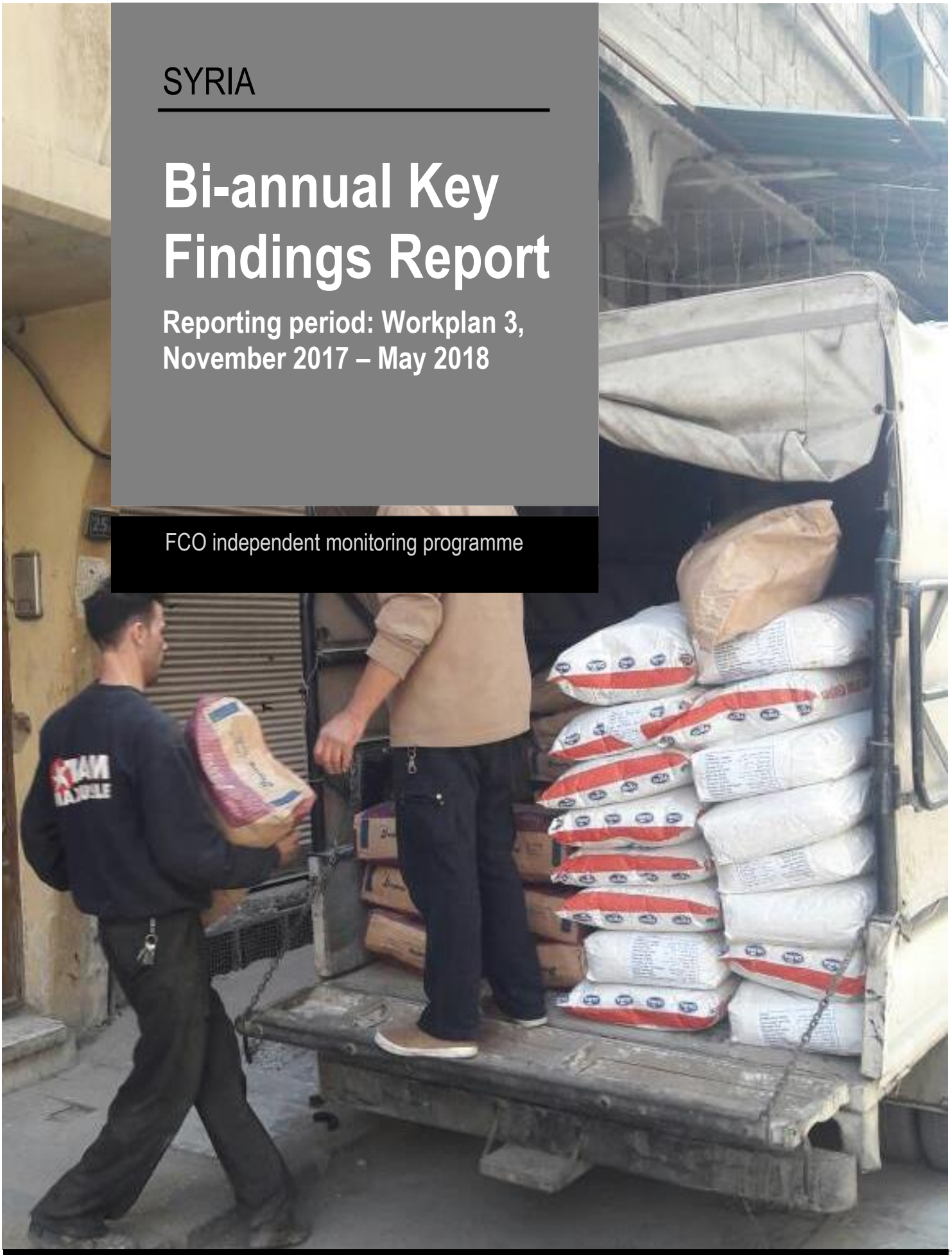
SYRIA

Bi-annual Key Findings Report

Reporting period: Workplan 3, November 2017 – May 2018

FCO independent monitoring programme



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Cover photo: SRMS003 sugar distribution in Misraba, Eastern Ghouta, October 2017 © IMPACT, 2018

About IMPACT
IMPACT Initiatives is a Geneva based think-and-do-tank, created in 2010. IMPACT's teams implement independent assessment, monitoring & evaluation and organisational capacity-building programmes in direct partnership with aid actors or through its inter-agency initiatives, REACH and AGORA. Headquartered in Geneva, IMPACT has an established field presence in over 20 countries across Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Central and South-East Asia, and Eastern Europe.

Executive Summary

As part of the Syria Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) Independent Monitoring Programme funded by Her Majesty's Government (HMG) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, IMPACT Initiatives has monitored several projects in Workplan 3 (WP3). From November 2017 to May 2018, monitoring cycles[1] of the following projects were completed: Ciheam Bari 2 (Rural Women Association); SRMS003 (distribution); CSSF political programme and coordination of the 'Idlib Strategy'. The most relevant findings derived from the primary data collected by IMPACT are presented in this report. Key observations are outlined below:

- **Ciheam Bari 2 (Rural Women Association)**: The third-party monitoring (TPM) sought to understand the decision-making process in the Association and the extent to which the Association is assisting women in addressing their livelihood needs. Members of the Rural Women Association monitored were reportedly able to participate in decision-making through regularly held Association meetings. Association members reported that they were able to raise ideas during meetings, which were then discussed and approved through majority voting. Topics discussed included decisions on product lines, the selection of workers and the types of community activities to conduct. Key informants (KIs) perceived that participatory decision-making processes set up by the Association were effective in allowing its members to participate, contributing to their sense of ownership in the Association. Finally, findings suggested that livelihood needs were addressed to a certain extent. Workers reported that their salaries were able to supplement the basic needs of their families; non-workers did not receive salaries but some perceived training to have improved their employability.

- **SRMS003 (Distribution)**: The TPM sought to understand the criteria used to trigger distribution, the methods/coordination of distribution, and the community perception of the distribution. Findings suggested that the distribution of vegetable oil, rice and sugar was triggered at a critical time when all crossing points into Eastern Ghouta were closed; and the Provincial Council decided to distribute items in equal portions to all families with a ration card (rather than based on a vulnerability criteria) to reduce community tension. Food items were distributed separately (rather than in an integrated basket) at selling points through coordination between the Provincial Council, Local Council and Neighbourhood Committees; and there were some efforts of coordination with external actors to fill in distribution gaps. The Provincial Council reportedly conducted field visits to verify that beneficiaries have received food items and no complaints were reported. A large majority of beneficiary survey respondents were satisfied with the quality of the items, but perceived distribution to be unfair as each family was given an equal portion, meaning larger families received proportionally less than smaller families.

- **Political programme:** The TPM sought to make a limited assessment of the extent to which key beneficiary groups' (key political figures, civil society groups and Syrian women) political participation and international engagement have been enhanced as a result of the CSSF political programme.[2] Findings suggest that key political figures and civil society groups valued and depended on Independent Diplomat's (ID) and the Public International Law and Policy Group's (PILPG) support in enhancing their international engagement. IPs' support was perceived to have contributed toward strengthening the legitimacy and credibility of the Syrian opposition and Syrian civil society groups in the eyes of the international community. Additionally, The Shaikh Group's (TSG) Track II Dialogue Initiatives contributed toward bringing different parties together to bridge understanding both (i) between different parties within the opposition through ISDs, and (ii) between the opposition and the regime through JTMs. ISDs/JTMs

[1] For a monitoring cycle to be completed the following steps have to be taken: data collected, cleaned, analysed, and draft output report submitted to HMG.

[2] Assessed projects included (i) "Technical Assistance and Strategic Support to the Syrian Agents for Change (Opposition, Civil Society and Women)," implemented by Independent Diplomat (ID); (ii) "Negotiation Support to the Syrian Opposition", implemented by the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG); and (iii) "Syria Track II Dialogue Initiative – Intra-Syrian Dialogues and Joint-Track Meetings," implemented by The Shaikh Group (TSG).

were percieved to be valuable in enabling participants to increase their understanding of political issues in Syria and in identifying common points of agreement to inform Track I. Overall, IPs' support were viewed to be distinct from other organisations, and beneficiaries also appreciated the accumulation of experience and rapport that IPs were able to build with beneficiaries over the years. Despite the limited success of the Geneva peace talks in bringing a political solution to end the country's conflict, findings suggest that IPs provided useful support needed by the opposition's key political figures and civil society groups to strengthen their ability to engage in international diplomacy and negotiations.

