THE INFLUENCE OF NGO – GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS ON NGO INDEPENDENCE

A case study on how the independence of NGOs is affected by the Dutch Relief Alliance

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master in Political Science (MSc)

Julia M. Rombouts
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Abstract

Around 2014, there was a major change in the way the Dutch government organizes its humanitarian assistance, 14 Dutch humanitarian aid organizations formed an alliance, the Dutch Relief Alliance, in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a donor. There is a lot of literature that suggests how a partnership could have a negative effect on independence of organizations. However, most of this literature is focussed on huge organizations such as the United Nations. Therefore, the case of the Netherlands provides a missing piece of the puzzle – how individual donors organize relations with their own NGOs in the field of humanitarian assistance and how this affects the independence of these NGOs. Based on existing literature, I expected that the organizational independence would decrease as well as the intervening variable that the size of the organization will influence how much organizational independence the NGO loses. A qualitative single case study method was used and within this, deductive methods were applied to analyse semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the different members of the DRA. The research also left space to explore if new themes and concepts would evolve. The overall findings indicate that the relations between the NGOs and the government through the DRA is still a donor-receiver relationship. Nonetheless, with the development of the DRA, this group of NGOs got more freedom and responsibility on certain aspects than before. However, these findings are not articulated in the expectations derived from the literature, most likely because of specifics of the Dutch context.

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Lastly, two words to the reader: enjoy reading!

Table of contents

Acronyms

ACM	Acute Crisis Mechanism
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fun
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
DRAC	Dutch Relief Alliance Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IO	International Organization
IOB	Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie
JR	Joint Response
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD-DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and development
PCM	Protracted Crisis Mechanism
RTF	Response Task Force
SHO	Samenwerkende hulporganisaties
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

1.1 The Dutch Relief Alliance

On Tuesday the 4th of August 2020, 5 PM Dutch time, a large explosion took place in the port of Beirut, the capital of Lebanon. In a very short time, this news reached the whole world. Soon it became clear that the major explosion moved through the capital with a devastating force. Two days later, on the 6th of August, the dynamics of the explosion were still unknown, but a poorly stored deposit of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, which is a highly explosive chemical, was identified as the origin (BBC News, 2020). At this time, 5,000 injuries and 135 deaths had been confirmed, with the expectation that this would rise (Paauwe, 2020). An acute crisis like this asks for help and that was given. Many aid organizations started to set up programs to help in a destructive situation like this. One of the organizations that came to the rescue was the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA). This is an alliance of 14 Dutch humanitarian aid organizations in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

On the 6th of August, the DRA requested the government to start an Acute Crisis Joint Response in Beirut, Lebanon. On that same day, a group call with representatives of the 14 organizations was done to vote to proceed. Around 9 PM, a Brief intervention Outline was submitted to MFA. In this Brief intervention Outline the NGOs requested if MFA agreed with the response or disagreed with the response. Around the same time, the 14 organizations were asked if they would have interest in being part of the Joint Response and also more information was coming in. With that information the focus of the Joint Response was set up: Protection, Food Security and Livelihoods, Shelter, Multi-purpose cash, Health and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) (*Lebanon Joint Reponse*, 2020).

On Saturday the 8th of August, the organizations that wanted to participate submitted a concept note and these concept notes were sent to all the prospective Joint Response organizations. That same day, the prospective organizations did a scoring of all the Concept Notes, except their own. A few hours later, it is known which six organizations scored the highest and so may participate in the programme as well as that MFA has given a GO for the Joint Response. The next day, on the 9th of August, the last information was submitted and around 6 PM everything was confirmed and the Joint Response in Lebanon could start.

1.2 Research puzzle

The above short story illustrates the fastness of a collaborative response between multiple humanitarian aid organizations on an acute crisis in the Netherlands. Around 2014, there was a

major change in the way the Dutch government organizes its humanitarian assistance. From that moment on, the Dutch government entered into a new way of strategic partnership with an alliance consisting of, at that time, 12 humanitarian aid organizations. Although the above short story suggests that the DRA is able to operate effectively and efficiently, it is unknown how this partnership affects the organizational independence of the participating organizations.

Since the 1990s there has been a trend of exponential increase in the number of NGOs and many scholars have paid attention to challenging issues on the strategies and impact of NGOs. At the same time, NGOs all around the world have benefited from the increase in funding devoted to humanitarian assistance from the 1990s onwards. Moreover, a lot of donor governments, like the Netherlands, have increased the amount of humanitarian aid they channelled through national based NGOs (Anheier & Themudo, 2016, p. 109; Edwards & Hulme, 1996a, p. 962).

Consequently, one of the frequently raised problems in the existing literature with a government-NGO relationship is the expanding integration of NGOs into a social and political aid system (Nelson, 2006, p. 702). NGOs are supposed to be, as their name suggests, non-governmental. Several sources in academic literature have been critical of the dependence of NGOs through government funding and the potential constraints that come with this relationship (Ebrahim, 2003; Edwards & Hulme, 1996a; Fontes Filho, 2017; Hudock, 1999; Smillie et al., 1999; Sogge, 1996, 2002), they are concerned about the growth of the number of NGOs, which leads to increased competition for funding (Cooley & Ron, 2002, p. 6). In the literature, scholars talk extensively about the decrease of organizational independence when receiving money from a donor (Dahl, 1983; Haftel & Thompson, 2006; Kramer, 1994; Abbott & Snidal, 1998; Burt 1980; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003), strategic partnerships (Bebbington,1993; Clark, 1995; Farrington & Lewis, 1993; Fowler, 2000; Mohanty, 2002; Reith, 2010; Salamon, 1995) and alliances (Ahuja, 1998; Burt, 1997; Cullen et al., 2000; Frankel et al., 1996; Kale & Singh, 2009).

However, the Dutch context provides us with a unique concept, the DRA, in which 14 Dutch humanitarian aid organizations formed an alliance in partnership with the Dutch government as a donor. Therefore, the puzzling question that evolves is how does the way the Dutch government organizes its humanitarian assistance with the establishment of DRA affect independence of these Dutch NGOs? It might make coordination smoother as illustrated in the story above, but how does a change like this impact independence? There is a lot of literature that suggests how a partnership could have a negative effect on independence, but how does it apply to the DRA? The focus of this thesis will solely be on the DRA and will compare the independence of its members now to their independence before the DRA, given that it is a unique concept which

has not yet been written about extensively by scholars and marks a major change in the way in which the Netherlands organizes the disbursement of humanitarian aid.

This thesis will aim to answer the following research question:

How has the establishment of the Dutch Relief Alliance affected the ability of this group of Dutch humanitarian NGOs to operate independently?

1.3 Method

In order to understand and provide an answer to the research question, this thesis aims to bridge discussions in academic literature on organizational independence, strategic partnership, alliances and coordination in the Dutch context of humanitarian aid NGOs. To discover how the complex aforementioned relationship works, a qualitative single case study method was used. Within this single case study, deductive methods were applied in order to explore the relationship between the dependent and independent variable. In order to do this, a discussion of the existing literature is provided as well as an analysis with collected data through semi-structured interviews with the different members of the DRA to see how the establishment of the DRA affects independence. For the coding procedure of analysing the interviews an iterative approach was taken. The project first explored how the creation of the DRA affected NGO independence and tested the prediction(s) that: the DRA has led to a decrease in organizational independence as well as, that I also expected that the size of the organizations has influence on how much organizational independence NGOs loses on account of the DRA. However, the research also left space to explore if new themes and concepts would evolve. The group of respondents consisted of people with different positions in the organizations, varying from project officer, humanitarian team lead, former DRAC committee members, communication officer, senior partnership officer to CEO. This diverse group of correspondents provides a holistic understanding of the relationship between the Dutch government and the Dutch NGOs.

1.4 Scientific and societal relevance

The research is societally relevant because many discussions around the future of humanitarian NGOs end up revolving around matters of funding and risk management, and thus about the independence of the NGOs. NGOs working together in the humanitarian field on a national level is a recent development. The High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Finance in 2016, concluded that organizations generally compete for funding, which saps energy and duplicates efforts, and that

there are only a few exceptions of organizations working together (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, 2016). Focusing on a unique partnership such as the DRA gives insight to possible new ways of working in the humanitarian sector in the future. Lastly, this master thesis can be relevant for the humanitarian sector in Belgium, because at the time of writing this thesis different NGOs in Belgium are developing a funding mechanism which is based on the mechanism of the DRA.

The research question is scientifically relevant because, despite an increased amount of research on the efficiency and effects of humanitarian aid provided by NGOs in recipient countries along with the demand for transparency of the motives and strategies from NGOs, unfortunately, there is a clear lack of research on the relationship between NGOs and donor governments in the literature. For instance, most of the research that is done in the humanitarian field on donor-receiver relationships are about the classic debate between Médecins Sans Frontières (MFS), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations (UN). This gives a misleading picture since these are enormous organizations with big staff apparatus and with large amounts of resources available. Likely more common are unique funding arrangements and alliances like what we see with the DRA. Thus, while the results are likely not generalizable beyond the case of the Netherlands, they do provide insights into a missing piece of the puzzle – how individual donors organize relations with their own NGOs in the field of humanitarian assistance. At the same time, the DRA represents a major policy shift for the Dutch government and is thus important to study within its own right.

1.5 Findings

The findings indicate that the relations between the NGOs and the government through the DRA is still a donor-receiver relationship, indicated by the fact that the government still has a say in the decision-making process. Nonetheless, with the development of the DRA, the participating NGOs got more freedom and responsibility on certain aspects than before the DRA. For instance, NGOs now have more influence than before on where a response will be started, they have a say in the strategic development, influence on policies, and the ability to start an acute crisis response faster than before the DRA. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the mechanism has in itself posed certain constraints on the NGOs. The interviews suggest that the DRA has a downstream effect of moderation due to the tendency to find consensus between members. The interviews also suggest that the rules and criteria within the DRA mechanism may lead to left-over capacity at bigger organizations or constraints to participate for smaller organizations.

These above findings seem *not* to correspond with the expectations derived from the literature. The expectations are not articulated most likely because of specifics of the Dutch context. This unexpected finding in the analysis could perhaps be explained with something specifically Dutch, the Polder-model. The Polder-model is a Dutch model of consensus decision-making. While the interviews suggest that the workings of the DRA may be specific to Dutch culture and the Polder-model may play a role, the potential influence of the Polder-model was not included in this thesis and needs further research.

1.6 Structure

This thesis is structured as follows. The following chapter will illustrate the development of the DRA and how the DRA is structured. Next, in chapter three the theoretical framework will be discussed which provides an overview of literature on coordination, effectiveness, strategic partnership, organizational independence and alliances. Thereafter, the fourth chapter will demonstrate the research design, describing the justifications for the chosen methods of inquiry, the data that has been researched and the identified strengths and weaknesses. Chapter five demonstrates the empirical analysis of the collected data to test the expectations. Finally, in the concluding chapter the findings will be discussed together with the limitations of the findings and recommendations for further research.

2. The Dutch Relief Alliance

Before outlining the discussion that exists in the current literature, it is important to understand the structure of the DRA. Therefore, this chapter begins with an explanation of the context in which the DRA was established. Next, the current DRA members and the membership will be discussed. Followed by an explanation of the DRA as a funding mechanism and the governance structure. Lastly, an overview of the projects will be provided.

2.1 Background

Until 2013-2014, the preference in Dutch policy was for indirect funding of NGO activities, namely through UN joint funds. The (general) understanding was that this was the best way to ensure coordination of aid. In 2012, according to the 'Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie' (IOB, 2015), which is part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and conducts independent research into the effectiveness and efficiency of Dutch foreign policy, around 80 percent of the Dutch humanitarian aid budget was channelled through the UN (IOB evaluatie, 2015, p. 14). The main recipients were the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), for which funding is channelled through the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). These organizations could spend this contribution according to their own priorities (IOB evaluatie, 2015, p. 14). It is worth noting that a significant proportion of the UN funding is ultimately spent through NGOs, as in many cases the UN contracts NGOs as implementing partners.

Before 2013-2014, the Ministry largely ignored the experience and potential input of Dutch NGOs in the field of emergency assistance. Compared to other donors, the Dutch government contributed very little directly to NGO activities. Dutch support for NGOs in 2012, expressed as a percentage of total humanitarian aid, is much lower than that of other donors, only 4.5 %, while the United Kingdom 10%, Germany 26%, Denmark 28%, and Sweden 12% (Financial Tracking Service (FTS) / DARA, 2014, p. 29) At that time, it was only possible to submit individual proposals for funding to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Decision-making on subsidies took place on an ad hoc basis. Both the volume and predictability of funding were low. For instance, sixteen of the NGO files examined by IOB's analysis (2015) of NGO funding to Dutch NGOs showed that half of the projects were approved in the last quarter of the year. So, in practice, relations between the Ministry and the NGOs were not very intensive. The Dutch government had virtually ceased to be a relevant donor for the emergency assistance provided by Dutch humanitarian NGOs. Dutch NGOs therefore mostly had to obtain their funds from other sources.

