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Safety and security for national humanitarian workers

Annex I to:

TO STAY AND DELIVER

Good practice for humanitarians
in complex security environments

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Office for the
Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs

Policy Development
and Studies Branch

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Good practice for humanitarian
in complex security environments

Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer and Katherine Haver

Independent study commissioned by the Office for
the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)



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Introduction

Origin of this report

This report highlights the issue of operational security for national humanitarian aid workers and partner organisations, drawing from and expanding on a recent study commissioned by OCHA: *To Stay and Deliver: Good Practice for Humanitarians in Complex Security Environments* (Egeland, Harmer and Stoddard 2011). A version of this paper also appears within the *Aid Worker Security Report -2011* (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2011)

The principal findings include that despite overall improvements in aid agencies' security risk management, national aid workers perceive continued inequities in security support compared with their international counterparts. National aid workers, while less subject to major attacks per capita than international aid workers, nevertheless form the majority of victims, and their specific security needs require more attention.

The OCHA-commissioned study on operating in complex security environments included a multi-language web-based survey of national aid workers in complex security environments to elicit their perspectives on key issues regarding their security. The survey findings are complemented by a series of interviews that the research team conducted among international aid organisations to assess

some of the broader policy and operational considerations regarding national staff security.

Methodology

The web-based survey of national aid workers was conducted as part of the OCHA study on operating in complex environments. It consisted of 27 mostly closed-ended questions, and gave respondents the option to elaborate further with written comments. It was launched July 2010 in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. The survey was disseminated globally but with an emphasis on the highest-risk countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan. The survey, which remained open after the OCHA study was finalised, ultimately garnered 1,181 respondents – and thus reached a greater number of nationals than are typically represented in research, even with extensive fieldwork. To ensure maximum honesty, respondents were anonymous, with the only requirement that they identify their type of institutional affiliation (UN agency, INGO, national NGO, host government, etc.). Respondents were primarily comprised of UN national staffers (66 per cent), and INGO national staffers (30 per cent), with the small remainder representing host country NGOs and national Red Cross/Red Crescent societies.

Background and definitions

1.1.

Why the issue is important

National aid workers constitute the majority of aid staff in the field – upwards of 90 per cent for most international NGOs – and undertake the bulk of the work in assisting beneficiary populations. Although the statistics show that international (expatriate) aid workers have a higher per capita rate as victims of violent attacks, the national staffers, because of their higher numbers and greater exposure in frontline field positions, comprise the vast majority of victims every year. This fact alone should be enough to place the safety and security of national aid workers at the highest level of an organisation’s priorities.

The issue of national aid worker security is becoming critical for humanitarian agencies and their donors for several reasons, including the declining access for international staff in some high-risk contexts and increasing reliance on national staff and local partners to remain where international staff members have left. Host state restrictions on international staff movement and, in their most extreme form, expulsion of international agencies (such as in Sudan in early 2009) have increased the need for effective partnering between international and national aid organisations (ICVA 2010). This coincides with a growing professionalism within the humanitarian security sector and recognition that the inter-dependent nature of humanitarian work requires all agencies operating in highly insecure contexts to better appreciate good practices and minimum standards in security risk management (HPN 2010, Inter-action 2010).

1.2.

Who are ‘national’ aid workers?

National aid workers are defined here as paid personnel working on assistance programming in their home countries. This includes both the national staff of international organisations and the personnel of local or national aid organisations.

International organisations have classically referred to ‘national’ and ‘international’ as their two main categories of

staff but multiple distinctions can exist within these terms. ‘International staff’ refers to all staff not from the country within which they are working. In addition to Western expatriate staff, an organisation’s international staff often is made up of a range of nationalities, including those from neighbouring countries and those who were previously national staff in another country. International staff are generally all employed under the same terms and conditions of employment.

‘National staff’ can encompass a range of hiring categories that can stipulate different terms and conditions of employment. Increasingly organisations differentiate between *local staff*, hired directly from the area that they work, and *national staff*, nationals of the country but not from the duty station locale. In this paper, we use the terms ‘local staff’ and ‘nationally-relocated staff’ to distinguish between these two. In many organisations, local staff have different terms of employment, compared with their relocatable counterparts. Further, some organisations, including the UN agencies, will have different contracting arrangements, benefits and career tracks for nationals hired for ‘professional’ positions and those hired for general services and administration. Like in many NGOs, UN national staff can serve in senior management positions and ultimately become international staff working in other countries.

1.3.

Duty of care and responsible partnership

Distinguishing between the levels of legal and ethical responsibility that international organisations bear toward national aid workers is important. Organisations have a direct duty of care for the national staff they employ in matters of safety and security, among other things.¹ This legal obligation does not extend to the personnel of local partner NGOs, even if the partner is a direct subcontractor of the

¹ The legal concept of duty of care presumes that organisations ‘are responsible for their employees’ well-being and must take practical steps to mitigate foreseeable workplace dangers’—a responsibility that takes on additional implications when the employees are working overseas (Claus 2010).

international organisation. However, few would dispute that an ethical obligation to the local partner organisation exists that, while less clearly defined, becomes more important as security conditions deteriorate and local NGO partners take on greater program implementation as a result.

In the past, inadequate attention to the security needs of national aid workers was often based on certain false assumptions, for instance, that a national staffer will be able to work securely anywhere in the country because he or she does not stand out as being visibly foreign. In truth, of course, locals may perceive nationals from another region or province to be just as much of an outsider, and their association with certain ethnic or religious groups, clan affiliation or economic privilege may even put them at additional risk. Organisations are slowly beginning to emphasise the different types of risks faced by national aid workers.

Duty of care and legal liability for national staff and local partner organisations have recently become topics of interest to international aid organisations, indicating a growing acknowledgment of the need to take national-staff security more seriously at the corporate level (Finucane 2011). Potentially soaring personnel costs and other organisational disincentives hinder this effort, however, as will be discussed below.