- **Coordination of the 'Idlib Strategy'**: The TPM sought to explore the coordination of the Idlib Strategy, including what coordination looked like in practice and its results. The Idlib Strategy's intention to improve coordination was welcomed to a large extent by HMG, IPs and the wider donor community. There were successful results of coordination. The Idlib Strategy filled a donor coordination gap, facilitating information sharing and a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of the Idlib context. The Idlib Strategy also demonstrated successful examples of cross-CSSF collaboration on the project level, and there was evidence of other donors that began to mirror programmatic approaches developed under the Idlib Strategy. However, managing coordination itself was a challenge. Coordination gaps included more strategic clarity in coordination roles and responsibilities and increasing the level of consultation from IPs and within HMG.

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Geographic Classifications

Governorate	Highest form of governance below the national level (admin level 1)
District	Sub-division of a governorate in which government institutions operate (admin level 2)
Sub-district	Sub-divison of a district in which government institutions operate (admin level 3)
Community	Bounded clustering of population in the form of a city, town or village (admin level 4)
Neighbourhood	Lowest administrative unit within a city (admin level 5 or 6)

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASI	Adam Smith International
CB	Ciheam Bari
CSSF	Conflict, Stability and Security Fund
DO	Direct Observation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
HNC	High Negotiations Committee
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
ID	Independent Diplomat
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IP	Implementing Partner
ISD	Intra-Syrian Dialogue
JTM	Joint Track Meetings
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
LC	Local Council
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PC	Provincial Council
PILPG	Public International Law and Policy Group
RAF	Radicalisation Assessment Framework
SDR	Secondary Data Review
SRM	Stabilisation Response Mechanism
SMEB	Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket
SNC	Syrian Negotiations Committee
SYP	Syrian Pounds
TPM	Third Party Monitoring
TSG	The Shaikh Group
UN	United Nations
US	United States
WFP	World Food Programme
WP	Work plan

Introduction

As part of the Syria Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) Independent Monitoring Programme funded by Her Majesty's Government (HMG) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, IMPACT Initiatives has monitored several projects in Workplan 3 (WP3).[3] This report provides a summary of key findings for the following projects: Ciheam Bari 2 (Rural Women Association); SRMS003 (distribution); political programme and coordination of the 'Idlib Strategy'.[4] Research methods used and challenges encountered by IMPACT monitoring teams are also outlined. See Table 1 for an overview of the programmes monitored and summarised in this report.

Table 1. Overview HMG-funded programmes, projects, IPs, and services delivered

HMG-funded programmes	Projects monitored by IMPACT	Implementing Partners (IPs)	Services delivered
Support to Agricultural Livelihoods Programme	Ciheam Bari 2 (Rural Women Association)	Ciheam Bari	Ciheam Bari provided financial and technical support that are designed to increase female participation along the food supply chain.
Syria Stabilisation Response Mechanism Programme	SRMS003 (Distribution)	Adam Smith International	Stockpiling of two-week supply of food items and a one-month supply of fuel for the civilian population.
Political Programme	Technical Assistance and Strategic Support to the Syrian Agents for Change (Opposition, Civil Society and Women)	Independent Diplomat (ID)	Provision of strategic and tactical advice to key political figures and civil society groups from the Syrian opposition. Examples include supporting key visits to diplomatic capitals, providing support to diplomatic products (e.g. talking points for visits, public statements), providing negotiation support during Geneva talks and media support.
	Negotiation Support to the Syrian Opposition	Public International Law and Policy Group (PILPG)	Provision of legal negotiations assistance to the Syrian opposition during and between negotiations. It also provided diplomatic support such as drafting opening statements, briefing papers and proposals.
	Syria Track II Dialogue Initiative – Intra-Syrian Dialogues and Joint-Track Meetings	The Shaikh Group (TSG)	Facilitate consensus-building among diverse constituencies through the Intra-Syrian Dialogue (ISD) which brings together representatives from across Syria's ethnic, religious and sectarian divides; and (ii) the Joint-Track Meetings (JTM) which brings together representatives of the opposition with politically independent or regime loyalist Syrians. They are key platforms for in-depth discussion on key issues of contention likely to arise in negotiations.
Coordination of the 'Idlib Strategy'[5]	Various	Various, including Adam Smith International (ASI)	An integrated strategy developed by HMG with the aim to preserve the moderate space and to counter extremism by countering extremist groups such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in its governance and civilian space in the Idlib governorate. Programming strands include (i) connecting civilians to legitimate governance bodies; (ii) supporting community resiliencies; (iii) addressing

[3] WP3 refers to monitoring projects from November 2017 to May 2018.

[4] Output reports for these five monitored projects were submitted by IMPACT to HMG.

[5] The 'Idlib Strategy' is not considered a programme. It is an integrated Strategy developed by HMG, intended to be implemented through the coordination of various CSSF programmes and its relevant projects. The Syria Stabilisation Response Mechanism (SRM) Programme is the main implementing tool of the Idlib Strategy.

			drivers of extremism; and (iv) countering HTS narrative.

Findings by Project

This section summarises the key findings of the TPM of the following projects:

1. Ciheam Bari 2 (Rural Women Association)
2. SRMS003 (Distribution)
3. Political programme
4. Coordination of the 'Idlib Strategy'

Findings presented per project are not generalisable and are strictly connected to the monitored locations or context. Furthermore, findings per monitored location represent the opinions and perceptions of beneficiaries and other stakeholders included in the monitoring. Consequently, results are indicative of the projects' overall performance.

Ciheam Bari 2 (Rural Women Association)

Intervention background

The 'Support to Agriculture Livelihoods Programme' was launched by Ciheam Bari in March 2015. Under the programme, Ciheam Bari supported income generation activities for two women's groups, one in Afrin (Aleppo Governorate) and one in Ma'arrat Tamasrin (Idlib Governorate).

In Ma'arrat Tamasrin, a Rural Women Association (hereby referred to as "the Association") was constituted and had 175 members as of April 2017. Ciheam Bari provided financial and technical support at the beginning of the project, which included introduction sessions on how to run an Association using a bottom-up approach as well as English courses. Ciheam Bari, in collaboration with the Association, created an activity plan for food processing (dairy products). Additionally, technical assistance was provided through virtual classrooms on a needs-basis. According to Ciheam Bari, yoghurt production in Idlib started on May 29th 2016, and the Association started earning a positive net income after three months. In 2017, 20 female employees worked in the Association's factory[6] and generated income for their families under a worker rotation system.[7]

Monitoring took place in Ma'arrat Tamasrin, Idlib governorate. The Association in Afrin (Aleppo Governorate) was not monitored due to security reasons. In this location, IMPACT conducted one day of pilot monitoring on September 20th, 2017. Two days of monitoring activities were then implemented on September 26th and 27th 2017. Female enumerators conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with Association members (all female). This included seven Member workers, seven Member non-workers and four Members of the Executive Board (EB). A male enumerator conucted four KIIs with Local Council (LC) members (all male). All interviews were one-to-one KIIs. See Map 1 for a visual overview of the location monitored during the monitoring exercise. Overarching research questions addressed were:

1. *How do women make decisions in the Association and how are these implemented?*
2. *Has the participatory decision-making process helped the members build ownership of the Association?*
3. *How is the Association assisting women in addressing their livelihood needs?*

[6] According to LC KIIs, the yoghurt factory was provided and rehabilitated by the LC.

[7] The Women Association operates using a worker rotation system. As there was a higher number of Association members that wanted to be a worker than the number of vacant positions available, 20 Association members were selected to be Association workers at the beginning of each year. Ten of the selected workers work for the first six months, and the remaining 10 workers work in the remaining six months.

Map 1. Ciheam Bari 2 (Rural Women Association) locations assessed by TPM activities

Key finding #1: Association members were reportedly able to participate in decision-making through Association meetings.

Findings indicated that there were mechanisms in place to make decisions within the Association. Worker meetings were reportedly held once every two weeks, and non-worker meetings once every two months. Respondents reported that they participated in these meetings on a regular basis. In addition to conducting Association meetings in-person at the facility, discussions and at times voting also took place virtually in a Whatsapp group. Findings indicated that members (EB, non-workers and workers) were aware that there was a complaint box in place. In addition, respondents knew that they were able to discuss issues directly with the Association's president. Members were not aware of any previous complaints made.

Additionally, findings suggested that inclusive participation was fostered within the Association. Respondents reported that they were able to raise their own ideas during meetings, which were then discussed and approved through majority voting. For example, the idea of purchasing new equipment was presented during a team meeting. The idea was selected through majority voting, which was then presented to management for approval. Other decisions include the selection of workers based on an established vulnerability criteria, deciding what products to produce, raising ideas on new product lines, etc.

Respondents unanimously expressed that everyone was treated equally with no reports of favouritism. They felt that the decisions made by the Association were fair, e.g. how the president dealt with complaints and misconduct.

