

A Systems Analysis Framework with Business Analysis and Project Management for Building Corporate Governance Structures in Post-Conflict Syria

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Abstract

This paper presents a systems-analysis framework designed to facilitate governance development in Syria. The main idea is to use the methodological rigor of business analysis and project management to support the design and implementation of governance mechanisms in Syria. The proposed framework is based on systems thinking as it focuses on interdependencies between political stability, economic activity and institutional capacity. Drawing upon the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge and the Project Management Body of Knowledge, this study introduces a five-layer structure for the proposed model; (1) contextual systems mapping, (2) requirements definition for institutional reform,

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(3) project-governance integration, (4) performance measurement and learning and (5) adaptive feedback and sustainability. Outcomes and lessons from reconstruction efforts and governance attempts in other post-conflict countries inform the proposed model's applicability to Syria. Discussing implementation challenges and enabling conditions, we argue that the proposed framework that combines analytical discipline with structured execution offers feasible pathways to operationalize governance reform, enabling Syrians to build resilient institutions that steer and foster long-term stability and sustainable development.

Keywords: Systems Analysis, Syria, Business Analysis, Project Management, Corporate Governance, Post-Conflict

Introduction

Syria has been torn apart by decades of civil war, leaving behind not only human casualties and physical damage but also a broken system of government, destroyed public infrastructure and erosion of institutions. World Bank (2025) projects that reconstruction costs range between USD 140 billion and USD 345 billion, with a conservative best estimate of USD 216 billion. Also, Syria's current macroeconomic and fiscal capacity are severely limited making it quite unlikely for the country to handle the reconstruction costs. Besides, service restoration needs for sectoral functioning are not even taken into account for in these figures.

Syria is now standing at the edge of a reconstruction phase. While physical structures like buildings and roads will need to be built, a harder task is to build trust, capability, and accountability in the institutional core of the country. In other words, post-conflict reconstruction is both a governance system design and an economic redevelopment challenge. Without mechanisms that are in action for coordination, transparency and stakeholder feedback to occur, there is a real threat that old distributional inequalities and governance problems will come back. To mitigate or to reduce the magnitude of these risks, we argue that the reconstruction process in Syria needs a framework that is intended to blend systems analysis, business analysis and project management thinking.

In the unstable nature of the post-conflict environment, efforts to reform governance often run into three major and persistent problems: (1) institutional fragmentation and overlaps or proxies in authority, (2) limited and compromised administrative capacity to consider policies and translate them into implementable projects and (3) absence of a performance monitoring methodology to enforce accountability of those in charge. To address these problems, we need to take a systems approach. A systems approach can map the interdependencies that are resident in all connected political, economic, and administrative subsystems, rather than treating them as separate silos. Systems analysis offers a conceptual framework for understanding the interactions

among various governance components and how adaptive learning can take place and mature. But this way of looking at things analytically is not enough on its own. Rebuilding also needs the enhanced ability to carry out tasks in a disciplined way through project management and making decisions based on evidence, informed, educated, and guided by business analysis.

The Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK) categorizes structured methods, tools and techniques to clarify stakeholder needs, eliciting requirements and designing value-adding solution options (IIBA, 2015). Similarly, the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) identifies knowledge areas that include initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and closing, which translate mechanism between high-level policy aspirations and actual operational work inside institutions and in the field (PMI, 2021). When combined within a systems analysis point of view, these two disciplines reinforce each other. Business analysis helps ensure that institutional reforms reflect stakeholder priorities in Syria, while project management provides the disciplined implementation structure needed for action cycles that are transparent, measurable and repeatable. When put together, we get a useful way to build strong and flexible governance frameworks in Syria.

Current research on post-conflict rebuilding based on experiences in Iraq, Bosnia and Rwanda, shows that governance reform efforts are successful when reform is treated as a system rather than as individual projects. For example, decentralization, regulatory reform and capacity-building must be synchronized across ministries, local governments and private enterprises. Also, in contemporary reconstruction, corporate governance plays a pivotal role: strengthening private-sector, public-private arm's length partnerships and diaspora investments all gain momentum on quality institutional environments. Thus, strengthening corporate governance is a key step toward political stabilization and social trust.

This study aims to develop a systems analysis framework that incorporates business analysis and project management knowledge areas to guide the formulation of corporate governance in post-conflict Syria. The proposed framework focuses on five interrelated layers, including contextual systems mapping, requirements definition for institutional reform, project-governance integration, performance measurement and learning, and adaptive feedback

and sustainability. By aligning business analysis diagnostics with project execution, the framework aims at operationalizing transparency, participation and responsiveness in Syria's institutional environment.

We facilitate a conceptual approach based on systems thinking and organizational analysis. It draws lessons learned from international reconstruction programs in retrospect and applies them to Syria's fragmented authority and limited administrative capacity. The proposed framework is not about a single institutional model; but an flexible architecture that national stakeholders, international donors and the Syrian diaspora to adapt to organize the efforts, assess progress and build trust.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews theoretical foundations linking systems thinking, business analysis and project management for the formation of post-conflict governance. Section 3 describes the methodological foundations. Section 4 explains the proposed framework. Section 5 analyzes comparative lessons from Iraq and Bosnia. Section 6 discusses implementation challenges and enabling conditions. Section 7 concludes with policy implications for sustainable, inclusive and accountable reconstruction in Syria.

Theoretical Background

This section establishes the conceptual grounding for the proposed systems analysis framework by linking systems thinking, business analysis and project management to post-conflict governance and corporate governance rebuilding in Syria. The argument is that effective governance reconstruction is not only about policy design, but also about implementation under volatile conditions.