1.4.

Past and current initiatives to address these issues

This is not the first study to examine the issue of security for national aid workers, but surprisingly few comprehensive analyses exist of their role in highly insecure contexts, given the importance of the topic. A decade ago in 2001, InterAction produced an important resource, *The Security of National Staff: Towards Good Practices* (Fawcett and Tanner 2001) and a number of institutional security guides for national staff have been prepared, such as one by ICRC and IFRC for their national societies (Leach and Hofstetter 2004). More recently, studies have looked at security-coordination issues between national and international humanitarian actors (Christian Aid 2010, HPN 2010). Past studies have noted the discrepancies between national and international staff in terms of access to security training, physical security measures for residences and vehicles, and telecommunications equipment (Stoddard, Harmer and Haver 2006). This study attempts to go further by documenting the perspectives of national aid workers and examining how these perspectives relate to ongoing policy initiatives. It attempts to distinguish between what is seen as a growing organisational rhetoric towards supporting national aid workers and a less-positive reality.

Differing perceptions of risk

Survey questions regarding risk

The survey asked national staff respondents a range of questions related to their perceptions of risk and relative to international staff, including this sample:

- How would you rate the security of your local work environment for aid operations?
- Has access (due to deteriorating security) declined for aid operations in your local work environment?
- What is the greatest (most prevalent) source of threat facing aid personnel and assets in your environment?
- In your environment, which jobs carry the most risk?
- Do international staff perceive local security conditions differently than national staff? If so, in your opinion do they generally overestimate or underestimate the risk?

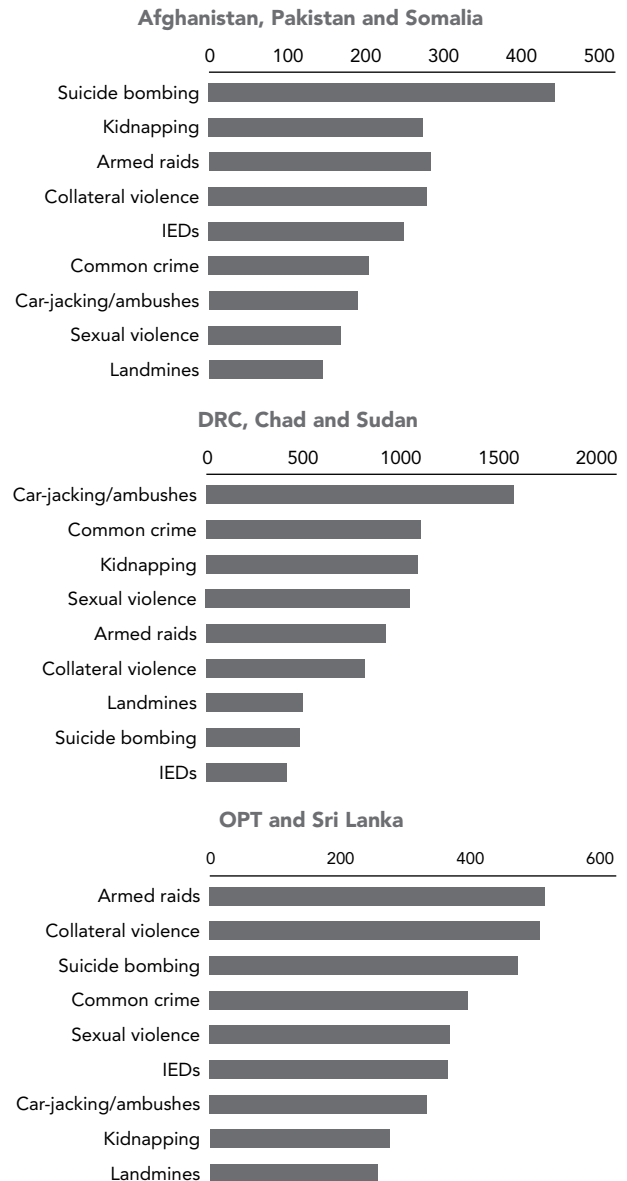
One of the primary objectives of the survey was to explore the perceptions of national aid workers on the types of threats and level of risk they face in their work and whether they perceive these threats and risks differently than their international counterparts.

The survey was targeted to national aid workers in conflict-affected operational settings considered more insecure or higher risk. Only those respondents from the most-extreme security environments – Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Somalia – defined their conditions as ‘somewhat’ to ‘highly’ insecure and were more likely to perceive humanitarian access as declining (as opposed to improving or staying the same) because of insecurity. The rest of the respondents, even those from the remaining ten highest-incident countries such as the DRC, Chad and Haiti, assessed the current conditions in their operational environments as ‘mostly secure’, defined as ‘a few isolated acts of violence, but no specific targeting’.

The context in which the national aid workers were operating also dictated their identification of the most-serious or prevalent types of threats. The findings are consistent with the incident records in those contexts. In the contexts of Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Somalia, for example, respondents ranked the top two threats to aid operations as

Figure 2.1.

National aid workers’ rankings of most serious and prevalent threats in their contexts



suicide bombings and kidnapping. In DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), Chad and Sudan, the top two threats were car-jacking and common crime. In oPt (occupied Palestinian territories) and Sri Lanka, the chief concerns were armed raids and collateral violence from combat operations.

A majority of survey respondents felt that national aid workers do indeed perceive security risk differently than their international counterparts. Most felt that internationals tended to overestimate the risk in the local security environment. Length of time in the operational context can partly explain this. National aid workers generally have more longevity in their positions in-country, compared with international staff, who typically rotate in and out of insecure contexts in less than two years.² This experience combined with having a local frame of reference, so crucial for informing an organisation's security strategy, may also account in part for local staff's relatively more sanguine outlook on security and access conditions in their countries. International staff and security managers acknowledge that a gap exists between them and their local staff and partners in how they perceive security risks. Many of them cite additional, less positive explanations for why this is. They refer to the 'frog in the pot' syndrome, where individuals become inured to chronic violence in their environment and come to view it as normal. Many international aid workers also cite the related tendency for some national staffers to take a more passive and fatalistic approach to their own safety and security.