Key finding #2: Participatory decision-making processes set up by the Association were effective in allowing its members to participate, contributing to their sense of ownership in the Association.

Findings suggested that the participatory decision-making processes[8] set up by the Association were effective in allowing its members to participate, contributing to their sense of ownership in the Association. First, the management training raised members' *awareness* and *knowledge* of the tools needed to participate in decision-making e.g. concept of majority voting. These tools were effective in facilitating participation in a systematic and coherent manner within the Association. Second, members perceived that everyone was *treated fairly*, which might

[8] KIIs with LC members indicate that they were not aware of the Association's decision-making processes on product lines and profit reinvestments. This suggests that decisions were made autonomously within the Association, and had little external involvement from the LC.

be conducive to making members feel that their voice was heard regardless of their position. However, indicators to measure whether members feel "ownership" of the Association can be further explored.

Key finding #3: Livelihood needs were addressed on different levels to certain extents. Workers reported that their salaries were able to supplement the basic needs of their families; non-workers did not receive salaries but some perceived training to have improved their employability.

Findings indicated that livelihood needs were addressed on different levels to certain extents. For Association workers, the provision of a job can meet their financial needs on a basic level. Worker KIs reported that they earned around 5,000 to 7,000 SYP per week, which fluctuated depending on profit. The Association worker's monthly income is roughly 31.4 to 44.1% of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) for Northwest Syria.[9] All five worker KIs interviewed reported that the salary received was not enough to cover all basic needs, but was able to contribute to their livelihood needs and improve their financial situation. Some livelihood improvements mentioned by worker KIs included being able to pay off some of their debt, not being dependent on aid assistance, and being able to meet the basic needs of their family (to a certain extent for some).

Non-workers (including Executive Board members) reported that they did not receive any salaries or share of the Association's profit. For non-workers, the Association's activities facilitated them to address their livelihood needs in an indirect way. First, KIs reported that the English language, yoghurt making and management training improved their skills. Second, some KIs perceived the certification of their training to improve their employability. Lastly, some KIs reported an expansion of their social network through the people that they meet in the Association, leading to indirect benefits such as being referred to attend job interviews.

Concluding remarks

Overall, the KIIs conducted were useful in gaining an insight into the decision-making processes and in identifying the benefits of the Association's activities for its members and wider community. Social benefits specific to women were also brought up. KIs reported an increase in confidence and an increase in social status among their families and wider community. Participating in the Association also reportedly allowed them to know a wider network of women from diverse backgrounds, strengthening their social support and contributing to an increase in social cohesion. KIs reported that they did not know any similar initiatives, which suggests that the Rural Women Association was a unique model within the community.

To improve and expand the Association's activities, suggestions made included (i) expanded educational activities and curriculum, (ii) adjustments in training course arrangements, (iii) expanded production and equipment and (iv) salaries for all members and fixed salaries for workers.

SRMS003 (Distribution): Pre-positioning Supplies in Eastern Ghouta[10]

Intervention background

Following the recapture of eastern Aleppo in December 2016, many observers expected the Syrian regime to focus on recapturing the remaining areas of opposition-held Eastern Ghouta (Rural Damascus Governorate). In 2017, Eastern Ghouta faced a tightened siege and was subject to intense military activity.[11]

The SRMS003 project was designed upon the premise that if Eastern Ghouta was to prove resilient to the siege, staple goods would eventually be exhausted entirely. The SRMS003 project aimed to support the moderate opposition, enhancing their resilience to the siege. Specifically, SRMS003 aimed to support the moderate

[9] A SMEB represents the minimum culturally adjusted group of items required to support a six-person Syrian household for a month. In October 2017, the SMEB for Northwest Syria is 63,545 SYP. See Annex II for items counted in the SMEB. Source: Syria Market Monitoring Exercise October 2017.

[10] SRMS003 (Stockpiling) refers to the purchase, delivery and stockpiling of food and fuel to warehouses, and SRMS003 (distribution) refers to the distribution of food and fuel to the public. SRMS003 (Stockpiling) was presented in the Key Findings Report of Workplan 2, and SRMS003 (distribution) is presented in the Key Findings Report of Workplan 3.

[11] The Syrian government eventually took control of Eastern Ghouta in March and April 2018.

opposition-led PC of Rural Damascus to pre-position a two-week supply of food items and a one-month supply of fuel for the civilian population. According to ASI's project proposal, the goods would be for civilian use only and would be sold in local markets in the event of a tighter siege and intensive attacks, and revenues would be used to buy additional food stocks when possible.

SRMS003's first monitoring round conducted by IMPACT between April to July 2017 (under the previous work plan) to monitor the stockpiling of goods. The second monitoring round (MR2) was conducted between October 11th and December 13th, 2017. The objective of MR2 focused on the distribution of food items that were also monitored under MR1. Specifically, the TPM exercise sought to assess the distribution process by collecting and analysing information on stakeholders' views (PC, LC, LC in Exile, Health Directorate, beneficiaries) of the intervention. Overarching research questions addressed were:

1. *What and how effective were the criteria used to trigger distribution and to identify beneficiaries?*
2. *What were the methods of distribution and coordination?*
3. *How did the PC monitor the results after the distribution? What was the community's perception of the distribution?*

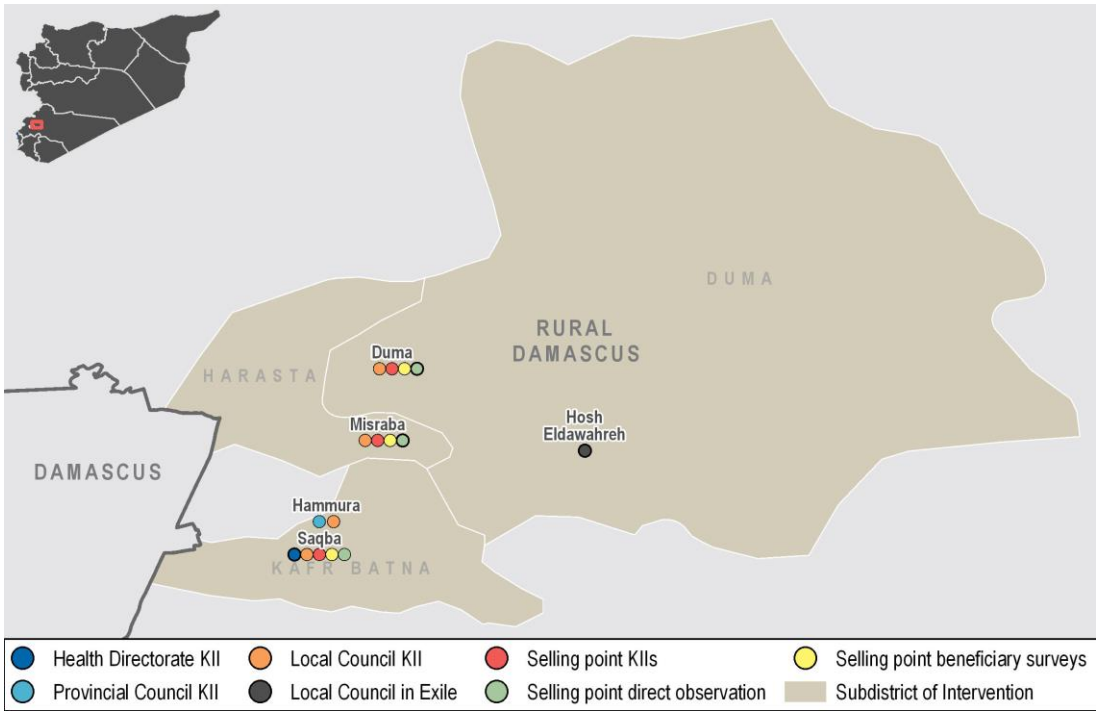
Monitoring activities were conducted for the distribution of vegetable oil, rice, and sugar in Eastern Ghouta.[12] A combination of direct observation (DO), key informant interviews (KIIs) and surveys were used in data collection. This included:

- Group KII with three PC representatives
- Group KII with two Health Directorate representatives
- One-to-one KIIs with one representative of each of the selected LCs (Duma, Saqba, Misraba, and LC in Exile[13] in Hosh Eldawahreh)
- DOs and KIIs with distribution staff at eight selected selling points (Duma, Saqba, Misraba)
- Individual structured surveys with 70 beneficiaries at eight selected selling points (Duma, Saqba, Misraba)

DOs were conducted at selling points where vegetable oil, rice and sugar were sold to the public in order for enumerators to observe the implementation of the distribution at the site. **Beneficiary surveys** were used at each selling point to collect feedback on the recipients' satisfaction with the food items received and the distribution process.[14] Additionally, **KIIs** were conducted with the distribution staff at each selling point to gather their opinion on the distribution process.

