

# Media and INGO Decision Making:

Analyzing the influence of news media coverage of conflicts and crises on INGO decision making processes

## Master Thesis

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

# THE TIMES

Thursday September 3, 2015 (Revised) 10p (incl. VAT)

## Europe divided

Political leaders paralysed by crisis over migrant quotas • Bodies of infants washed up on beaches



**IN THE NEWS**

- Future of healthcare: Health officials across the EU are debating how to fund the system. Page 2
- Charity's heated cash: The RSC, the charity that runs the UK's largest charity shop, is facing a £100m cash crisis. Page 3
- Carly's boss fails: Carillion's chief executive, Gerry Conboy, has resigned. Page 4
- Kenneth backs Syria: Kenneth Clarke has backed the UK's intervention in Syria. Page 5
- History accused: The UK's intervention in Syria has been accused of being a historical mistake. Page 6
- Crash transfer fee: Chelsea's transfer fee for Eden Hazard has been revealed. Page 7

EXCLUSIVE: Evans' £200k McLaren prang

# THE Sun

Thursday, September 3, 2015 BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING PAPER

## MR CAMERON, SUMMER IS OVER ... NOW DEAL WITH THE BIGGEST CRISIS FACING EUROPE SINCE WW2

### IT'S LIFE & DEATH

BOUN IN A HOLIDAY STATION YESTERDAY

DIED ON TURKISH BEACH YESTERDAY

**SUN SAYS**

BABY CALLED HOPE: PAGES 4 & 5 • SOLVE THIS TRAGEDY: PAGES 8 & 7

# THE INDEPENDENT

Thursday 3 September 2015



## SOMEBODY'S CHILD

The tide of desperate humanity seeking safety in Europe is rising. Yesterday's victims include this Syrian boy, drowned in his family's attempt to reach Greece from Turkey. The EU is deadlocked; our Prime Minister is in denial. A vast human catastrophe is unfolding. Do we really believe this is not our problem?

REPORTS & ANALYSIS P.6-9; EDITORIAL P.4

Late summer plates

Palmyra's devastation

Original gangsters

# the guardian

## The shocking, cruel reality of Europe's refugee crisis



Cameron: we can't take any more people fleeing from war

Boy among 12 Syrians who died in boat tragedy

Picture raises questions over EU's response

INSIDE: Brilliant puzzles pullout

# DAILY Mirror

Thursday, September 3, 2015

## EUROPE'S REFUGEE CRISIS

### UNBEARABLE

A three-year-old boy washed up on a holiday beach in Turkey... the heartbreaking human face of a tragedy the world can no longer ignore

THE body of a three-year-old boy is carried off a beach, washed to shore after attempting to reach Greece from Turkey.

SUPERB PULLOUT INSIDE

# Daily Mail

THURSDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2015

## Tiny victim of a human catastrophe

Crashed in the arms of a Turkish policeman, this little boy was drowned during his refugee family's desperate bid to reach Greece. The image could not be more harrowing - but must be seen to comprehend the gravity of the migrant crisis engulfing Europe

REPORTS, PAGES 8-9

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Photo on front page: PA Wire/PA as featured in the Guardian, *The front pages of six British national newspapers featuring the picture of Alan Kurdi*. 2016

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Media and NGOs

It is impossible to open a newspaper or watch a news broadcast without confronting the horrors happening in countries that are in conflict or crisis. Most crises and conflicts receive attention for a limited time span, quickly fading from collective memory. Sometimes however, footage relating to a conflict or crisis hits so hard at the collective consciousness that these images become synonymous with that conflict or crisis and in turn can generate unprecedented attention from media, politics, NGOs, and the public. An example is the picture of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old boy from Syria who drowned in the Aegean Sea while fleeing to Europe with his parents. According to researchers at Sheffield University the picture reached 20 million screens in 12 hours and changed the public debate on migration, softening opinions on refugees (Press Association, 2015). The refugee crisis certainly was not new at that point, and before Aylan and his family tried to cross the sea, hundreds had already lost their lives in the same waters. The softening effect on public opinion and policy was temporary; a year after the public outcry policy became stricter and countries started closing their borders again (Kingsley, 2016). The mediatization of conflicts and crises from all over the world is a relatively new phenomenon. The Biafra war in the late 60s and early 70s is considered to be the first conflict of its kind to be mediatized on such a grand scale.<sup>1</sup>

INGOs and their employees are often those on the frontlines, alleviating the suffering of the victims of such conflicts and crises. To do their work, INGOs need money, which comes from both private and institutional donors. After Aylan Kurdi's death, there was an enormous spike in donations to local NGOs and INGOs focused on refugees (Merrill, 2015). Similarly, the fire at the Notre Dame Cathedral was a highly mediatized event. In the days after, a spike in donations was not only visible for rebuilding of the Notre Dame itself, but also for the rebuilding of burned down churches in Louisiana (Zraick & Chokshi, 2019).

Such clear spikes, however, are rare and at first sight seem to happen more often when the crisis or conflict has clear links to the west. It seems logical that mediatization can lead to these spikes. But does more media attention generally mean more money for INGOs, even if not so noticeably as with the aforementioned crises? Does it also influence what INGOs do with the money? And might it influence where they can help? Could media, and specifically news media attention to conflicts and crises influence the decisions INGOs make and can make at all? And, if so, in what ways?

Interestingly, there is hardly any substantive research on the role of the news media on INGO decision making. When the media is considered, which it usually is not, the literature seems to consider it as an irrelevant factor. When media is looked at, it usually is done only to find a link between more media attention and more donations, but not why the link exists and if there could be more to it. A closer look is warranted. A relationship between the news media and INGO decision making is not unlikely. Research must be done to establish in what

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<sup>1</sup> The Biafra conflict was an intra-state war of secession in Nigeria that led to a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

ways there might be a connection, how strong that connection is, and why it is there.

## **1.2 Objective and Research Question**

The objective of this research is to explore whether there is a relationship between news media attention for conflicts and crises and INGO decision making, and if so, what that relationship looks like and which theories might help explain it. This research will focus on Dutch INGOs since research will be conducted using qualitative methods, and due to time and scope constraints can only be conducted in the Netherlands. Another reason is that The Dutch context might well differ from contexts in other countries, and the results for Dutch INGOs cannot be translated to other contexts without further research.

To find whether the aforementioned relationship exists and what it then looks like, the thesis will draw on existing literature as well as collected survey data to find areas of decision making the relationship might apply to, and apply the theories of rational choice and media agenda setting to explain the relationship. This framework will be the basis to analyze the influence of news media attention on INGO decision making. The analysis will aim to answer the main research question:

*How does the news media attention a conflict or crisis receives influence decision making in Dutch humanitarian INGOs?*

In order to guide the initial research and to be able to give an as clear and comprehensible answer to the research question as possible, the following sub questions are asked:

- 1. What types of news media do Dutch INGOs pay attention to?*
- 2. Do Dutch INGOs believe the news media influences their decision making?*
- 3. What areas of decision making (e.g. resource allotment, representation to the public, appraisal of aid dilemmas) are impacted by the news media attention a conflict receives?*
- 4. What does the (indirect) causal mechanism look like? Which theories can explain this impact?*

## **1.3 Societal and Scientific Relevance**

The research question is scientifically relevant as there is a clear lack of research on the influence of media on INGO decision making. The question thus addresses a gap in the literature. The question also seeks to solve a real-world puzzle, not just a theoretical one. Traditional news media is still relevant for INGOs (Fenton, 2010; Powers, 2014; Ahlers, 2006), and can thus still have an influence. While systematic research on INGO decision making has been done before, the factor of media influence has so far been overlooked or treated as an external factor of little importance. Research has often focused on organizational structures (Heyse, 2004; Kruke & Olson, 2012), which indeed seems to be an important factor for INGO decision making. However, especially in situations of crises, alternative decision making patterns have been found but are yet to be explained. Researching the influence of news media attention on INGO decision making can add to this discussion. This brings in a new dimension to the INGO decision making literature and might help explain discrepancies and gaps in studies done so far. By applying different theories to the research question the

research can show the degree of relevance or irrelevance of these theories for this topic. Applying theories such as media agenda setting and rational choice might also help explain discrepancies found in the literature between the needs-based motivations of INGO workers and actual INGO activities.

The research question is also socially relevant in the sense that the decisions these INGOs make have a real-world influence on many people. There are still many crises and conflicts which impact people all over the world. Especially in the Global South, where regimes often cannot or will not help the people they are meant to protect, foreign aid can be of life or death importance. Investigating how news media attention can influence INGO decision making can be relevant for INGOs, donors and the media itself. INGOs need to be aware of what consciously or unconsciously influences their decision making in order to make informed decisions and justify those decisions. Donors need to be aware of this media influence as well, as it influences them and can lead to a negative opinion about the sector which it might not deserve, and which has consequences for funding and thus the people that are in need of receiving it. It might also be relevant for the news media as it can make the media more aware of the consequences of what they choose to print or broadcast.

#### **1.4 Overview**

After this introduction chapter in which the topic and the research question are introduced and in which the scientific and social relevance of the question are explained, chapters on theory, methods, analysis and the conclusion will follow. In the second chapter, I show which previous research relevant to the topic has been conducted and why the research question can fill a gap in this research. Previous research is used to find decision making areas of interest as well as theories that can be used to explain the phenomenon. The chapter also includes the four hypotheses which will be tested in the analysis. The third chapter gives a clear view of which methods were used, as well as why and how these methods were used. Chapter 4 looks at the data gathered through surveys, and includes the analysis of interview data used to test the first two hypotheses. In chapter 5, interview (and survey) data is used to test hypotheses 3 and 4. Chapter 6 concludes the research with a summary of the findings and notes on limitations and further research.

## 2. Theoretical Perspectives on Media and INGO Decision Making

### 2.1 Introduction

The Biafra war began in May 1967 and lasted until January 1970. This conflict, fought over secession, is perhaps one of the most well-remembered conflicts by those old enough to have understood what was happening at the time. There is a clear reason for this: this was the first intra-state conflict and humanitarian crisis to be globally mediatized (Macekura & Manela, 2018). Whereas the ICRC and other organizations had been delivering aid to Biafra since November 1967, the aid influx exploded after footage of starving people – especially children – emerged everywhere (O’Sullivan, 2016). Many humanitarian INGOs – experiencing a huge increase in income at the time – wanted to join in the effort and started their own programs in Nigeria or funded those already there (Macekura & Manela, 2018; O’Sullivan, 2016). During the last phase of the war, 250.000 kilos of aid was flown into Uli in the southeast of Nigeria each day (O’Sullivan, 2016).

Even though much research has been done on the influence of international humanitarian NGOs on the decision making processes of other actors, such as states, international organizations, or the media; the factors influencing INGOs’ decision making itself are under-explored. While INGO decision making has been researched systematically within the field of public administration, a factor that has been overlooked in this and other literature on INGO decision making is the possible influence of the media, and particularly the news media. For many reasons, which will be elaborated upon in this chapter, it is not unlikely that the news media attention a conflict or crisis receives could influence humanitarian INGO decision making in multiple areas. It is thus pertinent to explore why this link might exist and what it might look like. This influence might especially be expected when crises occur, such as environmental disasters or the flaring up of a conflict. This research will thus investigate whether the proposed influence differs between emergency assistance and development aid.

For the purposes of this research, INGOs are defined as, “any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on an [...] international level” (United Nations Civil Society Unit, 2019). In the context of this research, all INGOs provide humanitarian aid, or foreign assistance that “is intended to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after man-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for when such situations occur” (Global Humanitarian Assistance, 2019).

The focus in this research will lie with assistance during or after crises. The literature shows that INGO decision making becomes harder to explain by the approaches taken so far in such situations (Heyse, 2004; Kruke & Olson, 2012). Besides, crises and the flaring up of conflicts get much more media attention than ongoing conflicts or the aftermaths of crises, which makes it more likely that media influence is much more pronounced for emergency assistance. The news media are those media or subchannels of larger media platforms that concern themselves primarily with delivering news to their audience. News media attention means any form of direct attention the news media gives to a certain issue. This research does

not limit itself by defining the term conflict, as it wants to take into account all situations defined as conflict by the relevant INGOs. With crisis, those crises are meant that lead to large-scale humanitarian disasters. Such a crisis can include several humanitarian consequences of armed conflict, as well as natural disasters leading to a humanitarian crisis. This includes complex humanitarian emergencies, defined by the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (2019) as “an acute emergency layered over ongoing instability”.

As this research is exploratory in nature the process by which the research is conducted will be reiterative, meaning that there will be a back and forth between literature, methods and analysis. For the sake of making this research more readable, international humanitarian NGOs will also be referred to as INGOs from here on out.

## **2.2 INGO decision making – what has been studied so far?**

While relatively under-researched, there have been some efforts to research INGO decision making. Elisabeth Heyse’s (2004; 2013) research on INGO decision making is especially relevant, as she looks at Dutch INGOs.

Heyse (2004) approaches INGO decision making by linking different logics of decision making with particular institutional set-ups. According to Heyse (2004) there are three logics of decision making. The first is the logic of consequence characterized by “sequential and prospective reasoning; maximizing behavior; and information and expert driven decision making” (Heyse, 2004, p. 223). The second is the logic of appropriateness, having more to do with “retrospective reasoning; obligatory and rule-based behavior; and decision making by analogy” (Heyse, 2004, p.223). The third logic is garbage can decision making, which is on the spot decision making that is not guided by goals or values (Heyse, 2004, p.223).

Her hypotheses that the logic of consequence will be found mostly in organizations with formalized and centralized structures; the logic of appropriateness will be found in less formally structured and decentralized organizations and the logic of garbage can will be found in informally structured organizations with debated goals and values are mostly supported by her research (Heyse, 2004). More interesting, however, is that Heyse (2004) found alternate decision making processes in all cases, and that these different decision making processes were often found when there were present pressures or crises. Heyse (2013) argues that more research on other determinants of INGO decision making needs to be done.