Systems Thinking in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Systems thinking frames governance reconstruction as an adaptive, interdependent network rather than a sequence of isolated reforms. Classical systems theory describes institutions as components in a dynamic whole, connected by feedback loops and shaped by changing constraints. In post-conflict conditions, this lens is crucial because institutional failure is rarely

confined to a single ministry or sector; instead, breakdowns in security, finance, service delivery and legitimacy reinforce one another (Morgan, 2011).

As Hinnebusch (2019) argues, the Syrian state has historically functioned through a hybrid of centralized authoritarianism and localized clientelist networks where sectarian and regional allegiances and proxies erased institutional accountability. This was consequential in generating inefficient feedback loops between political loyalty, economic privilege and administrative survival, a structure highly resistant to reform. Systems thinking therefore provides a way to figure out how these subsystems interact, how shocks affect them and where there might be opportunities for change.

In Syria, the legacies of centralized rule, regional fragmentation, sanctions and infrastructure destruction have produced governance environments that are uneven, overlapping and sometimes competing. Current policy analysis on Syria notes that political fragmentation and weak regulatory credibility persist alongside urgent demands for economic stabilization and service delivery, which means that any governance intervention in one sector (for example, licensing for private investment) has immediate spillover in security perception, donor confidence and local legitimacy (Mahli, 2025).

Öztürk (2022) adds that “identity-based polarization and the erosion of trust networks” continue to hinder conflict-resolution and consensus-building processes in post-war Syria. From a systems-analysis perspective, this social fragmentation must be treated as an endogenous variable within the governance system — affecting how reforms are perceived, communicated, and institutionalized. Incorporating sociocultural feedback loops into institutional design becomes critical for sustainable governance recovery.

Systems thinking contributes three concrete capabilities to post-conflict rebuilding: (i) interdependency mapping, which exposes how fiscal management, local administration, infrastructure rehabilitation, and anti-corruption oversight interact and either stabilize or destabilize the wider recovery environment (Morgan, 2011); (ii) leverage-point identification, which helps locate small but high-impact interventions—such as transparent procurement or participatory budgeting—that generate visible trust gains without requiring full institutional maturity, a logic also emphasized in multi-level governance toolkits for

distressed countries (Morgan, 2011); and (iii) adaptive learning, which assumes that governance arrangements must evolve in response to political shocks and stakeholder pushback. This perspective aligns with recent assessments of Syria's transition, which argue that inclusive governance and credible reform must proceed in parallel with economic recovery (Mahli, 2025).

Akkan and Aksu (2023) reinforce this logic by showing how sectarianism has been “instrumentalized as a governance tool,” producing overlapping decision networks that persist even amid administrative collapse. A systems approach is thus indispensable for identifying these informal power circuits and for designing reforms that replace loyalty-based control mechanisms with transparent, rule-based structures.

Critically, systems thinking also reframes “corporate governance” in post-conflict Syria. Corporate governance here is not only board accountability inside firms; it is the predictable, rules-based environment in which private actors, public agencies and foreign or diaspora investors operate without arbitrary interference. Analyses of Syrian economic governance argue that wartime economic orders reproduced many pre-war patterns: opaque regulation, patronage networks and weak rule of law (Donovan et al., 2025). This continuity means that rebuilding governance is not a clean reset but a transformation of entrenched practices (Hinnebusch, 2019). A systems approach makes that continuity visible instead of assuming a “fresh start”.

Business Analysis for Institutional Reform

Business analysis is fundamentally about defining needs, aligning stakeholders, and ensuring that proposed solutions deliver measurable value to those stakeholders. In governance rebuilding, those stakeholders include ministries, municipal authorities, civil society organizations, donors, returning refugees and private sector actors that are expected to generate employment and tax base.

Post-conflict governance programs repeatedly fail when institutional reforms are designed top-down without validated stakeholder requirements. UNDP's capacity development work in fragile and post-conflict states (for example, Liberia and Sierra Leone) highlights that imported institutional designs collapse when they are not co-produced with local actors and when they ignore local

incentive structures (Morgan, 2011). This is directly relevant to Syria, where governance will be negotiated among interim authorities, local councils, surviving administrative cadres and external funders. Business analysis techniques such as stakeholder analysis, needs elicitation, requirements traceability specifies a disciplined way to document and reconcile these competing expectations instead of letting the loudest actor dominate.

According to ISO 21502 (2020), successful project and program governance requires “identifying, engaging and managing stakeholder expectations in a transparent and documented manner to maintain alignment with organizational objectives.” This mirrors BABOK’s emphasis on continuous stakeholder collaboration and provides an operational reference for public-sector reform projects in post-conflict environments. Embedding ISO-compliant stakeholder registers and decision-logs within business-analysis processes ensures traceability and legitimacy in policy formulation.

Another BABOK principle that becomes highly relevant in this context is requirements for validation and value assessment. In for-profit organizations, the term “value” is normally interpreted through a financial lens in monetary terms. In a post-conflict governance setting, however, “value” cannot be reduced to revenue or return-on-investment. Here, the term “value” includes legitimacy, inclusion, transparency, procedural fairness, and basic service delivery outcomes. In other words, value must be interpreted in governance terms. Table 1 presents examples about defining value as follows:

Value Dimension with respect to Gov- ernance	Illustrative Question for Operational Interpretation
Transparency and Auditability	Can the procurement processes for reconstruction projects in governorates such as Aleppo, Hama and Latakia be audited step-by-step by independent oversight units?
Equitable Resource Allocation	Can local councils in Idlib, Raqqqa or Deir ez-Zor allocate municipal budgets so that affected communities themselves recognize as fair and not captured by factional interests?
Predictable Rule- Based Investment Environment	Are international or Syrian diaspora investors (for example, industrialists returning from Türkiye, Jordan or Europe) protected against unpredictable expropriation or politically motivated asset seizure by any authority or any proxies claiming jurisdiction?