After 2013, humanitarian aid returned to the top of the agenda again and various new initiatives were proposed in order to adjust policy to the new situation (IOB evaluatie, 2015). In this new situation, the humanitarian aid sector faced new challenges, such as the expanding scale of humanitarian crises in Syria and South Sudan, as well as the challenge of long-term refugees and displaced persons (IOB evaluatie, 2015). These events called for adjustments in the traditional approach of humanitarian aid by donors. The government's ambitions changed and the Minister wanted to adapt the policy to the new circumstances. Cooperation with Dutch NGOs was sought more actively than in previous years. The Ministry wanted to use the qualities and experiences of NGOs to shape humanitarian policy.

On 19 September 2014, the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation wrote a letter containing an overview of the policy update. She notes that the sharply increased need for humanitarian aid and the complexity of armed conflicts were putting pressure on the existing humanitarian system. The way in which aid was delivered had to be reconsidered in order to increase its effectiveness (Ploumen, 2014). The Minister proposed a substantial increase in Dutch humanitarian aid funding. For the period 2014 - 2017, on top of the regular budget for relief, an additional €570 million would be made available in a separate fund, the Relief Fund. In 2014, €100 million of the Relief Fund budget was already spent on, among others, Syrian refugees, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Northern Iraq, the Ebola crisis and an additional contribution to the ICRC (IOB evaluatie, 2015, p. 93). For the period of 2015-2017, in addition to extra expenditure for the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the ICRC, 120 million was also reserved for Dutch NGOs, both for rapid onset in case of natural disasters as well as flexible onset in case of chronic crises. While spending via the UN is still the majority, with the creation of the Relief Fund, there would be a shift from 4,5% of spending through Dutch NGOs in 2009-2014, towards 19,5% of the funding (Financial Tracking Service (FTS) / DARA, 2014).

The significant increase in funding shows that the government had high ambitions to improve the coordination and effectiveness of humanitarian aid in the Dutch environment. However, even before the new impulse in humanitarian aid funding, both the IOB evaluation of Dutch humanitarian aid of 2006, and the peer reviews of 2006 and 2011 by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC) were already critical on the capacity of the staffing of the humanitarian aid department of the government (IOB, 2006; OECD-DAC, 2006, 2011). Around 2013, the government's ambitions were still not in line with the organization and capacity for implementing the new policy.

The main points of critique were that the humanitarian aid cluster consisted mainly of general policy staff instead of humanitarian aid experts resulting in a lack of thematic expertise,

there was a high turnover of staff within the department which limited the continuity and build-up of knowledge, and the staff spent a lot of time approving subsidies instead of also devoting time to strategic policy development and defining policy lines for the medium and long term (IOB, 2015, p. 45). From 2014 onwards, steps were taken by the humanitarian department of the government. For instance, in 2014 it became possible to recruit a humanitarian aid specialist externally on a temporary basis (IOB, 2015, p. 45).

At the end of 2014, a group of 12 NGOs submitted a proposal with the objectives and expected results and the structure of this new NGO facility, named the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA). The newly created funding mechanism became operative on 24 April 2015. The composition of the DRA allows participating NGOs to jointly respond to large-scale protracted crises and acute emergencies in devastating international crises in a timely and effective manner (*Dutch Relief Alliance | An Alliance to Enhance Humanitarian Aid*, 2015).

For the funding of their relief activities, Dutch NGOs must submit a joint proposal for a specific crisis, led by one organization (the lead). In addition, both the Ministry and the NGOs can submit proposals for grants for other crises. The first proposal was approved in 2014 for activities in South Sudan, for which a group of eleven NGOs, led by one lead NGO, received a sum of €11 million.

It is important to note that government funding is not the only funding that the NGOs receive. NGOs have different funding streams, for instance, membership dues, donations from private sector companies and donations from philanthropic foundations. This thesis focuses only on the government funding that these NGOs get, since funding from the government is most criticized for affecting the independence of NGOs.

2.2 Membership and the members

The main conditions for eligibility for DRA funding have been laid down in the decision of the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation on 1 December 2017, no. MINBUZA-2017.7963, establishing policy rules and a subsidy ceiling for subsidies under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Subsidy Scheme 2006 (Emergency Assistance Dutch NGOs 2018-2021). This legislation states that, firstly, the NGO must be registered in the Netherlands, it must not be set up by a public authority nor legally or de facto affiliated to a public authority and it must have a legal personality under civil law. Second, the NGO should have a proven, good track record in humanitarian aid delivery. Third, the NGO must be in possession of a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission. The FPA serves as a threshold criterion for the admission of experienced organizations that have demonstrated that they operate efficiently and lawfully. Lastly,

in order to receive funding, the NGO should be a member of the DRA. This membership is open to organizations that meet at least the above requirements.

Currently, 14 aid organizations are members of the DRA: CARE Nederland; Cordaid; Dorcas; Oxfam Novib; Plan International Nederland; Help a Child; Save the Children; SOS Children's Villages The Netherlands; Stichting Vluchteling; Tearfund NL; Terre des Hommes; War Child; World Vision; and ZOA. The DRA consists of 14 diverse members. Between these organizations there is a lot of diversity in size, structure, expertise and capabilities. Several of the members are original Dutch entities while the vast majority are part of a wider international organization or movement.

2.3 Governance structure

The rules of engagement of the DRA are established by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This involves the governance structure, processes and responsibilities, and decision-making. Decisions are made on the basis of consensus in the first place and with a two-thirds majority option, if no consensus can be reached. Furthermore, the MoU describes a set of regulations which provide a detailed description of the roles, frequency of meetings and responsibilities (Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) et al., 2016, p. 14).

The DRA is not a legal entity in itself. In brief, there is an overarching agreement between the member NGOs to work jointly in receiving funds and delivering humanitarian response. They do this through grants that are awarded by the MFA for a specific crisis to a single lead NGO. In other words, MFA signs a contract with the organization that is lead. That lead NGO is responsible for the sub-awards with other members that work on the same response. The funding agreements are negotiated between the MFA and lead NGOs for each crisis (Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) et al., 2016, p. 13). As such, the MFA only has contact with one organization for each Joint Response.

The DRA is considered as a response financing instrument that is divided into two funding windows and an additional support budget. The first funding window is the Protracted Crisis Mechanism (PCM) grant, which is around 70% of the total fund. The Protracted Joint Responses duration is a year and after a year the DRA can decide to continue in the same country or a new country can be chosen to start. DRA members are allowed to participate in a maximum of 3 protracted Joint Responses per year. The second funding window is called the Block Grant and is around 30% of the total fund. The Block Grant consists of two components. First, the Acute Crisis Mechanism (ACM), with a maximum duration of six months. The DRA is designed to provide a rapid response and therefore, the ACM is set up in a way that there is a commitment to rapid

processing of proposals and budgeting. In a sudden onset crisis, the timescales are designed to enable the Joint Response to start within 72 hours. A slow onset crisis on the other hand, will likely start within a minimum of one week up to a maximum of three weeks. After the partners decide that they want to start an Acute Crisis Joint Response, MFA is informed about their plans. Within three hours a Brief Intervention Outline is submitted to MFA for either a sudden onset emergency (response for a GO or no GO within 48 hours), or for a slow onset emergency (response may take longer than 48 hours). After 6 to 8 hours an informal call will be done with MFA about the likelihood of a GO from the Minister. If the likelihood is high, then contracts and transfers will be prepared.

Second, the Innovation Fund, which is managed by the Dutch Innovation Fund (DIF) manager; an independent consultant hired by the DRA. The DIF manager together with the Innovation Working Group (IWG) presents a call for proposals for the members. Lastly, there is also an additional support budget from MFA which subsidizes the DRA committee (DRAC), various working groups and task forces.

The DRA is established to collaborate together on a set of joint objectives and this is supported through the DRAC and various working groups. The role of the DRAC is the daily management of the DRA. The DRAC consists of a Chair, who ensures the proper functioning of the alliance together with the Vice-chair and a Crisis Coordinator that oversees the protracted and acute crisis projects. The positions of Vice-chair and Crisis Coordinator are fulfilled through annual elections. The position of Chair is fulfilled by the Vice-chair of the previous year. Any DRA member is electable for a position within the DRAC but each partner organization can only have one position in the DRAC at any given time. Throughout the year there are three particularly important meetings during which key decisions are made: the Partner's Meeting, the CEOs Meeting, and the Annual Assembly.

Both for Acute and Protracted crises, DRA members need to do an entry test in order to be able to submit a proposal. One of the criteria of the entry test is that the humanitarian aid portfolio must equal at least €1 million in the last year. Furthermore, a member must have sectoral expertise, geographical presence and access in the country where the program will be set up, and a good track record within that specific region. The partners that meet the entry criteria are allowed to write a proposal. The proposals are scored by the other DRA members that also submitted a proposal for the same call. Participating organizations do not include their own proposal in this scoring process. Figure 1 on the next page provides an overview of the DRA structure.

Subsidizer

Ministry of
Foreign Affairs

Support Budget
DRAC+WGs/TFs

PCM Grant

Block Grant

Dutch Relief Alliance
Est. 2015

Signatories to the
Partnership Agreement:

Care Nederland
Stichting Cordaid
Dorcas Aid International
Stichting Oxfam Novib
PLAN Nederland
Save the Children
Stichting TEAR fund Nederland
Terre des Hommes
Stichting Vluchteling
Stichting War Child
Stichting World Vision Nederland
Stichting ZOA
Stichting Red een Kind
Stichting SOS Kinderdorpen

For the implementation of:

1. Protracted Crisis

Project duration:
12 – 24 months

2. Acute Crisis
(slow (3 wks) or rapid onset (72 hrs)

Project duration:
6 months

3. Innovation

Project duration:
24 months

Governance structure

Daily Management

Decision-making

Consensus, otherwise:
QMV of 2/3 of partners
Quorum: 2/3 of all partners

Dutch Relief Alliance Committee (DRAC)

Chair:
Ensures the proper functioning of
the alliance together with the
Vice-chair

Vice-chair

Crisis Coordinator:
Oversees the protracted &
acute crisis projects

Partners Meeting
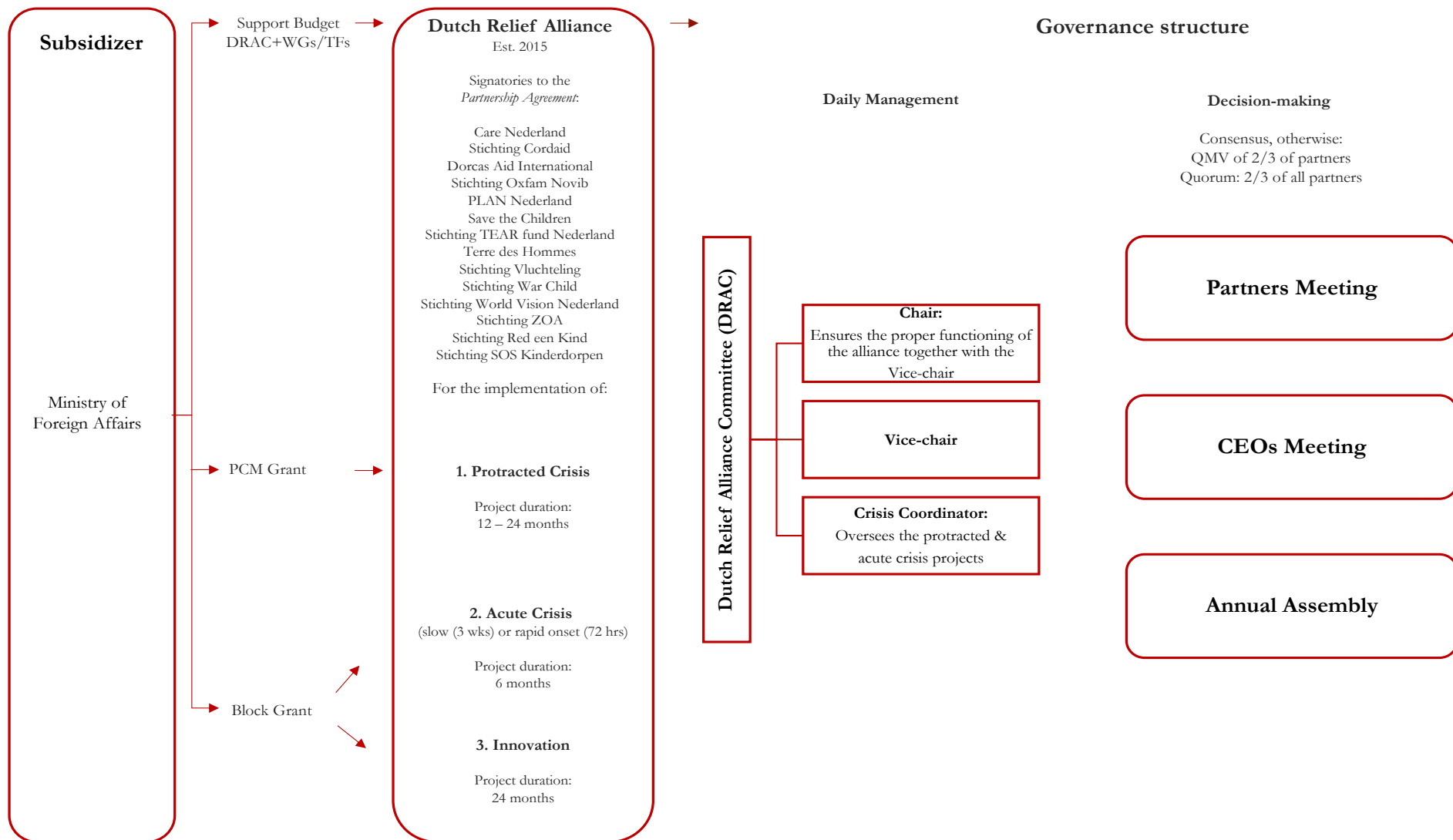
CEOs Meeting

Annual Assembly

Figure 1. DRA structure

2.4 Projects

The DRA has three types of programs: Acute Crisis Joint Response, Protracted Joint Response and Innovation programs. All these projects consist of different themes, such as, protection, health, water, sanitation and hygiene, food security and livelihoods and shelter. Although all the Joint Response programs have to devote a certain percentage to innovation, the DRA also has a separate Innovation Fund where organizations get the change to test new innovative programs. The figures below provide an overview of current and previous DRA projects. Furthermore, the figures show who are the leads of the projects and the other participating organizations. Note that all the mentioned programs are retrieved from the DRA website. Not all projects between 2015 and 2017 are listed on the website (*Dutch Relief Alliance | An Alliance to Enhance Humanitarian Aid*, 2021).