Kruke & Olson (2012) also look at how organizational structures of humanitarian INGOs influence decision making processes, but focus on decision making processes surrounding perceived emergencies and crises. Kruke & Olson (2012) claim that there should be more decentralized decision making but that in crisis situations there often is highly centralized decision making “due to late or incorrect responses in the field or because powerful individuals believe themselves to be better suited to take the vital decisions” (p. 216). Linking to Heyse (2004), Kruke & Olson (2012) believe that when this centralization is unintended and unlike the usual decision making authority structure – thus somewhat like a secondary decision making process – it can lead to simplified interpretations. Based on interviews with both INGO field workers and those employed at headquarters, Kruke & Olson (2012) claim that decision making power in areas such as resource allotment, new projects

and the involvement of donors lie with headquarters and conclude that “there is a mismatch between where organizational knowledge about the actual situation in the emergency is located, and where decision-making authority is situated” (p. 226).

Brass (2012) focusses solely on how decisions regarding new projects and their locations are made by humanitarian INGOs. In her both quantitative and qualitative study, she reaches the conclusion that these decisions are based on needs more so than on convenience (Brass, 2012). This does imply that INGOs need to find out about these perceived needs. One such source might be the news media.

### **2.3 Media instrumentalization**

There is some research on how INGOs use and instrumentalize the media to obtain their goals (Baitenmann, 1990; Deegan & Islam, 2014; Cottle & Nolan, 2007). Using the case of Afghanistan, Baitenmann (1990) shows how many INGOs (successfully) advocate their causes to the public, the media and governments, for example by providing information or footage to affect public opinion. Deegan & Islam (2014) conducted interviews with journalists and senior representatives of NGOs and found that “within the context of a developing country, the news media does appear to be particularly responsive to the concerns of NGOs and will run stories to support and promote NGO causes” (p. 411). Cottle & Nolan (2007) emphasize the crucial role of the media in humanitarian aid. INGOs use the media to circulate goals, appeals, photographs, footage and ideas (Cottle & Nolan, 2007).

It is also clear that both the news media and INGOs have changed due to newly available technology. The traditional news media has had to invest in their online platforms, as there has been a shift from offline to online news consumption (Ahlers, 2006). INGOs have, therefore, invested more and more in their media strategies and output and have become more media-savvy (Fenton, 2010). One might expect that the traditional news media and INGOs have become less relevant to each other with all new media possibilities now available. Fenton (2010) claims the opposite:

“The mounting media know-how amongst INGOs has occurred alongside efficiency cuts in news organizations, including a cut-back in journalists, particularly foreign correspondents (Davis, 2004) increasing opportunities to insert themselves into the news production process. International INGOs can now offer international news that news organizations are no longer well placed to provide” (Fenton, 2010, p.160).

Fenton (2010) goes on to say INGOs actually seek out the traditional news media instead of going for newer platforms since INGOs think that newer media use traditional media as a source, and that the traditional media is still most trustworthy in the eyes of the public as well as most used by those in power. Powers (2014) agrees that INGOs still seek out traditional news media sources to spread their message, even though some prefer media with more prestige, while others go for more general news media sources. Support for this viewpoint is offered by Ahlers (2006), who found that for many, online news media complements rather than replaces offline news media, implying that the traditional news media is still important.

There is also some research concerning conflict actors using the media to obtain help from, for example, INGOs; and on instrumentalization in general coming from all actors surrounding conflict (Bob, 2001; Donini, 2012). Not only INGOs, but other actors can

instrumentalize the media as well. Bob (2001) argues that INGO support can depend on how successful a certain actor is at creating awareness internationally, as well as doing so in a manner that matches the interests of transnational actors. Bob (2001) specifically mentions that understanding how the international media works is an important factor in successfully doing this, implying that the media does influence INGO decision making.

## **2.4 A puzzling gap**

Given that media seems so salient for INGOs, it is puzzling that there is hardly any substantive research on the influence of the media on INGOs. The influence of the media is sometimes acknowledged, but so far not researched in depth.

Heyse (2004) found that INGOs make decisions differently when faced with present pressures or crises. She very briefly mentions media pressure influencing decisions, but does not go into detail as these are deviant cases from her perspective (Heyse, 2004). The articles by Kruke & Olson (2012) and Brass (2012) support the need to look deeper into the possible influence of news media coverage of conflicts and crises on decision making processes. Whereas Kruke & Olson (2012) show that decision making power in INGOs lies with headquarter employees and decisions are often made without adequate information from the field, Brass (2012) claims that these decisions are often made based on perceived need. If both authors are right, it means that INGO decision makers have other sources for deciding where need is high than just their own field workers. Could media influence be part of the equation?

Going back to Heyse (2004), she admits in her conclusion that the methods she used could very well have led to an obscuring of the influence of external factors, like media pressure (p. 239). She even says that there were “some indications that media pressure led to the decision to enter a country, where the needs were not as high as expected or where others were already covering the area (Heyse, 2004, p. 240). In the end, Heyse (2004) still concludes that these factors were not of substantial importance in INGO decision making. I would argue that this conclusion is premature, especially since Heyse (2004) based all her findings on two cases and did not focus on ‘external factors’.

Another interesting perspective from which a gap in the literature becomes apparent is the widespread assumption that the media itself can be instrumentalized. Many different actors can instrumentalize the media, and among these are INGOs. The research by Baitenmann (1990), Deegan & Islam (2014), Cottle & Nolan (2007), Fenton (2010), and Powers (2014) shows how this process works. What is interesting is that the aforementioned research often implicitly or explicitly uses both instrumentalization and media agenda setting theory when it comes to INGO influence on media. What seems odd is that media agenda setting theory, originally meant to describe processes by which the media influences opinion and possibly decision making, is turned around in this research. INGOs are seen to be influencing what the news media reports on in the first place. It, however, seems somewhat naïve to assume that INGOs could instrumentalize media agenda setting, while not being influenced by media themselves. What the media reports on is an intricate process with many underlying factors. Seeing INGOs as detached units who sometimes use the media as their puppet and are otherwise removed from processes like media agenda setting might be giving them too much power.

## 2.5 Questions to be asked

The media will of course not be the only factor that influences INGO decisions, but based on the literature it is a factor that deserves more attention. All of the above leads to the following research question, which will be restricted to Dutch INGOs due to practical matters and matters of scope:

*How does the news media attention a conflict or crisis receives influence decision making in Dutch humanitarian INGOs?*

In order to guide the research and to be able to give an as clear and comprehensible answer to the research question as possible, the following sub questions will be asked:

1. *What types of news media do Dutch INGOs pay attention to?*
2. *Do Dutch INGOs believe the news media influences their decision making?*
3. *What areas of decision making (e.g. resource allotment, representation to the public, appraisal of aid dilemmas) are impacted by the news media attention a conflict receives?*
4. *What does the (indirect) causal mechanism look like? Which theories can explain this impact?*

## 2.6 Possible areas of influence

INGOs are complex organizations in which many different decisions have to be made. In this research it will not be possible to investigate all different aspects of decision making with respect to the media. Besides the practicalities, it would neither be prudent, as there is reason to believe that the news media might have much more influence on certain decision making areas than in others. This is why there will be a focus on the area of programs and resource allocation; and the area of aid dilemmas and representation to the public.

### *Programs and resource allocation*

One of the most important areas of INGO decision making concerns where INGOs start new programs, as well as how much resources are allocated to programs. The discussion in the literature on this topic often focusses on decision making by bilateral and multilateral donors, rather than INGOs. INGOs are then often drawn into the conversation in terms of following donor countries in where they allocate aid. Yet it is not clear whether INGOs and institutional donors use the same logics concerning aid allocation.

There is some research specifically focused on INGO aid allocation. Nancy & Yontcheva (2006) conclude from their quantitative study of European INGOs that INGO aid allocation is driven by poverty and that INGOs are not highly influenced by strategic factors, such as donor financing. Koch et al. (2009) conclude in a methodologically similar study that INGOs do indeed take poverty in account in deciding which countries to give aid to. However, they claim that INGOs are less autonomous and are sensitive to preferences of donors in deciding where they go (Koch et al., 2009). Besides, they find that INGOs often cluster in certain locations and that they give preference to countries with similar characteristics (Koch et al., 2009). Neither of these studies included media attention as a variable.

While most research on aid allocation ignores the issue of the media, there is evidence that the media can affect decisions on where to allocate aid. Olsen, Carstensen & Høyen (2003) look at emergency aid given by institutional donors (possibly to INGOs). For nearly all of the cases they look at, they find a correlation between media attention and aid allocation. More media coverage can lead to dramatic increases and disparities in aid allocation (Olsen, Carstensen & Høyen, 2003). They conclude that “the media play a crucial role in influencing decision-makers only when there are no vital security issues at stake, namely when a humanitarian crisis occurs in a place of little strategic importance to aid-funding governments (Olsen, Carstensen & Høyen, 2003, p. 124). If political leaders can be influenced by the amount of media coverage a conflict/crisis receives, could this also be true, or even more true, for INGOs who do not have to deal with the limitation of strategic importance?

### *Ethical dilemmas & representation to the public*

Over the past decades much has been written about the dilemmas surrounding humanitarian assistance. It has become clear that besides the benefits of humanitarian aid – in the first place alleviating human suffering – there are also negative externalities when it comes to providing aid (Alterman, 2018; Blouin & Pallage, 2008; Narang, 2015; Wood & Sullivan, 2015; Choi & Salehyan, 2013). Alterman (2018) shows with the case of Yemen that INGOs are constrained in providing aid in a conflict sensitive way, due to time and money constraints and a lack of capacity to properly analyze a conflict. Besides, INGOs are dependent on donors, and “can be scared to admit negative consequences out of fear of negative repercussions” (Alterman, 2018, p.4). Another dilemma INGOs face is that humanitarian aid can prolong conflicts (Narang, 2015). Wood & Sullivan (2015) claim that humanitarian aid can incentivize non-state as well as state actors to attack civilians. Choi & Salehyan (2013) add to this that humanitarian aid in refugee host countries can make these countries more vulnerable to terrorist attacks. It is clear that humanitarian aid is tied to many dilemmas INGOs have to face.

Media attention might influence how INGOs handle these dilemmas. Large donors can be influenced by the amount of media coverage a conflict or crisis receives (Olsen, Carstensen & Høyen, 2003). These donors are often also the biggest donors of INGOs. If INGOs are or feel that they are indeed to a degree dependent on their donors’ wishes and aid conditionalities, their choices might indirectly be influenced by the news media. Whether INGOs should or should not give humanitarian assistance while aid dilemmas are apparent is a normative question that I will not address. However, it would be interesting to explore whether news media attention influences how INGOs handle these aid dilemmas. Could more media attention for example push INGOs to go into a country or keep a program going while doubting the effectiveness or success of an intervention? De Montclos (2009) seems to think so:

“in situations where aid is clearly problematic, the difficulty is to explain to the general public that humanitarian aid can do more harm than good and that it is sometimes better to stop it. Excessive media coverage and the politicization of relief do not help in this regard, for states and INGOs risk being accused of doing nothing” (p.76)

This implies that due to media coverage, INGOs might feel pressured into providing aid in situations where they might normally not, since they fear their funding and/or reputation.

Representation to the public can be tied to the issue of aid dilemmas. In a much more mediatized world, INGOs have had to adapt and are more sensitive to the court of public opinion and possible scandals. According to Cottle & Nolan (2007), INGOs have had to direct “valuable time, resources and energy in seeking to safeguard their organizational reputations (and credibility) against the risk of media-led scandals and other damaging sensational claims” (p. 864). Smillie (1998) and Gibelman & Gelman (2001) confirm that a scandal can damage both reputation and income. A good example of this is the Oxfam scandal – staff was accused of paying survivors of the Haiti earthquake for sex – which was made public by the news media and led to a serious loss in donors as well reputation (Carolei, 2018). Has this new vulnerability led INGOs to change policies and divert resources in order to prevent and deal with scandals?

## **2.7 Theoretical approach**

When exploring the possible ways in which the news media might influence INGO decision making, two theoretical approaches will be used. First, media agenda setting, or what is often called the CNN-effect will be applied. Secondly, rational choice and cost benefit theories will be used.

### *Media agenda setting and public opinion*

Media agenda setting theory’s main assumption is that news media coverage partly determines what people are aware of, what they do or do not pay attention to, and what they consider to be important (Shaw, 1979). Through priming and framing it can also influence how people think about certain issues (McCombs, 2018). Different academics have approached and researched the theory in different ways. Shaw (1979) claims that media most of all effects cognition, but that cognition in turn determines opinion. Shaw (1979) sees the media as determining what issues are relevant to people. McCombs & Shaw (1972) view the theory in a similar way and tested it on the issues of importance to a political campaign and concluded that media influence was the most plausible explanation of the effects they found. Shaw & Martin (1992) wanted to explore the theory in more depth and studied whether people with a certain level of intake of news media would differ in their agreement on certain issues within their specific group. They found that more media intake leads to more agreement on issues within gender, racial and age groups, as well as those with high and those with low education (Shaw & Martin, 1992).

Yagade & Dozier (1990) took a different perspective to the theory. They claim that media agenda-setting theory only has a strong effect on the salience of concrete issues. According to Yagade & Dozier (1990), previous research has shown that unobtrusive issues – issues not directly impacting individuals – are more affected by media agenda setting than those that are obtrusive, and they believe that the same goes for concrete vs. abstract issues. Concrete issues – like a specific conflict or humanitarian crisis – are those linked to a certain event or small number of events that are easy to visualize and connected to events in the world, and can thus be subject to agenda setting, as opposed to abstract issues – like the

nuclear arms race – which are not. (Yagade & Dozier, 1990). Wanta and Hu (1994) add to the debate that the amount of exposure does mostly determine the strength of agenda-setting, but that the amount of exposure depends on whether people see the news media as credible and so become reliant on it.

