based security strategies as a method of managing risks without resorting to bunkerisation (Egeland et al., 2011).

iv.   Remote management and partnerships

Reflection on remote management as an increasingly accepted practice through which aid agencies maintain access in insecure environments has developed, with **arguments** both for and against. Some maintain that remote management and partnerships erode effectiveness and have inherently weak accountability (Donini & Maxwell, 2013) and that the terms of the arrangements need to be challenged rather than accepted as the new *status quo* (Harmer, Forthcoming), and other country-level analysis reflects the fact that remote management

should no longer be viewed as a last resort (Howe, Stites, & Chudacoff, 2015; Rivas, Guillemois, Rzeszut, & Lineker, 2015; Rivas & Martins, 2014). Some aid agencies, including NGO and UN as well as donors, have developed internal guidance to guide its management and improve the operational quality of remote programming approaches ('ACF Remote Approach Programming: Guidelines for Implementing a Remote Approach', 2011, 'Instruction note for ECHO staff on Remote Management', 2013, 'Third Party Monitoring Guidelines', 2014).

Whilst the ethics of **risk transfer** from international to national staff and to local partners has yet to be openly debated, statistics and evidence suggest a significant disparity to the protection placed on international staff and as compared to national partners, and sometimes also to national staff despite the increased risk profile of nationals (Collinson & Duffield, 2013; Harmer, Stoddard, & Toth, 2013; Stoddard, Harmer, & Hughes, 2012). Guidance has been developed on how to best support development of security management capacities in local partners (Behn, Kingston, & Singh, 2012).

v.   Principles, ethics and conflict sensitivity

The publication of papers, particularly by individual agencies, in defence of the humanitarian principles and imperatives to preserve **humanitarian space** has been unabated in the past three years (e.g. Dyukova & Chetculi, 2013; Lewis, McDonald, Labbé, Volz, & Mohanna, n.d.; McDonald & Valenza, 2012), although discussion regarding the effects of the **UN integration** agenda on humanitarian operations appears to have slowed, with most aid actors still seemingly unfamiliar with integrated action with low levels of understanding on the implications of working with an integrated mission (IASC Task Team on Revitalizing Principled Humanitarian Action, 2015) . The majority of work on humanitarian space, however, emerges often at the country-level; for example, of increased attacks by non-state armed groups in Somalia on humanitarian facilities, counter-terror legislation in Syria, and stabilisation programming in Afghanistan (e.g. Bradbury, 2011; Bryce & Dodd, 2015; Drumtra, 2014).

In spite of an ODI review on humanitarian space, however, which debunks the common myth that humanitarian space is actually shrinking (Collinson & Elhawary, 2012), the dominant narrative within the aid community appears reactionary, largely featuring calls to revert to the classic humanitarian principles. There does not appear to have been significant monographs on the critical reflection of the greater **ethics** of aid work since perhaps *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Terry, 2002). Although smaller recent works profile different ethical systems increasingly at play in humanitarian action, such as newer biomedical ethics ('Common ethical principles of health care in conflict and other emergencies | International Committee of the Red Cross', n.d.) as well as Islamic ethics (Svoboda, Zyck, Osman, & Hashi, 2015).

Nonetheless, the new challenges of contemporary complex operating environments for aid agencies is generally recognised (Labbé & El-Okdah, 2013). However, operational guidance to understand and analyse these contextual issues, and particularly how aid agencies and their interventions affect and are affected by ongoing conflict (i.e. **context analysis** and **conflict sensitivity**), has been extremely limited. Work by the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium largely ceased in 2011, and only a handful of documents have since been

produced by agencies, such as CDA and Norwegian Church Aid's *Conflict Analysis Framework* (Woodrow & Tsuma, 2012) and Catholic Relief Services *Toolbox of Conflict-Sensitive Indicators* (Wingender, 2013), and the UN Staff College's guidance on the analysis of non-state armed groups ('Understanding a New Generation of Non-State Armed Groups', 2015). It is apparently still very rare for common context analyses to be conducted multilaterally; Syria is a welcome exception (see: Slim & Trombetta, 2014).

c. Operational quality of aid in insecure environments

vi. *Communicating with affected communities*

Research and guidance continues to be limited regarding communicating with and engaging affected communities in insecure environments. There have been no projects in similar nature to the World Bank's Voices of the Poor research series in the lead up to the *World Development Report 2000-2001: Attacking Poverty* (World Bank, 2000). However, further guidance has recently emerged on **informational communications**, with a renewed focused by specialised humanitarian projects, such as the Infoasaid Project (Chapelier & Shah, 2013; 'Communicating with Communities: The role of information and communication with affected populations to achieve protection outcomes', 2015).