Table 1. Governance Value Dimensions and Syria-Specific Questions

The OECD (2019) evaluation framework broadens the concept of value by embedding relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. If Syrian reconstruction agencies and stakeholders embed these six criteria into their business-analysis cycles, they can systematically test whether a reform proposal is technically sound, institutionally legitimate and morally defensible. To illustrate briefly: the “coherence” dimension can be used to check whether externally funded projects are actually compatible with Syria’s national governance priorities, rather than just donor agendas. Likewise, “impact” and “sustainability” indicators can steer adaptive learning so that institutional strengthening is not short-lived but accumulates over time.

Business analysis also helps anti-corruption architecture develop. In Syria, where reconstruction funds are projected in the hundreds of billions of dollars (World Bank, 2025), the ability to define, document and audit requirements for procurement, licensing and service delivery is not just administrative hygiene, it also means conflict prevention. Integrating these steps within business-analysis templates strengthens integrity controls and allows early detection of governance risks such as patronage or procurement bias.

In addition, the use of a standardized risk register aligned with ISO 31000 (2018) gives reconstruction authorities and external donors a shared language for categorizing, assessing and reporting risks. This transparency in turn provides a more objective basis for oversight, progress reporting, and escalation of concerns when necessary.

In our study’s framework, business analysis is therefore positioned as the “institutional design and requirements” function.

Project Management as Governance Execution

Project management provides the structure for translating defined requirements into accountable execution under resource constraints. The PMBOK process groups (initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling and closing) can be repurposed as governance delivery cycles in fragile environments. Field examples from Iraq, Bosnia and other post-conflict settings shows that reconstruction programs succeed when they are run as portfolios of projects with explicit scope, risk controls, stakeholder engagement plans and measurable

outputs (Voetsch and Myers, 2005; UNDP, 2024).

Three elements of project management theory are especially relevant for corporate governance rebuilding in Syria: (1) Integration management and portfolio alignment: UNDP's recent program evaluation in Iraq (2020 - 2024) notes that stabilization work progressed when humanitarian assistance, infrastructure recovery and governance reform were managed as an integrated program rather than as disconnected donor projects. That integration included administrative and fiscal decentralization, institutional reform, and capacity development for local authorities (UNDP, 2024). ISO 21502 (2020) likewise emphasizes the need for "a clear governance framework defining roles, responsibilities and decision-making paths across the project portfolio," which directly supports this integration logic in public-sector reconstruction. (2) Stakeholder governance as risk governance: PMBOK treats stakeholder identification and engagement as continuous, not one-off. In conflict-affected environments, stakeholder structures are fluid: authorities change, mandates overlap and political legitimacy is contested. Reconstruction case work from Iraq, Sudan, Bosnia and Kosovo shows that project teams must continuously renegotiate who authorizes, who blocks and who must be visibly consulted to avoid sabotage or reputational collapse (Voetsch and Myers, 2005). This is directly applicable to Syria's fragmented sovereignty. (3) Monitoring, transparency and accountability: In post-conflict settings, donors and local populations demand rapid, visible gains (for example, electricity restored, hospitals reopened, payrolls stabilized) but also demand proof that funds are not being captured by elites or factions.

The Need for an Integrated Systems Framework

Even where reconstruction resources exist, governance rebuilding in post-conflict states often fails because efforts are fragmented, politicized or purely technocratic. Comparative evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that reconstruction can stall without secure environment, strategic vision and strong leadership to coordinate aid and institutionalize reform (Nedić, 2006). At the same time, analyses of post-war Syria warn that simply rebuilding physical assets without transforming governance practices risks reproducing opaque pre-war and wartime economic orders: patronage networks, weak rule of law

and exclusive decision-making (Donovan et al., 2025).

We argue that Syria now needs an integrated systems framework that closes the loop between analysis, design, execution and learning:

(1) Systems analysis identifies where governance is structurally weak (for example, municipal fiscal authority, procurement oversight, licensing for private investment) and maps interdependencies across political, economic and administrative subsystems (UNDP, 2024). (2) Business analysis translates those systemic gaps into explicit governance requirements, assigns ownership, and defines the value of reform in measurable governance terms such as transparency, participation and service reliability (Nedić, 2006). (3) Project management plans and delivers these reforms as controlled portfolios with defined scope, budget, KPIs, governance milestones, stakeholder accountability mechanisms and auditable reporting structures (Voetsch and Myers, 2005). (4) Feedback and adaptation (continuous improvement) ensures that each governance project is evaluated, lessons learned are captured, and processes are iteratively refined to become part of a stable corporate governance environment. This echoes guidance that post-conflict public administration reform must be tailored to local parameters and cannot rely on “one size fits all” templates (UN DESA, 2010).

ISO 21502 (2020) does not present governance as a fixed structure. Instead, it defines project governance as the combination of principles, policies and procedures through which projects are authorized, guided, and kept aligned with decided requirements. The standard also emphasizes that oversight, justification, and key decision-making points occur throughout the project's life cycle, including through gates and progressive justification stages. Read in Syria's post-conflict context, this means that governance cannot be treated as a one-time design option: Conditions will shift, new risks will appear, and additional data will invalidate earlier assumptions. OECD (2019, p.3) reaches a similar position by arguing that the criteria should be applied in ways that are adapted to context rather than mechanically.

Therefore, the theoretical standpoint of this study is that rebuilding corporate governance in post-conflict Syria is not simply a technocratic or legal drafting drill. It is much closer to a systems-transformation exercise that needs iteration,

feedback, and correction. Systems thinking provides the analytical framing; business analysis defines and tests requirements and value, and project management provides the structured execution logic needed to make those institutional changes real and trackable across time.