Based on the above information it is unclear why in the research on humanitarian aid, media agenda setting theory has mostly been used for either showing how it affects major donors, or to show how INGOs influence what the media reports on. There is no reason to believe that it could not affect INGO decision making. Looking at the Dutch INGOs studied here, they form a rather homogeneous group of white, highly educated people, making issue convergence possible. They deal with mostly concrete issues, and it seems reasonable to assume that their media intake will be relatively high, even though that remains to be seen at this point. Media agenda setting could influence INGOs by influencing opinions of decision makers, and indirectly by influencing the opinions of private and institutional INGO donors. It is important to take this theory into account as we go on.

### *Rational choice and cost-benefit*

Rational choice theory in its most basic form means that individuals make rational choices that aggregate into certain social behaviors and phenomena. Actors are rational in the sense that they have preferences and that they can order these preferences. Actors are expected to make cost-benefit analyses of their preferences in determining the best choice for maximizing those preferences. Rational choice always rests upon some sort of methodological individualism. This research adheres to weak methodological individualism, which allows for both holistic and individualistic aspects to be considered in choice processes. This version of rational choice allows actors to have other motives underlying their preferences than simply wealth and power (Udehn, 2002; Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). The motivation for an INGO employee's preferences could perfectly well be altruism. This does not mean that that person does not make cost-benefit analyses or a self-interested choice, it merely means that this person has someone else's well-being in mind and is self-interested in the sense of wanting to maximize that goal instead of a purely selfish goal (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997).

Ostrom (1991) agrees, claiming that rational choice means knowing what action we need to take to achieve our goals, but that those goals can be motivated by many different things. INGOs are reliant on private and government donors that are themselves influenced by the media and who they have to appease (de Montclos, 2009). Tied to this are certain institutional incentives, most simply the survival of the INGO itself. The news media might influence which conflicts can bring in more money. If INGOs can receive more funding by promoting donations towards a highly mediatized cause, and can in that way maximize their (possibly altruistic) goals, they might do so regardless of their opinion about the priority of that specific conflict or crisis. Media attention might also have an indirect effect in the sense that it can impact for which conflicts it is more difficult to sanction transgressions for donors and indirectly INGOs (Bob, 2001; Swedlund, 2017).

## 2.8 Hypotheses

Based on the above and the aforementioned research question, four hypotheses will be tested. These hypotheses are expected for situations that involve emergency assistance as the media is expected to give much more coverage to such situations as opposed to the aftermath and long-term development of these conflicts and crises. The first and second hypotheses concern decisions on where to start programs and how to allocate resources to programs, following media attention. In particular, I predict that:

### *Hypothesis 1:*

More media attention to a conflict or crisis will increase the likelihood that an INGO will start a program or expand on an existing program focused on that conflict or crisis

### *Hypothesis 2:*

More media attention to a conflict or crisis will increase the likelihood that INGOs allocate more resources to programs dealing with that conflict or crises.

Media attention is expected to influence both decisions on where to start programs and where to allocate resources, as more attention is expected to influence funding from both private and institutional donors for specific locations and INGOs are expected to ‘follow the money’ to a degree. It may very well be, however, that in practice INGOs are constrained on where they can start programs. Thus, even if they have a desire to reallocate funding or start new projects, they will be unable to.

The third hypothesis is concerned with ethical dilemmas. INGOs giving emergency assistance are expected to follow the money to a certain degree. INGOs are also dependent on donors, and many of their institutional donors will set certain conditions for the spending of their funding and their support for INGOs. All donors, both private and institutional are expected to be influenced by news media attention for conflicts and crises. As INGOs are organizations that need money to function, and it is expected that more money can be available for conflicts and crises that get more news media attention, it is expected that INGOs will have more ethical dilemmas to deal with due to this increased attention. INGOs might for example be forced to start a program or raise funds for a crisis or conflict they believe already receives enough emergency assistance; or they might not start a program they believe to be more necessary and/or efficient due to the attention to a different crisis or conflict. I thus expect that the relationship can go in two directions. More media attention can result in ethical dilemmas which can have both a negative and positive effect on the ability to provide aid to a crisis or conflict. This leads to hypothesis 3:

### *Hypothesis 3:*

Increased news media attention for a conflict or crisis will lead to INGOs being confronted with an increased number of ethical dilemmas.

The fourth hypothesis is concerned with representation to the public and reputation. It is expected that increased media attention to scandals concerning specific INGOs influences the entire sector and leads to an increase in resources having to be invested in media strategies, accountability to donors, transparency, prevention, and new protocols.

*Hypothesis 4:*

National or International news media attention for a scandal specifically concerning INGOs will increase the amount of INGO resources spent on the prevention of scandals

In trying to explain the mechanisms posed in the hypotheses, media agenda setting theory and rational choice theory will be used. INGO representatives' own decisions are expected to be better explained on an individual level by rational choice with an altruistic motive, because they are expected to have more information than those outside of the INGO sector and are perhaps less directly influenced by news media attention. On the other hand, private donors are expected to be more influenced on a collective level by media agenda setting and institutional donors by both media agenda setting and rational choice, adding a layer of indirect influence of news media attention on INGO decision-making.

In conclusion, the following will be tested in this research. First, the possible influence of news media attention for conflicts and crises on both where new programs are started and the allocation of resources to these programs will be investigated. Second, the possible influence of news media attention on ethical dilemmas as well as reputational scandals will be explored.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methods used to test the aforementioned hypotheses will be explained. Three research methods are used: a literature study, surveys and interviews. The latter two will be discussed in more detail – focusing on sample selection, structure and analysis – as these are less straightforward and more important for the analysis and results. Subsequently the importance of triangulation will be discussed.

### 3.2 Surveys

The first step was to survey senior INGO employees. The surveys were meant to result in an overview of how INGO representatives perceive the news media and the influence of news media attention on decisions made in their organizations. Broad questions based on the research question, the sub questions and the hypotheses were asked. As the sample was small the surveys were meant to support and compliment the findings in the subsequent interviews. Survey respondents were asked whether they would be open to an interview, making it a first pool to find possible interviewees. The surveys contained closed and open questions, which are discussed in detail below. The survey yielded both quantitative data and qualitative data. The data was used to see if there was initial support for the proposed connection between news media attention and INGO decision making; to create the interview protocol; and to test the hypotheses.

#### *Selection of the sample*

The research question was limited to Dutch INGOs due to matters of scope and the importance of staying within a context. There are many Dutch INGOs, and so a selection had to be made. INGOs part of the Dutch Relief Alliance were selected. These particular INGOs were chosen as they are all engaged in emergency assistance and are relatively large and well-known INGOs, meaning that the media and most individuals could be expected to know (most of) these organizations. 16 INGOs collaborate within the Dutch Relief Alliance, which is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to better deliver aid in emergency situations. The INGOs participating are: Cordaid, Dorcas, Icco & Kerk in Actie, Oxfam Novib, Red een Kind, Stichting Vluchteling, War Child, War Trauma Foundation, World Vision, ZOA, Tear, Terre des Hommes, SOS Kinderdorpen, CARE Nederland, Plan International Nederland and Save the Children. These INGOs are separate entities, with varying budgets, varying numbers of personnel and varying religious affiliations. The INGOs have in common that they are all relatively large organizations with large budgets, they work on an international scale and provide humanitarian aid, and they are all funded by private, corporate and government donors. The variation between these INGOs is interesting. It would be, for example, interesting to explore whether the link differs for religious versus non-religious INGOs. Further research might need to be done to investigate this, but it remains outside the scope of this research. Within these INGOs, I approached senior representatives. Senior representatives include directorial and managerial staff as well as program or unit coordinators and senior officers. As the research concerns different areas of decision making, representatives working

in different areas were approached, such as communications, funding, emergency assistance, security and country programs.

### *Survey design*

The survey consisted of multiple-choice questions, scaled closed-ended questions, and open-ended questions. 17 questions were asked. The first half of the questions concerned news media intake and overall perception of news media reporting on conflicts and crises. These questions were intended to show to what extent news media is important in the lives of these respondents, whether this importance is similar for most respondents and whether they believe the media does a good job reporting on crises and conflicts. A survey was the best approach to investigate this as it allows for comparisons between a larger number of respondents representing a larger number of organizations than interviews. If media turned out not to be of interest to INGO representatives, it would be impossible to test the hypotheses through surveys and interviews.

The second half of the survey consisted of questions about news media influence on INGO decision making, both whether respondents felt there is such an influence and what this influence looks like. The resulting data from these questions could help test the hypotheses, form a basis for the interview protocol and either support, add to or oppose interview findings. The surveys were conducted both in English and Dutch. The English survey protocol can be found in appendix A.

### *Data collection*

The 16 INGOs were approached by sending an e-mail to their communications departments, asking whether they were open to participating in the survey. Due to new privacy laws, it was much harder to find contact information of INGO representatives and often impossible for communications departments to give this information out which is why communications departments were asked to send the survey to senior representatives in the organization, specifically to communications officers, emergency aid coordinators, program officers and other managerial or directorial staff. Save the Children, Plan International, CARE Nederland, SOS Kinderdorpen, Terre des Hommes declined to cooperate right away. Red een Kind, Oxfam Novib, ICCO & Kerk in Actie, Dorcas, War Trauma Foundation, War Child, Cordaid, Stichting Vluchteling did cooperate and sent out the surveys to those employees for which it was relevant.

From communication with these organizations it has become clear that the survey was on average sent out to four or five people within the organization. The expectation was for at least two people per organization to fill out the survey. Communication with World Vision, Tear and ZOA was initially slow or unproductive. Thanks to personal contacts it has been possible to get two employees in each organization to fill out the survey. In summary, representatives of eleven organizations were contacted either directly or through communications departments. The expectation of two to three respondents per organization seemed rather accurate with a total of 25 respondents.

### *Analysis*

The data obtained from the completed surveys was analyzed both in terms of frequencies and trends as well as with content analysis. The closed questions were analyzed by finding the average answers, consistency of the answers and the deviation around the average. The

answers to the open questions were used in the formation of the interview protocol and were, like the interview data, analyzed with directed content analysis. Directed content analysis combines inductive and deductive content analysis. This means that the codes used to analyze the data were deduced and refined before and during the analysis from theory and data (van Staa & de Vries, 2014). The data that could not be classified as belonging to one of these codes was later coded and analyzed inductively (van Staa & de Vries, 2014).

The risks of directed content analysis are: researcher bias, leading questions and blindness to contextual factors (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Being aware of these risks can help limit them. Besides, due to the preliminary coding being drawn from different theories and theoretical expectations and not just one existing theory, and since codes were added inductively during the analysis, the risks could be mediated. The steps taken before and during the content analysis will be discussed in more detail below.

#### *Limitations*

The small sample size is the most glaring limitation in this research. However, due to both new privacy issues and difficult and slow communication with some of the INGOs, it has not been possible to get more respondents in the available timespan. However, by combining the survey and interview results, the results can still be valid. This will be discussed in more depth in the section on triangulation. Another limitation is that respondents might not report anything unfavorable to them or their organization in a survey. To mediate this the surveys were anonymous and the more sensitive questions were asked during the interviews. Another limitation is that different respondents might have interpreted the same answers differently. This is why after almost every closed question, respondents were asked to elaborate. Questions were also repeated in the interviews to get a clearer image of what respondents meant.

### **3.3 Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were the second method used in the analysis. The semi-structured interviews served the purpose of going deeper into the topic and to result in data with which the hypotheses could be tested. Interviews were more suitable for this than surveys as the topic can be sensitive and complex, and open questions with probes were expected to achieve more and better-quality data. Whereas the survey data showed broader support for certain connections, the interview data showed why and how the links between media attention and decision making work and to what degree they are relevant and important. With interviews the insider perspective could be examined in more detail, which allowed for better testing of the hypotheses. The interviews, combined with the surveys, also helped ensure internal validity. The interview data was purely qualitative and was analyzed using directed content analysis.

#### *Selection of the sample*

As explained before, the INGOs selected for the sample were those INGOs who are part of the Dutch Relief Alliance. The eleven INGOs that responded to the survey were considered for the interviews. In the survey, respondents were asked whether they were open to a follow up interview and to leave their contact information if they were. In total, six respondents

working at five different INGOs said they were willing to be additionally interviewed. As the sample selection for the survey already ensured only those employees with relevant responsibilities for this research filled out the survey, any of the respondents would be suitable for the interview phase. Criteria for the interview sample selection were that a variety of organizations and job titles had to be included. This happened to be true for the 6 potential interviewees. Interviewees will not be mentioned by name. Interviewees 1 and 2 both work at Cordaid. Interviewee 1 is employed in the communications department; Interviewee 2 is a senior representative primarily concerned with resilience and security. Interviewee 3 works at Red een Kind, the interviewee's responsibilities involve fund raising, awareness and communications. Interviewee 4 works at ZOA and works on emergency assistance. Interviewee 5 works at World Vision and has fundraising and acquisition as a main responsibility. Interviewee 6 works for Tear and coordinates emergency assistance.

### *Interview design*

The interview was semi-structured, meaning that there was a base protocol consisting of open-ended questions and pre-designed probes. During the interview improvised probes were added and follow up questions were asked. The interview questions were based on the literature review, hypotheses, and survey responses. Questions slightly varied according to the expertise of the interviewee, but the base protocol remained the same throughout all interviews.

Interviewees were asked to discuss the influence of the news media on different areas of decision making in their organization as, being senior representatives, they were expected to be aware of the larger decision making processes within the organization. The interview consisted of three parts, with a total of seventeen questions. In the first part, more general questions were asked concerning the interviewees job and his or her view of the media and its possible influence. In the second part, questions specifically designed to get the data to test hypotheses 1 through 4 were asked, as well as questions probing for aspects not yet discussed but important according to the interviewee. Part three was designed to more explicitly test the applicability of rational choice and media agenda setting theory. Data regarding all hypotheses could be found in all parts, which is why the interviews were analyzed in full instead of per section. All interviews were conducted in Dutch. An English translation of the interview protocol can be found in appendix B.

