



Preparedness Support:
**Helping Brace Beneficiaries,
Local Staff and Partners for Violence**

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Under the Auspices of
The Cuny Center**

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This paper was prepared under the auspices of The Cuny Center. The Center is an applied research and educational institute that pursues practical solutions for the needs of societies affected by conflict. It was founded by Fred Cuny, the renowned aid worker who disappeared in Chechnya in 1995, and later renamed in his honor. More information can be obtained by contacting the author and Protection Research Fellow, Casey A. Barrs at: cbarrs@mt.gov. Cite only with permission.

I. INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian aid agencies can help beneficiaries, local staff and partners *physically prepare themselves today* for violence they may face after we are separated tomorrow. This paper focuses on the many people who are at risk of being killed after events drive us apart. Their supportable capacity to survive and serve others alone amid conflict is the most neglected truth in our well-worn debates over civilian protection. There often comes a day when we must leave them or they must leave us, and we have missed our chance to help them tactically prepare for imminent threats. We are forced to leave our relief or development work—feeling we have abandoned them. They are forced to leave their communities or camps—and perhaps walk straight into violence.

But an agency that is adequately grounded on site and that hires specific talent in house can support locals' preparedness. As ALNAP says, "whenever access permits" we must work with at-risk civilians on their own protection tactics.¹ If we believe civilians can use more tactical know-how for living out their "legal rights" in a lawless land, then we can begin sharing it today. Save the Children-UK notes that we can use "periods of relative peace and stability to develop [stratagems including] community and household-level emergency preparedness plans so that strategies are in place for responding to attacks and safely escaping if necessary."²

"There is much that aid organizations can do to build on the strategies that communities employ" in order to "maintain their assets, escape violence, and mitigate threats."³

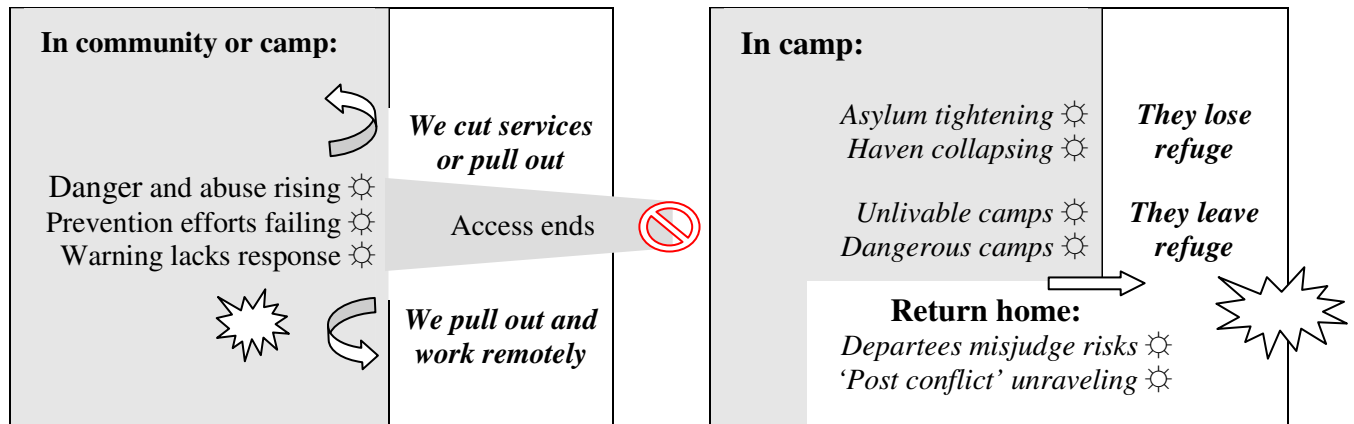
—Humanitarian Policy Group

Last one standing. Many have told us to invest in local capacity for self-preservation.⁴ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee argues that "practical protection is provided first of all by and through the community."⁵ The ICRC insists that we can support local insights and capacities for self-protection.⁶ It says we can "help communities improve their means of reducing exposure to risk [...an example being to] assist communities to adopt early warning systems and contingency plans for emergency situations."⁷ Astutely, the Global Protection Cluster Working Group says "we must recognize the temporary nature of our presence... and our limitations... [We must] strengthen local coping strategies and protection mechanisms."⁸ OCHA adds that "the difficulties and uncertainties of humanitarian access lead logically to emphasis on local mechanisms and strategies for provisioning and protection. ... When our access for protection and assistance is difficult, innovative alternatives are worth exploring."⁹ Kofi Annan found that local actors are "the basic source of protection, especially when all other layers of protection fail ... funding and training [them] is an important investment."¹⁰ In this vein, the European Community Humanitarian Office says community "self-protection must be at the heart of protection strategies."¹¹ *But though we do support some local responses to violence there are many more—particularly the discreet and unorthodox ones—that we fail to assist.* Indeed there is a whole understory of local preparations against harm that we tend not to even recognize.