Acute Joint Responses

Where	Lead organization	Organizations	Date
Mozambique	Plan International Nederland	Oxfam Novib, Care Nederland, Cordaid, Tearfund Nederland, SOS Kinderdorpen	May 14, 2021 – November, 14, 2021
South Sudan	Save the Children	Cordaid, ZOA, Dorcas, Tearfund Nederland	April 15, 2021 – October 14, 2021
Ethiopia Tigray	Cordaid	Save the Children, SOS Kinderdorpen, Stichting Vluchteling, Tear nederland, ZOA	February 4, 2021 – August 3, 2021
Burkina Faso	Plan International Nederland	Cordaid, Plan International Nederland, Save the Children, Stichting Vluchteling and Terre des Hommes	December 1, 2019 – May 31, 2020
Lebanon	Dorcas	Cordaid, CARE, Dorcas, Save the Children, Stichting Vluchteling, World Vision	August 9, 2020 – February 8, 2021
Ethiopia & Somalia	SOS Children's Villages The Netherlands	Cordaid, Dorcas, ICCO Cooperation, Oxfam Novib, Save the Children, Tearfund, ZOA	April 22, 2020 –October 21, 2020
Vietnam	Plan International Nederland	Plan International Nederland, Oxfam Novib, CARE, World Vision	November 5, 2020 – May 4, 2021
Zambia & Zimbabwe	Cordaid	CARE, ICCO Cooperation, Oxfam Novib, Plan International Nederland, Save the Children, SOS, World Vision	March 5, 2020 – November 30, 2020
Cameroon	Stichting Vluchteling	CARE Nederland, Plan International Nederland	June 13, 2019 – December 12, 2019
Malawi & Mozambique	Oxfam Novib	CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Save the Children, Tearfund NL and World Vision	March 22, 2019 – September 21, 2019
North West Syria	CARE Nederland	Stichting Vluchteling, World Vision	February 20, 2020 – August 19, 2020
South Sudan	Save the Children	Plan International Nederland, Help a Child, Tear Netherlands and ZOA	November 26, 2019 – May 25, 2020
Venezuela	SOS Kinderdorpen	Cordaid, Plan International Nederaland, Save The Children, Terre des Hommes	February 26, 2019 – August 25, 2019
Sulawesi (Indonesia)	CARE Nederland	Cordaid, Oxfam Novib, Plan International Nederland, Save the Children, Tearfund NL, World Vision and ZOA.	October 5, 2018 – May 14, 2019
Bangladesh	Oxfam Novib	CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Plan International Nederland, Save the Children	November 1, 2017 – April 30, 2018
Zimbabwe	Oxfam Novib	Cordaid, ICCO&KiA/ACT, Plan International Nederland, Stichting Vluchteling, Terre des Hommes, World Vision	July 1, 2016 – December 31, 2016
Somalia, Somaliland& Puntland	CARE Nederland	Dorcas, Save the Children, Tearfund NL and ZOA.	July 1, 2016 – December 31, 2016
Vanuatu	World Vision	Save the Children, CARE Nederland	March 31, 2015 – December 31, 2015
Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone	Oxfam Novib	CARE, Cordaid, Plan International Nederland, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes and ZOA	January 1, 2015 – September 30, 2015
Nepal	Oxfam Novib	CARE Nederland, Cordaid, ICCO Cooperation, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, Tearfund NL and World Vision	April 15, 2015 – December 31, 2015

Figure 2. Acute Joint Responses (source: https://dutchrelief.org/joint-responses/)

Protracted Joint Responses

Where	Lead organization	Organizations	Date
Central African Republic	Cordaid	Plan International Nederland, ICCO, SOS Kinderdorpen, Stichting Vluchteling	January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2021
Democratic Republic Congo	World Vision	CARE Nederland, Help a Child, Tearfund NL, World Vision, Stichting Vluchteling	January, 1, 2019 – December 31, 2021
Nigeria	Save the Children	ICCO Cooperation, Tearfund NL, Terre des Hommes, ZOA	January, 1 2019 – December 31, 2021
Somalia	Oxfam Novib	Red een Kind, SOS Kinderdorpen, World Vision.	January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2021
South Sudan	Save the Children	CARE, Plan International Nederland, Dorcas, Help a Child, Tear Netherlands	January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2021
Sudan	Plan International Nederland	World Vision and ICCO Cooperation.	January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2021
Syria	ZOA	Cordaid, Dorcas, Oxfam Novib, Terre des Hommes	January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2021
Yemen	CARE Nederland	Cordaid, Stichting Vluchteling / IRC, Oxfam, Save the Children, ZOA	January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2021
Afghanistan	Cordaid	Oxfam Novib, Stichting Vluchteling, Terre des Hommes, ZOA	January 1, 2018 – December 31, 2019
Ukraine	Dorcas	Terre des Hommes en SOS Kinderdorpen	January 1, 2018 – February 28, 2019
Iraq	Terre des Hommes	Dorcas, ICCO & Kerk in Actie/ACT Alliance, Oxfam Novib, Tearfund NL, World Vision ZOA.	January 1, 2018 – December 31, 2018
Ethiopia	World Vision	CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Dorcas, ICCO and Kerk in Actie, Oxfam Novib, Plan International, Save the Children, Stichting Vluchteling, Tearfund NL, ZOA	November 1, 2015 – December 31, 2016

Figure 3. Protracted Joint Response (source: https://dutchrelief.org/joint-responses/)

Innovation projects

Where	Lead organization	Theme	Date
Uganda	Cordaid	Renewable energy	January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021
Uganda	CARE Nederland	Renewable energy	January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021
Uganda	Save the Children	Renewable energy	January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021
Ethiopia	Stichting Vluchteling	Safety & Protection	December 1, 2019 – May 31, 2021
Colombia & Uganda	War Child	Safety & Protection	November 1, 2019 – October 31, 2021
South Sudan	Help a Child	Safety & Protection	December 1, 2019 – November 30, 2021
Democratic Republic Congo	Tearfund NL	Safety & Protection	October 20, 2019 – June 19, 2021
Multiple countries	Save the Children	Safety & Protection	November 1, 2019 – April 30, 2021
Philippines	Oxfam Novib (lead) & Plan International Nederland	Cash Programming	January 1, 2019 – February 28, 2020
Netherlands (pilot)	Dorcas	Cash Programming	January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2020
-	ZOA	Safety & Protection	December 1, 2018 – December 31, 2019
Multiple countries	Stichting Vluchteling (lead), Save the Children, CARE Nederland	Smart use of Data	December 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020
Democratic Republic Congo	Help a Child	Safety & Protection	January 1, 2019 – August 31, 2020

Figure 4. Innovation projects (source:https://dutchrelief.org/innovation/)

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter lays the foundation for this thesis' approach to understanding and analysing the research question as it describes the conceptual, empirical and practical contributions in literature. There will be a focus on literature that helps to discern the different aspects of the relationship between the Dutch NGOs and the Dutch government. First, all of the literature forms a base on which expectations are deduced to lay a foundation for the empirical analysis. To be able to follow this, I will therefore start with the expectations and justify them through the literature discussion. After the expectations a brief overview is provided of the literature on coordination and effectiveness since this seems to have been the motive to establish the DRA. Next, an overview of the literature on strategic partnership and organizational independence will be provided in order to comprehend the challenging and complex relationship between the Dutch government and the NGOs. Lastly, a brief overview of the literature on alliances is provided.

In light of this thesis, the definition of NGOs and humanitarian aid will be as follows. An NGO is "an organization that tries to achieve social or political aims but is not controlled by a government" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Humanitarian aid "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).

3.2 Expectations

Based on the literature discussed below, in this project I tested the prediction that: The DRA has led to a decrease in organizational independence. While coordination may have increased, I expect that that resulted in a decrease in organizational independence. As mentioned in the literature discussion, NGOs are often accused of getting 'too close' to donors. The expected consequence of a closer relationship with the donor government is that they become more exposed to external control and influence that potentially leads to weakening their organizational independence. For instance, NGOs will follow the donor agenda in order to get more funding and the donor will put restrictions on how the money is spent.

Furthermore, I expect that the size of the organization will influence how much organizational independence the NGO loses on account of the DRA. In other words, I predict that the size of an organization is an intervening variable on the independence of participating NGOs. This prediction is based on the fact that the DRA consists of a very diverse group of

NGOs, some of which are much bigger than others. It is expected that these bigger partners have more capacity and resources to compete for funding within the DRA, when compared to smaller members. Therefore, bigger organizations can operate more independently.

3.3 Coordination and effectiveness

With the establishment of the DRA, the government wanted to increase the coordination and effectiveness of providing humanitarian aid. As described in the previous chapter, the Dutch government increased humanitarian aid funding from 2014 onward. This increase in funding led to new projects which required a lot of effort and coordination. Due to a lack of staff capacity and expertise, cooperation was sought with Dutch NGOs through establishment of the DRA, in order to streamline this coordination process.

It is important to mention that in this thesis, coordination is considered differently when compared to the description that is often used in INGO and conflict studies literature, i.e., with a focus on local coordination between INGOs and local actors. Instead, in this thesis, coordination is described as is customary in public administration literature. In public administration literature, coordination is considered as a response towards facing complex problems (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, p. 752). There are a variety of different ways of approaching coordination and different levels of coordination throughout the literature (see Bouckaert et al. 2010; Metcalfe 1994; Peters 2015). However, two things that most definitions have in common, according to Cejudo and Michel (2017) is that coordination has clearly outlined rules and responsibilities for all the actors that are involved, and that these actors exchange knowledge and information (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, p. 752). These described responsibilities are necessary so that each involved actor knows about the different activities and functions that should be done to realize particular objectives (Streeter et al., 1986; Cejudo & Michel, 2017). Nevertheless, to let coordination occur it is important to define a set of rules or procedures that state how actors should collaborate (Streeter et al., 1986). Furthermore, an important feature of coordination is the sharing of information. As stated by Wheately (2006, p.107), if there is an inadequate sharing of information and knowledge, the involved members will not be capable of establishing coordinated solutions to problems.

For this thesis, the definition of coordination that will be used stems from Cejudo and Michel (2017) who provide an extensive overview of different definitions of coordination in the public administration literature. The following definition will be used: "coordination is a process in which members of different organizations define tasks, allocate responsibilities, and share information in order to be more efficient when implementing the policies and programs they select to solve public problems" (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, p. 752).

Thus, the Dutch government gave high priority to improving the coordination of humanitarian aid with the expectation that this would enhance its effectiveness. The findings of Lecy et al (2011) show that there is an absence of a shared definition in the literature on organizational effectiveness (Lecy et al., 2011, p. 438). For this thesis, when referred to effectiveness the notion of project impact is meant (see Eisinger, 2002). The reason for this is that this is the kind of effectiveness that the government wanted to improve. In other words, the government wanted to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid on the ground, i.e., improve its impact. However, whether the effectiveness improved with the development of the DRA is a whole other topic for research and not in line with the research question of this thesis.

3.4 Strategic partnership

Fundraising is seen as one of the most common management difficulties NGOs face. Similar to other organizations, NGOs need resources to realize their mandate (Anheier & Themendo, 2016). NGOs are attracted to donor programs with the possibility of getting funding (Nelson, 2006). Therefore, NGOs have to enter into contracts to gain resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). In order to be able to understand what impact government funding has on the independence of NGOs, the conceptualization of the relationship between the government and NGOs must first be looked into.

There is quite an amount of work in the NGO literature and non-profit literature that touches upon different elements of the government-NGO relationship, for example, Mohanty (2002), Farrington and Lewis (1993), Bebbington (1993), Clark, (1995), Young (2000), Fowler (2000), Reith (2010), Salamon (1995). From the diverse range of literature, it becomes clear that many different forms of relationship exist. For instance, Young (2000, p. 150) proposes different types of relationship between the government and non-profit organizations: "supplementary, complementary or adversarial." He states that different types of relationship are not mutually exclusive and that countries will exhibit a combination of the different forms. Young's model shows that the different kinds of relationships result in different types of independence. This research will only focus on one of the types of relationship that he proposes, namely, complementary, i.e., strategic partnership.

The term partnership indicates that different groups are working together to achieve common goals. However, different authors criticize partnerships for being complicated relationships. It is argued by scholars, like Reith (2010), that partnerships lead to an imbalance of power and inequality. Which results in one 'partner' having control over another (Reith, 2010, p. 447). A commonly cited description of the different qualities a partnership can entail is described

by Fowler (2000), and this will be the definition used throughout this thesis: "a joint commitment to long-term interaction, shared responsibility for achievement and also failure, reciprocal obligation, equality, mutuality and balance of power" (Fowler, 2000, p. 3).

Since the introduction of the "New Poverty Agenda" (Edwards & Hulme, 1996a, p. 961), donors are engaging more into partnerships with NGOs. The development of this agenda resulted in NGOs obtaining a more noticeable role in the delivery of aid. From the 1970s onwards, donors saw the importance of NGOs and they were often viewed as more efficient providers of services to the poor than the government (Edwards & Hulme, 1996a; Reith, 2010). Donors were able to use and control NGOs to pursue their own agenda. According to Reith (2010) have the rise of donor control combined with the wish of NGOs to grow, resulted in more NGO funding by donors. Since a larger share of the total NGO budgets came from donors, they became more dependent on these donors and vulnerable to donors pushing their agenda through donations (Wallace, 1997; Agg, 2006).

Stirrat and Henkel (1997) make some important points in their analysis about giving and receiving donations. They question whether gifts are ever truly unselfish, because giving a gift directly creates a relationship. They state that the partnership becomes unstable when the "act of receiving is hedged with conditionality at best, while at worst the gift may become a form of patronage and a means of control" (Stirrat & Henkel, 1997, p. 72). In other words, this proposes that something is demanded in return and conditionalities are tied to how the money can be spent. According to Stirrat and Henkel (1997), this creates a hierarchy of power within the partnership.

With an increase in the number of different NGOs competing for funding, money becomes a bigger concern as well as how relationships are established between the donor and NGOs (Reith, 2010, p. 449). There is a pressure on NGOs to make sure that they meet the criteria and demands of the donor. Right now, there is an extremely competitive environment and therefore, there will always be another NGO who fulfils all the requirements of the donor (Reith, 2010, p. 449). According to Cooley and Ron (2002), the danger of competition is that "interests will be shaped, often unintentionally, by material incentives" (Cooley & Ron, 2002, p. 13). It is important to understand this competitive context in which NGOs operate, as this can lead them with barely any choice other than accepting the funding, including any attached constraints. This could even result in a situation in which NGOs become "servants of an externally imposed agenda" (Commins, 1997, p. 154, cited in Reith, 2010, p. 449), with the consequence that this is at the expense of their own ambitions.

Furthermore, the concern about corruption and misappropriation evolves frequently in discussions about aid effectiveness, with a common notion that when aid is ineffective this is an

outcome of the misuse by the receiver (Sogge, 2002). There is a prevailing belief that aid without conditions will have little success, especially amongst donors (Wallace et al., 2007). The restrictions are regularly defined by major agencies, such as the UN, World Bank and IMF. The idea behind the conditions is that risks are minimized for the allocating actors, in this case governments, so that they are protected from blame or accusations of failure (Edwards & Hulme, 1996b).

Attributing conditions to funding, in the words of Wallace et al. (2007, p. 24) "implies a lack of confidence that donors and recipients share goals and intentions and so cannot lead to the building of strong partnerships". It is the donor that has control over the funding and the donor can, by means of constraints, pursue their own agenda to which an NGO has to adjust. The NGO can decide how they correspond with the agenda of the donor. If they do not correspond, the consequence probably leads to rejection of funding. Reith (2010) argues that often, NGOs fail to question the intentions of donors because of the fear of losing funding. Donors, on their side, also leave little room for flexibility and communication in the partnership (Reith, 2010, p. 450). NGOs are embedded in a contractual and competitive environment (Cooley & Ron, 2002, p. 14). An institutional constraint that arises in an environment where multiple NGOs compete for the same funding, is that the more actors there are to compete for a contract, the more insecurity there is on the position of an NGO (Cooley, & Ron, 2002, p. 17). Consequently, according to Cooley & Ron (2002), some organizations may attempt to undermine competitors and hide information.

3.5 Organizational independence

There is a critical tone throughout the literature on partnerships and the relationship between NGOs and governments. According to literature, NGOs are becoming more exposed to external control and influences that potentially lead to the development of deforming their mandate and weakening their organizational independence (e.g., Ebrahim, 2003; Edwards & Hulme, 1996b; Hudock, 1999; Smillie et al., 1999). In general, the tension of most literature is the fear that NGOs will become public sector contractors, incapable of remaining true to their standards and subverting their independence as a result (Edwards & Hulme, 1996).

But then, what is meant by organizational independence? After analysing various literature about NGO independence and related concepts (i.e., power, autonomy and interdependence), it became clear that organizational independence and organizational autonomy are often utilized as synonyms. Various definitions for organizational independence and organizational autonomy exist in the literature (Dahl, 1983; Haftel & Thompson, 2006; Kramer, 1994; Abbott & Snidal, 1998; Burt 1980; Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003).

The definition that will be used throughout this thesis, when referred to organizational independence, is a definition that provides a combination of the definitions from Dahl (1983) and Burt (1980). This combined definition was described in the PhD thesis of da Silva Themudo (2004). Thus, when I refer to independence, NGO independence or organizational independence I mean: "Organizational independence from another actor is the ability and freedom to follow its own mission and values without external restrictions from that actor (i.e., the government in this study)" (da Silva Themudo, 2004, p. 58).

One part of the definition stems from the famous definition of independence by the political scientist Robert Dahl (1983, p. 16), he proposes that in order to be independent "in a political sense is to be not under control of another." The other part of the definition comes from a definition by Burt (1980) which is possibly one of the most used concepts in the resource dependence tradition and, therefore, often used in the organizational theory literature. Burt (1980) defines independence as "the ability to pursue and realize interests without constraint from other actors in the system" (p. 893). To put it another way, it is the freedom from outside restrictions to allow an organization to follow its own mission and values (da Silva Themudo, 2004, p. 57). This definition is about the relationship between an organization and other actors in their environment. The most crucial part of independence refers to the ability to operate without restrictions, because external actors will frequently try to influence organizations (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003, pp. 261-262).

A complication with defining organizational independence is that, as described above, often the two terms organizational independence and organizational autonomy are used as synonyms. When one has a closed look at the two, it seems that the term independence is frequently used in describing a relation between two actors and autonomy as a more general relationship among organizations and their organizational environment, which could consist of many different relationships. For this study, I will focus on independence, for the reason that it reflects my objective better. Which is to analyse one relationship, namely, between the Dutch NGOs and the government as a donor. Instead of autonomy in a wider environment.

3.6 Alliance

In the aforementioned part, the definition of partnership was given. However, in the context of the DRA there is not only a partnership between the Dutch NGOs and the government but also a strategic alliance between 14 Dutch humanitarian aid organizations. It is important to mention this concept separately because in the literature there is a tendency to use different terms for strategic alliance, for instance, partnerships (Frankel et al., 1996). However, in this context these

two should be seen differently and alliance refers to the 14 Dutch humanitarian aid NGOs. The definition for alliance that will be used in this thesis is: "An alliance reflects a process whereby participants willingly modify their basic business practices to reduce duplication and waste while facilitating improved performance" (Frankel et al., 1996, p. 48).

Over the last two decades more alliances emerged and they became part of the strategic business plan of many organizations and firms (Kale & Singh, 2009). Alliances help in increasing effectiveness (Ahuja, 1998), they have financial benefits and potential risks could be shared (Cullen et al., 2000). Often organizations spend a lot of time on evaluating the risks and the financial benefits, i.e., the hard, functional side of alliances (Cullen et al., 2000, p. 223). However, according to different scholars, an alliance will most likely not succeed when no attention is paid to the soft side of the alliance. With the soft side of the alliance the mutual trust and commitment is meant (Burt, 1997; Rousseau et al., 1998; Hosmer, 1995). According to research by Cullen et al. (2000) on trust and commitment in strategic alliances, managers of both successful and failed alliances identified the importance of building mutual trust and commitment. "No matter how mutually beneficial and logical the venture may seem at its start, without trust and commitment, the alliance will fail entirely or, at the very least, it will fail to reach its strategic potential" (Cullen et al., 2000, p. 224).

Furthermore, another important aspect of strategic alliances are the characteristics of the members of the alliance. The selection of the members has an effect on the performance of the alliance. The members that are part of the alliance should be able to make a contribution and have the desirable capabilities and experience (Hitt et al., 2000). Moreover, according to Hitt et al. (2000) this is not only beneficial for competitiveness, but also important for the success of an alliance. Another characteristic that seems very important is a certain level of partner similarity in resource and capacity, because too much partner difference could potentially lead to deficient trust and causing instability in the alliance (Kale & Singh, 2009).

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter will demonstrate the research design used to answer the research question. First, the choice for a qualitative single case study with a deductive theory building approach will be discussed. After that, I will explain the choice for semi-structured interviews and the interview design. Followed by explaining the selection of samples. Next, I will explain how the data was collected and analysed. Lastly, I reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of this research design.

4.2 Qualitative single case study research

In the social sciences, there are extensive discussions about whether quantitative or qualitative methods are more convincing to use. Quantitative research methods are mostly trying to measure social phenomena through numbers and set variables and utilize consistent variables appropriate for large samples (Silverman, 2019). On the other hand, qualitative research seeks to understand and explore cases in a particular context by means of in-depth interpretation of experiences and opinions (Bryman, 2016). For this research a qualitative single case study method was chosen and more precisely, a deductive method theory-building was used to explore the relationship between the dependent and independent variable. A case study is defined as an empirical research that investigates "a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (Yin, 1981, p. 98) or as the intensive study of "a spatially delimited phenomenon" (Gerring, 2016, p. 19). Furthermore, a case study can be observed at a certain point in time, or over a specific period of time. In other words, case studies are proposed to provide a level of detail and understanding.

The unique single case used for this research shows an important change in which the Dutch government organizes its humanitarian assistance and is thus important to study within its own right. Since there is no other case available, a comparison with how it was previously organized in the Netherlands will be done. Furthermore, this single case study is relevant since we do not know the implications of it or how it affects certain things, like organizational independence. Moreover, it is also not clear what other intervening variables there might be. Next, this single case study allows me to question existing and old theoretical relationships and discover new ones, because a more in-depth research is done (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Boddy, 2016). Lastly, this single case study can be used in order to provide "reliable indications for the directions in which future research can go" (Boddy, 2016).

Finally, taking the arguments above into account, a deductive theory building method was used. Since, the expectations of this research were based on existing literature and from there a

research strategy was designed to test these expectations. Building theory from a case study is a research strategy in which one or more cases are used to get an understanding of "the dynamics present within single settings" in order to make theoretical concepts based on empirical evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). This method seems most suitable as this allowed me to explore the complex relationship between NGOs and the Dutch government and left space for potential intervening variables that were not considered at first based on the existing literature.

4.3 Semi-Structured Interview

For the purpose of answering the research question, the conducting of semi-structured interviews was chosen as a suitable research method. This method allowed for structured, open-ended questions and follow up questions to a small sample, as well as looking at various experiences and opinions concerning the research. Furthermore, the interviews provided more in-depth and extensive data which was desirable for a topic that is politically sensitive and complex. All of the respondents were asked the same questions with standard probes. An interview protocol was developed that consisted of open-ended questions and pre-designed probes, as this allowed me to get at the causal relationship of inquiry (see appendix A). However, there was also plenty of space for things that were overlooked at first during the interview.

4.3.1 Interview design

The structure of the interviews ensured that important theoretical issues were covered throughout all of the interviews. However, throughout an interview it frequently happened that follow up questions were asked and new probes were added to these questions. The questions asked in the interviews were grounded on the literature review and the expectations. Depending on the expertise and position of the respondent in the organization or the DRA, questions were slightly altered. However, a base protocol was constructed and stayed the same throughout all interviews.

The interview consisted of four parts, with a total of nineteen questions. The questions were asked in an order that seemed most suitable for a good build-up for the interview. However, it happened occasionally that the order was not strictly followed. The reason is that due to the open and semi-structured nature of this research, it felt right to let the respondents respond to the questions in an unrestricted way, in order to give them the space to answer everything that came into their mind. Throughout several interviews, themes that were planned for a later part of the interview were brought up by the respondent at an earlier stage. At those moments, the questions were advanced concerning that specific theme. The interview protocol was therefore mostly used

as a supporting tool to make sure that all areas of the research were touched upon and to make sure that all respondents were asked the same questions (Patton, 2002, p. 347).

In the first part of each interview, general questions were asked that concerned the respondent's job and his or her responsibilities. How long a respondent had been working for the NGO and whether they also worked for another DRA partner in the past was also asked. In the second part, respondents were asked if they could explain the development of the DRA and how funding streams worked previously. The third part consisted of questions specifically designed to get data to explore the concept of partnership and effectiveness in context of the DRA as well as the first expectation described in chapter three. The fourth part was designed to get data on both expectations 1 and 2. It should be taken into account that throughout the whole interview protocol the research question and expectations could be found. For this reason, the interviews were analysed mainly in full and not per section. The interviews were conducted mostly in Dutch in order to allow native Dutch speakers to speak more freely. A few of the interviews were conducted in English. The English version of the interview protocol can be found in appendix A.

4.4 Selection of sample

The universe of cases of this project are member organizations of the DRA. All of the 14 members, as well as MFA, have been reached out to by email. In the email, I asked if they were willing to participate in an interview of maximum 45 minutes. The email stated that the research was about the partnership between MFA and the DRA and how this partnership had changed over time.

From most of the members, a quick response was received. The email was sent to employees with different responsibilities. Some respondents indicated that a colleague would be more suitable for the interview. Two organizations did not respond to the interview request, and one indicated that there was no one available due to limited staff capacity and a big workload. Unfortunately, after several attempts, no response came back from MFA. As such, a total of 14 respondents were interviewed from 11 different organizations: CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Oxfam Novib, Help a Child; Save the Children; SOS Children's Villages The Netherlands, Stichting Vluchteling, Terre des Hommes, War Child, World Vision, and ZOA.

Job titles of the respondents varied from project officer, humanitarian team lead, former DRAC members, communication officer, senior partnership officer to CEO. I tried to reach out to people with different responsibilities in order to have a variety of jobs resulting in a sample that covers a broad range of people. The humanitarian field is small and people often switch between jobs and positions. Therefore, most respondents felt more comfortable talking when they knew that the organization, they work for would not be mentioned throughout the analysis. As such,

anonymity was promised and respondents will not be mentioned by name or job title. In order to ensure anonymity, all the respondents are referred to (in random sequence) as: respondent 1, respondent 2, respondent 3 etc.

4.5 Data collection

Initially, the interviews were planned to be conducted within two weeks. However, after the first week of interviews the Samenwerkende hulporganisaties (SHO) (i.e., Giro 555) launched a campaign for raising money for COVID-19 vaccinations in developing countries. The consequence was that two interviews were cancelled and two rescheduled. Unfortunately, there was no time left to reschedule the cancelled interviews. The interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams and lasted 45 minutes on average. All interviews were recorded with an external recording device and recordings were transcribed word for word. Since most of the interviews were conducted in Dutch, only parts of the interview that are quoted in the research were translated to English.

4.6 Analysis

In this research I have specific predictions on the relationship between the variables. In order to test these predictions, a way of analysing the interviews was required, as such, after conducting and transcribing the interviews, a coding procedure was created. For the coding procedure, an iterative approach was taken. Within this iterative approach, deductive methods were used, however, the research also leaves space to explore if new themes and concepts would evolve (Thomas, 2006). This allows the exact causal relationship to be explored. Firstly, I developed a deductive coding scheme with concepts from the theoretical framework to analyse the interview transcripts. To answer the research question and intervening variable, I used two categories, partnership and size. The concept of partnership was divided into two sub-categories, power balance/equality and organizational independence.

From the literature, it became clear that organizational independence and power balance can be seen as features of partnerships. To explore these sub-categories, in the data, I looked for predefined themes. For **power balance and equality**, I coded information on how decisions were made (decision-making), the equality of the relation between donor and receiver, and mutual trust between the two partners. For **organizational independence**, I coded information on: competition for funding between the NGOs, whether the NGOs followed the donor agenda on decisions or whether they were able to follow their own missions and values, information on specific restrictions and the involvement of MFA in the DRA. Lastly, the hypothesized intervening

variable of **size** was mainly measured via one specific question, where I explicitly asked about the effect of size of an NGO on independence.

After my initial coding, detailed reading was done again to explore if new themes and concepts would evolve (Thomas, 2006). These were gathered together and will be explained thoroughly in the analysis chapter below.

The analysis of the collected and coded data was focused on the interpretations of relevant theoretical concepts and the way in which these concepts were corresponding with the theoretical literature. Furthermore, a comparison was made between the answers on the same questions to see how they differ or correspond from one and another. Additionally, the concepts used in the deductive coding procedure were compared to the additional findings that did not match the literature immediately to see to what extent there were differences and if there were new contributions.

4.7 Anecdotal evidence

Anecdotal evidence relies on personal observations and is non-scientific. The reason for mentioning this is that part of the topic for this thesis was established throughout two internships, one at Save the Children, February 2020 - June 2020 and the other at the DRAC September 2020 - January 2021. The information provided in the first two chapters are partly based upon the knowledge that I gathered throughout my two internships. It should be emphasized that the analysis of my research question was completely based upon the interviews. The knowledge from the internships was, however, useful in developing the research puzzle, providing background information for the understanding of the context, as well as facilitating interview appointments.

4.8 Limitations

Every research has its limitations. This study is a single case study, which is often criticized for its external validity. External validity, which refers to the generalization of research beyond the case at hand, will therefore not be claimed. Actually, while the results are likely not generalizable beyond the case of the Netherlands, they do provide insights into a missing piece of the puzzle - how individual donors organize relations with their own NGOs in the field of humanitarian assistance. At the same time, the DRA represents a major policy shift for the Dutch government and is thus important to study within its own right.

Furthermore, a limitation for interviewing is that this kind of data gathering and analysis are socially constructed and restrained by an interview situation. According to Lampard and Pole,

(2001) interviews have an artificial character and one cannot expect to "uncover the truth or the essence of individual belief, experience or opinion" (Lampard & Pole, 2001, p. 127).

Moreover, reliability is considered as a limitation. Reliability is whether a study can be repeated and if so, would come to the same results and conclusions (Silverman 2019). This point is particularly problematic in qualitative research. The challenge in qualitative research with interviews is that "the data yielded are a reflection of the circumstances under which the interview is conducted" (Lampard & Pole, 2001, p. 127). As a result, when one would repeat the interview, this might lead to other outcomes due to a changed context. In a similar vein, it is important to regard the role of the author as a potential weakness as well. The perspective of the researcher has an influence on how data is interpreted. However, this does not imply that qualitative research by definition omits reliability as stated by Silverman (2019). Silverman (2019) recommends potential ways in which reliable qualitative research can be done. His advice to researchers is to be transparent about the research process and the choice and stance of theory in which the interpretation takes place of the data, because then the steps can be followed and reproduced (Silverman, 2019, p. 91).

5. Empirical analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the empirical findings of the analysis are presented. This chapter will start with presenting the main findings for answering the first expectation; *The DRA has led to a decrease in organizational independence. Coordination may have increased, but I expect that that resulted in a decrease in organizational independence.* This part evolved out of the coding scheme described in the methodology chapter, and is thus based on literature. The main findings are structured in four parts: pre-DRA context and the development of the DRA, changing relationship, government involvement and constraints, defining the new strategy and, lastly, influencing the government. Next, the findings on the intervening variable are presented; *the size of the organization will influence how much organizational independence the NGO loses on account of the DRA.* This chapter will end with outlining new themes and concepts which are not yet described in the literature.

5.2 The main findings

5.2.1 Pre-DRA context and the development of the DRA

In this section, the context prior to the development of the DRA and the establishment of the DRA will be illustrated according to the descriptions of the respondents. In chapter 3, the development of the DRA was covered. However, in order to answer the research question, it is important to understand how the relationship was prior to the DRA to provide context for the current relationship between the DRA and MFA. Therefore, all the respondents were asked how the context and relationship with the government was prior to the DRA. It should be mentioned that there were only two respondents that worked for one of the current DRA partners before the DRA existed and two just started working at the time that the DRA was developed. All of the other respondents based their answers on stories they have heard over the years from colleagues.

Prior to the DRA, MFA gave individual funding to NGOs. There were several posts for different regions where NGOs could submit their proposals. The ministry decided what the themes of programs were for different countries.[1] If there was an emergency in a country, different NGOs would all go to the corresponding region post to ask for funding.[2]

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[1] Respondent 6
[2] Respondent 9

> "Basically, the moment something happened, for example like now in India, everyone would individually step towards MFA and say: we want to respond and we want this much money."
>
> -Respondent 6

As already mentioned in the introduction, before 2014, there was a limited amount of funding that went to NGOs. Because of the limited funding and the way, the mechanisms worked, there was constant, fierce competition for funding between NGOs.

> "Before the DRA existed, we all had separate bilateral lines with The Hague, which often resulted in elbow-to-elbow situations, in which each NGO would try to be in front as possible. That has really diminished since the DRA came into existence, or let me just say, it has become a lot more mature and much crisper and more concise."
>
> -Respondent 3

Since the funding was given individually to NGOs, the contact was also with individual organizations. "Before the DRA all NGOs had individual contact with MFA, right now, the contact with MFA is actually through the leads of the JR's and the DRAC, so contact with MFA has become more indirect than in the past."[3]

It appears that for MFA, it was also out of a kind of necessity, because it was difficult in terms of monitoring from their capacity. As stated above, when a crisis broke out, multiple NGOs would go to the ministry to ask for funding. This led to a very slow funding stream. Therefore, it was also important for MFA that the NGOs started to work together in a consortium in order to have one entity that represents Dutch NGOs together.[4] Two respondents said the following about the benefits for the government on the development of the DRA:

> "It is also easier for the government to have vetted and specific organizations that they have partnerships with already. These pre-selected organizations that meet specific criteria, makes it easier for the ministry to be able to give quick funding without having to go through the official criteria and all these kinds of things with organizations every time they have a proposal."
>
> -Respondent 11

> "The DRA fills in a significant way the gap of a very pluralistic field of all aid organizations, in which now there is just one model. In fact, with the DRA, the government is outsourcing much of the decision-making. For instance, which crisis they are going to start a project in and which not."
>
> -Respondent 3

Several respondents mentioned that a quicker and better joint operation is not something new, because that already lay with the SHO (Samenwerkende hulporganisaties, i.e., Giro 555) which already existed before the DRA.[5] One of the respondents that worked in the NGO field before the

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[3] Respondent 2
[4] Respondent 2, 9, 11
[5] Respondent 4, 6, 10 and 13

development of the DRA suggests that the SHO could even be seen as a basis for the creation of the DRA. On 12 January 2010, Haiti was struck by a devastating earthquake. More than a week later, a fundraising campaign was held on various TV and radio stations to raise money. This raised over €41 million. The minister at that time, Bert Koenders of Development Cooperation, had promised to double the final amount (Verslaggever, 2010). This substantial amount of funding laid a foundation for the development of the DRA.

> "This was over 40 million and that was a very large amount in one go from their emergency aid budget at the beginning of the year. Then the Court of Audit said: we are going to audit this and see how that money is spent. I think that this has already laid a great foundation."
>
> -Respondent 10

The respondent continued by explaining that this worked very differently when compared to the DRA and was less controlled because the Giro 555 is a fundraising mechanism. In this way, the government had less control over the money. The Giro 555 is only an ad hoc mechanism and largely based on donations from the Dutch public. Therefore, it cannot be fully controlled by the government. With the DRA, the government can audit the money and see where it actually goes. Thus, with the creation of the DRA, the Dutch humanitarian sector got the chance to get a regular funding stream from the Dutch government, and on the other hand the government had a mechanism to streamline the funding more easily. Furthermore, all the respondents confirmed that, as is also outlined in the introduction and DRA chapter, the DRA was established to make humanitarian aid more coordinated, collaborative and efficient.

> "By coming together and coordinating better and collaborating better, the interventions would be more efficient and also cost efficient, because we started looking at the strength of Dutch NGOs. In this way you know each other's strengths to work together."
>
> -Respondent 1

The respondents that worked in the humanitarian NGO field before the DRA or just started working are all indicating that the relationship at the start of the DRA was very much based on trust and a mutual spirit. They wanted to try to move partly away from the traditional donor-receiver relationship.[6] One of those respondents said the following about the relationship which summarizes it:

> "At the beginning, the idea was really to work in partnership, to really discuss and explain why we wanted to do things in certain ways. It was much more of a partnership where there was not that traditional role relationship. I mean, we were not equal, but there was respect for each other and we listened to each other and there was trust. For example, reports back then could be done very much in outline form and not many questions came back because there was a lot of trust."
>
> -Respondent 6

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[6] Respondent 6, 12

5.2.2 Changing relationship

All the respondents were asked how they would describe the concept of partnership in this context and what the distinct features of the partnership are that the DRA has with the government. They all unanimously said that it will always be a donor - receiver relationship. At the end of the day MFA is the donor and they are the ones that hold the funding.

> "By calling something a partnership, you do not get rid of the fact that it used to be a hierarchical relationship and that when the chips are down, MFA can impose things, because they are the ones who finance and subsidize us, so there is always an area of tension there."
>
> -Respondent 12

> "I think MFA sees us very much as a partner, but we really see them as a donor. I do think the DRA members really do see each other as equal partners."
>
> -Respondent 8

All respondents started very positively about the partnership and said that in general there is trust and a lot of responsibility is with the DRA. For instance, a few respondents said that the government basically decentralized a lot of the decision-making towards the DRA.[7] Many of the substantive features of emergency assistance they provide are now discussed and decided at the DRA level.[8]

> "When you look at the ACM, of course MFA gives the final decision, but how much money is made available from the fund and in what way, which areas and which sectors etc. that is up to us."
>
> -Respondent 3

Generally, respondents compared the DRA with other funding mechanisms and underlined that the DRA is rather unique in the way of working. One of the reasons why it is unique is because collaboration is already encouraged before the money has been allocated.[9]

> "If you compare it to other mechanisms, other funding in the humanitarian sector, there is a big difference. In other funding mechanisms, a call is often first launched by the donor with all the details and then proposals can be submitted. In that case, partnerships are artificially shaped, because they only consider who can work well together after the proposals have been submitted. With the DRA this has already been looked at beforehand and we can make the design ourselves."
>
> -Respondent 3

Another reason, given by a respondent who also has experience working with other donor governments, mentioned that the Dutch government is much more hands-off when compared to other governments. Even though it will always be a donor - receiver relationship, it is much more

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[7] Respondent 3, 5, 7, 8
[8] Respondent 9, 12, 13
[9] Respondent 3, 10, 11

partnering than most other donor governments.[10] For instance, the respondent made a comparison with the government of the United States and said that they are more co-managing and want to be involved in every little detail. "So, you have to send them a report every month, so it's extremely hands-on."[11]

Furthermore, the respondents feel very much that they are seen by the government as expert partners.[12] "I think in terms of expertise it is equivalent and we are seen as a real knowledge partner."[13] As can be read above, all respondents were generally very positive about the partnership and all emphasized the uniqueness of the way of working there is in the Netherlands between the government and the NGOs, which is more flexible than many other donor-receiver relationships. According to a few respondents, this is maybe something typical for Dutch politics.[14] "The DRA is a typical Dutch 'polder model'."[15] Which is a method of consensus decision-making.

Despite these positive notes, further on in the interviews the struggles and friction between the DRA and the ministry came to light. The degree of struggles and friction seemed to depend very much on the position of the respondent. On CEO level it seems that there is a good relationship with trust and open discussions.[16] However, as one moves further down, there seems to be more tension. Firstly, according to the respondents that had already been working for one of the partners at the start of the DRA, the relationship changed over the years. One of the respondents describes it as follows:

"There is now less open discussion and more back-and-forth and less criticism of each other as NGOs, much more consideration of what MFA would think."

-Respondent 6

Also, respondents that have been part of the DRAC or have had lead positions confirm that the way of working and the spirit of the first years of the DRA have changed over the last years. The questions posed by the ministry are far more detailed than they were in the past and it feels as if they want more involvement.[17]

"MFA now sends much longer lists of questions on reports, whereas I think ultimately it was not intended that we would do that at that level. When I led a Joint Response a few years ago, I would usually get a call from someone at MFA and we would discuss some things. It is more formal now than it used to be."

-Respondent 6

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[10] Respondent 11
[11] Respondent 11
[12] Respondent 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12
[13] Respondent 5
[14] Respondent 6, 7, 10
[15] Respondent 7
[16] Respondent 4, 10, 12, 13
[17] Respondent 6, 10, 13

Another respondent mentions the same development.

> "When I was the lead, I think I had a meeting twice a year with a representative of MFA where I explained the program so that they were better informed."
>
> > -Respondent 13

A current lead confirms this and mentions that over the last few years the amount of evaluation criteria has increased, as well as the number of detailed questions and feedback from MFA.

> "I have the feeling that every joint response has to be evaluated multiple times during the project phase. I can understand this, but it is getting too much. Then we also have to do a real-time review, so during a Joint Response a review has to be done, but then again, a final review, the COVID reviews and if there are both an Acute and a Protracted crisis in a country, sometimes there are four or five reviews going on at the same time. There needs to be more of a balance in this, because you can evaluate everything and that takes a lot of time. What you see happening is that consultants are hired to do it, but they are very expensive."
>
> > -Respondent 3

During the interviews I asked the respondents who mentioned this development why they think this happened and all of them said that they could not give the exact answer, but only speculate why this happened. As the DRA progressed, some of the people who were very involved in the beginning have now gone, and with them maybe the spirit.[18]

> "I have discussed this with people before, but there should actually be a proper introduction for new people about the core value of the DRA and the vision with which it was founded."
>
> > -Respondent 6

The same counts for MFA, there are also staff changes at the ministry, new employees may have different intentions. Elections may also play a role in MFAs changing attitude toward the DRA.[19] Between 2012 and 2017 Lilianne Ploumen was Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. Under her the DRA was established as described in chapters above. Then in 2017 Sigrid Kaag became the minister. One of the respondents suggests that Sigrid Kaag is less pro NGO than Lilianne Ploumen.

> "I think the relationship between the DRA and the government was good, but I think the relationship between NGOs and the government became less good under Kaag. Kaag is not necessarily being less supportive of NGOs, but she sees the UN and ICRC more as an eligible partner. Of course, she is only one figure, but a very important one."
>
> > -Respondent 13

Or lastly, two respondents mentioned that it maybe could be because MFA thinks DRA is not effective enough.[20]

> "The micro-managing might be because MFA thinks the DRA is not showing or that

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[18] Respondent 6
[19] Respondent 6, 13
[20] Respondent 6, 13

the DRA needs to be pushed more, but in that case, as far as I am concerned, the reaction is not to start micro-managing, but to start talking."

-Respondent 6

5.2.3 Government involvement and constraints

As already has been reflected in an earlier part of this analysis, the overall thought from the respondents is that they get quite a large amount of freedom and they generally feel trust from MFA. As well as that there is a common opinion that MFA invests a lot of time in the DRA and thinks along with the DRA on issues such as strategy, projects and cost extensions.[21]

"We want to take action, so we also play a proactive role as a partnership towards the Ministry to raise issues of certain crises and that we should take action. It is an interaction, because MFA can also sometimes point to a certain situation in a country."

-Respondent 2

One of the respondents shows with an example that the DRA does not always follow everything that MFA wants.

"We published a newspaper article as DRA and the government gave feedback on this and then we had an internal discussion to what extent we would take this over. There are situations that the DRA does not agree with the government and sometimes they listen and sometimes they just do it their way when it comes to communication. We have thanked MFA for the feedback and adopted certain things, but certainly not everything under the guise of you being allowed to give feedback, but it is our article in the end."

-Respondent 4

The questions about the involvement of the government in the DRA could not be answered by all respondents. It became clear from the interviews that the contact with MFA is mostly with the DRAC and the leads of projects[22] and therefore, all other respondents indicated that they were not able to answer this question adequately. On a daily basis, the involvement of MFA is not really noticeable for everyone. For instance, the involvement of MFA is not very noticeable on locations where aid is provided, but is much more focused on a national level, i.e., in policy making, according to a respondent that works in the field.

"The embassy comes only to do a formal introductory talk at the beginning of a project, but this does not really feel like a partnership. They have never actually really been at the locations."

-Respondent 8

The involvement and contact with MFA seem to go almost only through the DRAC and leads. "As the lead, you are in contact with MFA; for example, if a report has been submitted, you get questions about it."[23] The leads and former DRAC members indicated that the level of involvement

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[21] Respondent 6, 11, 12
[22] Respondent 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13
[23] Respondent 5

and monitoring also depends on the crisis and the interests of the Dutch government. For instance, Syria is much more controlled than other Joint Responses.[24]

Then, when it comes to constraints, it was notable that mostly all respondents could not mention certain constraints at first. They are almost all saying that they get the freedom to choose where they want to start a project. In the past, MFA was the one that published calls for proposals for countries and organizations could write a proposal if they wanted the grant. According to respondents that have been working from the start of the DRA, there are now fewer constraints and the ability to get funding is much easier than before the DRA. "Maybe we do not realize it enough, but I really think that we get a lot of freedom from the Ministry." [25]

Today, the NGOs can decide together where they want to start an acute JR. The locations of the protracted crisis are decided together with MFA. The decision on locations for the protracted crises seems to go mostly in coordination with each other. However, sometimes the DRA guides MFA on choices.[26]

> "Last year, Ethiopia was high on the list of MFA and yet we as DRA decided to continue working in the countries we are already in rather than go to Ethiopia. MFA asks critical questions about that, but that is only right. We are critical to them and they are critical to us."
>
> -Respondent 10

However, the fact is that the DRA enters a political landscape with the partnership and they seem also to be dependent on that. For instance, the agenda is largely decided by the government, and NGOs appear to give in to that. "We certainly have a certain amount of freedom, but I think in practice we tend to give in to government feedback, because it is the donor." [27]

> "Sigrid Kaag was very much on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and Lilian Ploumen on Gender-based violence. so, I mean of course you depend on that. But then again, if it is a healthy partnership then you can handle that."
>
> -Respondent 6

> "The agenda is set by Dutch policy, so that is why some countries do get a lot more money. That is not so much where the needs are highest, but also has to do with where the trade interests of the Netherlands are."
>
> -Respondent 8

According to the respondents, MFA will only reject a response if it is extremely politically sensitive but not on programmatic grounds.[28] This has happened with the Syria JR. "The Ministry said to us, if you use our money in Syria, we do not want you to give more to the controlled areas than to

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[24] Respondent 10, 13

[25] Respondent 3

[26] Respondent 2, 3, 10, 12

[27] Respondent 4

[28] Respondent 13

the non-controlled areas or vice versa, it needs to be equal."[29] According to the mechanism, organisations can decide for themselves in which countries they want to participate or not and the rule is that you can only participate in three protracted programmes. The DRA then, under pressure from MFA, allowed a DRA partner to participate in a fourth programme in order to have an equal program in Syria.[30] This rejection was done based on political grounds.[31] In a similar vein, respondents mentioned that Gaza is a no go for MFA. The respondents indicate that they have tried over the years, but it has never been a point of discussion for MFA because it is too political.[32]

> "For example, if we were to ask about the situation in the Gaza Strip, the Minister would almost always say: we contribute to the UN and it is up to the UN to take action. It is always a hidden answer."
>
> -Respondent 6

Furthermore, a few respondents indicated that one of the challenges is to maintain the balance in the partnership as well as the trust relationship.[33] The respondents that had a DRAC position and/or lead position all said that the government sometimes needs to trust the partners more.[34] As stated earlier, the relationship has changed over time and it seems from the interviews that MFA is trying to get more involved in the DRA.

5.2.4 Defining the new strategy

Another constraint seems to be that the NGOs have to stick to the framework and strategy they develop with MFA. A lot is possible within this framework, but stepping outside of its boundaries appears to be difficult. "The Dutch government has a lot of influence in setting up the framework, as long as you are going along with what you agreed upon and it falls within the guidelines then they will approve everything."[35] For instance, the strategy is humanitarian aid focussed and therefore, the NGOs cannot just start a program that is peace-building directed, because DRA money is specifically for emergency aid.[36] The periodic strategy for the partnership is developed in collaboration between the NGOs and the government.

> "The DRA has developed a strategy and the Ministry has to agree to it, so as long as everything falls within the strategy, it is basically okay what we do, but you cannot suddenly start working outside the strategy. The DRA programs are implemented within the Ministry's policy and framework, so anything outside of that can be rejected by the Ministry. The Ministry has agreed with the ACM and PCM, so everything within that

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[29] Respondent 10

[30] Respondent 10, 13

[31] Respondent 6, 10, 13

[32] Respondent 6, 10, 13

[33] Respondent 4, 6, 7, 12

[34] Respondent 6, 10, 13

[35] Respondent 11

[36] Respondent 13

framework will be accepted."

Respondent 13

At the end of this year, the strategy of 2018-2021 will come to an end. Therefore, at this moment the DRA and MFA are developing a new one. Not surprisingly, all respondents talked about the new strategy, as this will also have an enormous influence on the relationship between the DRA and the government for the next strategic period. The government involvement and constraints described above are points of discussion between MFA and the DRA in forming the new strategy.

Generally, the respondents indicated that creating a new strategy is a very difficult process, as 14 organizations are involved as well as the government.[37] Everyone has their own priorities and thoughts on what the new strategy should look like for the next strategic period.[38] A draft strategy is developed by the DRA members and sent to MFA for feedback. Generally, the respondents that were involved in forming the new strategy mentioned that MFA got back with quite a large amount of feedback and questions, which has led to tensions.[39] However, the respondents think differently on how to respond to this. "You now notice that there are certain points that MFA really wants to see reflected and we have to work with that."[40] While another respondent argues that they should have asked the government beforehand what the priorities of the government were.

> "I did notice that at the last feedback meeting, questions from MFA were suddenly added, so perhaps it is important that we have an idea at an earlier stage of what MFA thinks is important to include in that strategy."
>
> -Respondent 2

Another respondent mentions that they indeed gave critical notes on the strategy, but that other NGOs were ignoring that and now MFA comes with a few of the same critical questions and feedback.

> "The critical comments that we had made may have been irritating for other partners, but MFA now comes with the same comments and they listen to them, while I think that MFA did not need to make these comments at all. It feels very unbalanced now because we do what MFA says."
>
> -Respondent 6

Of the respondents that have been part of the DRAC or have been leads or are currently leads, all say that MFA should be involved more on a strategic level, because right now they want to be too much involved in the details.[41] It is therefore, according to two respondents, important to protect the boundaries as NGOs, but MFA as well.[42]

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[37] Respondent 6

[38] Respondent 7

[39] Respondent 2, 5, 6, 12

[40] Respondent 5

[41] Respondent 6, 10, 13

[42] Respondent 6, 13

> "Is the involvement on the detail because of interests or control? I do not know. What we never want and will never do is to become an extension or an execution channel of the ministry. That is what they are trying to do, of course, because it is their money, so they want to direct it."
>
> <div align="right">-Respondent 10</div>

The respondent goes on with saying that this increased involvement can become less when they change the mechanism.

> "MFA is the contract holder of every JR individually, if we create one Block Grant and we as DRA can manage this, they will probably feel less responsible. In that way, we can talk with MFA on a strategic level, like which direction we want to go."
>
> <div align="right">-Respondent 10</div>

5.2.5 Influencing the government

According to most respondents, there is still room and freedom to speak out against the government. "That may also have something to do with the Dutch culture. They can criticize each other without immediately having to turn the money back."[43] A respondent said that because the DRA consists of 14 humanitarian aid organizations that form an alliance, it should not be underestimated that they can do a lot together. According to several respondents, they do make connections with members of the Lower House. In fact, when the interviews were conducted there were introduction workshops for new members of parliament on the DRA and what they do.[44]

All respondents were asked if the DRA also has influence on national policy. There was one example that was frequently mentioned, the anti-terror law.[45] The initial bill would require NGOs and journalists to individually request permission from the Ministry before travelling to 'terrorist areas'. This would be a limitation for humanitarian aid organizations. Therefore, the DRA successfully lobbied together with MSF and ICRC for an exception. "We are in a partnership with MFA and at the same time we are fighting legislation from the ministry. I think that it is very interesting that that is possible within the partnership."[46]

Nevertheless, the respondents mention that they do not get the most out of lobbying.[47] It seems that because a compromise is always sought with the entire group, the sharp edge in the direction of MFA is sometimes lost in lobbying and visibility. "I think the DRA has to compromise quite a lot."[48] Another quote that shows compromise:

> "I have been involved in the strategy and then you see that it is a product of 14 different organisations all with their own opinions and views on things. The organisation I work for

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[43] Respondent 10

[44] Respondent 4, 10, 13

[45] Respondent 4, 10, 13

[46] Respondent 10

[47] Respondent 6, 10, 11, 13

[48] Respondent 1

can keep shouting all kinds of things, but you're not going to see all of it reflected in the new strategy."

<div align="right">-Respondent 2</div>

It appears that a consequence of compromise is moderation which is illustrated by the following quote:

> "Before the DRA, it was still possible to bang your fist on the table and say that something really was not acceptable, but now if the rest of the DRA does not think so, it looks strange. Colleagues from communication and lobby and advocacy departments sometimes find this difficult, all those alliances with which they are pushed into a particular corner and sometimes just want to stand on the barricades themselves."

<div align="right">-Respondent 6</div>

The DRA has a lot of potential to influence the government, however, the DRA is often very modest. They do not seem to step outside as an alliance. "Recently, a joint advertisement was placed in the newspaper, but that is really exceptional. There are also many parties who absolutely do not want that, because it can have an impact on their own business operations."[49]

5.3 Intervening variable: does size matter?

During the interviews all respondents were asked whether there are certain organizations with more influence in the DRA and if so, what the reason for that was. The answer that organizations of all sizes gave was that it definitely has to do with how vocal the people of an organization are.[50] "Sometimes we focus too much on the ones that have a loud voice, but at the end of the day, everyone has an equal vote."[51]

What was interesting is that the respondents of the smaller and medium sized organizations gave relatively similar answers, while the respondents of the bigger organizations also gave similar answers. First, the smaller and medium sized organizations all said that the bigger the organization, the more capacity one has. On a national DRA level this means that a bigger organization has more capacity to think about strategic issues, or be able to participate in more working groups.[52] Also, according to some respondents, having a bigger capacity has the benefit of more people that can help on the development of a proposal and this often results in better proposals and thus in better scoring and better chance of obtaining a lead position.[53] "I think that larger organizations can read

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[49] Respondent 6
[50] Respondent 1, 9, 10, 11
[51] Respondent 10
[52] Respondent 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11
[53] Respondent 2, 11

up better and perhaps prepare everything better, so, in that sense they can perhaps give more guidance in the direction they want to go."[54]

Another mentioned benefit of larger organizations is that on average they are more present in different countries. The consequence for smaller organizations of having less capacity in a country is that they cannot participate in some JRs because of the threshold criteria they have to meet. It is hard for them to start in new places and to grow with DRA funding. So, it may be the case that the large organizations have a little more influence if you just look at how the system is set up.

> "There is a threshold criterion in the mechanism, so for example to be allowed to participate in a protracted crisis you have to convert a minimum of 1 million humanitarian dollars into that country. And for smaller organizations, this means that they often cannot participate in advance. These criteria are an indication of your capacity in a country, but of course this does not necessarily say anything about the quality of your assistance. It is also possible that with €500,000 you make a very good impact."

-Respondent 5

Nevertheless, the answer that almost all the respondents gave is that even though the DRA is equal on paper, the organizations that seem to have the biggest influence are the ones that have a position in the DRAC and/or are lead of a JR.[55] Moreover, a DRAC position and lead position helps in developing and shaping a good relationship with the government as an individual organization.[56] The DRAC has regular meetings with representatives of MFA, as do the leads of a JR because the contracts go via MFA. "You have a bigger say in the DRA if you have a more prominent role, such as being part of the DRAC or lead."[57] Or, similar "If you have more lead positions and are part of the DRAC then you can give more guidance to the agenda."[58]

Although most respondents mentioned that with a DRAC position an organization has influence on the agenda, the respondents also say that "you trust that these elected representatives will communicate the interest of all the NGOs."[59] According to the respondents from smaller organizations, the bigger organizations often have more lead positions than smaller organizations.[60] Smaller organizations do either not meet the criteria to be lead in a certain country or they do not have the capacity or time for a lead position. As a consequence, some organizations get more funding than others.[61] However, smaller organizations also mentioned that all of the above does

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[54] Respondent 4
[55] Respondent 1,2, 5, 8, 10
[56] Respondent 3, 5
[57] Respondent 8
[58] Respondent 10
[59] Respondent 2
[60] Respondent 11
[61] Respondent 7

not mean that they are not able to establish a good relationship with the government at all. MFA is also willing to talk one on one with NGOs about how things are going in the DRA. "You have it in your own hands as an organization. You can be as active as you like and there is a right to vote for all DRA members." [62]

Besides that, smaller organizations get more funding now when compared to before the establishment of the DRA. Some indicated that before the DRA they did not receive humanitarian aid funding from the Dutch government at all.

Both smaller and bigger organizations mentioned that besides the constraints that smaller organizations face within the DRA because of their capacity, there are also constraints for bigger organizations. On the one hand, for the programs and the speed at which funding is realized, the DRA has brought a lot of benefits, but on the other hand, if you look at lobbying and influencing MFA, for example, organizations are also very dependent on the DRA. For some organizations, it offers a lot of opportunities, but for some, and especially for larger organizations, it also limits them, because they have to lobby on behalf of the DRA instead of their own organizations. That is not always advantageous.[63]

> "For example, we cannot just go and ask tough questions in the Lower House about countries where we are not the lead. That has to be done via the lead of the relevant organization in that country. It is a kind of unwritten rule that you do that via the DRA. That is sometimes a pity, because sometimes we receive very interesting reports from the international headquarters."
>
> -Respondent 6

Bigger organizations mentioned that you can also question whether some organizations that already participate in three protracted responses could also not have added value in a fourth.[64] This is currently a point of discussion in the PCM working group.

To summarize, there seems to be a tendency that bigger organizations have more influence in the DRA. On the one hand this is because they have more capacity to be involved on different levels, on the other hand, this is also potentially made possible through the mechanism of the DRA. The next part will go more into detail on the DRA mechanism as a potential constraint.

5.4 New concepts and themes: the mechanism as a constraint

In this part, concepts and themes will be outlined that did not fit in the coding scheme developed based on the literature. Throughout all the interviews there was one overarching theme that stood out the most when talking about constraints, namely, the mechanism itself. The constraints and

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[62] Respondent 5
[63] Respondent 5, 6, 10, 13
[64] Respondent 2, 6, 7, 13

problems with the mechanism that the respondents mentioned can be divided into two parts. The first part is about constraints that the mechanism proposes right now and the second is about constraints that they see for the future development and changing field of humanitarian assistance.

First, current constraints. Over the years more rules have been established and there are increasingly more boxes that need to be ticked.[65] "The DRA is too busy internally with rules and systems to keep everyone happy."[66]

> "The DRA was always very much based on mutual trust and over the years they have tried to seal it all off, all kinds of rules and procedures, checklists. The trust is there, but in the meantime, they have to go through more and more checklists."
>
> -Respondent 3

Furthermore, the relationship between the NGOs has also changed over the years. Whereas in the beginning they really stood shoulder to shoulder and the higher goal was to provide emergency relief together, they now increasingly see a sense of competition.[67] This competition probably has to do with the scoring mechanism. The NGOs score each other and a few respondents mentioned that this is not always going fair.[68] "There is a lot of favouritism."[69] This competition is also visible in the projects, because responses often result in all sorts of separate projects being put together in a consortium, instead of the collaboration the DRA actually stands for.[70]

Another constraint of the system is that you need to have a positive track record in a country and you must have already converted a certain amount in a country in the previous fiscal year to meet the threshold criteria.[71] So for some organizations it is difficult to start in new places. One of the respondents could provide an example, where they started a new Country Office in a country, but by the time they were there, the money was already allocated between other DRA members.

> "But even if we had gone a couple of weeks earlier, so to speak, we would have been on time, but we would never have made it because there is a rule that you have to have spent a certain budget in a country in your previous fiscal year. This did make our start-up a lot more difficult."
>
> -Respondent 3

> "There is a threshold criterion in the mechanism, so for example to be allowed to participate in a protracted crisis you have to convert a minimum of 1 million humanitarian dollars into that country. And for smaller organizations, this means that they often cannot participate in advance."

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[65] Respondent 3, 6, 7
[66] Respondent 6
[67] Respondent 3, 6, 7, 11
[68] Respondent 7, 8, 9, 11
[69] Respondent 8
[70] Respondent 5
[71] Respondent 3, 5

An additional constraint of the system is that some respondents question whether some organizations that already participate in three protracted responses could also not have added value in a fourth.[72] "There is much less focus on who is actually best placed because of that maximum three rule".[73]

> "We have agreed within the protected crisis mechanism that organisations can participate with a maximum of three joint responses, so in that sense there is equivalence, but you can ask yourself whether some organisations might still have added value with a fourth joint response."
>
> -Respondent 2

Moreover, there is a rule that funding for an acute crisis in a certain country will only be provided once a year. So, if you start a new Country Office in a country where an acute crisis already has taken place, you cannot start a project funded by the DRA. Managing the funding seems very challenging. On the one hand, they want to be open and make sure that all JRs are available to all organizations, but at the same time, they want to provide the best possible emergency response. Why these additional rules came into place could not exactly be answered by the respondents. Some of them suggested that these additional rules were established because of government requirements such as quality. However, others proposed that these other rules were something the NGOs opted for themselves. "It is more the NGOs that established this than it was an initiative of the government, however the government might have had influence on this."[74]

> "Perhaps the Ministry is emphasizing quality and all kinds of quality requirements that have to be met. So, if you set a yardstick against that, you soon find yourself competing against each other and that's at the expense of trust."
>
> -Respondent 3

Or

> "NGOs are so used to working within the framework of the donors that when the donor is very flexible, they often end up rearranging it so that it yields just as much friction as other donors and we impose it on ourselves because it is the only way we are used to working."
>
> -Respondent 8

Furthermore, depending on the funding that is made available, there is a maximum number of NGOs that can participate in a program and then they have to compete amongst each other.

> "Yes, sometimes you do not get funded. That also happened to us. We have no complaints about it, because it just happens sometimes. You have to look carefully at what the guidelines are for an acute crisis and then make sure that you provide a good concept note, and yes, sometimes you do not make it because the others score higher. That is just part of the mechanism."

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[72] Respondent 2, 6, 7, 13
[73] Respondent 6
[74] Respondent 3

Secondly, the mechanism as it is right now is not future proof according to the respondents. Almost all the respondents mentioned the shift towards more localization and what this would mean for the DRA and the whole NGO sector.[75] "Sometimes I wonder whether NGOs are a dying sector."[76] There was an agreement that there should be more focus on localization and more responsibility for local partners.[77] However, the one thing that seems to contradict each other is that on the one hand MFA wants more localization, so more and more responsibilities are placed locally, but on the other hand there is also the demand for risk mitigation and for a lot of control, which is now placed at the NGOs.[78] It seems that MFA would rather finance Dutch organizations than foreign ones, however, in the humanitarian field there is a shift towards working more locally. So, it seems that MFA is struggling with that shift.[79] "MFA is very much Holland focused for an entity that strives for more localization. It is very Dutch oriented and all decision-making and contracting is done on a Dutch level".[80]

> "DRA is one of the front runners when it comes to localization, MFA also insists on localization, look at the draft strategy for example, but at the same time we as DRA know that it will be very difficult to get MFA to contract local partners directly."
> -Respondent 7

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[75] Respondent 1, 2, 5,7, 8, 11, 12
[76] Respondent 1
[77] Respondent 2
[78] Respondent 5,7, 8, 11, 12
[79] Respondent 7
[80] Respondent 8

6. Conclusion

In this concluding chapter the results of the interviews and their meaning will be discussed and contextualized in the literature. I will relate these findings directly back to the question posed: *How has the establishment of the Dutch Relief Alliance affected the ability of this group of Dutch humanitarian NGOs to operate independently?* And the intervening variable: *The level of organizational independence depends on the size of an organization.* This is followed by the limitations of the findings and recommendations for future research. This chapter will end with the contribution of this study.