### *Data Collection*

The interviews were conducted within two one-week time slots. Interviewees were asked which location they preferred. Three interviews were conducted at the workplace of the interviewee, one interview was conducted at a restaurant, and two interviews were conducted over Skype. Interviews lasted 45 minutes on average. All interviews were conducted in Dutch. All interviews were recorded. Recordings were transcribed word for word. Transcriptions were not translated in full. Only parts of the interview quoted in the research were translated.

### *Analysis*

The data obtained from the completed interviews was analyzed using directed content analysis. After transcribing all interviews and collecting the answers to open-ended survey questions, there was a total of seven data documents. Each data document was read and re-

read and meaning units were created for each relevant textual fragment. Subsequently a “formative categorization matrix” was developed in which main categories and subcategories were derived from theory and hypotheses (Assarroudi et al, 2018). Main categories corresponding to the hypotheses were chosen. Preliminary subcategories of all main categories were also derived from theory. The first round of content analysis had the purpose of coding the data documents according to the formative categorization matrix. Data was first compiled according to main categories, and subsequently more thoroughly coded according to subcategories. Meaning units that did not fit any of the predetermined codes were coded inductively. For these codes new subcategories or if necessary new main categories were added to the matrix. As the applied theories concern all these main categories, items corresponding to them were stated as subcategories of each main category. A second round of content analysis concerning these subcategories was done after the first round of coding and organizing the data as these subcategories were expected to be more latent and to overlap with initial coding.

### *Limitations*

Again, as with the surveys, the sample size is small. This can hopefully be compensated by using method and analysis triangulation. This research does also not aim to be completely generalizable. The research only looks at the Dutch context and does not pretend that the results can be translated to other contexts without doing further research. The research is explorative and aims to be a first step in the research on the topic. Another limitation is that interviewees might have given socially desirable answers. It was important to be aware of this when conducting the interviews. However, it also implies that if support for the hypotheses is found, it has likely been underreported as there is an incentive to downplay and will in reality be stronger.

### **3.4 Triangulation**

Triangulation means using “several aspects of research to strengthen the design to increase the ability to interpret the findings” (Thurmond, 2001). According to Denzin (2017), triangulation increases validity and decreases bias, and creates a better opportunity for data interpretation. As this research is qualitative, exploratory and does not aim to be very generalizable, it is important to ensure the highest possible validity and reliability of the findings despite all possible flaws and limitations of the methods. All efforts were made to ensure the highest possible internal and external validity and reliability. There are several different types of triangulation, and using more than one type results in multiple triangulation. In this research, methodological triangulation and theoretical triangulation were used. Triangulation is often criticized for being used in terms of ‘the more, the better’, this is not the case here. Since this study is exploratory and can only investigate a small sample, triangulation helped to get enough data to say something significant about the phenomenon.

Methodological triangulation means that 2 or more different ways of collecting data are used. Specifically, those data-collection procedures here are finding and evaluating secondary sources for the literature review, surveys and interviews. One could argue that the survey data could be used quantitatively, implying a mixed-methods design. While it is true that some of the survey questions will be reported on in terms of frequencies, no extensive

statistical testing will be done. The survey covered a small sample drawn from a small population and for the large part was analyzed descriptively. The quantitative data recovered from the survey was thus mostly used to support the findings and interpretation of the qualitative data. Combining surveys and interviews has the benefit of giving a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Thurmond, 2001), which was even more important here due to the small sample size.

Theoretical triangulation was also used in this research, as multiple theories and following hypotheses were used to examine the phenomenon. As the research is exploratory it makes sense to test several theories when evaluating the data. The main theories used here are media agenda-setting theory and rational choice theory. The benefits of theoretical triangulation are that the analysis of the phenomenon can be broader and that looking at rival theories can possibly show the greater or lesser importance of either (Banik, 1993; Thurmond, 2001).

## **4. News Media Influence on INGO Decision Making: Programs and Resource Allocation**

### **4.1 News media and its influence**

In this subchapter, I present the results from my survey of Dutch INGO representatives. The survey was meant to investigate three things: First, how important news media is for Dutch INGO representatives. Second, how Dutch INGOs perceive the reporting of news media on conflicts and crises. Third, the ways in which news media attention for conflicts and crisis possibly affects INGO decision making. Survey results for questions about the use and perception of news media sources will be discussed first. Results for questions about media influence on INGO decision making will be discussed subsequently.

#### **4.1.1 Use and perception of news media sources**

The first part of the survey asked about how and to what degree INGO representatives make use of news media sources, and what their perception of news media reporting on conflicts and crises is. My results suggest that there is considerable variation in the amount of time per week spent on consuming news media, with a range of 1 to 10 hours. However, overall, it tends to be quite high with an average of 6.2 hours.

My respondents reported making use of multiple types of traditional news media: The majority of the respondents (22 out of 25) reported using online new platforms to access these traditional sources, with a majority also reporting that they consult television broadcasts (18) and print newspapers (17). A slightly smaller number also mentioned the social media channels of news outlets (15).

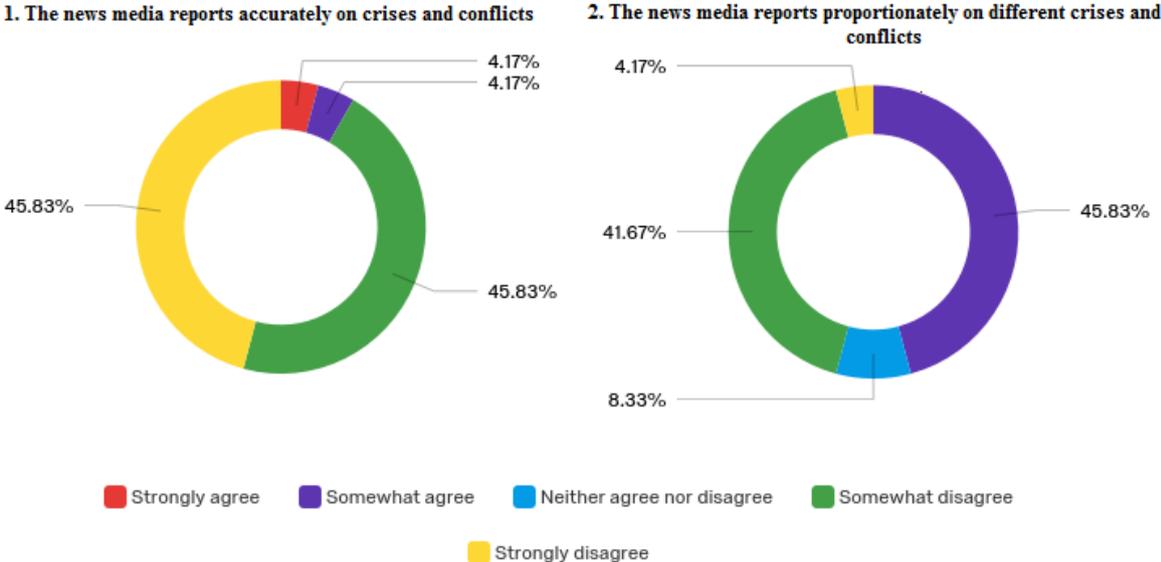
Most respondents reported consulting Dutch media first, after which they consult international news media sources. Of the 25 respondents, 21 explicitly said they use Dutch news media, 3 respondents – two of whom do not speak Dutch – said they consult non-Dutch sources, while 1 respondent did not answer the question. The news sources mentioned most were the news broadcasts by NOS (Dutch Broadcast Foundation) and RTL (Radio Television Luxemburg), the online platforms of NOS and Nu.nl (Now.nl) and well-regarded newspapers, such as the Volkskrant or NRC (New Rotterdam Current).

When asked whether they believe news media reporting on conflicts and crises is accurate, respondent opinions were divided (see graph 1). Respondents claimed that, while the reporting is usually factually accurate, it often is too simplistic, lacks detail and is biased since reporting is done by journalists with preconceived ideas and perceptions. Several respondents said they understand that such complex issues have to be simplified in news media reporting and compensate for this by consulting multiple news media sources. Respondents told me that the news media only report during the first stages of a crisis or conflict and create a hype, and often no follow-up is done. Respondents also claimed the reporting is one-sided and selective.

Respondents were much more negative about news media reporting on conflicts and crises when asked whether the reporting is proportional (see graph 1). According to my respondents, there are many forgotten crises and conflicts, while others get a large amount of

attention, no matter if other crises or conflicts are equally or more disastrous. According to respondents, crises and conflicts that are perceived as being closer to home, or where footage is readily available and there is a certain likeability factor, get much more attention. Forgotten or overlooked crises and conflicts often mentioned by respondents include Yemen, the DRC, South Sudan, Nigeria, the Central African Republic and Libya. Respondents were reluctant to name conflicts or crises that get too much attention, and claimed there is no such thing.

**Graph 1 – perceptions of news media reporting on conflicts and crises**

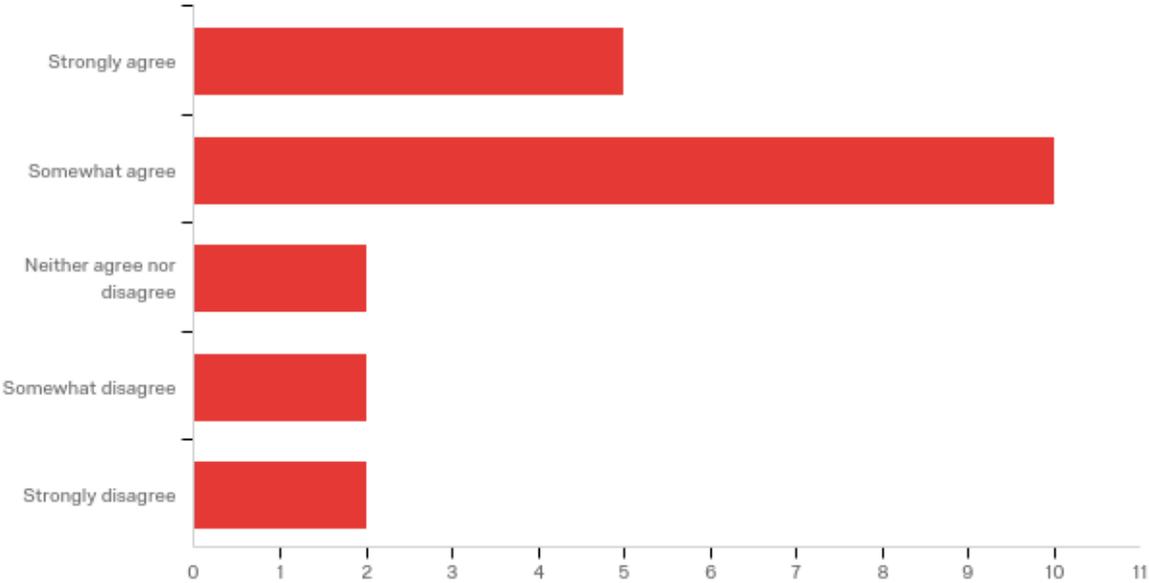


**4.1.2 Possible influence of news media on INGO decision making**

The second part of the survey was designed to find initial support for the expectation that the amount of news media attention for certain conflicts and crises influences NGO decision making.

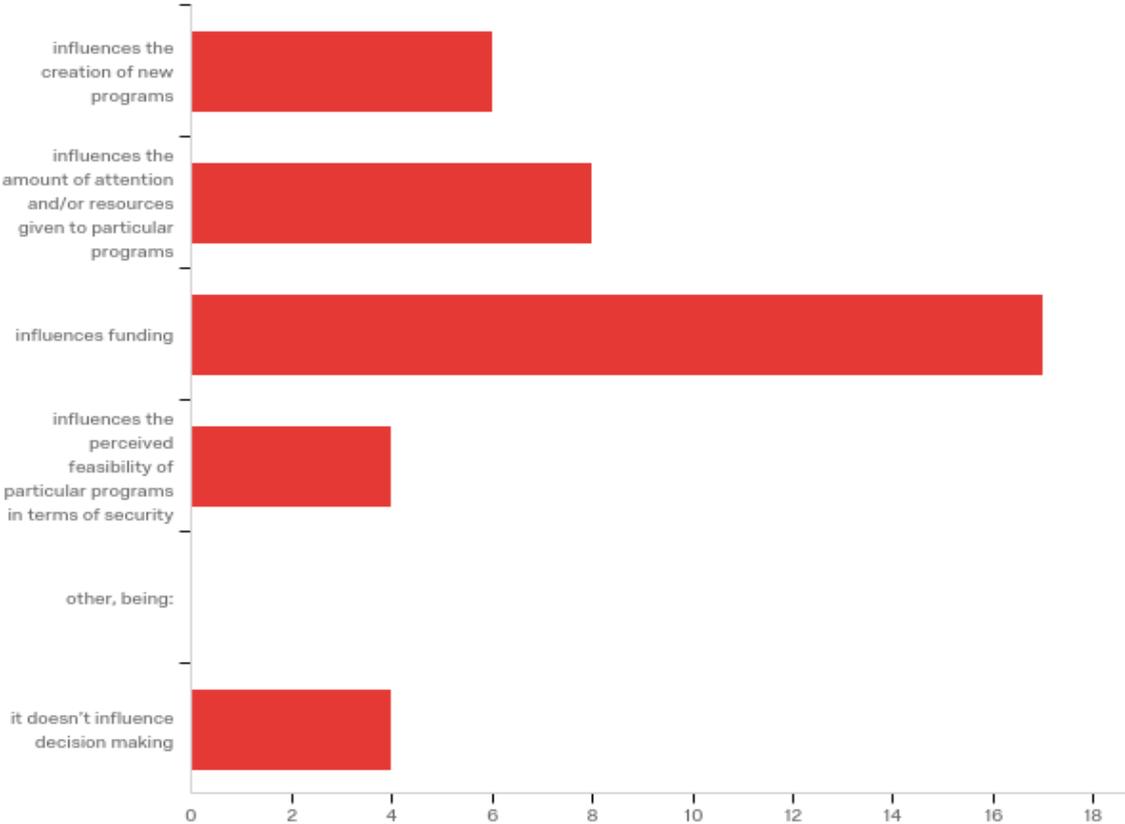
Respondents were first asked whether they believed the news media directly or indirectly influences decision making in their organization. The majority of respondents either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed (see graph 2). Respondents reported that media attention influences: (1) private donors and thus fund raising, (2) where programs are started, and (3) the own opinion of INGO staff and reputation. Respondents that disagreed or strongly disagreed to media attention having an influence on decision making claimed they perceived the organization they work for to be independent.