There is also forthcoming guidance from an 18-month project Ground Truth, which looks more closely at **beneficiary accountability** mechanisms, especially through different modes of communication. The State of the Humanitarian System (2012 and *forthcoming* 2015) has also incorporated remote surveys of aid recipients in Pakistan and eastern DRC, amongst other countries. In this study, aid recipients were surveyed on the quantity, quality and timeliness of the aid they received, the extent to which they were consulted on programming, and what they saw as the main obstacles to improved aid delivery. However, despite the forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit 2016's designated research theme including 'serving the needs of people in conflict,' there has to date been little systematic and coordinated consultation with affected populations in insecure environments.

vii. *Aid quality and standards*

Past programmes for standards in humanitarian programming have recently begun to coalesce. The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International, and People in Aid, have come together to consolidate **a framework of standards**, the Common or Core Humanitarian Standard ('Common Humanitarian Standard', 2013, 'Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability', 2014). Some have been sceptical that the new bar is both clear and set high enough. One commented: "these new standards seem like lesser versions of their former selves, abstract and technocratic" (Tiller & Hehenkamp, 2014). However, there currently exists little public reflection as to how insecure environments and a lack of, or poor quality of, access might impact upon humanitarian standards and the operational quality of aid, or vice versa; there is some

indication, however, that grey literature is beginning to broadly examine these issues, although with limited evidence bases.

III.   Country-specific literature developments

a.   Afghanistan

Humanitarian **access negotiations** in Afghanistan and other states were profiled as part of a longer term study by ODI (Jackson & Giustozzi, 2012), which noted that approaches to negotiation with the Taliban have been inconsistent, ad hoc and rarely publicly acknowledged, and that Taliban perceptions of aid agencies are still poorly understood. Further work suggested that the majority of agencies which worked in contested or opposition-controlled areas only undertook indirect negotiations through community elders (Carter, 2014), and that this was often delegated to national staff with little organisational support, oversight and strategy.

Chatham House examined more closely how IEDs had affected humanitarian presence in Afghanistan, highlighting differences between agency perception and reality, and how agencies' reaction (or sometimes over-reaction) had hindered operational access from areas with some of the most acute needs (Bryce & Dodd, 2015). The same centre had earlier argued that despite mounting **security risks** in the country, assistance was still possible and that "concerns about corruption, access, monitoring and evaluation do not represent an insuperable obstacle" (Strand, 2014), although the report examines aid from a development-driven stability lens, as opposed to strictly humanitarian relief.

In 2014, MSF's report on **access to healthcare** in Afghanistan, which was based on 800 interviews with patients at their hospital projects, nuanced that whilst health infrastructure had significantly developed over the course of the international stabilisation mission, there were still a number of barriers for Afghans to access healthcare, namely: insecurity [mines and IEDs, roadblocks and checkpoints, harassment, and crossfire], distance, high costs (of transport and medical fees), and lack of trust or confidence in the health facilities or staff ('Between Rhetoric and Reality - The Ongoing Struggle to Access Health Care in Afghanistan', 2014). Indeed, the continuing annual surveys in Afghanistan by the Asian Foundation found that more than half of Afghans (57.3%) said they live within 30 minutes of a clinic or hospital, while 6.8% say they either do not have a clinic or hospital in their area or live more than three hours traveling distance from it. Some of the more inaccessible provinces (which had some of the smallest presence of aid agencies), such as Daikundi, Ghor and Nuristan, had average travel times of approximately 90-120 minutes (Warren et al., 2014).

An edition of Forced Migration Review was dedicated to looking ahead to the situation of IDPs in Afghanistan after international military withdrawal ('Forced Migration Review 46 - Afghanistan's displaced people: 2014 and beyond', 2014). Premised upon the structural changes to the operating environment in a post-ISAF era, many contributors indicated the need to reaffirm **principled humanitarian action** in the wake of the **stabilisation** mission. This feeling echoed previous work by NRC on the subject matter (Featherstone, 2012), and also a longer line of commentaries on humanitarianism in the country.

Counterargument to provoke critical debate on the relevance of principles, particularly neutrality, however, was offered by Save the Children (Carter, 2015).

b. Somalia

The 2011-12 famine, and its humanitarian response, has perhaps energised a more relevant research agenda on Somalia, and operating in insecure environments. The announcement of the **famine** itself brought about a different imperative, direction and approach to the humanitarian response (Hobbs, Gordon, & Bogart, 2012; Salama et al., 2012). Helpfully, literature reviews and lesson-learning initiatives have already been conducted by the Feinstein International Centre (Maxwell, Majid, et al., 2014; Maxwell & Majid, 2014). The review notes that whilst data and literature is abundant, particularly on the technical aspects of the response, there appeared to be little on the role of community-led or diaspora responses or the Somali private sector, and not very much on the role of so-called new or **"emerging" humanitarian actors**, which were also significant aid actors during the famine. However, later works have begun to analyse these dynamics (Achilles, Sazak, Wheeler, & Woods, 2015; Svoboda et al., 2015).