Survey questions regarding perceptions of risk between internationals and nationals

In your view, who faces a greater level of threat of deliberate violence being committed against them in your settings – national or international aid workers?

As described above, incident statistics show that international staffers have a higher rate of attacks relative to their numbers in the field. The field-level perspective of national staffers, however, was at odds with the statistical reality.

A majority of national staffers (57 per cent) were of the opinion that nationals were generally more at risk than internationals. In survey comments and interviews, however, many nationals made the important distinction between the risk faced by national staff who are more *exposed* (are out in the field, travelling by road, living without additional security precautions at home) versus the risk faced by international staff who are targeted as foreigners and subject to politically-motivated violence from those with animosity and mistrust toward the West. Only in the occupied Palestinian territories did the national-staff survey respondents show a consensus that they, as Palestinians, faced greater risk than their international counterparts, due to the threats against them from Israeli military forces (and, in the West Bank, from settlers). International-staff interviewees strongly supported this view.

The most dangerous work for national staff?

Across all contexts, respondents ranked jobs that involved working directly with the local population, including guards, drivers and field programme officers, as the most dangerous.

Interviewees also highlighted that national aid workers – whether staff of international organisations, or partners – may have incentives to downplay the threats they face and accept imprudent levels of risk to safeguard their jobs and livelihoods, which depend on the organisation continuing its work. Interviewees stressed the need for organisations to address these concerns – primarily by training staff to understand that by reporting all possible threats, organisations can put in place reduction and mitigation measures which ultimately may save the programme and, therefore, much-needed employment.

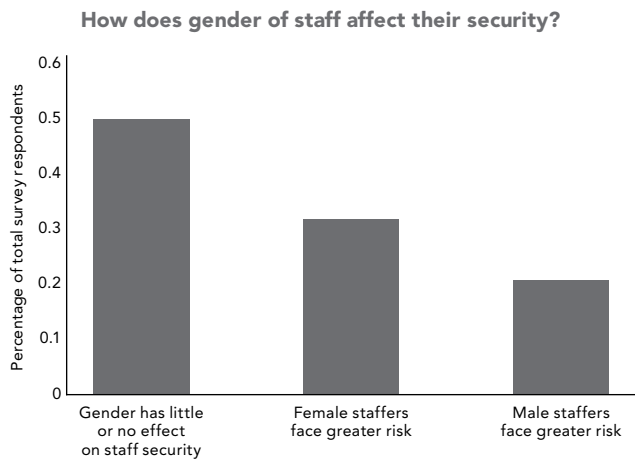
² A majority of survey respondents reported serving more than three years with their organisations, and nearly a quarter had served for more than five.

Gender and security

There is no comprehensive disaggregated data available on the gender of aid workers involved in security incidents, and even if there were, the lack of any gender breakdown of aid workers in the field overall would make it impossible to determine the relative rates of violence against men and women in these positions. The survey, however, sought more information on national aid workers' perceptions on how gender may or may not affect security, and to what degree. The majority of national staff survey respondents - combined from all settings - reported that the gender of a staffer had little or no direct effect on security.

The more dangerous the environment, however, the more staff seemed to believe that females faced a somewhat greater risk than males (oPt was the lone exception).

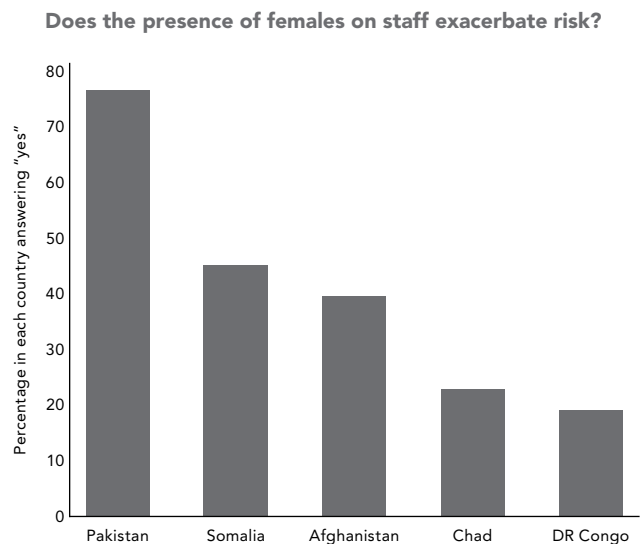
Figure 3.1.



Staffers in four countries in particular cited being female as particularly dangerous in aid work: Haiti, Pakistan, DRC and Somalia (in descending order). A quarter of total respondents believed that the presence of female staff added to aid worker insecurity due to local cultural norms that disapprove of women working or being in close proximity to unrelated men. Of the ten most dangerous contexts, the three countries from which respondents stressed this risk most were Pakistan, Somalia and Afghanistan.

Figure 3.2.

Threats relating to the employment of females



Staff care: Disparate levels of security capacity and support

Survey questions regarding levels of security capacity and support

- Did you receive security training during the time you have been employed by your organisation?
- How do you rate the level of resources (training, equipment, funding) that your organisation provides for staff security?

Previous research has identified a disparity between the level of security support provided to national as compared to international aid actors (Stoddard, Harmer and Haver 2006). To understand this disparity and the extent to which the gap has been closing in recent years, the survey explored a range of issues regarding how well employing organisations have fulfilled their security responsibilities vis-à-vis their national staff.