Methodological Approach

Design Rationale

This study develops a systems-analysis framework that unites business-analysis and project-management methods to guide the reconstruction of corporate-governance structures in post-conflict Syria. The methodology is comparative, integrative and practice-oriented, drawing simultaneously from (a) multilateral post-conflict governance literature, (b) empirical recovery assessments and (c) Türkiye's development-cooperation experience as a non-traditional donor.

The approach follows the logic of design-science inquiry, where theory informs a structured model that is later adapted for implementation. Data and conceptual anchors are derived from five bodies of evidence: (1) World Bank (2024) for providing quantitative baselines on infrastructure loss, capital-stock depreciation, and sectoral priorities for reconstruction. (2) UN DESA (2010) for identifying administrative capacity, legitimacy and public-service delivery as the main determinants of durable peace. (3) Morgan (2011, pp.18-19) for supplying operational insights on sequencing, leadership and absorptive capacity. (4) Nedić (2006) for illustrating donor coordination and governance fragmentation. (5) Mahli (2025) provides a recent projection of transitional governance and economic-reform dynamics.

Complementary regional sources include Sarmini (2024) on Syria's political stalemate and Türkiye's contributions to reconstruction diplomacy analyzed by Elbehairy (2025) and Düzyol (2025) which together frame Türkiye's development-cooperation model and its implications for soft-power-based capacity building.

As Brown (2019) warns, donor state-building logics often replicate pre-conflict centralization through technocratic design; the present framework instead embeds adaptive feedback loops to maintain local legitimacy.

Comparative Analytical Framework

The analysis employs a multi-layer comparative design combining vertical (macro-meso-micro) and horizontal (cross-country) dimensions: (1) Macro-level: Governance system design, public-administration architecture (UN DESA, 2010, pp. 13-15) and the interface between national legitimacy and international engagement. (2) Meso-level: Institutional performance—ministries, regulatory agencies and corporate-governance oversight bodies. (3) Micro-level: Organizational and project units implementing reconstruction programs.

Comparative baselines were established through two reference cases: Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995-2010) and Liberia/Sierra Leone (2003-2010) are selected because they illustrate contrasting donor-coordination and capacity-development outcomes. These cases are documented in Nedić (2006) and Morgan (2011) and triangulated with UN DESA (2010) findings.

The method proceeds in three analytical stages:

- Contextual Mapping (Step 1): Using systems-analysis techniques (causal-loop and stakeholder mapping) to delineate interdependencies among political, economic, and administrative subsystems.
- Institutional Diagnostics (Step 2): Adapting BABOK requirement-elicitation principles to governance reform by identifying stakeholder needs, governance gaps and enabling conditions for capacity development.
- Programmatic Integration (Step 3): Translating diagnostic outputs into project-management portfolios using PMBOK process groups and risk-management tools.

In line with field evidence from conflict environments, projectized approaches integrating humanitarian, governance and fiscal interventions under unified accountability mechanisms have shown higher institutional resilience (Voetsch and Myers, 2005).

Data Sources and Validation

The empirical foundation combines quantitative assessment from World Bank (2025) with qualitative interpretive data from policy briefs and institutional reports:

World Bank Syria assessments provide baseline data: 14 million displacements, USD 216 billion total damage, USD 117 billion direct physical losses (World Bank, 2025, p. 29). These figures informed the scope and prioritization matrix in the proposed framework’s “contextual mapping” layer. Mahli (2025) contributes scenario-based governance data on transitional institutions, economic-policy sequencing, and donor conditionality. Sarmini (2024) commentary on regional political dynamics contextualizes external-actor influence, emphasizing the persistent role of Russia, Iran and Türkiye in shaping reconstruction pathways. Contributions by Elbehairy (2025) and Düzyol (2025) supply empirical evidence on Türkiye’s evolving development-cooperation model, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), TİKA’s operational instruments and complex-realism frameworks linking humanitarian and geopolitical motives.

Analytical Procedures

System Boundary Definition: Boundaries were drawn around four governance subsystems: legislative and judicial institutions, economic regulation and fiscal governance, corporate oversight and anti-corruption mechanisms and donor coordination platforms.

Stakeholder Analysis: Adapted from BABOK (IIBA, 2015) stakeholder mapping; actors include transitional ministries, local councils, diaspora networks, private-sector associations and international donors such as TİKA and UNDP.

Governance Requirements Definition: Requirements were categorized as structural (legal and institutional reforms), processual (transparency and coordination mechanisms) and capability related (administrative skills and digital tools).

Project-Portfolio Integration: Drawing on PMBOK (PMI, 2021) knowledge areas, each requirement is linked to a project cluster with defined scope, resources and accountability indicators. This translates the systems map into implementable portfolios.

Feedback and Learning Loop: Continuous evaluation is embedded through key governance indicators (KGIs) for transparency, participation and performance. Reconstruction must be an iterative process driven by learning and innovation.

Brown's work illustrates that donor-designed governance programs often ended up repeating the same contradictions and design errors that existed in earlier state building efforts (Brown, 2019). In other words, lessons were not actually absorbed back into the next cycle of intervention. For this reason, in our proposed framework, iterative feedback loops are built in, so that reform decisions can be corrected and refined along the way, rather than simply reproducing same patterns of the past.

Ethical and Operational Considerations

This research is positioned within the extensive UN dialogue on ethical engagement in post-conflict scenarios. UN DESA (2010) and Morgan (2011) both clearly identify that legitimacy, ownership and inclusion are structural preconditions for meaningful capacity development, not optional normative add-ons. If they are not taken into account, capacity development becomes performative. So, three components are emphasized in this framework:

Local Ownership and Diaspora Participation: Rebuilding institutions should not be decided and realized by a small group of elites from the country or outside experts. The Syrian professionals and business diaspora, who already have knowledge of the sector and connections across borders, should be involved in the process of redesigning institutions. The TİKA case in Türkiye illustrates that a common history, shared memory and cultural familiarity facilitate smoother and easier implementation and expedite the establishment of trust (Elbehairy, 2025).