Of all protections, the ones for physical safety, economic survival, and local service delivery depicted here will be the last ones standing because they support the abilities of the very people who are left standing alone as violence shuts the world out. UNHCR refers to itself as the 'first port of call' and 'provider of last resort' for protection. But civilians are typically the first and last providers of their own protection. The whole responsibility-to-protect debate largely bypasses this reality.

Deadly Transitions and Responsibilities

There are many deadly junctures when we are unable to prevent conflict, continue our programs, transfer our work to nationals safely, guarantee our asylum or safe havens, protect their repatriation, or prevent the slide from “post-conflict” back to conflict. We cannot deny the dangers that civilians face *when we are incapacitated* in these ways. But we can at least do more to help capacitate *them* by preparing for these breakdowns. This paper thus proposes that as we work with beneficiaries, local staff and partners today, we should do what we can to help them brace for possible violence tomorrow. A sensitive proposition? The figure below depicts transitions in our work when millions of those who we have worked for and worked with must cope with violence alone.



Consider this paper your back-up plan. Whether we are leaving them or they are leaving us, ask: have we helped prepare them to survive violence alone? Will any protection that we set up survive the transition? Will it be portable, adaptable, and applicable to where they are going or what they will be facing next? The wisdom of embedding protection “in our daily work” is unquestioned—until the day our work is forced to stop. That is, *program-based* “protections” vanish if programs collapse without adding to local capacity for self-protection. Our *presence-based* protections end as soon as we leave. Our *camp-based* protections of the premises (e.g. well-lit latrines) and perimeter (e.g. firewood patrols) end when we or they are forced out of camps. Our *host-based* protections fail when host authority ultimately lacks the capacity or will to protect. Our *rights-based* protections are lost the minute we leave them to a lawless situation. These protections too often prove ephemeral.

When lawlessness reaches such a point, how often then do other remedies, based on negotiation, advocacy, or denunciation succeed? Not often enough. Or in terms of diplomatic and peacekeeping missions, how often do those in pinstripe suits and blue helmets prevail before the worst of the killing is over? Not often enough. This paper focuses on civilians’ own tactical capacities precisely because our own protection repertoire often fails and leaves too many men, women, and children to their own brutal fates. *That is the premise, the purpose, and the starting point of this paper.*

This is not meant to malign the invaluable work of humanitarians and others. But it is intended to stress the added responsibility that we share for the life-threatening situations that occur along the fault lines of our work; times when locals’ fates become bound up with our actions or inactions. Our often-repeated notion of “presence as protection” is rarely met by the question of whether we are fostering in locals a false sense of security and interrupting survival strategies that they might otherwise attempt for themselves. Our program suspensions (increasing globally) rarely show enough planning for the safety of local staff and partners, much less our beneficiaries. Our support of locally-led conflict prevention rarely helps them prepare for a failure to prevent violence. Our human rights efforts rarely include the tactical skills for living out those rights by outliving killers. Our early warning systems can get an alarm out, but rarely wire warning to those in harm’s way. Our asylum regimen and safe havens all too often collapse. Our camps all too often are so unlivable or dangerous that residents are compelled

to go home prematurely—and face violence. The peace accords that we broker and the “post-conflict” repatriation we encourage all too often come undone in the face of resurgent violence. Many of the dangers locals face are bound up with our shortcomings. Luckily, at each of these critical junctures lies the same neglected safety net: local capacity.

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If the coming pages seem too unorthodox, then remember that *today’s orthodoxy fails far too often*. If you feel skeptical, then ask: what is the greater risk to locals: getting systematically prepared for violence—or not? Ask: what assurances are you demanding? What alternatives are you offering? What level of innocence are you expecting? Some observers find that many civilian “‘self protection actions’ may be beyond what we like to label as ‘protection strategies’ [and do] not fit into the kind of international advocacy we engage with – for that we need ‘innocent and passive victims’, not all kinds of [shadowy] deals and trade offs and complex and contradicting survival/coping mechanisms.”¹² Whose calculation of risk and benefit matters more—yours or theirs?

Your agency *might be qualified to offer preparedness support* if it is well-grounded on site (having good situational awareness, local trust, and local backing) and acquires the type of advisors described in this paper. Preparedness support is “proven” in that there exist lifesaving strategies and skills that have been employed countless times. In history we see that civilians learn, especially when provided structure, how to survive overwhelming odds. And more to the theme of this paper: in humanitarian aid there are precedents in which we have supported the unarmed tactical ability of locals to endure conflict. This paper discusses some elements of the risk-benefit calculation to augment self- protection and how it can be offered in prudent ways while working under the gun. There are of course many ways to support capacity and convey lifesaving advice ranging from demonstration and drill on down to discreet discussion.