Positively, a majority of national aid-worker survey respondents across all institutional types reported that their organisations' attention to their security needs has improved. The UN – which states that it offers a comprehensive approach to all staff through the UN's Security Management System – fared best; their staff reported having received some training (which they noted as very welcome and useful) and being aware of organisational security policies and procedures. INGOs rated a bit lower, and local NGOs the lowest of all, with only slightly more than half of respondents affirming the existence of policies and a majority reporting having received no security training at all. Regarding the adequacy of available resources for security, 60 per cent of UN national staff respondents rated the level of resources as 'good' to 'excellent', while majorities of NGO staff (both national and international) rated their resource level as 'fair' to 'poor'. A number of survey respondents commented on the lack of communications training and equipment, despite the stated importance of these assets by international organisations.

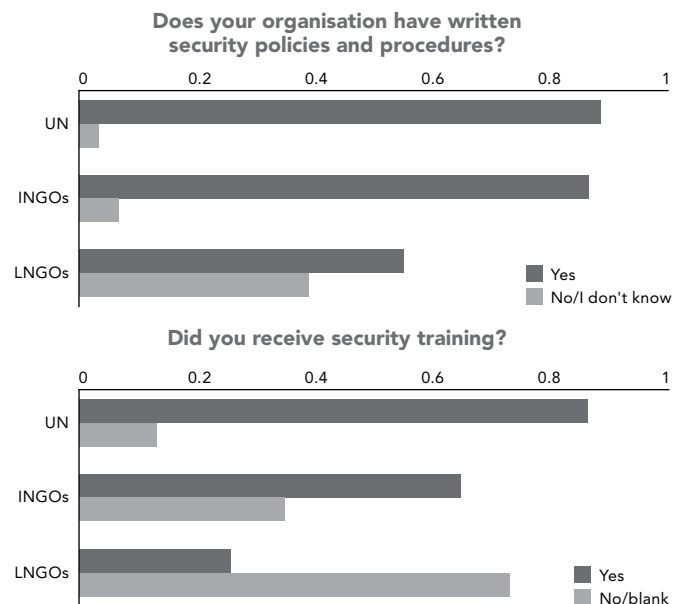
The potential burgeoning cost to organisations seeking to extend a more-equitable level of support and benefits to their national staff, or more resources to national organisational partners, is a major factor in why disparities have not been addressed as fast or as comprehensively as they

should be. In addition, prevailing economic conditions and local labour norms can provide organisations with a rationale to follow local norms rather than seek greater equity between international and national staff. For instance, if no other employer provides health or other benefits, and if nationals in local industries typically earn relatively low wages compared to what the international organisation pays, that organisation will feel little pressure to offer local staff employment terms that are on par with their expatriate staff. It should be emphasised that this reticence does not characterise all international agencies, and a few of the larger ones are beginning deliberate steps to raise standards in their local operational environments rather than follow the customary practices.

In summary, the survey findings suggest that most national aid workers see an international aid system that at times exaggerates the security risk, but which focuses its resources for mitigating that risk on its international staff members – not the national aid workers who are more often, in their own view, the subject of violence. International organisations clearly have an interest in bridging this keenly felt divide for practical and ethical reasons.

Figure 4.1.

Organisational policies and training for national staff



Organisational policies and approaches to duty of care

To augment the survey findings, the authors interviewed a range of agencies at headquarters regarding their human-resource and security policies for national staff. Here we found that although the rhetoric suggests little or no distinctions in treatment between national and international staff, differences in approach to security for international and national staff remain.

The larger organisations tend to have more-developed corporate policies for national staff, covering areas such as medical care, insurance and other benefits. Save the Children US, for example, allocates security inputs according to the job function, not by staff type. Certain senior staffers, such as the head of a field office, for instance, will require 24-hour access to vehicles and communications equipment regardless of whether they are nationals or expatriates. Staffers who have been relocated outside their home area will receive home leave or emergency transport to return if necessary, whether that means international evacuation or in-country travel. Yet in all cases national staff receive less coverage and compensation than international staff, primarily because their entitlements are linked to their salaries (which are generally much lower and in line with the local economy) or reflect the local labour laws. Generally, differentials exist in terms of entitlements. Most agencies' policies, for example, do not extend R&R leave to national staff, although a few examples were found of nationally-relocated staff receiving periodic home leave back to their place of hire. As an example of good practice, some agencies provide national staff with bonuses, which essentially mirror the hardship or hazard allowances offered to international staff.

Other forms of support include medical coverage. If no functional national insurance sector exists in the location, agencies will self-insure or find other ways to assist national staff and their dependents with health care, disability or bereavement costs. Only very rarely would such plans extend to medical evacuation, however. On

the thorny issue of evacuation of nationals in general, policies are fairly consistent: nationals cannot be evacuated from the country for reasons of severe insecurity, as internationals are. Agencies want to avoid creating refugees, and cite the difficult questions that would arise of evacuating staff members' dependents as well, or of supporting them if they are left behind. In the event of an evacuation of international staff, many organisations help nationally-relocated staff return to the point of hire or an alternate (in-country relocation), and some organisations provide national staff with two-to-three months advance salary and access to vehicles and communications equipment.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that crisis management and kidnap-and-ransom (K&R) insurance varies considerably regarding their application to national staff, although the issue is generally not openly discussed. Providing an accurate assessment of coverage for national staff is difficult.