[12] As milk and fuel were not distributed during IMPACT's monitoring period as of December 2017, they were not included in the TPM exercise.
[13] LCs in Exile refer to councils that have been displaced. For example, the Hosh Eldawahreh LC in Exile was based in Misraba, and was responsible for (i) local citizens still living in Hosh Eldawahreh and (ii) IDPs that were originally from Hosh Eldawahreh.
[14] As security challenges mean large-scale random sampling was not possible, convenience sampling was adopted.

Map 2. SRMS003 (Distribution) locations assessed by TPM activities



Key finding #1: The distribution of vegetable oil, rice and sugar was triggered at a critical time when all crossing points into Eastern Ghouta were closed; and the PC decided to distribute items in equal portions to all families with a ration card (rather than based on a vulnerability criteria) to reduce community tension.

Findings revealed that the distribution of vegetable oil, rice and sugar was triggered at a critical time when all crossing points into Eastern Ghouta were closed in October 2017, leading to unprecedented prices, extreme food shortages and an increase in malnutrition cases. According to the PC, the Consultant Committee decided to start the distribution as the "prices became very high and unacceptable". Some LC KIs also suggested that public sentiments influenced their decision to distribute food items.

In the vegetable oil, rice and sugar distribution, each family was reportedly entitled to 850g of vegetable oil, 1kg of rice and 500g of sugar at lowered prices of 1,000 SYP, 700 SYP and 400 SYP respectively. According to PC KIs, the decision to distribute vegetable oil, rice and sugar to all families was due to the PC's assessment that (i) all families were in need of the food items, and (ii) to avoid tension between beneficiaries and people that otherwise would have been excluded from the food distribution. As the distribution was intended to cover all families, ration cards were used to track and verify beneficiaries. The sales prices were set by the PC's Economic Committee and Consultant Committee according to the cost of the goods.

Distribution gaps identified included:

- Some internally displaced persons (IDPs) were not allocated portions as they did not have a LC in Exile to represent them in the distribution process.[15]
- Some families reportedly missed out on food items as they had no ration cards, or had ration cards that did not have their most updated community of residence, i.e. IDPs.

[15] A key challenge reported was the underlying tension between local citizens and IDPs. When creating the beneficiary list and distribution mechanism for vegetable oil, rice and sugar, the PC and LCs reportedly faced challenges in allocating portions for IDPs due to limited portions. Additionally, the LCs in Exile requested the PC to distribute food items for IDPs under LCs in Exile, rather than directly to the LCs that the IDPs were currently residing in as originally planned. Consequently, some LC KIs identified tension and coordination challenges between the LCs and LCs in Exile.

- Some families reportedly missed out as they could not afford to purchase the food item distributed through SRMS003.
- The looting of sugar from SRM warehouses in the Middle sector led the PC to decide to only distribute items in the Northern sector, and each family's entitled portions were halved from 1kg of sugar to 500g of sugar.

Key finding #2: Items were distributed separately (rather than in an integrated basket) at selling points through the coordination between PC, LC and Neighbourhood Committees; and there were some efforts of coordination to fill in distribution gaps.

Distribution took place through selling points coordinated by 16 LCs and LCs in Exile from October 5th to 25th, 2017. The PC decided to distribute separately food items from the warehouses - in the order of vegetable oil, rice and sugar – rather than all together in an integrated food basket. Based on the beneficiary list provided by LCs to the PC, the PC allocated portions and transported them to each LC and their respective selling points. IMPACT monitors reported that the distribution took place in an orderly manner at the observed selling points. LC KIs reportedly delivered items to those who were not able to access selling points, including the elderly and disabled. The LC in Exile KI also reported that they delivered items to local citizens and IDPs living far away from the selling points. Main challenges reported include (i) leakages when handling oil that led each family to only receive 850g instead of 890g of vegetable oil, and (ii) delays in the distribution process when involving LCs in Exile to manage the distribution for IDPs.

Findings revealed that the SRM distribution involved coordination with external actors. First, KIs reported that some organisations subsidised poor families so that they were able to receive SRM's distributed items for free. Second, the Duma LC divided Duma into separate geographical sectors, in which the SRM distribution covered certain geographical sectors in Duma only, and the remaining sectors in Duma were covered by other distribution efforts. Finally, as rice portions were not enough to distribute to all families in Eastern Ghouta, the PC had planned to distribute 12 tonnes of sugar under CSSF's Tamkeen programme to compensate beneficiaries who were not able to receive rice.[16] The PC and LC KIs reported no overlap in distribution efforts.

Findings suggested that processes were in place for revenue safekeeping and the PC KIs reported no challenges faced in revenue management. Through close coordination between the PC and LCs, the revenue was reportedly transferred from selling points to their respective LCs, which were then transferred from the LCs to the PC's Finance Office. The PC's plan was to use the revenue to purchase and store 240 tonnes of barley in PC warehouses.

Key finding #3: PC reportedly conducted field visits to verify that beneficiaries have received food items and no complaints were reported. A large majority of beneficiary survey respondents were satisfied with the quality of the items, but perceived distribution to be unfair because larger families received proportionally less than smaller families.

To monitor the results of the distribution, the PC's monitoring office reportedly conducted field visits with approximately 10% of families to verify that they have received food items. The PC reported that all beneficiaries monitored received food items. The PC's Citizen Services Office, in charge of receiving complaints through written forms, phone calls and social media, reportedly did not receive any complaints. PC and LC KIs reported that there were no protection issues or unintended/negative consequences to the distribution.

Through surveys conducted with 70 beneficiaries at eight selling points in Duma, Saqba and Misraba, findings revealed that 84.3% of respondents perceived the goods to come from the PC, LC and/or the Relief Office. Remaining respondents did not know where the goods came from. A large majority (98.6%) of survey respondents perceived the distribution to be unfair – 88.6% believed it was unfair because large families were entitled to the same portion as smaller families, while 10.0% reported that the distribution should be based on vulnerability categories. A large majority (91.3%) of survey respondents were satisfied with the quality of the food received.

[16] This eventually never happened as sugar from Tamkeen was also looted during the looting incident.

However, due to high levels of food shortages as a result of the tightened siege, many survey respondents mentioned that the amount received was not enough and that larger amounts should be distributed.[17]

Concluding remarks

Overall, findings revealed that the food items distributed through SRMS003 were quickly sold out, which suggests that the project was meeting a community need. However, the distributed amount - enough to last approximately two to three days for a five-person family - arguably had minimal effect in strengthening resilience against the siege in extreme political and military circumstances such as the situation in Eastern Ghouta during the distribution period.

Findings from the TPM exercise suggest that the PC's public reputation can be fragile, especially in extreme circumstances such as a tightened siege. Mismanagement of the distribution could lead to public discontent or distrust of the PC. Although the TPM did not focus on the public's perception of the PC, there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that some members of the public were dissatisfied with the PC's management of the SRM distribution.[18] However, there were also examples of public support for the PC. The people's voluntary return of food items[19] after the looting suggest that there was still public trust in the PC's management of the distribution, including trust in the PC's ability to redistribute portions as they see fit to other members of the community. Further investigation can seek to understand whether the distribution project can be an opportunity to strengthen community resilience and to gain greater public support.

To better understand the results of SRMS003, further investigation could contextualise SRMS003 within other aid distribution efforts and the population's food security concerns. If similar projects were conducted in the future, further investigation could explore ways to improve the project's conflict sensitivity, e.g. whether there are ways to better plan and estimate population numbers, and whether there are ways to strengthen the PC's governance to address community tensions and IDP needs. The extent to which the PC's established beneficiary feedback mechanisms were effective could be further explored.

Political Programme

Intervention background

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, there were various international initiatives that aimed to bring an end to the Syrian conflict. Two main tracks included (i) the United Nations (UN)-sponsored talks in Geneva, and (ii) the Astana negotiations, facilitated by Russia and Turkey.[20] The Syrian Track II Dialogue Initiative was also established to involve the broader Syrian constituency represented in the negotiations.[21]

The Geneva negotiations were conducted based on the framework of the Geneva communiqué, which was drafted in Geneva I by major powers, including United States (US) and Russian officials, in June 2012.[22] The communiqué envisioned the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers that would oversee elections and put the country on the path to democracy. The High Negotiations Committee (HNC), based in Riyadh,

[17] Using World Food Programme's (WFP) standard food basket of dry goods, the amount distributed by SRM was able to meet a five-person household's needs for less than four days. This is lower than the intended project goal of covering civilian needs for two weeks, as listed in the SRM project proposal.