Do-No-Harm Principle: UNDP (2024) consistently emphasizes that interventions which reproduce or reinforce old power asymmetries cause harm although short-term outputs appear efficient, successful or clean.

Accountability and Transparency: Previous post-conflict assessments in Bosnia and Iraq pointed to significant corruption vulnerabilities (Nedić, 2006; UNDP, 2024; Güven and Krupalija, 2025). The appropriate response is not merely language. Audit trails, accessible documentation and disclosure rules should be integrated into the project cycle rather than relegated to project closure reporting.

These ethical anchors directly respond to the risks of authoritarian-style reconstruction raised by Heydemann (2019), they help ensure that auditability and participatory budgeting really perform as protection against elite capture.

Integration with Regional and Donor Practices

A further aspect of this framework is that it looks at how regional actors actually operate, instead of assuming that all donors act the same way. Türkiye is a good example of this because it is both a donor and a direct political actor in the region. Elbehairy (2025) demonstrates that the TİKA model is not solely a technical aid instrument; it functions within what he terms a “complex-realist” framework. In this way of thinking, humanitarian diplomacy and geopolitical calculations are very closely related. Düzyol (2025) notes that Türkiye sets itself apart from traditional OECD donors by using cultural proximity and relationship-based trust building as operational tools instead of just following procedural project cycles.

Adding these insights, regional actors have become co-facilitators of institution-building, and in many cases, they are perceived as more legitimate by local organizations than Western agencies, because the relational distance is smaller. This regional layer matters for the Syrian case. Administrative and geopolitical stabilization will almost certainly require structured cooperation with Türkiye, and also, in varying ways, with neighboring states. In that sense, regional involvement is not an optional supplement; it is part of the environment in which institutional capacity will consolidate or fail.

The Framework for Corporate Governance Reconstruction

Conceptual Overview

Based on the analytical and comparative foundation discussed in the previous sections, this part of the study introduces a systems analysis framework (SAF). It is meant to serve as a structured approach for rebuilding corporate-governance capacity in post-conflict Syria. The framework attempts to operationalize the fusion of systems thinking, business analysis, and project management into a usable methodology for fragile-state reconstruction.

It is also important to note that post-conflict settings are highly context-dependent. State capacity, inclusivity, and the intensity of international commitment change from case to case. Therefore, reconstruction planning cannot be based on a one-template approach because enabling conditions differ across cases.

The five layers proposed here; namely, contextual systems mapping, requirements definition, project governance integration, performance measurement and learning and adaptive feedback mechanisms, should not be read as a linear sequence (Fig.1). They operate more like interdependent cycles. Each layer informs the next, but they also return back to check earlier assumptions in previous layers. In that sense, the SAF is designed to create rounds of design, implementation, and improvement, rather than a checklist.

Layer 1: Contextual Systems Mapping

This foundational layer identifies the political, economic, and institutional interdependencies that shape reconstruction. Drawing on systems thinking and UNDP's capacity-development principles, contextual mapping visualizes how governance institutions, private-sector actors, donors and communities interact across national and local levels (Morgan, 2011; Mahli, 2025).

The mapping process integrates:

- Causal loop diagrams to capture reinforcing and balancing feedback loops

between governance trust, investment confidence and administrative efficiency.

- Stakeholder mapping (based on BABOK) to clarify roles, interests and influence of ministries, local councils, business associations and external partners such as TİKA and UNDP.
- Dependency matrices linking macroeconomic stabilization (monetary and fiscal control) with micro-level corporate regulation (licensing, compliance, audit transparency).

For a credible recovery analysis, governance mapping must handle both the vertical institutional architecture and the horizontal actor network. Otherwise, interventions do not land well in the real environment. And in Syria's case, this contextual mapping also needs to show that some groups have more access to resources than others and that there are clear horizontal inequalities between groups. Comparative studies have shown that these kinds of imbalances are not only barriers to development, but they are also linked to the possibility of conflict happening again (Brown et al., 2011). So, this is a significant design concept in the methodology.

The World Bank's 2025 reconstruction assessment gives the quantitative references for this layer. It documents the scale of infrastructure damage, identifies priority sectors for reinvestment, and estimates the fiscal capacity available for reconstruction. These baselines set the stage for governance interventions to be adjusted. If planners disregard this, the reforms may devolve into abstract notions rather than practical strategies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, fragmented donor involvement led to parallel interventions and ongoing inefficiencies (Nedić, 2006, pp. 8-11). Such examples encourage a more disciplined alignment to systemic realities.

The deliverables are: (1) Governance Ecosystem Maps of Syria to identify principal stakeholder communities. (2) Systemic Interdependency Matrices to visualize cross-sectoral feedback loops (for example, investment climate → governance trust → service delivery). (3) Baseline Dashboards to summarize macro indicators, for example, many of which can be drawn directly from the World Bank's (2025) reconstruction damage assessment.

Layer 2: Requirements Definition for Institutional Reform

When the systemic relations become more visible, the second layer moves into a business-analysis logic and starts to define governance requirements. In essence, this stage answers a practical question: which institutional capacities are needed, by which actor, and for what kind of measurable public-value outcome.

BABOK approach with adaptation for post-conflict agenda:

- Elicitation techniques (interviews, focus groups, workshops, document analysis) are adapted to post-conflict stakeholders such as transitional authorities, municipal councils, private-sector representatives and other actors in the fragile institutional environment.
- Requirement categorization follows along three dimensions: Structural (legal frameworks, regulations, oversight mandates), processual (workflows, transparency practices, coordination mechanisms) and capability (human skills, digital instruments, and resource base).
- Prioritization, verification, and validation are done through consensus-seeking sessions moderated by a facilitator who is trusted by both donors and domestic actors.