**Graph 2 – Is there an influence of news media on INGO decision making?**



Respondents were also asked in what ways the news media’s reporting on conflict and crisis influences their own decisions. The results can be found in graph 3. INGO representatives feel this influence exists in different areas of decision making, fund raising being by far the most prominent area.

**Graph 3 – areas of influence of news media attention for conflicts and crises on decision making**



### *Influence on Public opinion and own opinion*

According to interviewees, public opinion is heavily influenced by the news media.<sup>2</sup> “When people see tragic photographs they grab their wallets, that’s how it works.”<sup>3</sup> Interviewees claim that their own opinion is less influenced by the news media when it comes to crises and conflicts, as they have more access to primary sources and more knowledge of such situations. Nonetheless, they do believe that the media influences them to a degree.<sup>2</sup>

“I would be lying if I said it doesn’t move me. I have been in this business for years, I know how the media reports on this. That makes me more nuanced. But at the same time, some images can just really move you. Of course it influences you.”

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

A funding and acquisition officer for World Vision said that she “is someone who is still moved when I see a video of a poor child.”<sup>4</sup> “I am sure it influences me.”<sup>5</sup> While it makes sense that INGO workers are less influenced by news media reporting on crises and conflicts than the general public, it is also likely that there is underreporting of the influence, as it is not a professionally acceptable thing to admit to.

## **4.2 Program Choices**

Perhaps the most important choice INGOs have to make is where to start programs. How do INGOs decide which countries or regions they enter, especially when it comes to emergency assistance where there often is no prior commitment or program? Not much research has been done on this, and the research that exists is sometimes contradictory. Whereas Yontcheva (2006) claims that programs are started purely based on where the need is highest, Koch et al. (2009) claim that, while that is a factor, INGOs are also sensitive to donor preferences. The factor of media attention might influence such decisions and be able to help explain these disparities.

In my survey, six respondents stated that media attention directly influences new programs. This number might seem low. However, 17 respondents said that news media attention influences funding. It is to be expected that in most organizations engaged in emergency assistance the amount of funding influences which programs they (can) start. Fundraising for crises and conflicts is often ad hoc and depends on the willingness of private and institutional donors to donate. Media attention is expected to influence this willingness and INGOs are expected to follow it. From analyzing the textual survey responses and the interviews, it has become overwhelmingly clear that news media attention indeed influences where INGOs start programs. However, interviewees claim it only influences emergency assistance programs. The most obvious way it does is through its influence on both private

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<sup>2</sup> Interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019; Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019; Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019; Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019; Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>3</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

<sup>4</sup> Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

<sup>5</sup> Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

and institutional funding, which was the dominant topic in both the surveys and the interviews.

#### **4.2.1 Emergency assistance vs. development aid**

According to interviewees and survey respondents, the influence of news media attention on where INGOs decide to start programs is much stronger for emergency assistance than it is for development aid.<sup>6</sup> When it comes to development aid, most of the organizations have long-lasting programs that receive loyal support.

“Our supporters are quite loyal, some people have supported us for 15 years. For our sponsoring programs we do not need the media. [...] Emergency assistance is only part of what we do. Most of our programs are long-lasting development programs. Media is not a decisive factor in decisions concerning these programs. But it certainly helps when there is a lot of media attention. Emergency assistance is temporary. Sometimes the attention is over after just a week. People won't give much then. It is extremely important for emergency assistance.”

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

Other interviewees mentioned their own loyalty towards their development programs, citing commitment to their focus countries and programs despite media attention.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, my results suggest that media influence is a more important factor when it comes to emergency assistance. While it can have an influence on development aid in terms of new programs, it does not influence voluntary decisions about existing programs. The logical consequence is then that organizations that are more invested in giving emergency assistance, are more affected by the factor of media attention. “Emergency assistance never ends, but as an emergency assistance organization you sometimes need a large-scale disaster to boost your income”.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Funding and Campaigns**

##### *Decision Indicators*

According to interviewees, two important indicators that influence decision making are the organization's capacity and the efficiency of campaigns and programs. “The needed capacity is a decisive indicator for going or not going”<sup>9</sup>. “If the need meets our criteria, we still need capacity and access”.<sup>10</sup> Efficiency means having money to work with in the first place and having enough money to spend much more on the actual emergency assistance than on

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<sup>6</sup> Interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Utrecht, 23.05.2019; Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, Zwolle, 22.05.2019; Interview 4: interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, Apeldoorn, 09.05.2019; Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, Apeldoorn, 07.05.2019; Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, Utrecht, 23.05.2019

<sup>7</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, The Hague, 22.05.2019; interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Utrecht, 23.05.2019; interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, Apeldoorn, 09.05.2019

<sup>8</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, Zwolle, 22.05.2019

<sup>9</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

<sup>10</sup> Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

administration. Media attention can influence both available capacity and the efficiency of programs and campaigns.

“As a rule, a campaign must bring in at least twice the amount it has cost. We want to work where we can be efficient. How can you be efficient? When there is money. Either your own or money from government, institutional donors or private donors. You follow the money. The media have a large influence on that process. [There are yearly recurring crises] to which the media only sometimes respond, we follow that”

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

Media is also explicitly mentioned as an indicator. “What is shown in the media is an indicator to judge whether we should respond, you estimate how long it will be in the news as that is support for your campaign”<sup>9</sup>, “if there is extensive enough media attention we greenlight it, we go for it”.<sup>10</sup> As expected, the extent to which media influence matters for decision making differs between INGO alliances. One alliance in which all organizations discussed here participate is that of the SHO (Samenwerkende Hulp Organisaties), the collaborating aid organizations. The SHO responds when there is a large-scale crisis. SHO solely raises money from private donors, organizing so called action-days on which the general public is asked to donate for a certain crisis. Funds raised for the 44 actions so far vary enormously: for example, 360.000,- euro was raised for the Gulf War victims in 1991 and 208.300.00,- and 111.000.000,- euro respectively was raised for the 2004 Tsunami in Asia and the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti (Giro 555, 2019). Before the decision is made to start an action-day “the organizations look at whether there is interest for the crisis in Dutch society”<sup>11</sup> and whether there is enough media attention.<sup>12</sup> For SHO responses, media attention is one of the hard criteria for starting an action-day.<sup>12</sup>

“To make it worth it for SHO there has to be enough media attention and interest from NOS and RTL [Dutch news media outlets] to spread the message that SHO is starting a campaign. If not, we will not raise enough money to start a program”

Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

This goes for all organizations: As soon as SHO decides to respond, organizations are not allowed to raise funds themselves for that crisis, as all funds go to the SHO fundraising campaign. In this instance “all organizations benefit from the same amount of media attention”.<sup>13</sup>

The funding, awareness and communications coordinator of Red een Kind also mentioned the importance of the opinion of their loyal supporters. Red een Kind must respond to what their supporters want, which they know through years of experience and regular questionnaires.<sup>14</sup> This might very well be an indicator, which is influenced by media attention as well. Extensive research has shown that the importance the public attaches to a topic is influenced by the amount of news media attention a topic receives (McCombs, 2002).

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<sup>11</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

<sup>12</sup> Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

<sup>13</sup> Interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019

<sup>14</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

Humanitarian crises are concrete topics making media influence even more likely (Yagade & Dozier, 1990). I was not, however, able to capture this type of influence in my survey.

### *Funding*

21 survey respondents said that media attention influences funding, campaigns, or both. Whereas there seemingly is an influence on all donors, this influence might differ for private donors – being the general public – and institutional donors – being governments and international organizations –.

Five of the survey respondents claimed that media attention influences funding in general: if there is less or no news attention the organizations can raise less funds from private or institutional donors and vice versa. This was a predominant theme in the interviews as well. There is overall more money donated when there is more media attention, but there are nuances. The Resilience and Security Coordinator at Cordaid claimed that crises with links to the Netherlands or the global North in general get more media attention and more funding than crises that do not, especially from private donors.<sup>13</sup>

“For an SHO response media attention makes all the difference. Much less funds can be raised for a crisis in Syria than for the earthquake in Indonesia, which nominally caused less victims and damage, because there is much more media attention for the crisis in Indonesia in the Netherlands”

Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019

The emergency assistance coordinator of ZOA agrees: “In Indonesia, while there certainly was need, we got donations and funds without even asking for it at a certain point due to all the media attention”.<sup>15</sup> Less media attention means less private and institutional funds<sup>15</sup>, for crises that get more media attention there are more funds, “also from large donors”.<sup>16</sup>

Several interviewees stated that a lack of donor appetite for certain countries and regions due to media attention in the past can negatively impact fundraising.<sup>17</sup> Examples given are either countries in which conflicts have lasted for many years, such as Syria and Afghanistan, or countries in which crises are constantly recurring, like the droughts in Ethiopia.

“It doesn’t make sense anymore to campaign for Ethiopia, as it doesn’t pay. How do we explain that we need to help again while we did so 2 years ago, and 4 years ago? Why is the drought reoccurring? For some crises it is hard to explain why you are still in crisis so many years later. People want to see solutions.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

### *Private donors*

As has been already hinted at, respondents believe that media attention is particularly important for private donations. Eight survey respondents specifically mentioned the

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<sup>15</sup> Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

<sup>16</sup> Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

<sup>17</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019 ; Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

importance of media attention for donations from private donors, being the general public and local businesses. According to survey respondents, news media attention influences loyal supporters, and subsequently to what extent they donate for specific conflict areas, as well as the success of fundraising campaigns, with more media attention making it easier to raise funds and subsequently to implement programs. As expected, this is especially true for emergency assistance. According to one survey respondent, “if the media doesn’t see it as a crisis, it is not a crisis. It is then almost impossible for us to create enough attention ourselves amongst our constituency.” It can be a frustrating phenomenon for INGO workers, who need media attention to raise funds and subsequently respond.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand INGO workers are grateful that their supporters are often very loyal, and that media attention does mean that supporters are very generous donors.<sup>19</sup> Even though loyal supporters trust the organization they support and will respond to requests by the organization, they donate less when there is no media attention.<sup>20</sup> The emergency assistance coordinator for ZOA has examples of the relationship between media attention and donations from private donors:

“EO Metterdaad [a medium with a focus on aid and fundraising] will only cover mediagenic crises, which influences donations. The same goes for church denominations, whose associated churches raise money. Much more money is raised when a conflict or crisis gets media attention”

Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

A funding and acquisition officer working for World Vision added that media attention is also important in terms of getting enough donations to meet a certain percentage of matchfunding, which comes from private donors and is tied to funds from an institutional donor.<sup>21</sup>

### *Institutional donors*

Even though most interviewees believe the impact of news media attention on the funding they receive from institutional donors like governments and international organizations to be less dominant than the impact on private donors, they certainly think it is there. Whereas organizations get money from several institutional donors, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, to a slightly lesser degree, the European Union are the most important institutional donors for most organizations. According to the funding, awareness and communications coordinator of Red een Kind, the amount of money budgeted by the government for emergency assistance is influenced by the attention the news media give to emergency assistance.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes this benefits the INGOs and sometimes it does not.

“Take the Saint Martin situation. We [the government] all of a sudden spent a few million on it. The island is the size of Vlieland [a Dutch island of 315km<sup>2</sup>]. Public opinion on the Syrian refugees changed when the little boy drowned. Everyone saw that image. The media responded immediately, politics responded immediately, and suddenly everyone wanted to do something about it. Then funds become available,

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<sup>18</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

<sup>19</sup> Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

<sup>20</sup> Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>21</sup> Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

<sup>22</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

also in the DRA, suddenly there is much more money for the Middle East.”

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019

The emergency assistance coordinator for ZOA agrees that the media can influence institutional donors.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs which funds the DRA certainly wants the Dutch INGOs to help in certain crises. Because it gets a lot of media attention they want us to be active there. Nigeria never gets much media attention, finding institutional funds for Nigeria takes longer and is harder.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

While DRA responses are not dependent on news media attention, interviewees claim the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – and thus the DRA responses they choose to fund – still is influenced by news media attention for certain conflicts and crises. “Politics and the media influence each other. There is constant mutual influence between media, politics and NGOs.”<sup>23</sup> “When you look at the current [foreign] policy you can trace the anti-migrations sentiments in Dutch society; The minister won’t only be influenced by media, but it influences her policy.”<sup>24</sup> My results seem to indicate that whereas private donors are influenced by media attention in the sense that they attach more importance to a crises when it receives more media attention, the influence seems more complex and perhaps indirect for institutional donors. Institutional donors are said to strategically respond to tendencies in Dutch society as well as the media, and in a way that fits their political agenda.

### *Campaigns and Programs*

Eight survey respondents explicitly mentioned how the influence of media attention on funding by private and institutional donors in turn influences which fundraising campaigns and subsequent programs are started. According to respondents, organizations need to be aware of and are influenced in terms of starting an emergency assistance response by the public appeal of a particular crisis even if it is disproportionate in terms of for example human suffering. One survey respondent claimed that campaigns are most effective when they can piggyback on news media attention. This is, as expected, much more relevant for emergency assistance than for development aid according to respondents.