Somalia, notably, featured an unprecedented **cash and voucher** component in the humanitarian response, and there are a number of publications for experiential learning from its application in insecure environments (Dunn, Brewin, & Scek, 2014; Hedlund, Majid, Maxwell, & Nicholson, 2013; Kweyu, 2013; Wasilkowska, 2012). Despite the significant security and access challenges faced by humanitarian agencies and significant scepticism (Ali & Gelsdorf, 2012), Somalia was an appropriate environment for cash interventions: the famine was a result of livelihood failure (loss of income as a result of drought) rather than a failure of the market system; it has an innovative, system of money transfer 'hawala' agents, and the market system is integrated, competitive, and already relies heavily on imported food. Operational quality of C&V interventions in the insecure context of South-Central Somalia was increased by:

- increasing the number of distribution points to reduce travel time for beneficiaries
- improving the service at distribution points to reduce beneficiary waiting time
- increasing the value of the vouchers
- changing the value of cash distributed based on market price information
- managing operational issues brought to agencies' attention through the feedback mechanism.

The monitoring system also highlighted larger issues about targeting, diversion and reliance on 'gatekeepers' (informal IDP camp administrators, through whom aid agencies largely had to negotiate security and access), which would not have been picked up without the qualitative data collection (Dunn et al., 2014). Earlier work had also highlighted this dynamic of low level diversion and **abuse of power** with **gatekeepers** (Kamau & Sinigallia, 2013); the research describes how the worsening socio-economic situation in Somalia transformed the role of gatekeepers, with some finding it a lucrative economic opportunity in increasingly tough times by diverting, extorting or taxing beneficiaries.

Humanitarian **access negotiations** in Somalia, particularly with Al-Shabaab, were covered in the longer-term ODI study on negotiations with non-state armed groups, as well as other

work. The ODI paper outlines how aid agencies were seemingly faced with an impossible choice, to either agree to Al-Shabaab's extreme conditions in order to provide aid to those in dire need at a time of famine, or to simply withdraw from their areas of control. Complicating this were political pressures from host and donor governments, largely through counter-terrorism legislation, which hindered open engagement (Jackson & Aynte, 2013). A later contribution by NOREF supplements this perspective, outlining the ethical introspection required for aid agencies negotiating under those unenviable circumstances, as well as documenting the specifics of good practice in that particular aid agency's approach (Belliveau, 2015).

The place of **humanitarian principles** were also debated in light of the famine experience. The Brookings Institute, the Feinstein International Centre, and independent researchers separately released papers describing the humanitarian response as non-neutral, largely given UN integration, but also the stabilisation and state-building agendas for the country (Bradbury, 2011; Drumtra, 2014; Hammond & Vaughan-Lee, 2012; Menkhaus, 2010). An article by the British Red Cross, however, outlined the application of the humanitarian principles as operational decision-making tools in the Somali context, as they relate to the movement (O'Callaghan & Backhurst, 2013).

Mounting security risks in Somalia since 2009 have resulted in a remote management setup for many agencies, which manage operations from neighbouring Kenya. The longer-term impact of the **remote management** model had produced undesirable effects on the overall aid community and on aid quality itself. For example, humanitarian agencies seemed increasingly "distant" (physically, psychologically, socially, and emotionally) from the affected populations (Maxwell, Majid, et al., 2014). Another report noted that the model had strained trust both within and between agencies with suspicions of poor accountability and aid effectiveness in other agencies, discouraging ties between NGOs for reputational reasons (McEvoy, 2013). An ODI paper assessed that remote management has moved decision-making agency out from the field and where the needs are (from Somalia to Nairobi), whilst the burden of risks have been shifted in the other direction (Hammond & Vaughan-Lee, 2012).

Another evolution from remote management has been that donors have increasingly looked towards Third Party Monitoring (TPM) systems as a means to ensure accountability. A report by Integrity Research, which examined DFID's practices and partners in the Horn of Africa (one of very few public reviews of the practice by a donor), outlined that TPM is a sensitive subject, viewed with scepticism by many aid agencies; agencies were often defensive, viewing it as a means of donor micro-management, and there were also concerns over a lack of clarity on fundamental parameters such as the purpose of these tools and the way the collected data would be shared and used (Rivas et al., 2015; Rivas & Martins, 2014).

c. South Sudan

A special edition of Humanitarian Exchange was dedicated to South Sudan, primarily looking at the **resilience** linkage between (repeated and/or protracted) emergency response and long-term development, and focusing particularly on food insecurity in the country

('Humanitarian Exchange 57. South Sudan at a crossroads', 2013). Previous work on secure livelihoods in the South Sudan context has also been published (Maxwell, Gelsdorf, & Santschi, 2012), looking partly at its social protection dividends in a post-conflict context.

Research by Internews and Forcier Consulting explored how provision of information or **communication with affected populations** (especially IDPs) on areas such as daily survival needs, security issues, relocation, reintegration and reconciliation, could significantly increase their health, safety and well-being, and make an otherwise positive impact on their lives amidst an ongoing conflict (Forcier et al., 2014).

Access negotiations were considered through the lens of Operation Lifeline Sudan, which was in its time an innovative approach to multilaterally **negotiate access** to war-affected populations on both sides of a civil war that had both positive and negative impacts on both the war and the affected population, a tripartite agreement between the UN, the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army brokered in 1989. The experience of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) was revisited in analysis by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, to meaningfully apply experiential learning from it onto issues facing the humanitarian response in South Sudan (Maxwell, Santschi, & Gordon, 2014). The lessons from this unique phenomenon in negotiated access are instructive, and include:

- Agreements require continuous discussions and negotiations
- Humanitarian agencies need to realistically plan for contingencies of aid diversion, distortion and political manipulation
- Incorporation of protection (activities) into negotiated access agreements makes them more fraught, not less

UNHCR's real-time review of its emergency refugee response in 2012 noted that a number of institutional, bureaucratic and operational impediments reduced the pace at which UNHCR was able to respond to the unfolding crisis, resulting in an initially insufficient **scale**-up to respond to the emergency (Ambroso, Janz, Lee, & Salomons, 2013).

In more detail, however, an internal review of MSF's **operational access** in the first three months of the conflict in South Sudan, from December 2013 to March 2014, sheds light on the level of difficulty for humanitarian agencies of gaining and maintaining operational access to the affected populations, especially those in the most difficult-to-reach areas of Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile (Healy, 2014). It describes how operational access was secured by a mix of: direct negotiations with the parties to the conflict, independent logistical capacity especially in air transport, and security risk management which sought to preserve presence (including of international staff) to the maximum possible extent. Further, the agency's access was aided by the apparent high value the parties attached to an offer of surgical care, and to a certain measure of trust generated by long presence in the affected states. A further report by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium looked at the wider operational response in South Sudan, delicately treating the dilemma of gaining humanitarian access by being seen as impartial and neutral, but also not being able to 'not take sides' with both political legacies, expectations, and manipulation (Maxwell, Santschi, Moro, Gordon, & Dau, 2015).

d. Syria

An ODI paper outlines that as the formal humanitarian system has struggled with issues of access and protection in the conflict in Syria, a spotlight has been shone onto the '**local response**,' i.e. groups and organisations that do not belong to the formal or traditional humanitarian sector of the UN, the ICRC and international NGOs (Svoboda & Pantuliano, 2015). In Syria, this diverse category comprises: professional bodies (often medical groups) that existed prior to the conflict, charities, networks of anti-government and community activists, diaspora organisations, coordination networks and fighting groups that also provide relief. Another paper by ODI advocates for creative partnerships between international and local aid agencies, based on a collective analysis of the **protection** situation, and acknowledges that while insufficient, the local and diaspora groups were the one set of actors able to carry out a protective role (Svoboda, 2014a).

The fragmentation of armed groups and the fluidity of their areas of control has been a defining access issue for the humanitarian response in Syria. Most problematically, however, are the areas controlled by the Islamic State (namely Raqqah and Deir ez-Zour governorates) which are perhaps the most difficult to access for humanitarians, but where there are some of the most significant vulnerable caseloads. An ODI paper outlines that **access negotiations** with IS are critical, but will only be possible if there is greater clarity around the legal and reputational risks to negotiating aid agencies (Svoboda, 2014b).

An external evaluation concluded that WFP's response to the fast-evolving, complex crisis in Syria was scaled up quickly to stabilise **food insecurity** and by 2014 was assisting 4.25 million people in Syria and 2 million refugees across the region, but that there were also challenges. Initial choices were not based on detailed analysis of conflict, gender or the costs and benefits of different delivery modalities, including cash, and also more could have been done to manage the widely-held perception that WFP was too close to the Syrian Government (Drummond et al., 2015). A detailed profile of the **nutrition** sector, particularly the cross-border operations into northern Syria, is provided by the Emergency Nutrition Network ('Field Exchange: Programming Experiences and Learning from the Nutrition Response to the Syrian Crisis', 2014). It should be noted that there are some in-depth grey literature, including agency evaluations of cross-border access to Syria and practice reviews, which are publicly inaccessible or confidential; SAVE has had access to some, but not all, of these studies.

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