[18] For example, some beneficiaries (that refused to participate in beneficiary surveys) were upset, some reportedly believed that the PC's delay in distribution has led to the looting, and others noted rumours that the PC was involved in the looting. There were also rumours that some portions of SRM's food items were sold to the market for individuals' financial gains. Some also believed that food items should be distributed for free rather than to be sold at a price. Regardless of whether the rumours and criticisms from the community were valid, they can have negative consequences in undermining the credibility of the PC.

[19] According to the PC, 2,300kg of sugar, 796kg of rice, 2,000kg of milk, and 334L of vegetable oil were turned by the people after the looting incident.

[20] Al Jazeera, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/syria-diplomatic-talks-timeline-170915083153934.html

[21] Track I refers to formal negotiations, largely consisting of government officials and representatives of inter-governmental organisations. Track II refers to private, usually confidential talks among parties, experts and others. They can include actors such as non-governmental and unofficial groups and individuals.

[22] UN, https://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf

was the opposition's main diplomatic representative in the Geneva negotiations.[23] This was rebranded into the Syrian Negotiations Committee (SNC) in November 2017, and with a newly appointed lead negotiator Nasr al-Hariri.

Under the CSSF political programme, funding was provided to the Implementing Partners (IPs) Independent Diplomat (ID), Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG), and The Shaikh Group (TSG). The projects implemented by ID and PILPG provided technical assistance and strategic support to the Syrian opposition and the Syrian civil society to strengthen its ability in negotiations that aimed to resolve the Syrian crisis.[24] The project included activities such as the provision of negotiation assistance to the Syrian opposition in the Geneva and Astana talks, providing media and public diplomacy support to amplify the voice of the Syrian opposition, and providing diplomatic advice to the Women's Advisory Committee of the HNC/SNC to amplify Syrian women's voices, among other activities. For TSG's Syria Track II Dialogue Initiative, the project builds consensus among key Syrian actors on actionable proposals to achieve a legitimate, just, and peaceful political transition. It aims to achieve this through organising structured dialogues where influential Syrians representing diverse constituencies can meet, voice their views, and agree on common positions.

The objective of the monitoring exercise was to collect and analyse beneficiary feedback of monitored projects to understand the perceived effectiveness and result of CSSF's political programme. *Direct beneficiaries* refer to key political figures in Syrian opposition (including HNC/SNC) and civil society groups supported by IPs. *Indirect beneficiaries* refer to members of the international community (e.g. UN, foreign envoys to Syria, INGOs), that the Syrian opposition have interacted with as part of its international engagement. The overarching research questions are:

1. *To what extent do key political figures within the Syrian moderate opposition use and value the IPs' advice to inform their international diplomacy and negotiations strategy?*
2. *To what extent has the international engagement of Syrian civil society groups been enhanced as a result of the IPs' support?*
3. *To what extent has Syrian women's political participation in international diplomacy and negotiations been enhanced as a result of the IPs' support?*
4. *To what extent do Syrian opposition feel that their voice has been amplified internationally as a result of the ID's[25] public diplomacy support?*

IMPACT conducted purposive sampling using the full beneficiary list provided by the IPs. KIIs were conducted between May 4th to 28th, 2018. Nineteen KIIs covering 20 KIs were conducted.[26] Interviews with Syrian beneficiaries were conducted in Arabic,[27] and KIIs with (non-Syrian) indirect beneficiaries were conducted in English. KIIs were transcribed and translated into English. Data was coded using ATLAS.ti, and analysed according to sub-research questions and emerging themes that appeared in the findings.

Key finding #1: Syrian opposition KIs perceived IPs' technical support to be valuable in improving their ability to engage in international negotiations and diplomacy, strengthening the opposition's level of professionalism and credibility in the international community.

Findings suggest that key political figures in the Syrian opposition highly depended on IPs' support to inform their international diplomacy and negotiations strategy to a large extent. HNC/SNC KIs perceived ID's support to be

[23] The HNC is an umbrella organisation formed at the end of 2015 to represent the moderate political and military groups that oppose the Assad regime. Their membership includes Syrian groups ranging from Damascus-based oppositionists to moderate armed opposition groups. Source from HMG: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-the-high-negotiations-committee-of-the-syrian-opposition

[24] Under CSSF, PILPG provided support to the Syrian opposition, and ID provided support to both the Syrian opposition and civil society group only.

[25] PILPG and TSG did not provide public diplomacy support to beneficiaries.

[26] IMPACT was not able to conduct KIIs with some beneficiaries that were selected to participate in the TPM as they refused to participate due to their lack of availability.

[27] With the exception of one KII where the beneficiary was fluent in English and the interview was conducted in English.

invaluable, such as in gaining access to high-level contacts in the UN and governments, in receiving support on drafting statements, and in receiving strategic diplomatic advice. PILPG's support was also perceived to be important in providing consultation advice to HNC/SNC during and in between the negotiation rounds. For example, PILPG provided legal consultation to the opposition on how to respond to key documents presented by the UN Special Envoy for Syria as the basis for the negotiations, including the "Twelve Principles"[28] and "Four Baskets of Concerns". [29]

The Syrian moderate opposition's reliance on the IPs' advice was reportedly attributed to the **strong personal working relationships** that IPs built with the opposition over time. For example, an opposition KI mentioned that ID's support has evolved, and was able to adopt an individualised approach for each HNC/SNC member tailored to meet their needs. A KI from the international community suggested that ID and PILPG were "by far the most trusted advisors within the opposition", and mentioned that the number and sensitivity of requests that IPs were receiving has increased over time. Additionally, the Syrian opposition reportedly valued IPs' support due to the perceived **independence** of its support as foreign governments were perceived to have their own political interests in Syria. IPs were not perceived to be taking sides within HNC/SNC, allowing them to provide advice despite any internal division between HNC/SNC. KIs also expressed that they were comfortable in asking and receiving IPs' advice without feeling obliged to use it in a certain way.

Overall, IPs' support reportedly increased the opposition's level of **professionalism** and **credibility** among the international community. For example, an opposition KI perceived that "the UN [now] feels that the opposition's side is very serious and that we are concerned about the political process, as opposed to what the UN thought before". Another KI perceived that there are "more legitimacy and credibility" to the Syrian opposition because ID's support has been "reflected in our work". Similarly, a KI mentioned that PILPG's "professional legal opinion" had a "great impact on our [HNC/SNC's] work". The opposition reportedly became "very interested" in engaging and utilising law in its strategy. The opposition perceived their strengthened credibility to be important in demonstrating to the international community that they can be an "alternative to the Assad regime in the transition period".

Key finding #2: ID's support reportedly contributed toward Syrian civil society groups' improved technical ability to engage in international advocacy, improved access to high-level contacts, and improved ability to articulate shared perspectives in order to strengthen the civil society's voice in the international community.

Findings suggest that ID played an important role in enhancing the Syrian organisations' international engagement by bridging its gap with the UN, governments and international NGOs. ID's support strengthened the **technical capacity** of civil society groups in engaging with the international community. This included support such as utilising international law in its advocacy, drafting statements in a formal language, and framing key messages in a way that aligns with the policy priorities of the government and the UN. ID's extensive network, as well as financial and logistical support, reportedly provided Syrian organisations with the opportunity to access high-level figures in the international community through advocacy visits.

Additionally, ID played a coordination and mediating role between Syrian organisations, such as in identifying common positions across different organisations to strengthen the civil society groups' voice when advocating with the international community. For example, there were reportedly tensions between civil society groups, including "challenges [of] whether or not to participate at Sochi when the Russians engaged, or on how to influence the UN decision to be present at Sochi." A KI perceived that "ID has worked hard to align activists in civil society with clear messages about that." Overall, findings suggest positive results when Syrian civil societies were brought together in delivering its message to the international community. For example, a UN KI mentioned that "when a good solid

[28] The UN Special Envoy for Syria presented a document "Special Envoy's 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles" to the delegations in parallel meetings. These included 12 points of commonalities regarding the end-state of Syria, which were last shared with the parties in a version offered for their consideration by the Special Envoy during round 4 of the talks. Source: Statement on behalf of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura (2017).

[29] The "Four Baskets" of Concerns include issues regarding a credible non-sectarian transitional government; a future constitution; early and free parliamentary elections within 18 months; and a united war against terrorism within Syria. Source: Briefing to the Security Council by United Nations Special Envoy for Syria (2017).

group of Syrian civil society organisations sends [a] letter to the Secretary General [office], it gets their attention." Overall, KIs perceived ID's support to have strengthened the relationship between Syrian civil society groups and the international community, improving the credibility of Syrian civil society's voice among the international community.

Key finding #3: IP support facilitated Syrian women to have the opportunities and skills needed for international engagement, but engagement was viewed to be limited due to the perceived lack of interest from HNC/SNC and the international community.