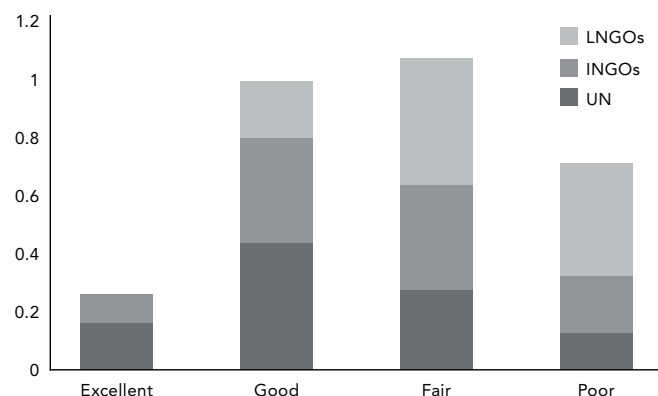
Organisations are increasingly considering whether to provide additional security protection for nationals' residences. Some interviewees argue that this is not helpful – it risks raising the profile of national staff and, rather than making them safer, might make them more of a target. Others note however that in some contexts national staff are a potential target of political or economic violence anyway, once they are identified as working for an international (often perceived as Western) organisation, and they receive salaries often far above the national average. In some cases, agencies differentiate between relocated and local staff – and only protect the residences of the former, arguing that they are not responsible to protect local staff from violence that may be unrelated to their work for the agency. The bigger issue remains the significant cost implications. As an example, in South Africa where staff are exposed to high levels of criminality, one organisation spends \$26,000 per international

staff member for security measures. If this were to extend to the organisation's 100 national staff, the programme funds spent on security would shift from 15 per cent to close-to 30 per cent.

Figure 5.1.

Resources available for national aid workers' security

How do you rate the level of resources available for security?



The issue of addressing stress and trauma among national staff in highly insecure conditions is receiving increased policy attention of late, particularly after the 2010 Haiti earthquake, although finding the money to pay for it is proving harder. A number of interviewees conveyed the challenges of ensuring national staff are aware of counselling services, where they are available. In Cote d'Ivoire for example, one national staff noted,

Local staff are not very well treated here. Since the start of the crisis, if a local staff member gets into trouble, no-one is available to go and help them ... I am not aware of any counselling services available to local staff in the agency I work with (IRIN 2011).

The funding challenges for psychosocial support and mental health care stem partly from their dependence on programme funds, rather than institutional funding not linked to any specific crisis. Very few agencies have specialised staff-care units, for example Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was the only agency identified with such a facility, but some have established staff counsellor posts or draw on programme funds to hire expert consultants. Agencies also note the challenge of identifying skilled and experienced counsellors who are able to work in the appropriate local language. While translators can help with language barriers, they too need to be trained to some degree to deal with the issues they face through this role.

People in Aid, an organisation promoting good practice in the management of people in the aid sector, argues that part of the wider problem in addressing duty of care for staff in a more comprehensive manner is the weak link within organisations between security management and human resource professionals. Williamson (2010) encourages human resource staff to be more aware of security needs and costs in their operations, particularly for national staff, and vice versa. Aid organisations have tended to underinvest in human resourcing capacity and time on national staff issues. As an example, one INGO's human resource department at one time had six-to-eight human resource professionals in headquarters dedicated to supporting its 200 international staffers in the field. In contrast, the same organisation had only one person assigned to national staff issues (part-time), despite employing thousands of national staff. Such a differential inevitably affects the quality of care and attention national staff security issues receive in terms of broad policy development and corporate care at the headquarters level.

Consultation and participation

Survey questions regarding consultation

- Do you regularly participate in security meetings and informational briefings?
- Does your organisation have a complaints mechanism in which you can raise issues of security?
- How is the communication on security issues between national and international staff

Senior staff of aid agencies often stress that their security management is only as good as their national staff, whose full participation in security systems and decision-making is key. Indeed, most security focal points and, increasingly, security coordinator positions are now filled by national staff; the aid organisations interviewed in the field who demonstrated success in accessing affected populations in insecure settings all made strong use of their national colleagues' (or partners') information and analysis, consulted them as co-equals in security management, and often had nationals in senior leadership or analytical positions in the security area. The benefits include 'responsibilising' decision-making, increasing security awareness, and building relationships with local authorities and others, including armed actors, in the commu-

nity. However, survey respondents noted some tensions on this issue. A number of respondents expressed feelings of not being listened to by international colleagues who 'project themselves as the experts'.

In the survey, the majority of national aid workers from all types of organisations reported having a complaints mechanism in which issues of security could be raised and addressed (some more informal than others); however, not all were pleased with the outcome. As one respondent wrote, 'We feel when we complain—the assessment team that looks into our concerns and do a “tourist kind” of assessment—they remain at the District HQ for example, talk[ing] to District Police Commander, Brigade Commander, but do not go deep in remote areas where field staff operate daily where this risk is high.'

In some countries, engaging national staff closely about the security dimensions of an organisation's decision-making process (including information sharing between organisations) will raise the concerns of authorities. Agencies note that where the host state has a significant influence over the security apparatus for aid organisations, they must carefully weigh the benefits of inclusiveness against the risk this may pose for their nationals.

National aid organisations and the need for responsible partnership

7.1.

The emerging concept of responsible partnership

The issue of addressing security needs and care for national partner organisations was described by one interviewee as taking the rhetoric-versus-reality problem one step further. That said, agencies (to varying degrees) are beginning to at least consider what their responsibilities are to partners regarding their security and, linked to this, having a better understanding of their partners' capacity to mitigate the threats and maintain their programming goals.

In response to deteriorating security conditions, many organisations opt to shift to a 'remote management' approach. This can include withdrawing international staff, altering management structures to give more responsibility to national and local staff who remain present, or working more with local partner organisations (HPN 2010). But, many aid organisations already routinely work with local partner organisations in a wide variety of settings, both secure and insecure. Organisations that decide to programme through local partners because of security constraints may believe that a partner organization will face lower risks, simply because it is a national (rather than international) organization. This should not be assumed, any more than it should be assumed that national staff of an international organization would be at less risk.