As discussed, media attention influences institutional donors. This in turn influences which campaigns and programs are started by INGOs:

“What we campaign and fundraise for is partially determined by what crises and countries the government tends to give aid to. We work there so that we can get money for our programs. That’s where our opportunities lie”.

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019

Interviewees claim they also use their experience and knowledge to predict whether a crisis will get a lot of attention. If they believe it will, they put more effort into fundraising.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019 ; Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

<sup>24</sup> Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

<sup>25</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

Organizations are aware that for a campaign to be effective, there has to be nation-wide news media attention for the crisis campaigned for.<sup>25</sup> “When we see potential for raising funds and there is enough media attention we greenlight the campaign. Media in that sense partially determines which programs we can and cannot finance”<sup>26</sup>

“If you go around saying that the situation in Brazil is terrible, but nobody knows anything about it since you don’t see it on nu.nl [a large online news media platform] then we can shout until our throats are sore but it won’t be an effective campaign.”

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Zwolle, 22.05.2019

#### **4.2.3 The exception: private money and silent crises**

The two interviewees working at Cordaid both underreported media influence compared to other interviewees and survey respondents. The most important factor they said might differentiate their organization from other INGOs is that they are one of the largest Dutch INGOs with a relatively large loyal support base.<sup>27</sup>

“We are lucky to have a fair amount of private money as we have approximately 300.000 private donors in the Netherlands. Those are funds we can spend where it’s needed. If a large-scale humanitarian crisis happens, and we do not have a country office there, we do not have external money to get there from day 1, donors are not that fast. We can then initially go there with our own money.”

Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019

According to both the Resilience and Security coordinator and the communications officer working for Cordaid, Cordaid is one of the few organizations in the Netherlands that can operate like this, and that it certainly influences what you can do and where you can go.<sup>27</sup> Even though media plays a large part in how many funds Cordaid receives as the crisis develops, there is not much of an influence on whether they can and will go there in the first place. It is beyond the scope of this research to further look into the disparities between relatively large and small organizations, but further research is warranted into whether a large support base and a bigger amount of private funding impacts the degree of media influence on program choices. It might then also be related to the finding that organizations who are relatively more engaged in emergency assistance perceive a larger impact of the media on their decisions.

Related to this is the issue of silent crises. As a survey respondent stated: “focusing on less mediagenic crises comes at a price”. There are crises, such as in Congo or the Central African Republic that are systematically underfunded, which often only reach 20% of needed funding according to needs assessments each year.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, this price seems to be most easily paid by Cordaid. Both interviewees who work for Cordaid mentioned that the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>27</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019 ; interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019

<sup>28</sup> Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

organization explicitly focuses on forgotten crises such as South-Sudan and the Central African Republic.<sup>29</sup> Media attention seems to have an opposing effect for Cordaid.

“I wouldn’t say that going somewhere is determined by it getting less attention, but it certainly has to do with it. These are forgotten countries, we might then find it more important to focus more on them. A choice can then be made to phase out of one country to be able to invest more in another. The fact that the latter is more of a silent crisis forgotten by the media can play a part in that decision.”

Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

It seems that being a relatively large organization receiving a large and steady amount of private funding may allow it to focus more on silent crises.

#### **4.2.4 Explaining news media influence on program choices**

According to interviewees, the influence of the media on people’s opinions and what they deem important is clear when looking at the funds they raise.<sup>30</sup> “You don’t raise funds when it hasn’t been in the media,”<sup>31</sup> “people give more when the crises we ask them to donate for have gotten media attention.”<sup>28</sup> Interviewees also say news media coverage can be a first trigger to look into a certain crisis or conflict, which can then lead to the start of a program.<sup>32</sup>

“We are now starting a program in Colombia for refugees from Venezuela. A part of the trigger was when the interim president stood up and it was in the news every day. You see that something is changing and something is happening and then we check whether we should respond. It triggers us to start checking on it.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

When and how much private donors donate seems to be influenced by the media as they donate more to crises that get more news media attention. This fits well with media agenda setting theory. I have collected less data on motivations of institutional donors, and this certainly warrants further research. However, my results indicate that institutional donors donate more to crises that get more media attention since they believe this to be strategically wise. I believe that donating patterns of institutional donors can thus better be explained through rational choice theory.

While opinions of INGO workers can be influenced by news media coverage of crises and conflicts, it seems mostly to trigger a first check on a situation. My results indicate that INGOs deal with the influence of media attention on donors quite strategically. All interviewees claimed to have altruistic motives. They also understand the influence of news media attention, which is an important indicator for them to greenlight fundraising campaigns

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<sup>29</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019 ; interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019

<sup>30</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019; Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019; Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

<sup>31</sup> Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

<sup>32</sup> Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019; Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

and programs. INGOs follow the opportunities media attention creates for them. If they indeed have an altruistic motive and want to help as many people as possible, the way to maximize this is to follow media attention in which programs to start, as more media attention means more funding and more funding means helping more people. When it comes to program choices, media agenda setting theory can help explain the influence of media attention on funding from private donors. Rational choice theory can in turn help explain which campaigns and programs are started by INGOs. More research is needed to investigate and explain the influence of news media attention to conflicts and crises on funding from institutional donors.

### **4.3 Allocation of resources**

This research expected to find that an increase in media attention for a certain conflict or crisis would lead to INGOs allocating more resources to that conflict or crisis. What we have seen is that media attention can influence how much money private and institutional donors are willing to donate and that this often influences the decisions INGOs make concerning which campaigns and programs they start. It can certainly be argued that these are conscious and well-weighed decisions, where NGOs anticipate as well as react to media attention, making decisions they feel will best make use of this. Media attention influences the allocation of resources in that it can increase or decrease the possible volume of a program. However, it seems like the influence on allocation of resources is much more one of logical consequence than of decision making.

#### **4.3.1 Volume of response**

Overall survey respondents and interviewees were much more hesitant to say media attention influenced their decisions concerning resource allocation. Four out of six interviewees claimed media attention had no impact on decisions concerning the allocation of resources to programs citing that “News media attention should not be relevant for this”<sup>33</sup>, that allocation of resources is purely based on needs assessments<sup>34</sup>, that if media has an impact it is negligible<sup>35</sup> and that they had never experienced an influence of the media on resource allocation.<sup>36</sup>

One survey respondent said that as news media attention influences fundraising, it inadvertently influences the volume of the response. This is a logical consequence when INGOs raise funds for specific responses and programs. More attention means more funds and thus a larger possible response.<sup>37</sup> The funding awareness and communications coordinator working for Red een Kind explains in more detail:

“We work in South Sudan, a country where our heart lies. When we know something is happening there that if we campaign hard, people will give something for it. But I have to spend much more money to raise funds for it. That makes us less inclined to

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<sup>33</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

<sup>34</sup> Interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019

<sup>35</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019

<sup>36</sup> Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>37</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

start something big, because it will cost you more than you raise. [...] We want to work in Congo as the needs are so extensive there, if there was more media attention for it we could do much more”

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019

When there is more money available INGOs can start a bigger response, when there is less, they can do less.<sup>38</sup>

#### **4.3.2 A short note on available staff**

The emergency assistance coordinator for ZOA did mention an interesting way in which media attention might influence the allocation of resources. She claimed that more media attention in both mass media and sector specific media can influence the availability of staff for certain crises.

“Some crises are fancier and people will line up to come work there, and for some countries you can’t find anyone. This has something to do with safety of course. But Nigeria was not fancy to go to at a certain point. It was so hard to find people for it, and everyone had that problem. Sometimes it does happen that everyone wants to go the new crisis or the big earthquake. For underexposed crises it can be hard to find people”

Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

Even though only mentioned by one interviewee and thus not very telling by itself, it is an interesting point, warranting further research. If the phenomenon were proven to be more wide-spread it could indicate that there is a direct influence of media attention for a crisis or conflict on the allocation of resources by INGOs, in this case specifically in terms of available staff.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The amount of news media attention a conflict or crisis receives seems to influence INGO decisions about where to start programs. Media attention can itself be an indicator taken into account when deciding on new programs. Capacity, efficiency and donor opinions are important indicators for such decisions as well, and are all reported by my respondents to be influenced by the amount of media attention a conflict or crisis receives. According to my respondents this influence is most relevant for emergency assistance programs. Respondents report that development programs are hardly influenced by the amount of media attention. Whether media attention does influence development aid by initially instigating the start of an emergency assistance program eventually evolving into development aid is unclear, but warrants further research. The logical consequence is that organizations who are relatively more invested in emergency aid as opposed to development aid, are more affected by news media attention for conflicts and crises.

Respondents report that news media attention for a conflict or crisis influences both private and institutional donors: both tend to donate more money to crises with connections to

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<sup>38</sup> Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

the Netherlands or the Global North. According to interviewees, private donors donate more money when a crisis receives more media attention; institutional donors often donate more money to crises that receive more media attention and respond strategically to issues important in Dutch society and that are given much media attention, in a way that fits their political agenda. Based on interview and survey data, more media attention for a conflict or crisis seems to have a larger influence on private donor funding than institutional donor funding. Whereas the SHO alliance, which solely relies on money from private donors, takes media attention into account as a hard criterion, the DRA alliance, which is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, does not. According to interviewees, in some cases the DRA starts a response while the SHO does not, showing that the impact of media attention is different for different alliances. Respondents claim that INGOs respond strategically to the influence media attention has on funding, starting campaigns for and responding to crises that are expected to receive more media attention and tend to receive aid from institutional donors.

Interviewees working for the largest Dutch INGO taken into account here claimed that media attention for them has an opposite influence. As they have so many loyal donors and a large reserve of money, they can start programs where they want and explicitly do so for crises that receive little media attention.

Collectively, the evidence I presented in this chapter indicates support for the hypothesis that more media attention to a conflict or crisis will increase the likelihood that an INGO will start a program or expand on an existing program focused on that conflict or crisis. However, this is mainly true for emergency assistance programs, and therefore the effect of the media seems to be larger for INGOs who are relatively more invested in emergency assistance; and the hypothesis is not supported for very large organizations who have a significant reserve of money. It is important to note that the evidence is self-reported and further research is needed. However, the evidence – especially evidence for the influence on donors and campaigns and on emergency assistance as opposed to development aid – does strongly suggest the posited link exists and thus warrants such further research.

In my survey and interviews, I do not find evidence in support of the hypothesis that more media attention to a conflict or crisis will increase the likelihood that INGOs allocate more resources to programs dealing with that conflict or crisis. Respondents report an influence on the volume of programs, yet that is only a logical consequence of media influence on funding and the start of campaigns in which conscious decision making plays no role.

In answer to the research question: My results suggest that more media attention to conflicts and crises influences Dutch INGO decision making on where to start emergency assistance programs, as long as the INGO is not able to start a response without raising additional funds first.

## **5. News Media Influence on INGO Decision Making: Ethical Dilemmas and Scandals**

### **5.1 Ethical dilemmas**

Based on previous research and theory, I expected to find that increased news media attention for certain conflicts or crises can lead to ethical dilemmas tied to providing or not providing aid to those conflicts or crises for INGO staff. Examples of ethical aid dilemmas might include, for example, responding to a crisis, while knowing another crisis needs it more; responding to a crisis while not wanting to for good reason; not responding to a crisis while knowing it is necessary to do so; starting inefficient or unnecessary programs to be able to show your organization responds to a crisis; or agreeing to unethical or inefficient donor conditions in order to be able to respond to a crisis or to not lose funding.

My argument is not that increased media attention itself causes such dilemmas, but that increased media attention can indirectly exacerbate these dilemmas, for example by leading to overfunding or underfunding. Obviously INGOs constantly need to make difficult decisions.<sup>39</sup> My focus is on how news media attention can influence how INGOs make difficult decisions. As it turns out, increased news media attention to conflicts and crises can make making ethical decisions concerning these aid dilemmas harder for INGOs. When a crisis or conflict is overfunded, INGOs sometimes make up irrelevant programs to be able to spend those funds. INGO decision making is sometimes influenced by increased media attention for certain conflicts and crises in the sense that the INGOs respond, even though they do not want to. Alternatively, they may feel they should respond, but do not.

#### **5.1.1 Overfunding**

Overfunding for a crisis or conflict shows how INGOs have to navigate ethical dilemmas resulting from increased media attention for a conflict or crisis. In terms of SHO action-days, the money raised for the earthquake in Haiti was the second largest amount ever, at 111 million euros (Giro 555, 2019). Only for the tsunami in Asia, which hit 14 countries, more money was raised (Giro 555, 2019). According to the emergency assistance coordinator for ZOA the fundraising for the earthquake in Haiti, and some other crises, resulted in too much funding:

“There was not enough capacity to use the money well. Much wasn’t used well and it took a long time to spend the money. Some organizations are still doing that. Not many crises receive this much funding, but it can lead to organizations making up projects just to be able to spend the money. You saw that in the countries hit by the tsunami and in Haiti. That there is too much money and you just make up a project that isn’t very relevant.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

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<sup>39</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

The SHO starting an action-day, knowing that media attention is a hard criterion for them to do so, indicates that there was a lot of media attention for the crisis in Haiti. Lobb, Mock and Hutchinson (2012) studied both media coverage and charitable giving surrounding the earthquake in Haiti and found that media attention for Haiti spiked right after the earthquake and then declined and that charitable giving followed the same pattern. Media attention was at the very least a factor in the overfunding for the crisis in Haiti, which led to inefficient and made up programs as INGOs had too much money and too little capacity to efficiently give aid (Larimore & Sharkey, 2013; Wearne, 2012; Arroyave, 2015).