To facilitate Syrian women's political participation in international diplomacy, findings suggest that IPs' projects have been gender-sensitive in their support to a large extent. This included ensuring a balanced gender ratio in activities, supporting female beneficiaries to advocate on gender issues, and highlighting gender issues where relevant. To further strengthen women participation, KIs suggested a higher representation of women in the TSG delegation's meetings with the international community, and incorporating more topics on gender issues in the ISD/JTM agenda. Overall, KIs perceived outcomes to be limited given the wider structural challenges, such as the perceived lack of interest from SNC and the international community in prioritising gender issues. Beyond expanded support from IPs to enhance women participation, KIs suggested that it was important to place women in leadership positions with decision-making power. This would limit the use of the 'women's participation' issue as a 'lip service', in order to translate participation into policy changes that support women.

Key finding #4: ISDs and JTMs were viewed to be credible and important Track II platforms to improve understanding between diverse parties. Common positions and points of agreements are identified in the meetings in order to inform Syria's ongoing political negotiations.

Findings suggest that ISDs and JTMs were perceived to be valuable platforms in discussing important issues, such as the constitution, pre-transition and transition. Participation was perceived to be inclusive, which brought together opposition actors across the spectrum, civil society groups, as well as independents, businessmen, lawyers, engineers, etc. ISD/JTM reportedly contributed toward bringing different parties together to bridge understanding (i) between different parties within the opposition through ISDs, and (ii) between the opposition and the regime through JTMs. For example, a KI reported that "our perception [between the opposition and regime] became closer" after attending JTMs; as compared to the start when the regime viewed the Syrian opposition only as "terrorists", while the opposition viewed the regime only for "killing the Syrian people". KIs also reported that through ISD/JTM they were able to gain a more in-depth knowledge of issues that were important to Syria's political process. ISD/JTM was viewed to be a legitimate platform as it was able to discuss issues in a serious and constructive manner, and it "did not simply issues like the other organisations".

The points of agreements resulting from the Track II meetings were reportedly shared with the international community. In both ISD and JTM, a MOU was created detailing outcomes of the meetings, which was seen as a "very important" document to influence the political process in the international community. A KI from the international community perceived ISD/JTM to be "most relevant and have most potential," especially as it was "a bit of a jungle [with] so many different tracks". The perceived value and legitimacy of the ISD/JTM was attributed to the design of TSG's mechanism, which was "consultative", "participatory" and "well-supported". To improve the effectiveness of JTMs, some (opposition and independent) participant KIs suggested the need to change a few participants from the regime in order for the discussions to be more effective, but noted that the quality of participants has improved over time. Some KIs also raised concerns about the applicability of ISD/JTM on the ground, and suggested further evaluation on whether new processes or mechanisms were needed to translate what has been agreed on paper (through Track II meetings) into practical change.

Coordination of the 'Idlib Strategy'

Intervention background

The Idlib Strategy was developed by HMG in April 2017. The aim was to preserve the moderate space and to counter extremism by countering extremist groups such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham[30] (HTS) in its governance and civilian space in Idlib governorate, with a focus on the community level.

The rationale for HMG's strategy was to counter the governance ambitions of terrorist entities such as HTS, as designated by the UK and US governments. The Idlib Strategy had four strands of programming:

1. Connecting civilians to legitimate governance bodies;
2. Supporting community resiliencies;
3. Addressing drivers of extremism;
4. Countering HTS narrative.

For the Idlib Strategy to be successful, effective coordination between the actors was perceived by HMG to be crucial. Stakeholders included HMG, non-HMG staff (other donors), and their IPs. Overarching research questions that the monitoring exercise sought to address were:

1. *How were projects intended to add up to an Idlib Strategy?*
2. *What did coordination look like in practice?*
3. *What were the results of coordination?*

Between January 30th and March 20th, 2018, 20 semi-structured KIIs (with 24 KIs) were conducted. This included nine HMG staff, 13 IP KIs (from six different IPs), and two non-HMG donor officials. With the exception of four KIIs, remaining interviews were conducted on the phone or Skype. Document Review was also used to understand the background of the Idlib Strategy and to capture some of the coordination in the Strategy. Programme documents reviewed included concept notes, activity plans, meeting agendas and meeting summaries collected from HMG and SRM.

Key finding #1: The Idlib Strategy filled a donor coordination gap, facilitating information sharing and a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of the Idlib context; but some IP KIs expressed lacking a channel for them to influence HMG's strategy and programmatic approach in response to developments in Idlib.

KIs perceived donor coordination conducted through the Idlib Strategy to be useful, and was seen as filling a key coordination gap in the donor community. The platform created through the Idlib Strategy was reportedly useful in bringing actors together to exchange information on the situation in Idlib, to understand what different actors were doing, and consequently to identify overlaps and/or possible areas for collaboration. This was perceived to be especially useful when programming in a high risk and volatile conflict environment - such as the case of Idlib - to create a shared understanding of the situation as well as lines of programming and risk that others were taking.

In areas where the Idlib Strategy aligned with other donors, there were opportunities for coordination. The Idlib Strategy was able to contribute towards channeling donor resources more strategically in alignment with the HMG's CSSF effort. Findings revealed successful examples of donors taking on certain programming approaches from the Idlib Strategy. The US reportedly began to model some of Idlib Strategy's approach; Canada took on the Strategy's women peacebuilding programme; and the French provided health programmes through a need that was identified through the Idlib Strategy's 'Radicalisation Assessment Framework' methodology.[31]

[30] Idlib HTS, formerly known as al-Qaeda in Syria, is a Salafist jihadist movement that aims to seize control of Syria from the Assad regime.
[31] The development of RAF in CSSF Syria has also influenced CSSF in other countries. According to an IP KI, RAF is reportedly piloted in CSSF Iraq and will be introduced in CSSF Yemen.

However, findings suggested a coordination gap in information sharing. Some IP KIs perceived the IPs' lack of involvement or input on the strategic level in the Idlib Strategy to have limited the effectiveness of HMG's strategy in Idlib. For example, a KI mentioned that although the IP was asked to feed information to HMG through research outputs, the information was reportedly not adequately utilised as there were no opportunities for discussion around the information provided to inform the approach taken by the Idlib Strategy. Other IP KIs perceived that had there been more IP involvement at the planning stage, the Idlib Strategy would have been more relevant to the context on the ground, and that it would have been "more realistic" and "less ambitious".

Key finding #2: The Idlib Strategy demonstrated successful examples of cross-IP project collaboration, but not all project initiatives were perceived to be appropriate under the Strategy due to differing project timeframe and approach.

The Idlib Strategy was able to identify areas across different programme areas and IPs that could meaningfully collaborate in a project to increase strategic impact. For example, the 'Moderate Opposition Resilience' project reportedly demonstrated successful coordination between SRM and other IPs across programme areas. Through cross-cutting collaboration, an IP was reportedly able to utilise strategic communications programming to promote SRM's service delivery projects in a systematic manner, with the aim of strengthening the credibility of local governance actors among the community. A HMG KI perceived the project to be a success in which "the Strategic Communications programme and SRM support for Idlib City Council demonstrated that coordination could be achieved in order to bring about a successful outcome." An IP KI also mentioned that "pushed by HMG, the coordination was worthwhile. It absolutely made sense on the communications side [to be] working on this project."

However, some KIs perceived new projects introduced under the Idlib Strategy to contradict the nature or needs of their current projects. For example, there was intention to fit a new project for the Idlib Strategy into CSSF's education programme, as multiple surveys found that Syrians valued education and demanded education for their children. However, a KI mentioned that there was "immediate discrepancy in objectives" in which the "education projects under the Idlib Strategy contradicted the objectives of the broader education programming". First, the Idlib Strategy had a short project timespan, which reportedly contradicted the time required to drive meaningful education outcomes. This limited education activities under the Idlib Strategy to be short term, relatively simple and quick. Second, due to contract regulations,[32] it limited HMG's ability to contract their current IP (perceived to have the technical capacity) to take on additional education projects under the Idlib Strategy. This restricted education projects under the Idlib Strategy to be "simple" and "one-off activities", such as the distribution of school bags and winterisation kits. A KI mentioned that "the IP did not have the technical knowledge and understanding of education to do anything beyond that".

Key Findings #3: The Idlib Strategy's coordination responsibilities were broadly divided between HMG and SRM; but some KIs expressed that ASI's coordination role was limited due to its lack of autonomy to coordinate other IPs.

The responsibilities for coordination were broadly divided between HMG and SRM. In addition to delivering specific projects under the Idlib Strategy, SRM was given a coordination role due to the flexible nature of its programme, enabling it to cover a wide range of projects within a short period of time. Findings suggested a mixed response regarding SRM's coordination role. Although a few were open to coordinating with SRM, some KIs were confused about reporting to ASI (rather than HMG).