Compared with others, partnership-based organisations demonstrated an earlier consciousness about providing security support to partner organisations. For example, Christian Aid and the ACT Alliance, which represents over 100 NGOs, have been examining their responsibilities for a number of years and have developed *Staff Safety and Security Principles* for the whole alliance – which reaches thousands of partners in the field – as

well as hands-on training and training kits for all their partners. Multi-mandated but primarily development-oriented agencies often stress that partnership is core to their work, but they too identify challenges and weaknesses in their approach, particularly when they are engaged in responding to sudden-onset crises. In such circumstances, as one NGO experienced, it is possible to be caught short while trying to quickly scale up and, in the process, identify new partners without knowing or investing in their security capacities in advance of initiating the response effort. The humanitarian agencies that typically directly implement programmes and only rely on partner organisations when their access is limited acknowledge that they are behind in addressing the question of partnership and support to national partners and have only just begun to think about their responsibilities in this area. What was striking and common to all interviewees was the need to define the limits of their organisational responsibilities. Agencies' chief concern is that formally acknowledging and addressing the issue of national partner security might put unmanageable pressures on their limited resources and capacity.

Some organisations have recently attempted to address their obligations and responsibilities (or limitations) in their security policies. For international organisations to adopt a policy position stating that local implementing partners are responsible for their own safety and security management is becoming increasingly common (Finucane 2011). Oxfam GB, for example, developed a new security policy in 2010 that states very clearly that Oxfam's partners are responsible for managing their own security. Recently a few of the large UN agencies have started to more-systematically review security measures, contingencies and capacity building with their implementing partners as a matter of policy and ongoing programme management.

2010 UNHCR annual consultations with NGOs

In 2010, UNHCR conducted a survey for their annual consultation with national NGO partners. Ninety-eight national organisations in 29 countries were surveyed. On the question of the challenges of working in environments where there is little UN presence, respondents noted that they needed

- Training, logistics support and support in staff capacity to ensure they continue reaching the groups in the most affected areas;
- More attention to their security and the introduction of incentives (such as higher salaries) to organisations working in difficult environments and
- UNHCR to be more present in a facilitator role between national organisations and governments to ensure that humanitarian actors are neutral and provide services without discrimination.

Source: UNHCR 2010

Overall, however progress has been slow and not at the pace that the transfer of responsibility is taking place from the international organisation to the national partner. For many organisations, practice is not guided by any formal policy but is developed country-by-country, according to available resources and pre-existing relationships with partners. As such, arrangements for national partner security are very ad hoc, with some able to access vehicles and communications equipment and some offered training (particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan), but others operating in similar contexts receiving no additional security support. Attempts to provide locally appropriate assets (such as rented local vehicles rather than four wheel drives, and local mobile phones rather than radio equipment) so as not to raise the organisation's profile, are examples of good practice, which could be more widely adopted.

A wider concern regarding collaborating with national organisations how resources for security are allocated, largely through inter-agency mechanisms. The security budgets of UN agencies and NGOs come predominantly from within their bilateral programme or project grants. Increasingly, the UN has tried to utilise the consolidated

appeals process and other common financing tools such as the CERF to raise security funds collectively, although this has so far shown very limited returns. In both cases, the funds remain largely in the hands of the appealing agencies and the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS). When local partner organisations are contracted, the international security resources do not appear to filter downward and outward to their implementing partners on the ground.

7.2.

The role of security coordination fora in supporting national partners

A range of important security coordination fora have emerged in recent years, including the UN-NGO collaborative effort of Saving Lives Together (SLT), as well as context-specific security platforms such as ANSO (Afghanistan) and GANSO (Gaza). While these are all, in theory, useful mechanisms for extending coordination and support to national partners, there is not much evidence of it happening in practice. SLT is broadly understood to be a mechanism to support the implementing partners of UN agencies, but UNDSS notes that bringing all agencies under the SLT framework is not possible, and participating INGOs have the responsibility to channel the benefits of SLT down to their national partners, rather than directly benefiting themselves. Increasingly national NGOs are collaborating directly with UN agencies and in these cases SLT should apply, although UNDSS highlights the need for caution regarding the way in which national partners automatically become involved in in-country security coordination, particularly where the host government imposes strict controls on national staff access to security information. To address the issues of how SLT applies to INGOs and their national partners, some NGOs have proposed to develop an *NGO-version* of the SLT framework that would provide the terms and conditions of security management support between INGOs and their implementing partners, including guidance on the responsibilities, obligations and expectations of each organisation.

Humanitarian principles: Operational interpretations and applications by national aid actors

Survey questions regarding humanitarian principles

- Does your organisation actively promote humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality in its operations?
- Does an organisation's adherence to humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality help to enhance the security of national aid workers?

The question of whether and how national humanitarian organisations and staffers can uphold humanitarian principles in highly contested contexts is an increasingly important issue given international organisations' reliance on these actors to operate, often without significant monitoring or support. International staff interviewees in this and past studies have questioned the ability of their national staff to uphold principles when under extreme pressures in conflict settings, and the utility in asking them to do so. Agencies often present this as one of their primary concerns when switching to a remote management mode of operations, particularly in contexts where there is a strong authoritarian state (Stoddard, Harmer and Renouf 2009). Prior to this survey, exploring national staff perspectives on humanitarian principles has not been done in any systematic way at an inter-agency level. In the survey, we asked two questions: first, whether their organisation actively promoted the principles of impartiality, independence, and neutrality – respondents overwhelmingly answered in the affirmative (94 per cent) and, second, whether doing so enhanced the security of national aid workers – 96 per cent said yes. These questions received larger majorities than any other.