### **5.1.2 Pressure to respond**

According to interviewees, sometimes INGOs do not want to or deem it inefficient to respond, but do so anyway. As mentioned before, the action-day for the tsunami in Asia resulted in a massive amount of donations. The tsunami received extensive news media coverage for over a month, much longer than seen before for other crises (Wynter, 2005). Brown and Minty (2006) measured both U.S. media coverage of the tsunami as well as donations given and found evidence that more media coverage led to more donations. Red een Kind did not have programs in the area at that time and decided not to respond.<sup>40</sup>

“We have come to regret that deeply. Usually loyal private donors wanted us to help the victims of the tsunami, and stopped donating to us for two months to do so themselves. Churches usually bound to us said that the church collection would now obviously go to the tsunami. It was a difficult year. It was an ethical dilemma not to respond. But by not doing so when crises are really big you cannibalize your own organization. That can be a factor choosing to respond or not.”

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019

The interviewee continued to say that they should have at least been open to raising funds even if only to transfer them to other organizations just to keep the INGO’s loyal supporters close.<sup>40</sup> The emergency assistance coordinator for ZOA also talked about the pressure to respond due to private donor expectations and the pressure to show that the organization monitors situations and responds to them.<sup>41</sup>

“When we don’t respond 5 times in a row, our supporters will lose faith and the next time something happens donate to another Christian organization involved in humanitarian aid. We have to show that we respond, there is pressure to respond when there is a big crisis. This drives the decision. We can’t do nothing even if we don’t feel like doing anything.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

Increased media attention influences private donors in wanting to give more to that crisis. According to interviewees this can lead to organizations responding to crises they do not want to respond to because their loyal private donors pressure them to and since the INGO cannot

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<sup>40</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019

<sup>41</sup> Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

lose its support base.

### 5.1.3 Wanting to respond

Sometimes INGOs wanted to and felt it was necessary to respond, but could not. This is again truer for emergency assistance than development assistance, and is thus more relevant for organizations that provide a higher share of emergency assistance compared to development assistance.<sup>42</sup> If there are several crises at a time, and one of them has more links to the Western world than the other, interviewees claimed that there will be more media attention for the crisis with connections to the West which influences the possibility for INGOs to respond to the other crisis.<sup>42</sup> Organizations know which crises are recurring and only respond when the media picks up on it.<sup>42</sup> The crisis in Mozambique after cyclone Idai coincided with the Dutch provincial elections, and the elections got a lot of media attention while Mozambique got very little.<sup>43</sup> This shows that not only different conflicts can take media attention away from one another, but that when there is an event that is extremely important to Dutch media and citizens, most attention will go to that event. This meant that fundraising prospects for Mozambique were not favorable. While the DRA did start a response, the SHO did not, leading to much frustration with a funding and acquisition officer working for World Vision.

“We had a week opening Monday about advocacy and awareness, about wanting to pay attention to things even when it is a difficult matter. Do we then speak out, and say that this deserves attention? All I thought then was why didn’t we in Mozambique? I understand we need to consider whether it is worth the trouble, it costs organizations a lot of capacity, but I still think that, with people in need and a good story to along with it, that we should be able to sell it. Media plays a part in this.”

Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

Organizations take media attention for a conflict into account. “If we only take on programs that we think are great but where no attention can be generated, we do eventually have a problem.”<sup>43</sup> A lack of donor appetite due to much media attention for a country or region in the past and a lack of it in the present can also play a part here. One interviewee mentioned the example of Latin America.

“For Latin America we had no support office, who can file for funding with ECHO [the EU organ coordinating Humanitarian Aid], not one country had a lead support office. When Peru and Ecuador wanted to file, we had to figure out who could do it. Countries that suffer a lack of donor appetite become less important in our strategy, which certainly has to do with how much attention there still is for a continent. When something then does happen, it becomes complex to deal with it.”

Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

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<sup>42</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019

<sup>43</sup> Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

#### **5.1.4 Explaining news media influence on ethical dilemmas**

Overfunding can partially be explained with media agenda setting theory. When a conflict or crisis receives much media attention this influences public opinion, making the crisis an important issue for the general public and making them donate more. Not much choice or strategy seems to be involved in the subsequent dilemma of having to spend the money and starting inefficient programs to do so. There is pressure on organizations to spend the money they receive since donors want them to and they simply have to. Media agenda setting might lead to this but not much rational choice seems to be involved in the process.

Rational choice theory can be applied to organizations responding to crises they do not necessarily want to respond to. As not responding can lead to a loss of donors and funds, it would be irrational not to respond. It seems plausible that INGOs want to survive for both altruistic and egotistic reasons. Not surviving means people lose their jobs and the organization cannot help people anymore. Responding to a crisis an organization would usually not respond to in order to keep their donors is the rational choice to make.

Organizations not responding to a crisis while they do want to can partially be consistent with both media agenda setting theory and rational choice theory. When there is not enough media attention for a crisis it does not become an important issue to donors and not enough funds can be raised to start a response, especially for smaller organizations more heavily involved in emergency aid. It can also be a consequence of strategic decisions where organizations take capacity away from regions for which there is a lack of donor appetite, making responding difficult when organizations do at some point want to respond to a crisis in such a region.

### **5.2 INGO reputation**

In a world where media is everywhere and feeds constant streams of information to everyone, it has become much harder to escape the consequences of a scandal. As everyone is now able to follow such a scandal and its aftermath, it has also become more necessary and important to respond publicly and to respond well. This research expects to find that the entire sector is impacted by large INGO scandals and that widespread media attention for such a scandal will lead to INGOs diverting resources to responding to such scandals and implementing preventative measures.

#### **5.2.1 Misconduct scandals and overhead issues**

All interviewees claimed that the Oxfam scandal impacted the entire INGO sector. In 2018, the media brought to light that Oxfam Great Britain had tried to cover up an investigation into “the hiring of sex workers for orgies by staff working in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake” (Gayle, 2018). This led to threats to cut government funding, a loss of 7.000 private donors, new accusations of sexual misconduct in other countries, a loss of celebrity ambassadors, a statutory inquiry into Oxfam by The Charity Commission, Haiti withdrawing Oxfam GB’s right to work in the country, and the resignation of the CEO (Gayle, 2018). The U.K. newspaper The Times broke the story. It was then picked up by other major news outlets on a global scale and a media and public backlash followed.

As one interviewee told me, “The media is eager when it comes to misconduct scandals.”<sup>44</sup> Interviewees fully condemn the misconduct and believe that Oxfam GB indeed did certain things very badly and did not respond well to the misconduct they were aware of, making the problem fully their responsibility.<sup>45</sup> However, there is also the realization that an organization cannot always control every employee and that these scandals can happen to every INGO.<sup>46</sup> While the media attention was blown out of proportion according to some,<sup>47</sup> there is overall agreement that there were indeed integrity issues in the sector and that the outcome of the whole affair was good in the sense that all INGOs are now more focused on preventing such misconduct.<sup>45</sup>

All organizations reported being affected by this scandal, in part because of the media backlash<sup>45</sup>:

“The media making the Oxfam scandal as big as it did absolutely led to other organizations having to evaluate and tighten up. I don’t think there is one INGO that hasn’t. Also because our minister [Sigrid Kaag] asked us to, he demanded it. We have had to discuss much in terms of protocols and documentation.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

The resilience and security officer for Cordaid claims that the media attention for the Oxfam scandal led to new donor conditions

“The Oxfam affair was picked up by the media and subsequently by donors, saying wait, we have to do something about this. Media attention led to new conditionalities in terms of code of conduct and sexual harassment set by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is one of the clearest examples of how media attention leads to new conditions we have to comply with”

Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019

As a result of the scandal, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set strict new rules for INGOs.<sup>48</sup> Additional demands were made for more transparency of documents, to do self-assessments, have more certifications, have additional policy documents, yearly training of employees on matters of integrity and corruption. In short, there is much more regulation to comply with.<sup>49</sup> While interviewees agree that these measures can help prevent future misconduct<sup>48</sup>, they also note that it has cost the organizations a lot of resources to be able to comply to all new demands.

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<sup>44</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

<sup>45</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019; Interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019; Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019; interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>46</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

<sup>47</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019; Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>48</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019 ; Interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019; Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019; Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019; Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>49</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

“You have to look at all your protocols to see what could be better. Then you have to adapt your protocols and make sure that everyone who works for your organization and works with for example partner contracts to know what is in them and what to do. A lot of work goes into this.”

Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019

Another interviewee agreed, claiming that there was a lot of pressure on organizations and that it did cost resources to respond properly.<sup>50</sup> “We have spent huge amounts of time and capacity into making sure that preventative measures are up to par.”<sup>51</sup>

While not having as much impact as the Oxfam scandals, interviewees also mentioned other scandals that impacted their organization. Red een Kind experienced a scandal 20 years ago, where a family member of one of the founders was found guilty of abusing children.<sup>50</sup> This was picked up by the news media. A funding and acquisitions officer for World Vision also mentioned a scandal that happened a few years ago in Israel.

“World Vision often works with local leaders, which can mean you have contact with rebel groups sometimes. That doesn’t mean you give them money or agree with what they do, but that you need to have contact with to even be able to work. There was contact with Hamas in Israel. This got out and questions were asked in the media, also the Dutch media, while World Vision Netherlands had nothing to do with it. We then do have to respond.”

Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

While some scandals concerning INGOs are more damaging than others, the impact is reported to be larger when a scandal receives more media attention. It then costs INGOs time and money to respond to these scandals, even if they are not themselves implicated.

Another issue having to do with the reputation of INGOs often mentioned is the focus on overhead costs.

“Some people are hesitant because they have overhead costs on their mind. They want to know exactly where their money goes, what’s left behind. They have heard in the media that it’s a thing and then want the specifics. We get emails about the CEO’s salary. It’s a recurrent thing and we get many phone calls about it.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019

It is a much more frustrating matter for INGO workers than for example the Oxfam scandals, where they feel the attention and consequences are just. The rules on overhead and especially CEO salaries seem to be different for the INGO sector than for other sectors.<sup>52</sup>

“A CEO of a prison for example also gets a high salary, you never read about it while it’s also public money. You could say we have been fighting crime for a 100 years and prisons are still full. But as soon as money going to foreign aid is involved those rules

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<sup>50</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019

<sup>51</sup> Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>52</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05 2019; Interview 4: Emergency assistance coordinator, ZOA, 09.05.2019 ; Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

do apply.”

Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

Interviewees claim that the news media spend a disproportionate amount of time on overhead costs, making it an issue for the general public. It then costs INGOs time and money to deal with questions about overhead costs.

### 5.2.2 Impact on the INGO sector

Both scandals concerning INGOs and the negativity surrounding overhead costs damages the entire aid sector according to interviewees.<sup>53</sup> Attention for such scandals leads to much news media attention and inquiries into possible other scandals by the media, which – according to many respondents – diverts attention from crises and the help people need.<sup>54</sup> Interviewees seem to find attention to misconducts scandals valid, as it is a check on the sector.

Nonetheless, they reported being are frustrated by the negativity surrounding overhead costs which they believe to be unjust. News media attention can support INGO goals, but it can also do damage. A scandal in the aid sector, especially when it concerns development aid hurts all INGOs.<sup>55</sup> The World Vision scandal, which World Vision Netherlands had nothing to do with, impacts each national World Vision organization nonetheless.<sup>56</sup>

According to interviewees, there is a persistent negativity towards INGOs in the news media that damages the sector.<sup>57</sup> “It makes people less willing to donate, this means we have to work harder and the work becomes more difficult.”<sup>54</sup> People use such negativity to say the sector is no good and to spend money on it is to waste money.<sup>55</sup> According to interviewees, the Dutch general public is generally negative towards the sector and overemphasizes things like overhead costs they hear about in the media, which really damages the aid sector:

“People love to spend 50 euros on a violent video game without asking questions about what that money is then used for, while when donating 5 euros to a humanitarian crisis people are on average quite skeptical. Media has a part in this. Yes, there have been wrongdoings in the past and media can keep us sharp, but it’s a shame that that part is overrepresented on the news and that it’s hard to shake that image, while the [aid] sector wants to make the world a better place and works on justice.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

One interviewee claimed that media influences public opinion and enlarge an unnuanced and negative image of the sector which is frustrating as well as disastrous as people who need aid suffer from it.<sup>58</sup> It is hard to get attention for the positive impact development aid has:

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<sup>53</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019 ; Interview 2: Resilience and Security coordinator, Cordaid, 23.05.2019; Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019; Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>54</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019

<sup>55</sup> Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019

<sup>56</sup> Interview 5: Funding and acquisition officer, World Vision, 07.05.2019

<sup>57</sup> Interview 1: Communications officer, Cordaid, 22.05.2019 ; Interview 3: Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Red een Kind, 22.05.2019; Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

<sup>58</sup> Interview 6: Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

“It would be so great if the media would have a positive impact instead of a negative one. Because what the [aid] sector does is necessary, it is positive, and it matters. It would be nice if people would know what we achieve. Positive impact is also news.”

Emergency assistance coordinator, Tear, 23.05.2019

### **5.2.3 Explaining news media influence on reputation**

When it comes to misconduct scandals, INGOs have to deal with new conditions set by institutional donors, and often have to devise and implement new measures and protocols. This seems to be best explained by institutional donors reacting strategically to such issues, which become important through much media attention. As much of the money spend by INGOs come from such donors, these donors are bound to the parties they give the money to. A misconduct scandal can then backfire on these donors and hurt their reputation as well. It is then rational for institutional donors to react by punishing such misconduct scandals and demanding more preventative measures from other INGOs.