Barriers to coordination included the lack of clarity over SRM's coordination role, as well as SRM's limited power and influence to coordinate the Strategy. For example, an IP KI mentioned that "we don't answer to other implementers, we answer to HMG, our project objectives and log frame." An HMG KI mentioned that "IPs were confused about SRM's role…SRM was given a coordination role, but they are an IP too so it needed HMG programme managers to coordinate."

[32] According to the KI, CSSF contract regulations has a cap on the amount of funding each IP was able to receive. The current IP of their education programme reached the cap, which meant that HMG was not able to also contract the IP to implement new education projects under the Idlib Strategy.

Findings suggested a gap between HMG's intended coordination role for SRM and the parameters that SRM was given to coordinate. SRM perceived that HMG had not provided a "clear mandate" and "clear lines of authority" in clarifying "what precisely did we have control". From HMG's perspective, there were limitations to SRM's ability to coordinate given it was not a donor. For example, a HMG KI explained that the SRM team leader reportedly demonstrated a desire to have executive and convening powers over other implementers, but "the reality was that this doesn't really work (unless agreed via a consortium contract which forces implementers to work together). Coordination needed to be run through HMG in order to bring implementers together and ensure they worked collaboratively." The KI added that "Ultimately, SRM didn't have the HMG cap badge…and donors rather than implementers have the convening power to ensure projects work together coherently." This suggests that although SRM was given a coordination role to steer the Strategy, SRM's ability to do so was reportedly limited in practice given HMG perceived coordination to be more appropriate for HMG to conduct. Furthermore, it raises broader questions on the relationship between donors and IPs, including the optimal level of autonomy IPs could and should have in managing their programmes, especially when it involves coordination with other IPs.

Concluding remarks

Findings revealed that the Idlib Strategy involved a complex web of coordination, including layers of horizontal and vertical; internal and external (non-HMG), as well as formal and informal coordination. In order for coordination to be successful, it was necessary to navigate various underlying factors such as a developing a clear consultation and decision-making structure, and aligning project timeframes between programmes.

To better understand the coordination of the Idlib Strategy, further investigation could (i) cover a more diverse range of stakeholders (e.g. a wider range of donors and more non-HMG IPs) to obtain varied perspectives to cover different components of the coordination mechanism, (ii) contextualise the Strategy within coordination efforts outside of the Strategy to assess the extent to which the new coordination mechanism complemented, interacted and/or overlapped with previous efforts, and (iii) explore how best practices, shortcomings and lessons learnt on coordination from the Strategy can apply to wider CSSF Syria programming.

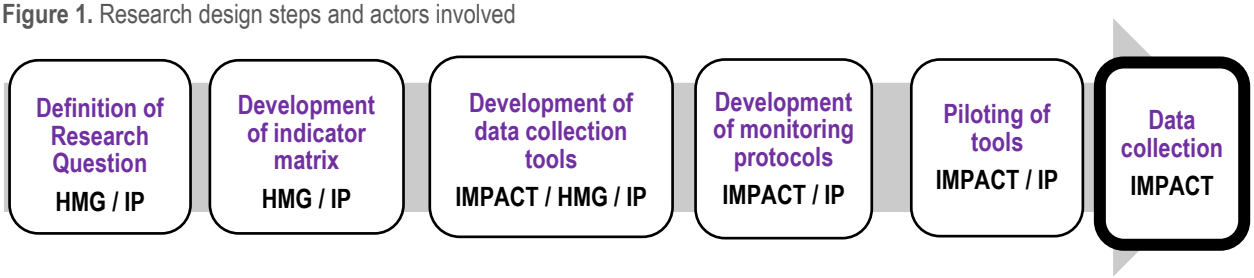
Methodology

Monitoring Cycle

For CB2, SRMS003 (Distribution) and the Political Programme outlined in the Findings section, research questions were defined by HMG in consultation with IMPACT and individual IPs. IMPACT engaged closely with HMG and individual IPs to develop suitable indicators based on information obtained from project documents, which were shared with IMPACT by HMG and indiviudal IPs ahead of each monitoring phase. For the monitoring exercise on the coordination of the Idlib Strategy, research questions for the coordination of the Idlib Strategy were defined by HMG and IMPACT only.

Once indicators had been approved by HMG and IPs, IMPACT proceeded with the selection of data collection methods and technical design of the data collection tools. An initial draft of the data collection tools in English was submited to HMG for feedback. Once a final version had been validated by HMG, IMPACT translated the tools from English to Arabic. In order to outline data collection procedures and facilitate the communication between IMPACT and the IP field teams, IMPACT developed specific monitoring protocols to guide all stakeholders, including enumerators, during the data collection process. IMPACT enumerators then proceeded to piloting the tools and collecting the data.

Figure 1. Research design steps and actors involved



Geographic coverage

The TPM exercises in WP3 were conducted in two governorates in Syria, Rural Damascus and Idlib. In CB2, locations monitored were selected by the IPs based on the implementation status of project activities and accessibility of locations where activities were conducted. In SRMS003 (distribution), selling point locations and corresponding LCs to conduct KIIs were selected by IMPACT. Remote interviews were conducted for the 'Coordination of the Idlib Strategy' and Political Programme monitoring exercise, with the exception of a few face-to-face KIIs held in Amman, Jordan.

Data Collection Methods

A combination of different qualitative and quantitative methods was employed during the TPM. The identification of suitable methods was based on the nature of the project monitored, the research questions and corresponding indicators. Consequently, data collection methods were established on a project-by-project basis. The completed TPM exercises in Workplan 3 as well as the data collection activities for each are listed in Table 3. Data collection methods are further elaborated in the following sub-sections.

Table 2. Number of data collection activities implemented per project and per type of data collection method[33]

Project	Status	DO	KII[34]	Individual Survey
Ciheam Bari 2 (Rural Women Association)	Completed	-	22	-
SRMS003 (Distribution)	Completed	8	14	70
Political programme	Completed	-	19	-
Coordination of the 'Idlib Strategy'	Completed	-	20	-
Total		8	56	70

Direct observation

DO was used to obtain descriptive information from a neutral third party of the environment of a particular intervention. In WP3, DO was used in SRMS003.

DO was beneficial in collecting physical evidence that can be readily seen, such as assessing the quality of stocks (e.g. through expiry dates, oil leakages during distribution) at selling points in SRMS003. It was also useful in providing additional meaning and context, such as observing the distribution process at the selling points and whether all beneficiaries presented their ration card at the selling point.

Despite the advantages of DO, this method was susceptible to the enumerators' inherent bias. To reduce bias, IMPACT enumerators were provided with pre-designed observation forms that guide the field activities. This

[33] Status as of November 15th 2017.
[34] Although most were one-to-one KIIs, some were group KIIs that which means there were a higher number of KIs interviewed than the number of KIIs conducted.

allowed them to proceed in a more systematic and structured manner in recording relevant information at the monitoring site. The principles of neutrality and professionalism were also emphasised during enumerator training. Ideally, enumerators should not conduct DO in the community that they are from to mitigate potential bias. However, due to movement restrictions, this was not always possible. IMPACT had not observed any cases of intentional bias by enumerators throughout WP3.

Key informant interviews

KIIs were used to monitor all projects in Workplan 3. This method has proved to be effective in providing in-depth information, especially in Syria where the lack of accessibility and a highly volatile context impede probability sampling of beneficiaries. KIIs were also used for key stakeholders, such as interviewing members of the PC and LC.

In the context of this TPM, key informants included:

- Beneficiaries: those who benefited directly and indirectly from the projects implemented.
- Staff that implemented the projects: managers, officers and technical experts.
- The representatives of the moderate opposition and/ or civil society: PC, LC and affiliated Directorates/Committees.

In CB2, the IP provided IMPACT with a list of beneficiaries in order to conduct random sampling when selecting KIs. In the political programme, purposive sampling was conducted in order to select a wide range of KIs. In SRMS003, KIs were selected by IMPACT. To understand the distribution process, a wide range of actors involved in different stages of the distribution process were identified. This included representatives of the PC, Health Directorate, LC and staff at selling points. In the Idlib Strategy coordination, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HMG staff, other donors and their IPs to gather different perspectives of stakeholders' participation and coordination roles in the Idlib Strategy. Snowball sampling was used to identify other actors involved in the Strategy.

Individual surveys

A survey approach was also utilised in SMRS003 to collect beneficiary feedback on food items received. Due to the volatile security situation and difficulties in accessing the entire population, randomised probability sampling was not possible. Although non-probability sampling method cannot be considered representative with a quantifiable level of precision, the survey approach was useful in sampling a higher number of respondents and the data gathered can be indicative of the target group surveyed.

However, the nature of individual surveys tends to solicit brief responses through multiple choice or short answer questions, as opposed to methods such as KIIs or FGDs that can explore topics in detail. Additionally, convenience sampling has a self-selection bias. In SRMS003, IMPACT monitors reportedly faced difficulties in finding beneficiaries to respond to the survey, especially after the looting incident at the sugar selling points.

Document review

For the purpose of this TPM, IMPACT has used document review in order to understand the scope, scale, objectives and activities of the projects monitored. Secondary data used in the monitoring cycle included programme documents; beneficiary lists; concept notes; meeting agenda; meeting minutes. When relevant, internal documents of IPs were also incorporated into the analysis process for triangulation with evidence gathered in the field.

Piloting of tools

Prior to the beginning of data collection, one day of fieldwork was normally conducted to pilot the tools. This piloting was done both at the IMPACT office and field level to make sure that potential issues with the tools (poor terminology, misunderstandings, errors in translation, etc.) were addressed prior to the official data collection process. The piloting of the tools at field level was done with individuals that did not take part in the actual data collection activities but have the same profile as the target groups. If no modifications were made to the data collection tool after the pilot, the data is included in the findings.

Analysis

After each monitoring day that involved data collection, enumerators were debriefed by IMPACT field coordinators. During the debriefing sessions, done over the phone or on Skype, staff ensured that the data collected during KIIs were forwarded to IMPACT field coordinators as comprehensively and understandably as possible. Debriefings also served the purpose of identifying any mismatching or confusing information, lack of accuracy and helped to identify data that required further triangulation.

Once this process was finalised, primary data was translated by IMPACT field coordinators or by external translators. IMPACT assured respondents that anonymity was preserved during all stages of the TPM, associating a code to each respondent that replaced their name in the questionnaire and in the database.

In the individual surveys conducted, quantitative data was entered into an excel data entry form, and data was analysed according to each survey question. In KIIs, qualitative data was coded using Atlas TI software, and divided according to the research question and indicators of the TPM.

Challenges and Limitations

Key challenges and limitations faced during the data collection and analysis stages included:

- Security challenges: In CB2, the volatile security situation in Afrin (Aleppo Governorate) meant that monitoring activities were only conducted to assess the Association in Ma'arrat Tamasrin (Idlib Governorate). There were ongoing security challenges during data collection in Idlib Governorate, though airstrikes did not directly affect the data collection sites. An ACTED Security Officer conducted close monitoring of the security situation, and provided security clearance before IMPACT's enumerators conducted monitoring activities. In SRMS003 (Distribution), Eastern Ghouta was subject to intense military activities throughout the distribution period. KIIs with the LCs and the KII with the Health Directorate were delayed due to ongoing airstrikes. The accessibility of selling points to IMPACT monitors was taken into account when selecting selling point locations to monitor.

- The highly volatile context can limit the predictability of project timelines, leading to limited time for IMPACT to prepare its monitoring activities. In SRMS003, distribution took place (i) in an emergency context and (ii) in light of ongoing airstrikes and security challenges. Consequently, IMPACT faced challenges in obtaining accurate distribution locations and times needed to plan its monitoring activities at selling points. There were no readily available documents detailing the distribution locations and times. Despite contacting the PC and LCs throughout the distribution period, distribution at several selling points was already completed by the time IMPACT was informed. This reduced the number of distribution locations available for IMPACT to select and monitor.

  Additionally, the lack of a distribution plan available especially for milk and fuel distribution made it challenging for IMPACT to identify who to speak to, and to obtain the background information needed to design the assessment tools. IMPACT monitors followed up regularly with the PC to obtain the latest information and most updated plan.

- As mentioned, convenience sampling was used to identify beneficiary survey respondents in SRMS003. IMPACT monitors reportedly faced difficulties in finding beneficiaries to respond to the survey, especially after the looting incident at the sugar selling points.

- Remote interviews: In the monitoring exercise for the Idlib Strategy, a majority of KIIs was conducted remotely via phone or Skype with KIs based in Istanbul.[35] There were several technical difficulties such as poor internet connectivity impacting the sound quality of the call, and it was arguably more difficult to

[35] As much as possible, IMPACT was able to meet with a few Istanbul-based KIs when they are traveling in Amman during the data collection period.

build rapport compared to conducting face-to-face interviews. IMPACT faced technical difficulties in audio recording for a small number of KIIs. Some interviews were not recorded and notes were taken by IMPACT during the interview.

- Lag time between programme implementation and data collection period: As the Idlib Strategy's TPM took place a number of months after the execution of the Strategy, it might have been difficult for staff to recall specific details of past events (e.g. what was discussed in a particular coordination meeting). As IMPACT and HMG provided a brief introduction to the monitoring activity prior to the interview, it allowed time for the KIs to gather any reflections they might have before the interview, if they wished to. IMPACT was also able to triangulate findings (e.g. specific coordination events held) across KIs in some instances.

  In SRMS003 (Distribution), the KII with the PC was delayed as IMPACT had originally planned to conduct KII with the PC after milk distribution. As milk distribution was delayed and had yet to occur as of December 2017, the decision was made to conduct the PC KII with a focus on the vegetable oil, rice and sugar distribution only. The vegetable oil, rice and sugar distribution took place in October 2017 and the post-distribution PC KII was conducted two months later.

  Additionally, staff turnover meant that some staff that participated in the Idlib Strategy were no longer working for the IP at the data collection period. Similarly, some KIs were not working for the IP when the Idlib Strategy was being executed. To minimise information gaps due to staff turnover, IMPACT arranged another KII with a previous staff where possible. In CB2, KIIs were conducted with previous LC members as the IP perceived that they have a greater level of knowledge of the Association compared to newly elected LC members.

- Availability of key informants: IMPACT was not able to conduct KIIs with some beneficiaries that were selected to participate in the political programme TPM. When there were no response from selected beneficiaries, IMPACT requested the IPs' support in contacting the KI and/or scheduling the interview. Nevertheless, some key informants did not respond or did not have time to participate in the monitoring exercise.

Conclusion

In addition to monitoring the political programme and coordination of the Idlib Strategy in WP3, project-level monitoring exercises (CB2, SRMS003) finalised included areas of livelihoods and stabilisation. Although these projects fall under different programme areas, some common themes can be drawn from the findings.

- Given high prices in Syria, both projects were able to sell products to civilians at lowered prices. In CB2, a worker KI mentioned that "the Association has catered for local market needs of dairy products that are…in good prices, which limited traders' manipulation of prices." Also, Association workers were reportedly able to purchase dairy products manufactured by the factory at the production cost. In SRMS003 (distribution), as intended in the project design, the PC decided to trigger distribution at a time when all crossing points into Eastern Ghouta were closed that led to unprecedented prices and extreme food shortages. Items were distributed at lowered selling prices compared to market prices.

  This further suggested that both projects included an element to enable project continuity. As both projects involved selling items at a lowered price (rather than freely distributing food items), the revenue made was used to purchase ingredients to continue producing dairy products in CB2, and for the PC to restock food items for future use in SRMS003.

- Findings suggested that both projects had taken conflict sensitivity into account when determining beneficiary categories to facilitate community cohesion. In CB2, as there were not enough vacancies in the yoghurt factory to allow all members to become workers, the Association established a vulnerability criteria in the selection of Association workers (e.g. widowed women, women with disabled husband). All Association members were reportedly able to vote to select Association workers. A non-worker KI also

mentioned that she was not a worker 'because there are many members who are in a worse financial situation than I am.' This suggested that the Association had derived a mechanism to facilitate cohesion when there were not enough vacancies for all Association members to be workers.

In SRMS003, based on previous experience, the PC reportedly decided to distribute food items to all families (instead of based on a vulnerability criteria). For example, the Duma LC KI mentioned the method takes into account the "satisfaction of all families" and "did not cause conflict", which was contrary to the previous distribution that was "reserved for a number of very poor families" which led to "conflict between the people and the LC." Although survey findings suggested that beneficiaries perceived the distribution to be unfair as larger families received proportionally less than smaller families, the PC's decision to distribute to all families nevertheless reflected their intention to satisfy a wider population and to reduce tension within the community.

Overall, TPM was able to provide an independent channel for project feedback from different stakeholders. Additional elements that can be added to monitoring exercise could include adopting quantitative methods (e.g. survey approach to verify KII findings from CB2) or returning to project sites after a period of time to understand overall changes to the operation. As Eastern Ghouta has become a government-held area since the implementation of SRMS003 (distribution), further investigation can explore whether lessons learnt identified in the distribution monitoring exercise can be applied in other contexts. Beyond understanding the coordination aspect of the Idlib Strategy, further evaluation can assess the effectiveness of the Strategy itself.