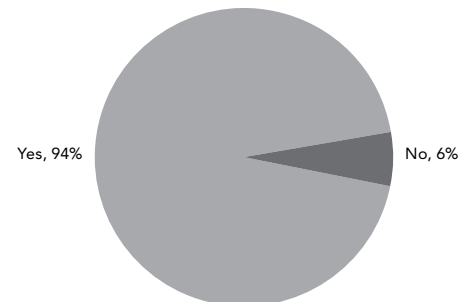
While a small number of respondents qualified their 'yes' response with a caveat, the strength of the positive responses signals an important and previously undervalued perspective on not only the practical usefulness of the principles, but also their role in keeping national aid workers safe in insecure conditions across different cultural settings. Conversely, when asked what factors contribute to insecurity, the lack of respect for principles was the third-largest contributor to insecurity (out of seven) in the

opinion of respondents, following 'incompetent organisations taking unnecessary risks' and 'lack of experience and cultural awareness'.

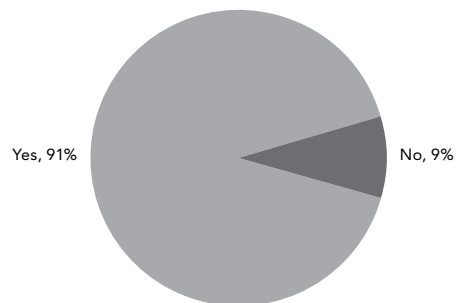
Figure 8.1.

Respondents' perceptions on humanitarian principles

Does your organisation actively promote humanitarian principles?



Does adherence to these principles help to enhance the security of aid national aid workers?



An important additional finding from the survey was in how respondents perceived the levels of threat faced by different types of organisations. Institutionally, employment in UN agencies was deemed to carry more risk than other types of institutional affiliations, followed by Western INGOs, and religious organisations. This perception held across all contexts, except for oPt and Sri Lanka, where local organisations were considered to carry more risk. The finding highlights the challenges the UN faces in many complex political emergencies where it often has both a political and a military role, as well as a humanitarian one. At times, these roles can be in direct conflict with each other. The UN's open and direct support to a

government that is also waging war on insurgents, for example, undermines efforts to establish it as a neutral and impartial actor (Harvey et al. 2010).

The OCHA study reaffirmed that humanitarian principles provide the basis for warring parties to accept humanitarian action in situations of armed conflict. But, the study highlighted the range of challenges agencies face in promoting these principles, including political constraints imposed by host and donor governments. While simultaneously calling for respect for humanitarian principles, in the recent past many humanitarian organisations have also willingly compromised a principled approach in their own conduct by closely aligning with political and military activities and actors (Egeland, Harmer and Stoddard 2010). These findings, combined with the importance national aid workers place on humanitarian principles, sug-

gests that international organisations need to rigorously and systematically support all staff, but particularly local staff and partners, to imbed humanitarian principles in their day-to-day work in high-risk environments. This should involve ensuring that organisational policies and operational decision-making on issues such as funding, beneficiaries, modes of operation, and security measures are in line with humanitarian principles. This should also involve investing in communicating the organisation's adherence to humanitarian principles at every level of the organisation, by all members of staff. Finally, it could also involve monitoring and reviewing operations in complex security environments on a regular basis to ensure compliance with humanitarian principles and to ensure that staff are receiving appropriate levels of support in achieving them (Egeland, Harmer and Stoddard 2010).

Conclusions and recommendations

9.1.

Conclusions

In many countries, the operational presence of international aid organisations is often ‘international’ only in name and in the person of a handful of international staff, while host country nationals undertake very nearly all of the program execution, management, administration and representation. This is increasingly true in some of the most violent contexts, where deteriorating conditions have forced international agencies to remotely manage their programmes. Even while many, particularly the largest, international aid organisations have made deliberate strides in nationalising their programming, a headquarters-country bias can still be seen throughout much of the sector. This manifests itself in greater headquarters support, including security resources, for international staff than for the bulk of the organisation’s staff in the field. Correcting this bias and more equitably and responsibly addressing the security needs of national aid actors will require a shift in both mindsets and resources. A few of the larger and better-endowed agencies have begun to make this shift, with security and other personnel policies starting to be developed specifically with national staff, as the majority of employees, in mind. Still, overall progress in security equitability for national staff has been slow and, for national partners, hardly yet begun.

9.2.

Recommendations

The following recommendations build on and complement those outlined in the broader OCHA study “To Stay and Deliver: Good practice for humanitarians in complex security environments” (Egeland, Harmer and Stoddard 2010).

1. Audit security resources and policies for national staff. Agencies should undertake comprehensive and detailed auditing of their security resources for national staff to identify and address any inequities in security policies and supports. This should cover human re-

source policies such as insurance, medical care and access to stress and trauma counselling, as well as opportunities for training and skills development for operating in high-risk environments.

2. Strengthen explicit security support in agreements with local partners. All international agencies should be proactive in assisting their local partners to determine their security support needs and provide the resources to meet those needs. Contracts and partnership instruments should include specific provisions for security plans and associated funding, including both hardware and training or capacity-building requirements. UNDSS and agencies should coordinate to articulate security resource needs for operational partners and include them in consolidated appeals, particularly where the movement of UN agencies has been severely curtailed.

3. Prioritise national participation in field-based security platforms and security coordination. The UN and non-UN operational agencies should increase efforts to ensure the participation of national aid organisations in security coordination platforms and mechanisms (such as SLT). This should include drafting guidelines for cooperation, performing joint training exercises in the field, ensuring meetings are carried out or translated into the national language and offering information and analysis that is inclusive of, and relevant to, the operational needs of local aid workers, as well as ensuring a two-way information flow.

4. Engage in ongoing dialogue with staff on risk perceptions and humanitarian principles. Agencies should systematically monitor and discuss the differing perceptions of risk among all their staff. Risk assessments and regular security discussions should aim to reach greater understanding and consensus on security risks common to all, as well as those specific to international versus national staff, and to men versus women. Within this dialogue, agencies should work to forge a common understanding of humanitarian principles as they relate to practical opera-

tions for secure access and promote a shared commitment to adherence to these principles and to universal safety and security precautions.

5. Increase donor support for national aid worker security. Donors should support investments

aimed at skill-set development and duty of care to national staff and support the strengthening of national partnerships. Donor grant and funding mechanisms could require grantees to ensure that all subcontractors and implementing partners have established security plans and resources.

10

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ANNEX 1

People interviewed

Frédéric Bardou, Head, Safety and Security Service, Action contre la faim (ACF, France)

Oliver Behn, European Inter-agency Security Forum Executive Coordinator

Dominic Crowley, Head of Emergencies, Concern

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Kaz de Jong, Psychosocial and Mental Health Staff Care, MSF Amsterdam

Randy Martin, Global Emergency Operations, Mercy-Corps

Kiruja Micheni, Corporate Security Manager, Christian Aid and Chair, ACT Alliance Security Advisory Group

Michael O'Neil, Senior Director, Department of Global Safety and Security, Save the Children

John Shabatura, Head, Staff Security Unit, International Organization for Migration

Norm Sheehan, Security Director, Academy for Educational Development (AED)

Matthew Thacker, Academy for Educational Development (AED)

Mike Tompkins, Director Operations, World Vision International

Christine Williamson, People in Aid

Survey instruments and summary results

Operating in Complex Security Environments: Survey for national humanitarian workers

1. The country where you live and work

2. The type of organisation/institution you work for:

- Local/national NGO or community-based organisation
 - International NGO
 - UN agency (or fund, program, office) involved in aid
 - National Red Cross | Red Crescent society
 - ICRC IFRC
 - National Government (host government)
 - Regional organisation (for example, SADC, ASEAN)
 - Other, please specify
-

3. How long have you been working for this organisation?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- Over 5 years

4. What type of programming does your organisation do (primarily)?

- Many types of aid (multi-sector) Agriculture
- Coordination
- Logistics and Support Services
- Economic Recovery and Infrastructure
- Education

- Food
 - Health
 - Mine Action
 - Protection | Human Rights | Rule of law
 - Security
 - Shelter and Non-food Items
 - Water and Sanitation
 - Other, please specify
-

5. What best describes your position/job? (choose the closest)

- Head of Office/Director
 - Programme/project manager
 - Programme/project staff(including health worker)
 - Local Security Assistant/focal point
 - Finance officer
 - Administrator
 - Warehouse manager
 - Logistician
 - Administrative/office assistant
 - Driver
 - Guard
 - Communications/media officer
 - Other, please specify
-

6. How would you rate the security of your local work environment for aid operations?

- Secure (no major acts of violence against aid workers)
- Mostly secure (a few isolated acts of violence, but no specific targeting)

- Somewhat insecure (a growing number of threats and some acts of violence)
- Highly insecure, dangerous (aid workers/ operations regularly targeted for attack)

7. During the time you have been working, has access (due to deteriorating security) for aid operations in your local work environment:

- Improved
- Stayed about the same
- Worsened

8. In your opinion, what is the greatest (most prevalent) source of threat facing aid personnel and assets in your environment? Please rank the below from 1 (lowest: rare or non-existent) to 9 (highest: major source of threat or constraint to aid work)

- Common crime- robbery/burglary
- Car-jacking and other attacks on the road
- Kidnapping
- Landmines
- Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)
- Collateral violence (proximity to attacks on military or other targets)
- Targeted armed attacks on aid project facilities or offices
- Sexual violence
- Suicide bombing

9. In your environment, which jobs do you think carry the most risk? Please rank the different types of positions in terms of the risk involved (1 is lowest risk/safest; 6 is highest risk/most dangerous)

- Senior management Programme/project staff
- In the field Administrative/finance/media staff
- In the office Warehouse staff
- Drivers
- Guards

10. Does your organisation have written security policies and procedures?

- Yes
- No

- I don't know

11. Did you receive security training during the time you have been employed by your organisation?

Comments (optional)

12. Do you regularly participate in security meetings and informational briefings?

Comments (optional)

13. How do you rate the level of resources (training, equipment, funding) that your organisation provides for staff security?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

14. During the time you have been working there, has your organisation's attention to the security needs of its staff:

- Improved
- Stayed about the same
- Worsened

15. Does your organisation have a complaints mechanism in which you can raise issues of security?

Additional comment

16. In your view, who faces a greater level of threat of deliberate violence being committed against them in your setting?

- National local aid workers
 - International (foreign/expatriate) aid workers
 - Why? (comment optional)
-
-
-

17. In your opinion, do international organisations ask their local national staff to accept:

- A comparable burden of risk compared to internationals?
- Less risk compared to internationals?
- More risk compared to internationals?

18. Do different types of organisations face different levels of threat in your setting? If no, leave blank and go to question 19. If yes, please choose those who appear to be especially at risk (click on all that apply)

- Local/national NGOs or community-based organizations
 - International NGOs in general
 - Western NGOs
 - Faith based organisations
 - UN agencies
 - National Red Cross / Red Crescent societies
 - ICRC
 - Other, please specify
-
-

19. In general, do you think international aid workers (in your organisation or in other organisations) perceive the general security conditions in the location to be:

- Different than the local national staff perceptions
- About the same as the local national staffs perceptions

20. If you think international aid workers perceive the local security conditions differently, do you think internationals generally:

- Overestimate the risk
 - Underestimate the risk
 - Comments (optional)
-
-
-

21. How does the gender of staff members affect security? (Select all that apply)

- Female staff are generally at greater risk than male staff
 - Male staff are generally at greater risk than female staff
 - The presence of female staff can add to the threat against our operations in general, due to local attitudes
 - Gender has little or no affect on security.
 - Comments (please elaborate)
-
-
-

22. In your opinion, how is the communication on security issues between international and national staff (either within an NGO or between NGOs and NGOs)?

- Good
- Adequate/improving
- Poor

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