Safety, sustenance, and services. The following modules are merely menus. There are too many diverse situations for this paper to be prescriptive. Action that can save lives in one time and place might endanger them in another. The next three sections cite ways to support civilian capacity for **physical safety, economic survival, and local service delivery**. Local views of security often differ from those of peace support and aid missions, encompassing not just bodily safety but *also* life-critical sustenance and services. The three strands cannot be separated because more civilians die in times of violence from the collapse of sustenance and services, and because civilians often take physical risks to obtain these elemental things. Reports find “serious disconnects” between our views of security and theirs, reminding us that local communities “have their own perceptions of and approaches to security [that] receive too little consideration from outside actors.”¹³

If capacity is “the identifiable strengths upon which communities can draw to avert, mitigate or recover” from crisis,¹⁴ then clearly it is vital to support these three areas. Actions can be chosen or omitted based on the risks and benefits involved. Even if only a few of the measures cited in this paper are chosen it still may save many lives. Families and communities trying to survive crisis very often invent strategies and structures for their safety and sustenance. Local providers facing violence very often relearn how to survive so they can continue to serve. As will be seen, **local providers** (if very well grounded in community life) **can be both receivers and providers of preparedness support**. The preparedness modules cited here can help shorten their lethal learning curves.

II. PHYSICAL SAFETY

How They Respond

The following taxonomy is by no means complete but does sum up some key civilians responses. All too often, at-risk populations feel they no longer have any choice but to seek **safety through arms**; arming themselves or gaining this protection through payment to or allegiance with an armed group.

The decision belongs to them—but is a choice for which this paper offers *alternatives*. As concluded in the remarkable account, *War and Survival in Sudan's Frontierlands*, and as might be true in many accounts of raw survival, “armed activity has not been the main key to survival of the displaced over the last two decades. It has been rather the exercise of will and foresight through more basic means—survival skills in the bush, decisions to move, to plan...[to] act in concert... [and] survive by sticking together.”¹⁵ There are many time-tested ways of staying safer amid conflict; ways that largely neither support aggression nor submit to life-threatening demands. As is discussed below, civilians often seek safety through affinity, accommodation, and avoidance. If we support such efforts of theirs, then we might help raise up or restore choices where there appeared to be none other than a gun.

Affinity groups. Fred Cuny once said that social units are the strongest of all coping mechanisms. People at risk survive through ties of affinity; they take refuge with those whom they trust. For us the word asylum means legal protection and relief found across a border. But a civilian’s “first asylum” is generally in networks of affinity. Much has been written about social capital that need not be repeated here. People can survive through useful ties to authority figures and controlling powers or, as this paper stresses, informal relationships and networks in associational life. Studies of crises show “the surprising capacity of reaction and self-organization of people outside any usual public or institutional structure”.¹⁶ The sense of identity and obligation, the relationships and leadership that exist prior to violence all affect how a populace protects itself. If there exists a tradition or history of being cohesive and organized, then escape and subsequent efforts at survival are more systematic. As Liam Mahony notes, “some of the most impressive cases of standing up to terror come from well-organised, cohesive communities. In contrast, disorganised and unsupported communities are much more vulnerable to manipulation through fear and violence.”¹⁷ Social capital and cohesion are ethereal things *yet critical to support and as essential as any aid commodity ever delivered*. In this vein Anderson and Woodrow argue that social and organizational capital or capacities can be as important to survival as physical or material resources.¹⁸

Accommodation. Initially, locals often try to “accommodate” dangerous actors. The word is used here in the pragmatic rather than the partisan sense. They accommodate in the hope of deescalating or at least winning some immunity from violence; some reprieve from demands. They may try this in ways that outside agencies are not familiar with or even aware of. Family and village-level efforts to deal with violence occur on a lower canopy, far below the more formal domains in which governments and civil society “engage” each other. They may have little to do with civic processes between citizens and duty-bearers redressing grievances within the rule of law. Instead, they occur between unequal parties, often with the weaker trying to calculate which concessions are the least harmful. The weak might have money to leaven an arrangement. But their best currency often is information. Who among the controlling powers (whether at a roadblock or in a ministry) might be accommodative? Who, by virtue of professionalism, kinship, friendship, greed, resentment, ambition, principle, shared background, or a pragmatic sense of shifting fortunes, might relent or even help? (In the related arena of nonviolent resistance it is a proven tenet that controlling powers are not monolithic; that one can often make discretionary approaches toward some in power and peel them away to attain support.) With information, and with personal courage, there have been many examples of local leaders striking deals for safe space, neutrality, separation from combatants, reprieve from conscription, freedom of movement, permission or payment to pursue livelihood, or other leniencies for their people.