Morgan (2011) notes that capacity development in post-conflict agenda works best when local actors articulate their own institutional requirements and external actors support but do not dictate. Türkiye's development cooperation record, especially the way TiKA works with local partners during the design of projects, shows a relevant model for the region. OECD's principle of "relevance and coherence" also supports a stakeholder-driven requirement definition and helps prevent externally imposed templates (OECD, 2019, pp. 7-8). Türkiye's peacebuilding experience in Bosnia additionally indicates that long-term participation of domestic institutions improves legitimacy and implementation (Güven and Krupalija, 2025).

Deliverables: (1) A Governance Requirements Catalogues (aligned with international frameworks like OECD (2019)). (2) Stakeholder-Validated Use Cases to translate governance needs (for example, transparent procurement) into functional processes. (3) Traceability Matrices to link each requirement to expected governance outcome (legitimacy, efficiency, inclusivity).

Layer 3: Project Governance Integration

The third layer transforms those requirements into practical projects, using project-management structures in line with PMBOK. Here, governance reform becomes a portfolio of implementable and auditable projects, not only policy languages. This is consistent with OECD policy and governance guidance on post-conflict transition, which notes that “effective support to transition requires collective and parallel engagement by different policy communities” (OECD, 2012, p. 5). Practically, Layer 3 is about the coordination mechanism that links institutions, donors and delivery instruments into one coherent governance portfolio.

Key process groups include:

1. Integration Management to align donor and government efforts under a shared portfolio design
2. Scope and Risk Management to define deliverables, success metrics and risk mitigation;
3. Stakeholder Engagement to coordinate, for example; EU, World Bank, Türkiye, UNDP and domestic bodies;
4. Monitoring and Reporting to embed dashboards and audit trails inside project management offices (PMOs).

Morgan (2011) demonstrates that capacity gains are weakened by fragmented execution. Reconstruction in Bosnia required harmonized financial pipelines and accompanying reporting standards (Nedić, 2006). UN DESA (2010) shows that centralized governance platforms, similar to the proposed National Project Governance Office, are important to avoid duplication. This is also directly aligned with OECD’s warning that donor instruments often fail to connect strategically: “This has resulted in both duplication and a fragmentation of efforts, preventing strategic linking of different instruments to a coherent delivery strategy” (OECD, 2012, p. 14). Accordingly, deliverables for this layer are: (1) National Project Governance Office (NPGO) acting as the PMO. (2) Portfolio Alignment Matrices that connect each integrated portfolio to strategic governance goals. (3) Standard Reporting Templates for transparency and donor coordination.

Layer 4: Performance Measurement and Learning

KGIs are used in this layer to set up structures for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. These evaluate metrics like time, cost, scope; as well as the actual results of governance, such as transparency, citizen trust and accountability. This aligns with UN DESA (2010) on feedback mechanisms and with World Bank (2025) on data-driven reconstruction oversight. There are three main areas from which indicators come:

- Institutional Effectiveness (for example, number of functioning regulators, business-license getting lead times, efficiency of procurement cycle, construction-permit time means and ranges in cities like Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Latakia).
- Transparency and Accountability (for example, public disclosure rates for reconstruction contracts, corruption-perception improvements, data publishing on time indexes from bodies like Aleppo Chamber of Commerce or the Ministry of Finance).
- Participation and Inclusivity (for example, percentage of projects with civil-society oversight, gender balance in committees, closure rate of citizen feedback tickets).

Data sources include administrative records, third-party data checks and open data dashboards. UNDP's experience in Iraq (2024) shows that publishing performance information in public portals improves donor trust and help reduce corruption.

Deliverables: (1) Governance Performance Dashboard for KGI tracking. (2) Learning Reports for summarizing cross-project findings. (3) Adaptive Strategy Notes for describing improvement suggestions.

Layer 5: Adaptive Feedback and Sustainability

This layer formalizes institutional learning by turning lessons into policies and standard operational procedures. Sustainability is obtained when institutions learn continuously. This layer has:

- Feedback Cycles linking evaluation results to new policy revisions;

- Institutional Memory Systems documenting reforms and decisions via digital tools;
- Capacity Retention through training, succession, leadership development;
- Regional Partnership Mechanisms which use Türkiye's cooperation infrastructure and regional universities for long-term transfer.

Adaptive feedback works best when it is paired with inclusive governance and international partnerships aimed at capacity transfer, not dependency (Güven and Krupalija, 2025). In post-conflict Syria, adaptive governance will depend on balancing central oversight with local responsiveness. With institutionalized feedback, SAF is going to remain dynamic and respond to political change, donor fatigue, or economic shocks.

Deliverables are: (1) Governance Learning Repository with quarterly updates and annual audit. (2) Annual Adaptation Cycle Reports. (3) Reform Continuity Charter that supports ownership transition from donors to Syrian institutions.

Schematic Description

SAF (Fig. 1) turns systems thinking and management theory into a way to rebuild governance. It helps Syria's transition by: (a) organizing reforms into portfolios that can be managed and audited; (b) connecting local ownership with international accountability; and (c) making learning and adaptive resilience a part of institutional processes. This architecture puts into action the main argument of this study: good governance after a conflict needs both analytical coherence and managerial discipline:

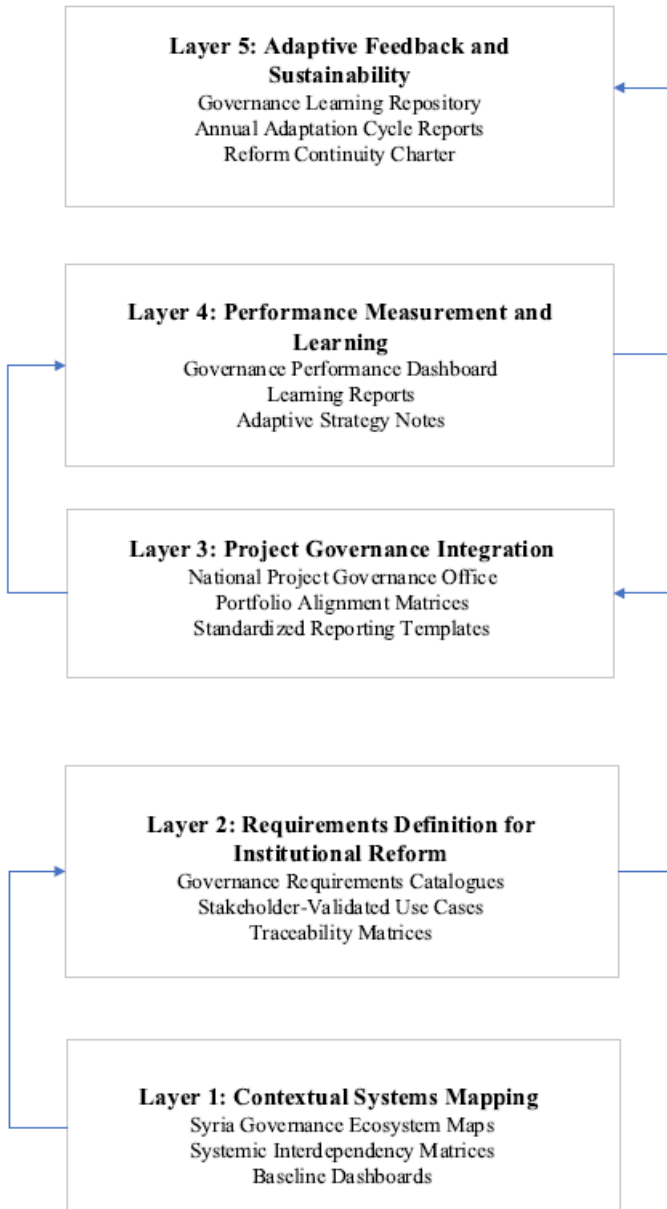


Figure 1. SAF for Post-Conflict Syria Corporate Governance Reconstruction

Discussion and Policy Implications

Translating Systems Analysis into Governance Practice

SAF regards reconstruction governance as a living system rather than a fixed agenda. This is highly relevant in Syria, years of conflict have created institutional voids. SAF attempts to move from abstract analysis to procedural discipline so that reform efforts can be flexible. Brown (2019) notes that many donor-driven programs in Syria repeated similar “state-building from above” pattern, ignoring social realities in the field. The main innovation of SAF lies in the dual mechanism: analytical coherence via systems mapping and executional discipline through project management integration. In practice, design and delivery is expected to reinforce one another.

Layer 1 anchors context; Layer 2 clarifies institutional needs; Layer 3 structures implementation; Layer 4 includes performance learning and Layer 5 is for sustained adaptation. Morgan (2011) recommends iterative cycles and integrated feedback and here the SAF tries to close the loop between policy intent and actual outcomes.

Institutional and Political Preconditions

For the SAF to function, two enabling conditions are necessary: political authorization and institutional absorptive capacity:

Political authorization determines whether a transitional authority can define a unified reconstruction framework. Without that, donor programs will continue to operate in silos and producing overlapping authorities weaken accountability (World Bank, 2025). International actors sometimes bypass local legitimacy at the expense of generating governance vacuums (Brown, 2019).

The second factor is absorptive capacity: the ability to internalize external support. UNDP-World Bank studies (Morgan, 2011) show failures occur when outsiders “do for” instead of “build with.”

Regional Cooperation and Türkiye’s Role

SAF has a distinctive implication for Türkiye. Türkiye is a neighbor, but also it

is an emerging donor with expertise in reconstruction. Türkiye's development-cooperation model, rooted in cultural ties, humanitarian diplomacy and "complex realism" (Düzyol, 2025; Elbehairy, 2025), brings useful lessons. Agencies and organizations like TİKA, AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Authority), and YTB (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities) help with both infrastructure and institutional mentoring.

Comparative Insights: Bosnia and Iraq

Bosnia and Iraq show two different examples. Bosnia reflects too much international control that suppresses local learning (Nedić, 2006). Iraq shows the other side: donors working independently without any oversight, which leads to separate bureaucracies. The UNDP (2024) evaluation of Iraq shows that fragmentation led to repeated training, poor monitoring and projects that didn't survive. SAF's integrated portfolio method is meant to help solving problems like these.

SAF suggests a mixed approach that tries to balance two directions simultaneously: centralized oversight through the NPGO and decentralized execution through project management. In this way, each layer is made to protect local learning while keeping a national line of coherence. For example:

- Contextual Systems Mapping (Layer 1) allows region-specific diagnosis;
- Requirements Definition (Layer 2) ensures local input;
- Project Governance Integration (Layer 3) centralizes reporting and risk management;
- Performance Measurement (Layer 4) standardizes indicators across provinces and cities;
- Adaptive Feedback (Layer 5) synthesizes local lessons into national policy updates.

This hybridization mirrors Bosnia's eventual shift toward local ownership after 2006 (Nedić, 2006, pp. 6-10) and Iraq's stabilization programs post-2018, which successfully integrated subnational actors under unified monitoring dashboards (Morgan, 2011). By putting this structure into Syria's reconstruction, the SAF aims to create a bridge between central and local legitimacy. In our view, this balance

is not a luxury concept; it is a material equilibrium that post-conflict resilience of Syria depends on.

Operationalization Roadmap

From the conceptual level to the actual field implementation, we suggest a phased operational roadmap, and it should move in three sequential phases:

SAF Phased Operational Roadmap	SAF Tasks (summarized in practical terms)
Phase I - Institutional Readiness (0 - 18 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• establish the NPGO with UNDP and Türkiye• organize national systems-mapping workshops with technical experts, local councils and diaspora professionals (for external insight)• draft the first Governance Requirements Catalogue, prioritize regulatory reform, fiscal oversight including public procurement
Phase II - Integrated Portfolio Deployment (18 - 48 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• launch pilot portfolios in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, utilities and municipal services• apply formal and standard processes for risk, stakeholder and performance management• introduce a set of KGIs to track transparency, procurement efficiency and citizen feedback performance• activate data platforms so monitoring can be conducted
Phase III - Institutionalization and Scaling (48 months onward)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• establish project management and business analysis units in ministries (apart from those in external PMOs)• gradually transfer NPGO functions into ownership of Syrian government• institutionalize the Adaptive Feedback Cycle by publishing annual governance reviews to feed real policy revisions• establish a Reform Continuity Charter to strengthen learning mechanisms, succession planning, institutional memory and maturity

Table 2. SAF Phased Operational Roadmap and Tasks

This roadmap operationalizes the SAF in practice, while still respecting the incremental and context-sensitive approach emphasized by UN DESA (2010) and by Morgan (2011).

Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Post-conflict reconstruction frameworks always face both structural and contextual risks. In Syria's case, the principal risks and the suggested SAF remedies would include the following:

Risk	Description	Mitigation within SAF
Political Fragmentation	Competing authorities to block centralized coordination.	Start with regional pilots; build legitimacy through transparent reporting and multi-stakeholder steering committees.
Donor Overlap	Parallel aid flows risk duplication and corruption.	Portfolio alignment under NPGO; standard reporting templates.
Capacity Deficit	Shortage of trained administrators in business analysis and project management.	Training-of-trainers programs via Türkiye and other donor countries with UNDP partnership; integration of Syrian diaspora expertise.
Corruption and Elite Capture	Reconstruction funds diverted to corruption.	Real-time dashboards (Layer 4); independent audits; civil-society monitoring.
Economic Volatility	Inflation, sanctions, and resource constraints hinder sustainability.	Flexible budgeting and adaptive learning (Layer 5).

Table 3. The principal Risks for the Syrian Context and Mitigation within SAF

Broader Policy Implications

The SAF gives three general policy messages that are relevant not only for Syria but also for other post-conflict environments:

Governance has to be designed as a lean system. Success in reconstruction is not about adding more units or agencies. Instead, it depends on whether institutions, procedures and accountability mechanisms are aligned and function together.

Value has to be measured in governance outcomes. The important questions are not how much money is spent or how many activities are completed. Instead, the important ones are “Did citizen trust increase? Did participation expand? Is transparency visible and traceable?”

Capacity development can be regionalized. In many cases, a neighboring country, especially one with cultural or historical proximity, can co-produce institutional learning. Türkiye is an example here. Several recent studies (Elbehairy 2025; Düzyol 2025) argue that Türkiye's approach to development cooperation has slowly moved toward a relational "co-development of capacity".

Summary

SAF is representing a paradigm shift from projects led and run by donors to governance that is focused on learning and developing. It uses systems thinking into business analysis and project management. SAF aims to align local and regional actors with continuous feedback to promote sustainability. For Syria, after the war, using this framework could turn recovery into an opportunity to build a state that is transparent, accountable and encourages participation.

Conclusion

Rebuilding Syria is not just a technical job. Economic revival, institutional redesign, and political stabilization are interconnected processes that exert complex influences on each other. In this study, we introduced a Systems Analysis Framework (SAF) designed to integrate systems thinking with business analysis and project management. The purpose of SAF is to support and enhance corporate governance structures in post-conflict countries like Syria, linking concepts with real-world implementation rather than presenting a purely theoretical model.

Expected contribution of SAF can be described in three main ways:

- First, it changes the way we think about rebuilding governance. It suggests a shift from a list of administrative changes to a systems challenge. To realize this, SAF provides diagnostic tools to discern systemic fragility and identify leverage points by mapping the interconnections among political, economic, and administrative subsystems.
- The model then directs the diagnosis into mechanisms that can be executed. Using BABOK-informed elicitation to define requirements with stakeholders and using PMBOK techniques to make sure that execution

stays on-track and can be audited. The layered architecture of SAF is meant to change reconstruction from a donor-driven delivery to the one that builds governance nationwide.

- Third, the framework aims to connect global theory with regional practice in different parts of the world. Türkiye's evolving development-cooperation model showcases how familiar regional actors can bring culturally familiar, relationship-based and capacity-focused engagements.

SAF also contributes to governance theory by linking systems analysis with evaluation based on results. Key governance indicators change the focus of governance from reporting inputs to learning and progressing through outcomes.

In practice, success in Syria will depend on the right conditions, like political support, fiscal space and good administration. The model proposed is iterative; it should start with pilot portfolios and then expand. Syria's fragmented authority, uneven administrative capacity and data constraints may limit the immediate feasibility of rollout, which reinforces the need for staged pilots and iterative adaptation. Future research can examine interdependencies via simulation and compare and validate results with Syrian stakeholders and regional partners.

In summary, this study presents a theoretically grounded yet practical model (SAF) for strengthening corporate governance in post-conflict Syria. The broader implication is relevant beyond Syria: in fragile settings, sustainable governance will belong to institutions that learn, adapt and evolve.

Ethics Statement

This study did not include human participants and therefore did not require ethical approval.

Use of Generative AI

This manuscript was written entirely by the author. No generative AI system was used to generate original scientific content, analysis, interpretation or argumentation in this manuscript. Grammarly for Windows (version 2025.11) was used only to correct grammar, spelling and minor phrasing. ChatGPT-5 and Google Translate were used solely to translate short excerpts from Turkish-language references, which are directly quoted in the text, into English.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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