In this thesis, a single case study was conducted to understand how the DRA affects independence and what the partnership with a government in this context entails. This complex relationship was empirically investigated by conducting semi-structured interviews and analysing them in a deductive way while leaving room for new themes.

6.1 Discussion of the analysis

6.1.1 Contextualizing results in the literature

First of all, from the findings one could argue that better coordination was indeed one of the main reasons to establish the DRA. The definition derived from the literature and used for this thesis fits the case perfectly. For the reason that the DRA was partly established as a response towards a complex problem, that is, the coordination of an increased amount of funding. Moreover, the DRA has clearly outlined rules for all actors, they exchange knowledge and information and, according to the respondents, are more efficient when implementing the policy.

Next, the concept of partnership as was described in this thesis is not completely met in the case of the DRA. The DRA has certain features of the definition, such as the commitment to a long-term interaction and reciprocal obligation. In spite of this, the features of equality, mutuality and balance of power are not met. The donor still has control over the funding and the donor can, by means of constraints, pursue their own agenda. So, although it became clear from the analysis that it is not an equal partnership, and one could question if that is ever possible, in the end the Dutch government is really putting effort in moving away from the traditional donor-receiver relationship by giving the NGOs more responsibility and decision-making power.

Something that is not touched upon in the partnership literature is the concept of an alliance. The DRA fits in the literature on alliances. From the analysis is became clear that with the alliance between the NGOs effectiveness and reduction of duplication is being tried to achieve as well as that they have to modify and thus make partial changes to their standpoints. Furthermore, the soft side of an alliance described in the literature review, i.e., the mutual trust and commitment,

also evolved out of the analysis. The respondents seem to suggest that overall, mutual trust and commitment are present in the DRA, but that the presence of these values have decreased since the initial establishment of the alliance. Furthermore, all the members are selected based on criteria, and therefore, they can all make a contribution and have the desirable capabilities and experience. The establishment of the DRA has allowed the 14 NGOs that are part of the alliance to form a strong bloc, making it easier to question, oppose and influence the donor. The DRA has applied this bloc formation strategy in order to push legislation such as the terrorism-law. On the other hand, as became clear from the analysis, in some cases, thriving for consensus among DRA members through compromise leads to moderation, making it difficult to push more controversial ideas.

Next, organizational independence. When it comes to this concept, it becomes clear that the NGOs are still dependent on the government. For the reason that the NGOs do not have complete freedom to follow their own mission and values without external restrictions from the donor. As appears from the analysis and also from the literature, one could question whether a partnership with a government will ever lead to full organizational independence. After all, the NGO enters political grounds in a partnership with a government. However, the expectation was that organizational independence would decrease and although the organizations are still dependent of the government, the analysis shows that the organizational independence did not decrease as was expected. It even seems to suggest that the NGOs got maybe more independence because with the development of the DRA, this group of NGOs got more freedom and responsibility on certain aspects. For instance, NGOs now have more influence than before on where a response will be started, they have a say in the strategy development, influence on policies, and the ability to start an acute crisis response faster than before the DRA.

6.1.2 Answering the research question

After contextualising the results in the literature, an answer to the research question can be specified. The establishment of the DRA enabled the NGOs to operate more independently within the framework, the boundaries of which the DRA defined together with MFA. Contrary to the situation before the DRA, the expertise and experience of the NGOs are used to define the framework. Furthermore, the mechanism of the DRA enables it to respond quickly to new emergencies. Everything that falls outside of the framework is not possible with the DRA funding. Moreover, from the analysis it became clear that MFA has a final say in everything that is decided and sets the agenda. Additionally, it even seems like the government has been trying to get more involved over the last few years than what was the intention at the start of the DRA. Taking this and the above contextualising of the literature into account, the *expectation* that a funding

mechanism such as the DRA would result in a decrease in organizational independence appears not to be the case. Of course, it is still a donor-receiver relationship, but the NGOs are more involved in the decision making on different levels and are able to put pressure on the government than they were before the establishment of the DRA. Also, based on the analysis, the effect of forming a partnership between NGOs and a government appears not to be as bad as it is described in existing literature, at least in the case of the DRA.

Furthermore, although the data on the *intervening variable* shows that bigger organizations have slightly more influence within the DRA when compared to smaller organizations due to their capacity to have more lead positions and more staff available for working groups, task forces and DRAC positions, the difference between the independence of smaller and bigger organizations seems to be less than was expected beforehand. The influence that bigger organizations have could mean that they have somewhat more independence than smaller organizations. Nevertheless, before the DRA, the difference between bigger and smaller organizations seems to have been even larger. Before the establishment of the DRA, in some cases, smaller organizations were not involved at all. Participation in the DRA has at least provided them a seat at the table and an opportunity to receive some amount of government funding for humanitarian assistance. Moreover, the list of leads provided in chapter two shows that smaller organizations are also represented as leads and participants in various responses. As well as that the analysis shows that it is also possible for smaller organizations to establish a relationship with the government, it seems that it is up to the organizations themselves to be as active as they want. Al in all, it could be said that the *intervening variable* of size does not play a role as significant as was expected.

Besides the expectations based on literature several other findings were observed in the interviews. One of the observations is that because of the DRA, the NGOs became more dependent on each other. The analysis of the interviews shows that the mechanism provides limitations for the organizations. Cooperating with other NGOs can potentially make it more difficult for organizations to follow their own ideals, as they have to find common ground within the DRA. This need for consensus leads to moderation within the decision-making. For instance, as can be seen in lobby mechanisms where there is an unwritten rule to coordinate lobbying with each other or that an organization cannot proactively speak out openly against something without coordinating with the other organisations.

Furthermore, larger organizations are limited by the framework, which only allows them to participate in a maximum of three protracted crises. While this may give all organizations equal opportunities, it also leads to situations in which especially larger organizations have left-over capacity. Following the above, one could question whether imposing a limit of three protracted

crises is desirable. While it is important to provide DRA members with equal chances, in the end the focus should be on providing the best humanitarian aid possible. Then again, one could also question whether abolishing such a rule makes the bigger organizations more powerful. Moreover, for smaller organizations there is the constraint that they have to fulfil the threshold criteria that the humanitarian aid portfolio must equal at least €1 million in the last year.

To summarize, the expectations that the organizational independence would decrease due to the donor-receiver relationship and the intervening variable that the size of the organization will influence how much organizational independence the NGO loses on account of the DRA are not articulated in the data. The findings seem to suggest that the partnership does not have the negative effects I expected based on the literature. Several other findings suggest that the DRA also has a downstream effect of moderation due to the tendency to find consensus between members. The interviews also suggest that the rules and criteria within the DRA mechanism may lead to left-over capacity at bigger organizations. So, the remaining question is, why did my expectations not correspond with the data?

The respondents of the interviews suggest that it may be something specific to the Dutch context. The DRA is very much based on consensus and finding a balance. The unexpected findings in the analysis could perhaps be explained with something particularly Dutch, the Polder-model. The Polder-model is a Dutch model of decision-making in which consultation, consensus and cooperation are key elements, it is reflected throughout the entirety of Dutch culture. It is about the way you engage and how you can work together despite differences. Reaching consensus becomes increasingly more difficult with more participating actors. The Polder-model is therefore only viable when the number of actors remains manageable. Since, the DRA consists of only 14 organizations, the Polder-model may well be at play within the DRA and could potentially explain the divergence between the results and literature. This does however need more research, as the potential influence of the Dutch context, and specifically the Polder-model, on the workings of the DRA was not included in this thesis.

6.2 Limitations and further research

After answering the research question and the theoretical implications, the limitations of this research and its methods are considered. First, due to time limits of this thesis there was a low sample of respondents, i.e., 14 respondents. The DRA consists of 14 organizations. Within each of these organizations, quite a lot of people work on the DRA. For this research 11 different organizations were interviewed of which two organizations twice. Although 11 out of 14

organizations is a considerable number, more interviews could be conducted to see whether these findings are consistent.

Furthermore, MFA unfortunately did not respond to multiple interview requests. Therefore, these findings show a one-sided picture of the complex partnership. Also, this topic could be considered as a sensitive theme, so there is a possibility of underreporting of certain aspects. Although, from the start respondents wanted to only mention the name of the organization throughout the interview, respondents mentioned that they also did not want that their organization was mentioned in the analysis.

Lastly, single case studies are often criticised for their generalizability. However, although the results of this research are most likely not generalizable beyond the case of the Netherlands, because as the analysis suggests there could be something particular about Dutch norms that allows for more independence, or at least the ability to speak one's mind and therefore it could probably not travel elsewhere. Besides this, this study does provide an important and unique insight on how individual donors organize relations with their own NGOs in the field of humanitarian assistance. Together with that the DRA signifies a major policy change for the Dutch government and is thus important to study because of its own special qualities

Some final words on the analysis which are discussion points for future research. First, further research, as suggested in the discussion, could investigate if indeed an explanation could be found in the Polder-model and what this would mean for other countries that are trying to set-up a system as the DRA.

Furthermore, as already said in the analysis, a way of giving the NGOs more independence could lay in a Block Grant funding stream. This is a grant from the government allocated to the NGOs which they can use for a wide range of services, instead of having all the individual JRs contracted with the government. This way of funding could possibly have a positive effect on the independence of NGOs. This is something that the DRA is currently discussing with MFA for the new strategy. However, further research could determine if this indeed provides even more NGO independence with government funding.

Lastly, the respondents of the interviews stated that the humanitarian field is shifting more and more towards working locally, however the government seems to struggle with issues such as contracting and risk management. Therefore, NGOs are currently still necessary in order to establish a good relationship with local partners. Through this relation, NGOs take on many of the risks associated with fund allocation. If the government adopts this shift towards localization, the position of Western NGOs might become unnecessary. As such the current partnership may not be future proof. The entire topic of localization needs further research.

6.3 Research contribution

Despite the limitations mentioned in the discussion chapter, this thesis has significant scientific and societal relevance. Academically, this thesis adds a new perspective on the broader organizational independence debate among scholars. This unique case shows a new perspective on what happens to a relationship when NGOs form an alliance and a partnership with the government. This relationship is new in contemporary academic literature.

The societal relevance of this research is that the DRA is often seen by other donor countries as an example of what future partnerships with governments may look like. Today, there are conversations in Belgium to set up a similar system. The investigated relationship and outcome of this research could be useful for other countries. It will not look exactly the same, as there will likely be different intervening variables and different policies that can affect the outcomes.

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Appendix A - Interview outline

<u>Semi-structured interview protocol</u>

Opening the interview
- Purpose of interview
- Tell the respondent that their name will not be mentioned in any product, however, ask them if they accept that there is referred to the organizations? Or do they prefer not, either in general or on a specific piece of information.
- Ask the interviewee whether he/she approves of being recorded
- Tell the respondent that the recording can be stopped at any time if there is information that is off the record and they do not want to be associated with.

Topic	Probe	Question
Organizational background of organization interviewee works for	Q 1, 2, 3) probe for context and second expectation	1. Can you give me a quick description of your job and responsibilities? 2. How long have you been working for the organization? 3. Have previous positions been at one of the other DRA members? Or in case not where?
Historical development	Context Q4 & 5) Probe for what the problem was that the DRA mechanism tried to solve (coordination/effectiveness) Q 4,5 & 6) Probe for understanding the development of the DRA and the relationship with MFA	4. What gap did the DRA try to fill in the humanitarian sector? 5. Do you think this is the same gap that MFA was trying to fill? 6. How did the DRA change the working relationship with MFA?
Partnership (partnership is linked with Independence, autonomy & power)	Q 7) probe defining partnership Q8) probe for partnership Q9) probe for partnership and independence	7. In the DRA-MFA context, how would you describe the concept of "partnership"? 8. What is your impression of the quality of the relationship between nongovernmental

		organizations and government officials? a) How is this for the organization you work for?
	Q10) probe for independence Q11) probe for independence and partnership Q12) probe for partnership and independence	9. Does the organization you work for have a say in defining the form of relationship? 10. How would you describe the government involvement in the DRA? 11. What have been the challenges and lessons learned as far as the partnership between the government and the nongovernmental organization you work for in your view? 12. How, in your view, can partnerships be made to work more effectively and efficiently between governments and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations?
Independence	Q13) probe for independence Q14) probe for independence Q15) probe for second expectation Q16) probe for independence Q17) probe for independence	13. What are the constraints of the DRA and the partnership? 14. Did the constraints change with the development of the DRA? 15. Do some organizations have a bigger influence in the DRA than others in your view? 16. Has the DRA been able to influence national/state policies? 17. Were you required to abandon/initiate new projects because of government involvement?

Ending		18. Is there anything you would like to add concerning the topics we discussed? 19. Do you have any questions for me?