Dance with the executioner. Civilians who make deals and concessions *are not* necessarily “collaborating” in the ideological sense. Nor have they necessarily lost control of their lives. There are many ways to appease powers and still keep some independence. “Superficial compliance can have elements of resistance. Such resistance can achieve more than open confrontation precisely because it aims at self-help and withdrawal rather than institutional confrontation.”¹⁹ Like their predecessors in feudalism, slavery and occupation, they learn how to be both compliant *and* defiant.

They learn how to concede to arduous demands with delay, deceit, underreporting, underperformance, and much more. It is their conscious choice first to keep concessions survivable and then to reserve unto themselves a modicum of autonomy and dignity. They understand the unsustainable and counterproductive nature of many compromises. The relationship they have with oppressive powers is complicated. But they know this dance far better than we. They know that even when demands are ratcheted up to the most intolerable levels that there may be ways to find advantage. When, for example, they turn over a son for conscription, it might be in anticipation of exemption or intelligence that saves the whole family. These are *their* risks and *their* calculations.

One urgent issue that local leaders try to resolve is the distinction between and separation of civilians and combatants. “The ultimate challenge [is]: how to capacitate civilians themselves to negotiate the separation... This could be a prime strategy.”²⁰ The word “negotiate” is imbued with western liberal beliefs and civil processes. A more apt phrase might be “cut deals”. We must consider “providing appropriate support to communities so they can deal with the armed actors that threaten them.”²¹ Experience shows that intelligence and communications (skills stressed in this paper) are critical when engaging dangerous actors. The prerequisite for bargaining is “learn all you can”. The prerequisite for local leaders trying to know the unspoken rules and unseen limits of accommodation is “learn all you can” and be ready to act. Well-placed eyes, ears, and feet on the ground provide early awareness as relationships shift and events evolve. Civilians need quick verification of micro-level events more than computer tracking of macro-level trends. They need ongoing real-time facts about threats and must push that awareness from the edge of their villages as far out as possible. This helps them understand the opportunities *and limits* of dealing with dangerous actors. Beyond those limits can be their backup plan. In Colombia, for instance, “some communities have managed a sometimes effective dialogue with armed groups. [But] the strongest of the communities have detailed contingency plans to deal with a deterioration in the situation.”²²

Accommodation is a two-way street. Fighting factions themselves need to believe that no threat is emanating from the communities. History shows that a key trait of many communities able to stay out of a conflict which was engulfing their neighbors was their leaders’ ability to reign in local extremists (or the psychological forces that feed extremism) and reinforce a local identity against violence. Again, adept use of information and communications can be crucial for such self-policing. People caught between fighting factions are often fed news both false and inflammatory. It aims to tempt or incite them to fight. But, as local warning networks in Sri Lanka have shown, local leaders who are armed with facts and proofs may be able to discredit belligerent fear and hate propaganda. They may be able to dampen the ardor of youth about the real nature of war and warriors with evidence. These being their own youth, they may be very motivated to scale up information and communication efforts. La Guardia Indígena in Columbia helps community members, especially the young, resist pressures to join the conflict. So too, with better situational awareness (and evacuation readiness) civilians may feel less threatened thus less prone to preemptively lash out. Belligerents are the needy ones: they need civilians to react in certain ways—to be sympathetic, frightened, provoked—or they become marginalized. This is *a form of conflict management* down where people live, work and sleep.

If accommodation is Plan A, then avoidance can be considered Plan B, and early warning should be wired to both plans.

Avoidance. When engagement fails, civilians then often disengage from those who are abusing them. Flight (displacement) is a key *strategy* for many civilians. Because it is a vital decision of theirs and since we profess the need for ground-truthing and for devolving ownership of initiative toward locals, we must consider supporting this. Historical and social science accounts are filled examples of civilian evasion tactics that do not need to be repeated here. It is crucial to note that avoidance limits the impact of violence not just in the obvious sense that fewer people are left dead or destitute—but it also mitigates conflict in ways we have given little thought to: The more prepared civilians’ social units and economic assets are, then *the less fodder and fuel there is for conflict*. Belligerents typically

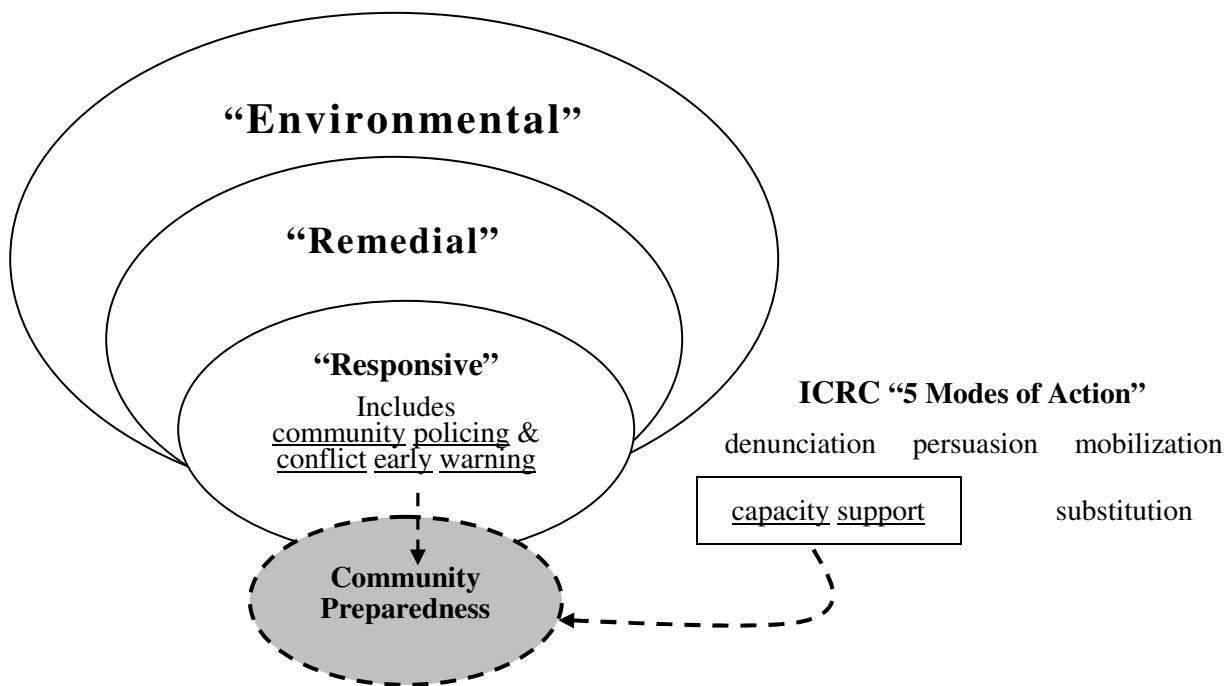
see vulnerable communities as a source of fighting bodies and fungible assets; manpower and materiel; conscripts and contraband.

Contraband: Stripping civilian assets is often central to conflict. In some cases it is done to deprive opponents of what is perceived to be a resource base. In other cases, unpaid soldiers rely on plunder for their own provisioning. And in still other cases—when “conflict” is better called an asset stripping criminal enterprise—looting drives “strategy”. But families and communities often “strip first” and so leave violence less to feed on. Compare this to a British Thermal Unit, the measure of heat given off when fuel is combusted. Communities will often be unable to prevent or accommodate conflict—but they can do something about their own BTU rating. When they strip and transfer their assets they deprive violence of some strength and cause it to burn less intensely. Pulling materiel fuel from the path of violence *is a form of conflict mitigation*.

Conscription: Long-term structural poverty and injustice are primary fuels for recruitment into conflict but beyond the scope of this paper. Yet there are also more proximate threats which come with the onset of conflict that push and pull people to take sides. These are the dire loss of *security*, the near collapse of *sustenance*, and the utter breakdown of *services* (especially public health). These are frequently referred as conflict’s “center of gravity”. Control of a populace goes to the side that can control (that is give or take) these elemental things. Join us and you get beans; don’t and you get bullets. Security, sustenance, services are at the heart of insurgency and counter insurgency. They are also at the heart of this paper. Collapse of these human essentials acts as an accelerant on conflict, but support of them acts as a retardant. Belligerents try to convince a populace of its utter reliance on them. The cynical price of reliance is extortion, conscription, and more. Families and communities thus try to preserve autonomous space; they augment their physical safety, adapt livelihoods, and improvise service delivery. This coping is amenable to support—and thus increased self-reliance. The more autonomous civilians become, then the longer they might be able to stay non-aligned in a fight. Add to this the earlier point about local leaders countering fear and hate propaganda, and one can see how the material and psychological forces stoking conscription can be reduced. This is *a form of conflict mitigation* at the forefront of conflicts that have no frontlines.

How We Respond

ICRC “Egg” Model of Protection



There has been a disconnect between the ways that we respond to protection concerns facing civilians and the ways that they do. As the ICRC's often-cited "egg" taxonomy of protection shows, much of our work is "environmental" (i.e. cultural or structural changes in society to foster rights and tackle root causes of conflict) and "remedial" (i.e. rehabilitation, restitution, and a restoration of justice and dignity)—both of which arguably come too late for those who face violence now. Some of our other work is termed "responsive" (i.e. meant to prevent, stop, prepare for, or mitigate the effects of violence). This latter work has tended to neglect locals' own strategies of affinity, accommodation, and avoidance. But it does include important precedents in both community policing and conflict early warning. This suggests a way forward (shaded in grey above) that this paper advocates: conflict risk reduction through community preparedness.

ICRC's nomenclature for protection cited above includes a wide range of activities—much of which depends on access and influence that we can easily lose, little of which can be considered timely in the face of imminent violence, and even less of which draws on local strategies of survival through affinity, accommodation, and avoidance.

Our support of local affinity groups has been mixed. Aid agencies experienced in development or developmental relief are aware of how important affinity is. We foster communal associations and increasingly support remittance practices, hosting traditions, and more. These mirror Prendergast's observation that "external response to emergencies should be driven by what already works at the local level: the structures already in place and supported by the community, and the indigenous social welfare mechanisms, and kinship exchange processes already functioning."²³

But too often we still supplant or shy away from local affinity groups. Though it is not an excuse, this usually happens because we are new, unfamiliar, or rushed by an emergency. (1) We are prone to solicit "local participation" on activities that we and our donors have *already* defined. After decades, and especially on matters of protection, our approach still reflects top-down paternalism. (2) We are prone to create parallel local structures. For example, we urge locals to "form a protection committee" and often then uncritically work with those who claim authority. This can undermine and out-compete the authentic groups and genuine leaders already trying to protect the populace. (3) We are also prone, especially amid civil strife, to hesitate to work with genuine local affinity networks. Affinity is about identity and in the 1990's we learned to dread the bloody communalism of "identity conflicts". But identity *also* binds people together in life-saving actions. The strongest impulse at-risk populations have is to help "their own people". As Ian Smillie concludes, it can be "expeditious" to work through "partisan connections"²⁴ Yet our concerns about neutrality keep us at a distance. This is a logical but an ineffective stance if we hope to support protection from the ground up. "For agencies that confuse detachment from disaster-affected communities with neutrality, local capacities to offset the worst effects of complex emergencies will continue to be missed..."²⁵ (4) We are very prone to forget that individual leaders are the vulnerable lynchpins of local affinity groups. Their death or dispersal can unhinge entire protective networks—which is a primary aim of parties intent on suppressing village leadership or civil society. And yet our notions of "leadership strengthening" are stuck on another plane of political or NGO "good governance". Aid agencies rarely support personal warning or precautionary steps that may help keep leaders alive so they can continue to lead.

Our support of local accommodation efforts has been narrowly drawn. We often try to help locals diffuse tensions—but through *our own* preferred approaches. Those approaches favor statist, jurist, and institutional perspectives. In aiming to preempt "bad governance, rights abuse, weak democracy, state collapse, and war... strengthening civil society has become an important preoccupation of the aid establishment."²⁶ As the Carnegie Commission noted 12 years ago while, "performing a wide variety of relief and development work, NGOs are deeply engaged in the world's conflicts and are now frequently significant participants in most efforts to manage and resolve deadly conflict... [They...]

help open or protect political space between groups and the government that can allow local leaders to settle differences peacefully.”²⁷

We thus see fostering accommodation between protagonists in conflict settings as a self-evident good. We have mandates for civil-legal engagement. We stress convening and negotiation skill sets framed within normative mindsets. We believe locals need legal and verbal force for speaking truth to power. We believe they can affect change while above ground in the public arena. Sometimes all these good efforts succeed. Sometimes. But we do not see “accommodation” as it often unfolds—for example, in a midnight round-up of leaders under the pall of threat. We do not see that threatened civilians often have little more to bargain with than duplicity and concessions (like paying for mercy). Instinctively we do not condone “morally hazardous” concessions to abusers. But upon reflection, even negotiators in high halls of power admit that the option of “rewarding bad people for good behavior” must not be dismissed but rather judged by its “ultimate effects” on averting violence.²⁸

Our predisposition raises some concerns: (1) With our engrained views of what civil society and conflict management *look like* we tend not to recognize informal localized efforts aimed at pragmatic deals and compromises for surviving another day. We do not think to share “probing tools” (especially information and communication methods) with village-level leaders who must probe the outer limits of tactical accommodation every day. Instead, we seek like-minded local NGOs dedicated to our formal civil processes. Yet this represents just one mindset and skill set by which locals try to barter with dangerous groups. (2) Much of today’s violence is not “conflict” between aggrieved parties which merely needs sorting out in structured processes that we can help facilitate. Rather, much is driven by goals not amenable to civil negotiation and by spoilers not interested in accommodation. (3) A mindset fixed on civil-legal engagement is not apt, even in the face of collapsing illusions, to make the shift to physical-tactical *disengagement*. That shift runs counter to our self-image and can seem self-defeating. Also, disengagement is premised on our own failure to prevent conflict—making it professionally and institutionally hard to embrace. The unintended consequence of promoting engagement—of stirring domestic aspirations and emboldening local counterparts to speak truth to power—too often can be retaliation that we prove powerless to prevent.

Our support of local avoidance measures is near non-existent. We may be apt to think it an anathema to share lessons with locals about getting out of harm’s way. But we need to reexamine the assumptions behind such a reflexive response. In recent times alone millions of civilians have chosen to break off efforts at accommodation and physically avoid their abusers. Our mindset and self-image need to remain relevant to their changing reality. As the 2000 Brahimi Report found, our undiscerning engagement with abusive powers can mean “ineffectiveness at best and complicity with evil at worst.”²⁹ A chronic violator forfeits the right normally accorded it to be openly and directly engaged.³⁰ Supporting the capacity of locals to stay physically safe by avoiding their abusers is of course a high stakes risk-benefit calculation that will be discussed later.

Promising trends: community policing and conflict early warning. One vital way in which aid agencies and peace missions have supported local tactical capacity to be physically safer fall under the rubric “community policing”. The Darfur Peace Agreement offers an example. It enabled displaced Dafuris to be trained by AMIS in unarmed policing skills. Many such volunteers have been advised on communication and patrol skills, security tactics, and more. So too, the MONOC mission to the DRC helped hundreds of villages organize patrols and early warning nets that got alarm of pending attack to peacekeepers deployed in the area. The operation, dubbed “Night Flash”, improved the mission’s ability to respond and reduced violence throughout the region in 2005. When peacekeeping missions are hamstrung by caveats about protecting civilians *if* facing “imminent threat” *if* “in the area of operation” and *if* the “resources available” allow, then the *strategic arithmetic* of joining up with local capacity—unarmed neighborhood watches, concerned citizen groups, auxiliary police—is undeniable.

As UNHCR says of its own capacity support efforts, with “sensitivity” to all involved “security mechanisms involving refugee guards, wardens, patrols, and watch teams can be highly effective.”³¹ This has been done in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Tanzania, Kenya and Ghana, and with Angolan, Congolese and other refugee groups. The efforts have included patrol gear, telecommunications, and lessons in early warning, mediation, first aid, and safe movement. Field Safety Advisors with military or police backgrounds play a key role in setting up refugee warden and community policing systems. Their help “aims to maintain the humanitarian and civilian character of the camps” that are facing armed attacks.³² That is, capacity-building of a quasi-military nature *preserved the humanitarian and civilian character* of aid settings by reducing the incidence of violence and crime. UNHCR sees such capacity support as a “softer” protection step on its “ladder of options”. Any aid agency can consider its own ladder of options and adjust its advisory modules according to the situation. Some NGOs already “facilitate the development of community watch groups” that they equip with alert devices including mobile phones.³³ Others (noted later) do what they euphemistically refer to as “counseling” and “education” aimed at helping civilians get out of harm’s way.

Another related way that agencies have supported local tactical capacity has been by promoting “conflict early warning”. Conflict early warning has existed many years but has evolved, as is reflected in one proposed classification of such efforts into “generations”. One of the characteristics distinguishing the generations that is most relevant to this paper is *ownership*. Generally speaking, “first generation” conflict early warning systems were both devised and run by outsiders for their own consumption and response. “Second generation” schemes tended to push that locus and ownership more toward the affected region. More recent “third generation” structures are run by locals[†] for locals and entail a local response to danger. (†A “local” is not always someone who lives in the communities that are at risk. It can be a fellow national who visits there but works in a civil society organization that is not directly in the path of danger. The distinction can matter.) An example of third generation systems is the Foundation for Co-Existence in Sri Lanka. The FCE’s information center is based in Colombo but maintains a daily two-way flow of communication with at-risk districts. Vital to this warning-related communication are (1) committees that mirror stakeholders and dense social networks, as well as (2) field monitors who are said to be “organic members of the communities they represent”. They are also vital to the intended early response. They serve an early trip-wire function by initiating “negotiations, facilitations meetings, and referrals,” the aim being to prevent conflict.³⁴

Take community policing and conflict early warning to the next level. Community policing and conflict early warning offer precedents by stressing local and tactical facets of protection. They offer best practices in the skill sets and mindset of community mobilization. Yet they suffer limitations.

◆ Community policing and early warning systems are often linked to conflict prevention: Many local policing and warning systems aim to gather and understand facts so as to anticipate violence and convene civil society, officials, or other “duty bearers” who can calm events before they escalate. These are excellent precedents—but still need a parallel Plan B because too many forms of violence in too many places do not yield to quick calming influences. Neither a police force nor a warning entity should monopolize information about pending danger. Neither should assume its institutional response will prevent conflict and thus not share warning that would allow the populace to implement its own tactical plans. The following shifts would enhance community policing:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| ○ Prevent conflict | | ○ Prepare for a failure to prevent conflict |
| ○ Rights require action by duty bearers | → | ○ Rights require tactical action by “victims” |
| ○ Warning wired to duty bearers | | ○ Warning wired to those actually at risk |

◆ Community policing is often linked to non-local protectors: It tends to assign locals the warning function and outsiders like host authorities or peacekeepers the rescue function. In too many

places, however, outside “rescuers” are unable or perhaps unwilling to protect civilians. Therefore, community watch mechanisms “have particular value where police and security forces are absent, overwhelmed, or lack the capacity” to respond.³⁵ This argues for *more self-reliant* community policing that stresses local capacity both in warning *and local response*. Accordingly, there needs to be a rethinking of the “responsibility to protect” and a rewiring of where warning goes. The following shifts would enhance community policing:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ○ Responsibility to protect: non-locals lead | → | ○ Responsibility to protect: locals lead |
| ○ Warning wired up and out to “rescuers” | | ○ Warning wired to those actually at risk |

◆ Community policing often stresses training a small distinct force in conventional policing: Ideally such auxilliary police are well-networked with the community. Yet this is much too limiting. *Capacity for physical safety* should be more widely dispersed. One risk, even with codes of conduct, is that forces which are empowered with policing functions can turn rogue. Another risk is that any institution, including volunteer community policing groups, can crumble in the face of violence. An in-depth ALNAP report on capacity building amid emergencies finds that we have “become so focused on assumptions that capacity building has to be institutional.” It suggests “paradoxically building and investing in capacity at an *individual* level may be more sustainable than institutional development, especially when the political and institutional context is turbulent and uncertain.”³⁶ As is noted shortly, infusing skills through any customary subgroups which may remain intact, while other entities disintegrate amid violence, can be a more sustainable approach to self-policing.

Also, the skills offered may need to be *upgraded* beyond conventional community policing. They must be skills for coping not just with lawlessness—but with war. Discerning “crime” from “conflict” is often impossible. It can at times be a deadly limitation to think policing only entails whistles and wearing tee-shirts; or fences and white flags. The following shifts would enhance community policing:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ○ Capacity for a community police force | → | ○ Capacity for all in the community; exponentially share advice throughout populace via wardens (trained to be trainers) and customary subgroups |
| ○ Conventional community policing skills | | ○ Upgraded community policing skills |

James Darcy once said that “short of armed intervention by a third party, there is no system of protection ... that can actually protect people if the warring parties are not motivated to do so themselves.”³⁷ Others have said that, “Unless the international community is willing and able to intervene to protect civilians... any sustainable and effective strategy is likely to start and end at the local level... Effective protection strategies can no longer rely solely on the will and capacity of distant and disinterested states to ensure the immediate protection of civilians. On the contrary, every step of these strategies should aim at strengthening the role of local communities...”³⁸ In recent years, community policing and conflict early warning have revealed the rudiments of a system of protection such as Darcy found lacking. As O’Callghan and Pantuliano note, “most people survive and do so without assistance from external parties.”³⁹ We need to use civilians’ strategies as a starting point not only because this can help them shorten their deadly leaning curve but also because they will trust that which is more familiar. Community policing and conflict early warning rest on these truths and, with the refinements suggested, can form the basis of a viable system of protection.

Modules for Physical Safety

A word about social architecture. “Community policing... has a long history: elements of it are found in most traditions and customs across the world.”⁴⁰ Preparedness support follows this social architecture by using a training-of-trainers mode that enlists “wardens” to spread advice exponentially.

Wardens are drawn from customary subgroups: a manageable-size kinship unit, a neighborhood cluster, an exceptionally cohesive group in community life, etc. Advisors work on the rudiments of physical safety with wardens who then impart the lessons to their subgroups. The logic of transmittal through such subgroups is that affinity holds them together. They will likely be the end-users of early warning information and instructions for. They might become the smallest viable groups in flight when violence atomizes and scatters the populace. They are close knit enough to detect attempted infiltration and cooptation by militants. The logic of using wardens who have earned respect through social standing, social contract, or social unit is that they can inspire the confidence, cohesion, and compliance that is so vital amid a crisis. In an era when “the unwritten social contract for aid workers [in many conflicts] no longer seems to hold,”⁴¹ and amid situations in which we might soon be separated from them, the best possible bonds to reinforce are the ones they hold between themselves.

“Most protection is self-protection by individuals, families and communities.”⁴² Strengthening their communal links is an important way to enhance their security. