

Annex to Regulations Manual: Illustration of Themes and Issues for the Small Grants Fund (SGF) for Syrian CSO-Media Co-Production Programme 2020



by Free Press Unlimited

Key notes

- The primary principles that this programme is bound to are fundamentally attached to respect and commitment to human rights; thorough commitment to humanitarian principles and the positioning of all narratives on the side of Syrian citizens who suffered from war and the violations of their basic human rights.
- In collecting these illustrations, Free Press Unlimited consulted Syrian 'key informants' relevant to the broad objective of the programme. The list provides a glance at perspectives on issues that are being discussed and sometimes debated among Syrians, inside and outside of Syria; and includes a range of issues in Syria's social, political and economical context(s).
- The illustrated themes and issues are not organised in any hierarchy or priority. The themes and issues show great degrees of interrelation, interdependence and interconnection around the human rights principles.
- The list is not exhaustive and is offered as non-exclusive. It offers an illustration of how issues can be reflected upon under this programme, which can be examined by potential applicants for the 'Small Grants Fund for Syrian CSO-Media Co-production Programme' (also referred to as 'Co-Production Fund').

Impact of COVID-19

The United Nations reports that economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in the Middle East into an ever more desperate situation and has increased their humanitarian needs. Many refugees have lost already meager incomes, forcing them to cut down on the most basic needs, including food and medication. Refugee households are taking on additional debt and are not able to pay their rent anymore. In camps, refugees are unable to social distance and do not have access to sanitisers. In most camps, hundreds of people are forced to use limited and basic hygiene facilities, making it impossible to follow WHO guidelines. Additionally, many areas of Syria have suffered extreme damage to the infrastructure, including hospitals, and sanctions mean that many medical facilities are unable to procure even basic supplies. Meanwhile, economic challenges have been exacerbated by the virus. (See: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/added-impact-covid-19-driving-food-insecurity-record-levels-syria>)

Food Security

The United Nations estimates that some 9 million Syrians require emergency food assistance to meet their basic needs, including 6.5 million people facing life-threatening food insecurity. It reports that 65 per cent of Syrian households have been forced to restrict their food consumption and/or purchase food on credit to meet their families basic needs. Over the last year, Syria and Iraq have witnessed "more frequent and intense" field fires, with evidence to suggest some fires were started maliciously. Although all Syrians have been impacted by the crisis, several groups are considered to be particularly affected by food insecurity, including people living in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in camps, newly displaced populations, and IDP returnees.

Humanitarian Impact of Sanctions

Economic sanctions on Syria have had a devastating impact on those living inside the country. Not only has it led to high inflation, but also a shortage of basic necessities. Political instability and infrastructural damage has led to high levels of unemployment. Devaluation of the Syria lira due to sanctions and the increasing cost of goods and services means that many people are unable to afford their needs. Humanitarian organisations are also impacted by the challenges of transferring funds and procuring supplies, meaning that they are inhibited from delivering essential aid to vulnerable populations.

Refugee & Displaced Rights

"A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries." (UNHCR: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>). Displaced persons, or internally displaced persons, have the same characteristics, except perhaps that they were not able, for one reason or another, to cross the border and seek refuge in other countries. The subject of rights of refugees and displaced people crosscut with all other rights and related subjects; such as the right to safety; to health; to education and to protection from ill treatment among many other areas.

Right to Return to Refugees and Displaced

During the armed conflict in Syria, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been displaced, removed by force and/or transferred from their original towns, villages and places of residence. Any solution or settlement should, without delay, guarantee and uphold these people's right to return to their homes and lands, while ensuring that their belongings, properties, businesses and other forms of materials they used to own; are accessible to them when they return.

Accountability & Public Accountability

To be held accountable for certain acts means establishing responsibility for the act and what it resulted in (violations or crimes). The State and/or representatives of State must be subject to questioning, investigation, prosecution and sentencing by competent court(s) of law on the national level; as well as on the international level when national legal mechanisms are weak or controlled by the government, or non-existent. Accountability is essentially a tool for justice and interrelates with several other subjects such as rule of law, victims' rights, fair trials, international justice and transitional justice. Public Accountability is a principle enshrined in the heart of governance. It describes and covers issues such as the public's right to know what the government is doing with regards to development, maintaining the economy, providing services, as well as many other issues. It also deals with transparent and open government and the public's right to hear (answers from the government) and be heard at the same time.

Hate Speech

Discriminatory attitudes have been significantly reported against Syrian refugees in hosting neighbouring countries. But similar levels (and more) of discriminatory attitudes and speech have been also largely reported within the Syrian divided political and social spectrum, where Syrians

discriminate against other Syrians, to the extent of inciting violence. Incitement is a serious issue and must be addressed on all levels.

Torture

The United Nation's Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1984, defines torture as "[...] any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity." Torture is banned always, anywhere, including in times of war, whether practised by the State and its agents or agencies; or by armed groups and their agents.

Enforced Disappearance

United Nation's International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance of 2006 defines enforced disappearance as "[...] the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law." In the context of international humanitarian law, enforced disappearance is also interpreted to include agents of non-State actors, for prohibition on enforced disappearance to remain significant in situations of non-international armed conflict such as in Syria. (See Commission of Inquiry Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria).

Arbitrary Arrest / Detention

Arbitrary detention is the denial of liberty of a person outside of the limits of national laws (or international standards), and is characterised as being inappropriate, unjust, unforeseeable or disproportionate nature of the detention. Such detention is arbitrary when: grounds for the arrest are illegal; the victim was not informed of the reasons for the arrest; procedural rights of the victim were not respected; and the victim was not brought before a judge within a reasonable amount of time (see Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

Unregistered Births

Thousands of children in Syria have been reportedly born to parents in different parts of the war-torn country without being registered upon their birth. Consequences of unregistered births are significant—they mean, atop of everything else, that these children are not recognised, and their existence is not documented. Furthermore, children that are not documented lack access to basic rights including civic status and other social, economical and political rights. Additionally, cases of children born to women that have been raped, also portray another dilemmatic picture of the immediate present and future of these children. On the one hand, the lack of registration or inefficient registration and/or documentation processes have the potential of transforming these children to less-equal kids than others as well as exposing them to risks of discrimination and ill-treatment.

Rehabilitation, Reintegration of Wounded, Disabled Persons, War Victims, Ex-detainees

Persons with disabilities may have been a largely forgotten (neglected) segment of Syrian communities amidst this prolonged armed conflict. Aiding them and providing them with access to rehabilitation services has not featured prominently on the humanitarian agenda. Similarly, access to rehabilitation services and programs to war victims and those wounded during the war, have seen less focus in the last few years. On the other hand, healing the traumas of people in the categories above, and beyond, is apparently a long-term effort that must take into consideration the intense amount of suffering men, women, children and the elders have been exposed to during years of armed conflict. The purpose of healing traumas may go beyond responding to treatment needs of individuals (tortured, raped, ill-treated, witnessed atrocities, etc.) but can also pave a path to collective recovery of the society.

Return of Refugees

Aside from the rights-based issue pertaining to the return of refugees, there is also the logistics-based side of the matters, which relates to facilitating such return when political resolution is available. Facilitating return of refugees requires both transitional arrangements (such as sheltering, access to food and health, among many other things) as well as **home-destination** related arrangements including safe return arrangements; availability of accommodation facilities (if destroyed during war), welfare and education programs.

Refugees in Neighbouring Countries

Some of Syria's neighbouring countries hosting refugees, depend heavily on international community aid and funding to provide essential living services to the refugees' communities, as well as the host communities themselves (that are already under dire economical conditions). When and if the international community withdraws from providing funding to those countries – while Syrian refugees are still living there – a dramatic failure in service provision [to refugees] will be inevitable.

Livelihood & Access to, Distribution of Humanitarian Aid

Questions have continued to grow in the last few years of war, around distribution and access to humanitarian aid, to either besieged towns and villages, or other areas that became regularly dependent on aid provision. Among these questions are the viability of distribution mechanisms; restrictions by Syrian government or armed opposition; transparency and efficiency issues among delivering agencies, in addition to more complex questions such as why delivery of humanitarian aid became the sole source of access to food and essential living commodities; and what social impact aid-provision had on Syrian communities?

Acceptance

Consenting to the existence of opinions, thoughts, beliefs, ideologies, origins, and other characteristics of people within the society is a mark of acceptance. The lack of it, marks a society (no matter what the shape of the society is currently) that discriminates against "others" that are different (whether those different people are among the majority or minority). Lack of acceptance is, and has proved to be, devastating. It can be the source of an ultimate disregard of the value of life itself.

Identity Crisis

Who we are, to what we belong and where we came from are part of a commonly shared identity (value) that society is marked with throughout time. However, at times of major divide; in war and armed conflict; the question of identity is significant. It is very much about who we are now; why we became who we are; what will we become alongside this divide; and where is it taking us?

Coping Mechanisms

Syrian people's ability to confront probably the most miserable and savage conditions humanity has known in recent history of war and armed conflict, portrays a dramatic chapter in the lives of all Syrians. Highlighting in-depth the context of coping mechanisms should examine the impact of war on the characteristics of the Syrians-of-today: men, women, children, elders, disabled, etc.

Ethnic Diversity & Minorities Issues

Syrian society has always been diverse and it has always included minorities. The fundamental essence of a society's vibrancy is their ability to protect and uphold this framework of diversity; that regardless of the divide and wounds of war, choices are made to preserve integration and inclusiveness; rather than disconnect and exclusiveness. Easier said than done, perhaps; but this remains as an unavoidable question.

Gender Equality / Gender Justice

Women's rights do not cease simply because of war and armed conflict. At times of war, there is an exceptional significance of how women rights are being regarded and upheld. Particularly, references to gender equality have great impact on how societies during war are surviving and struggling to exist.

What roles have women been playing during the war; what social and political space was available to them; what were the restrictions imposed on them; by whom and what consequences this have had?

Gender Based Violence

During years of war, different patterns of violence against women were carried out; sometimes as doctrine (policy). These patterns were of grave nature (in certain cases; crimes of war). According to the 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) released in November 2017 “gender-based violence, particularly verbal harassment, domestic violence (including family violence against women and girls), child marriages and the fear of sexual violence, including sexual harassment; continues to pervade the lives of Syrian women and girls inside and outside the home”.

Justice

The concept of justice spans over a range of issues, primarily the right of individuals and groups to seek a remedy for grievances inflicted upon them by other entities or persons. Justice refers to the availability of mechanisms to establish the occurrence of these grievances; establishing that victims are victims of a certain practice; and initiating a procedure that aims at restoring victims’ rights, including but not limited to trials before courts, investigations that lead to restoring rights and/or any other forms of mechanisms that aim toward that goal. Justice is also an inclusive principle; it may not be waived at times of war or peace; it is principled and can’t be tailored or be favourable to one party but not the other.

Transitional Justice

Transitional justice refers to the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression address large scale or systematic human rights violations. Transitional Justice instruments are applicable when violations and atrocities are so numerous, and so serious, that the normal justice system will not be able to provide an adequate response (Definition of the International Center for Transitional Justice ICTJ, see more at <https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>).

Legislative and Legal Reform

Law is a tool of governance, and shall always be like that, even in territories not controlled by the Syrian government. The question about law is two-fold. On one hand, there are laws and legislation that continued to be used over the course of decades to suppress Syrians and strip them of their rights. But on the other hand, sometimes, in certain areas; there is no law. How should law be enacted and enforced? Are there or will there be guarantees that these supposed laws will uphold the rights of Syrians?

Reconstruction Transparency and Accountability related issues

Promises that the war will end are beginning to surface in the political landscape in Syria. This may inevitably create new ‘political’, economic and social realities. If it’s going to happen in either case; issues related to ensuring transparency and fairness of the reconstruction process(es) will need to be addressed by independent bodies on the national and international level. Those bodies may not be facilitated by the government, but they remain essential so that potential violations are pointed out and recorded. Reporting & Monitoring Reconstruction Process, including media coverage and independent research are valuable resources in such a context.

Children Education

In late 2017, UNICEF estimated that 2.2 million children inside Syria are not in school and that more than half a million refugee children are not in school outside Syria. Beyond combating illiteracy, education is also seen as a means to protect school-aged Syrian boys and girls, and as an indispensable tool to help children cope with the hardships of war and armed conflict. Its absence puts at risk children’s prosperity and growth. However, whenever formal and/or informal education is available to Syrian children (in and outside of Syria); it is crucial to examine what quality, content and scope of education they are provided with.

Recruitment of Child Soldiers

International law is clear that the recruitment of children under 15 to participate in hostilities, is a war crime. Additionally, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes age of 18 as minimum age for recruitment or participation in hostilities. In Syria, different parties to the armed conflict have been reportedly recruiting children to join their military ranks in the ongoing fighting over the past few years. Too many social, economic and other factor interrelate with the issue of child soldiers; some of them, however, fail to examine the short and long-term impact on the lives of recruited children, their families and communities at large.

Sexual Abuses & Violence Against Children

Sexual violence against children presents a critical, serious and severe challenge to upholding children rights (and human rights in general). Such violence may occur at times of peace and times of war alike; within their homeland or in foreign lands (in the context of refugees' crisis). It's many forms include sexual abuse, harassment, rape or sexual exploitation. There are no limits to where it may happen, or at the hands of whom; homes, schools, workplaces, sexual violence can take place virtually anywhere. At times of war and armed conflict, abuses against children are significantly problematic, mainly because the protection framework seems to weaken or disappear completely.