From what interviews say, it seems that they believe the negativity towards the sector can be explained by media agenda setting theory. According to interviewees, the media perpetuates a negative image of the sector by focusing too often on things like overhead costs made by INGOs and shedding a negative light on the sector in general, and by not giving attention to the positive impact the sector has. According to interviewees, this then influences the opinion of the general public and thus of potential private donors, leading to less donations and more questions from private donors.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

When it comes to ethical dilemmas, it was expected that increased media attention for a crisis or conflict can lead to INGOs having to deal with an increased number of ethical dilemmas tied to providing aid to that or another crisis or conflict. My survey and interviews suggest that increased media attention can lead to overfunding for certain crises or conflicts and as a consequence to dilemmas for INGOs as they have to spend those funds and sometimes make up bogus projects to be able to do that. According to interviewees, increased media attention for a conflict or crisis can also mean that INGOs are pressured to respond, and sometimes do so even if they do not want to. Interviews and surveys also suggest that increased media attention for a conflict or crisis can also lead to INGOs not being able to respond to a crisis while they feel they should and they want to. The evidence certainly suggests support the hypothesis. However, further and more systematic research is necessary before hypothesis 3 can truly be said to be supported.

It was also expected that national or international news media attention for a scandal specifically concerning INGOs can cause INGOs to divert resources to the prevention of scandals. One of the most impactful scandals of recent years was clearly the Oxfam scandal. All interviewees mentioned it, noting that although the scandal deserved attention, the media making the scandal as big as it did led to questions from both private and institutional donors. According to interviewees, this led to organizations having to create new and preventative measures and accountability protocols, which cost a large amount of time and money. Respondents also noted that increased media attention for money spent on overhead costs has

also damaged the INGO sector, leading to a more negative image of development aid and a blown out of proportion focus on this issue compared to other sectors. The interview and survey results suggest that INGO scandals damage the whole sector, meaning that when one INGO suffers a scandal it usually has consequences for other INGOs which costs them time and money. According to interviewees, the news media has perpetuated a negativity towards the sector which makes the general public skeptical of foreign aid and which means that INGOs have had to work harder to get private funding and field questions concerning scandals and overhead costs. Collectively, the presented evidence indicates support for hypothesis 4: all organizations implemented new measures after the highly mediatized Oxfam scandal. However, systematic research comparing the mediatization of scandals and the consequences of this for INGOs is needed to further support the hypothesis. As the evidence is self-reported, further research is also warranted to investigate whether the media indeed perpetuates a negative image of the sector and whether that truly damages the INGO sector.

In answer to the research question: my results indicate that more media attention for certain conflicts and crises results in more ethical dilemmas for INGOs. My results also suggest that more media attention for scandals concerning INGOs result in the diversion of resources towards preventative measures by these INGOs.

## 6. Conclusion

My results suggest that media attention to conflicts or crises can increase the likelihood that an INGO will start a program or expand on an existing program in response to that crisis or conflict. According to interviewees, news media attention for conflicts or crises influences private and institutional donors, which in turn influences funding prospects for conflicts and crises. There is strong evidence that INGO decision makers respond to this strategically in starting campaigns and programs for certain crises and not for others.

There are, however, some caveats to this conclusion. There is especially strong evidence for this relationship being much more impactful for emergency assistance than for development aid. This means that it is likely that for INGOs who are relatively more invested in emergency aid, news media will have more impact on their decision making than for INGOs engaged in a smaller share of emergency assistance. Limited evidence from Cordaid also suggests that larger INGOs with a larger reserve of money and more loyal private donors are less impacted in their decision making by news media attention for conflicts and crises. The relationship might even be the other way around for such organizations, who seem more eager to respond to crises that get very little media attention.

My surveys and interviews also indicate support for the hypothesis that an increase of media attention for conflicts and crises can result in an increased number of ethical dilemmas INGOs have to deal with concerning providing or not providing aid to that conflict or crisis. According to respondents, increased news media attention for a conflict or crisis can lead to overfunding of that crisis and underfunding of another crisis, as well as to a pressure to respond felt by INGOs. All situations are said by interviewees to result in ethical dilemmas for INGO workers. My interviews suggest that in the rare case of overfunding INGOs can feel they have to participate in the response and subsequently spend the money in not always efficient ways. My results indicate that increased media attention for a crisis or event can mean INGOs sometimes decide not to start a response for another crisis they actually want to respond to. The results also suggest that INGO workers can also feel pressured to respond to conflicts and crises that receive a lot of media attention, as they believe they will lose their supporters if they do not.

Lastly, my survey and interviews with Dutch INGO leaders suggest support for the hypothesis that wide-spread media attention for a scandal concerning an INGO can cause INGOs to divert resources to the prevention of scandals. All INGO representatives interviewed noted that the highly mediatized Oxfam scandal led to new conditions set by institutional donors, meaning that INGOs had to invest many resources in updating preventative measures and implementing new measures. My respondents also suggested that the media focus on overhead costs also leads to the diversion of resources to responding to questions INGOs get about this matter. Limited evidence also suggests that INGOs believe the media to perpetuate a negative image of the INGO sector, which damages the entire sector. According to respondents, this means that INGOs have to work harder for the same result than they used to.

In answer to my overarching research question: strong evidence suggests that more media attention to conflicts and crises influences Dutch INGO decision making on where to

start emergency assistance programs, as long as the INGO is not able to start a response without first starting a fundraising campaign. Evidence also indicates that more media attention for a conflict or crises can result in more ethical dilemmas Dutch INGOs have to deal with. Lastly, my results suggest that media attention for scandals concerning INGOs influences Dutch INGO decision making as they have to figure out how to divert resources to deal with these scandals by, for example, updating preventative measures and implementing new measures.

It is important to note that since the evidence is self-reported, it is not possible to make an authoritative statement about any of the hypotheses. The evidence results from the reflections of the INGO representatives I surveyed and interviewed. However, the evidence is extensive and rather consistent. I thus do believe there is much evidence suggesting support for hypotheses 1, 3 and 4.

In regards to my contribution to theory, my results suggest that media is indeed an overlooked factor in the INGO decision making literature. While there is much that we do not know yet, this research is a start and indicates that news media attention impacts INGO decision making. It has been impossible to provide a systematic account of this here, yet it might be possible to come closer to such an account through extensive further research. The research also shows that media agenda setting theory and rational choice theory combined work well in supporting and guiding such research.

This research contributes to this emerging field by showing the importance of paying more attention to the influence of the media on INGO decision making. Importantly, my results suggest that this influence is likely to be different for different organizations and different kinds of aid. When researched further, these sources of variation may help solve some of the discrepancies in earlier work on INGO decision making. My research can also contribute in a practical sense by making INGOs, the media and donors more aware of the influence of the media and how it works. If there is indeed such a negative image of the sector, as interviewees claim, donors and the media knowing of the constricting force of media influence might alleviate some of this negativity.

#### *Limitations and further research*

This research is limited in many ways. First of all, it has only been possible to look at a small sample in the available timespan. This means that results are probably less valid than they would be with a bigger sample size. While the survey data came from 11 different INGOs, the interview data, making up the bulk of data, was gathered in only 6 different INGOs. The research was meant to be explorative and sketch a bigger picture, which I believe it has. However, more nuances could have been found if more organizations were looked at. I also only looked at Dutch INGOs. In terms of scope it was not possible to look at the phenomenon in different contexts. As it is likely that results would differ in different contexts, much more extensive research would need to be conducted to test the phenomenon in different contexts. While it might be impossible to generalize to other contexts, I do believe that my sample, while small, is likely representative of Dutch INGOs.

Another limitation is that only traditional news media were looked at. While this was based on research claiming that INGOs use this type of media most and most people still use it as a primary source, it would of course also have been interesting to look at social media,

local media, niche media and profession-related media. This was, however, not possible due to time and scope constraints.

A final limitation of the research is that the subject is quite sensitive and there might have been underreporting of certain aspects. Amongst this community, it is not necessarily socially desirable to admit media influence. I have tried to mediate this by making the survey anonymous, as well as taking much care in designing the interview protocol. Nonetheless, it is likely that underreporting still occurred. This means, however, that the influence of the media is likely under (rather than) over reported.

Further research on the topic certainly is warranted. In particular, my research suggests that we should pay more attention to how the degree the influence of news media attention differs for organizations who are less or more engaged in emergency assistance, as well as for organizations who are relatively large or small, and have relatively many loyal donors as opposed to less loyal donors. While media agenda setting and rational choice so far have helped explain private donor behavior and INGO worker behavior, institutional donors remain more of an enigma. Further research is warranted to investigate the impact of media attention on institutional donors, as well as their motivations when it comes to foreign aid.

Perhaps less pressing, but not less interesting are the following suggestions for further research. Some interviewees indicated that in the Dutch context, religious affiliation can be important. Evidence was not strong enough to bring this distinction into the analysis. However, further research should look into whether the influence differs for different types of religious and non-religious organizations, and should investigate whether niche media much used by such religious groups play a more important role there. Further research could generally include more different types of media, and especially social media. Further research also needs to be conducted into whether the news media indeed perpetuate a negative image of the INGO sector and whether this truly damages the sector.

### *In Conclusion*

This research has taken a first step in exploring the influence news media attention for conflict and crises can have on INGO decision making. My interview and survey results suggested that in three of the four investigated areas of decision making such an influence likely exists. While based on self-reported data, this result is nonetheless highly important. My research has shown that a gap in INGO decision making literature certainly exists and that including media as a factor adds a dimension to the literature and might help solve inconsistencies found in research done so far. This research can be a base for further research and will hopefully inspire others to conduct such research.

## **List of Interviews**

Cordaid

1. Communications officer, The Hague, 22.05.2019
2. Resilience and Security coordinator, Utrecht (skype call), 23.05.2019

Red een Kind

3. Funding, awareness and communication coordinator, Zwolle, 22.05 2019

ZOA

4. Emergency assistance coordinator, Apeldoorn, 09.05.2019

World Vision

5. Funding and acquisition officer, Apeldoorn, 07.05.2019

Tear

6. Emergency assistance coordinator, Utrecht (skype call), 23.05.2019

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Survey Outline

1. What types of news media sources do you make use of? (Select all that apply)
  - newspapers
  - television
  - social media channels
  - online news platforms
  - different, being....
2. How many hours per week do you spend on average watching or reading news media?
  - answer scale from 0 to 10
3. Which news sources do you consult the most?
4. The news media reports on conflicts and crises accurately.
  - strongly agree
  - somewhat agree
  - neither agree nor disagree
  - somewhat disagree
  - strongly disagree
5. Would you like to elaborate on your answer?
6. The news media gives each conflict or crises a proportionate amount of attention.
  - strongly agree
  - somewhat agree
  - neither agree nor disagree
  - somewhat disagree
  - strongly disagree
7. Would you like to elaborate on your answer?
8. In your assessment, which conflicts/crises have had most media attention in the past year?
9. In your opinion, have any conflicts/crises received more media attention than necessary in the past year?
10. In your opinion, have any conflicts/crises been overlooked by the news media in the past year?
11. I believe the news media directly or indirectly influences decision making in the organization work for or are affiliated with.
  - strongly agree
  - somewhat agree
  - neither agree nor disagree
  - somewhat disagree
  - strongly disagree
12. Would you like to elaborate on your answer?
13. The news media's reporting on conflicts and crises influences the decisions I make at work in the following way. (select all that apply)

- influences the creation of new programs
- influences the amount of attention and/or resources given to particular programs
- influences funding
- influences the perceived feasibility of particular programs in terms of security
- other, being:...
- it doesn't influence decision making

14. Would you like to elaborate on your answer?

15. My opinion and expertise impacts decision making regarding the goals and activities of the NGO I work/volunteer for.

- strongly agree
- somewhat agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- somewhat disagree
- strongly disagree

16. Would you be willing to talk about these issues in person?

- yes
- no

17. If so, please provide contact information.

## Appendix B – Interview Outline

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

#### Opening the interview

- State purpose
- Ask interviewee whether he/she approves of being recorded
- Explain that there might be some overlap with the survey questions as those were anonymous and because answers might change with new current events.

#### Part 1

1. Can you give me a quick description of your job and your work-related responsibilities?
  - probe for specific example of decision-making
2. How do you first learn of conflicts and crises and where do you get new information about ongoing crises and conflicts?
3. What is your view on news media reporting on conflicts and crises?
4. How do you think the amount of news media attention a conflict receives impacts your organization?
  - if they say amount doesn't matter, probe for other characteristics of coverage that might matter.
  - probe for when it matters, always or only in crisis situations?

#### Part 2

5. What do you base the decisions made in your work life on?
  - use answer in question 1 to make question more specific
6. Is this process different when there is a conflict or crises you need to respond to immediately? And if so, how?
7. Does news media attention for conflicts and crises play a role in the decisions you and your colleagues make?
  - if yes: explain
  - if no: why not?
8. Does news media attention for conflicts and crises affect which new programs are started by your organization?
  - if yes: explain
  - if no: what does determine what new programs you start?
  - probe for possible difference between status-quo/crisis situations
9. Does news media attention for conflicts and crises influence the allocation of resources to the programs your organization is involved in?
  - if yes: explain
  - if no: what does determine the allocation of resources to certain programs?
  - probe for possible difference in crisis situations
10. Have there been situations in which you felt your organization didn't prioritize the right conflicts or crises or where certain programs were inefficient but still continued?

- probe for aid dilemmas
- probe for news media influence
- probe for official donor aid conditionality
- probe for reputation issues
- probe for importance of it being a crisis or non-crisis situation

11. Are there other areas in which decision making by you and/or your colleagues is influenced by news media coverage of conflicts and crises?

### Part 3

12. Do you think your own opinion about where help and resources should go is influenced by what you see in the news media, and if so, how?

- (especially if not) probe for whether the general public is
- probe for whether he/she lets it influence decisions

13. How is the organization influenced by news media attention in an institutional sense in your opinion? (for example when it comes to the survival of the organization)

- probe about funding by the general public
- probe about funding by large donors
- probe about survival of the NGO

14. Is there an aid dilemma (for example inefficient programs that are kept running, programs that need to be started but aren't, having to deal with corrupt regimes or insurgent groups, aid ending up in the wrong hands, etc) your organization is currently facing?

- probe for media influence

15. Is there anything you would like to add concerning the topics we discussed?

16. Do you have any questions for me?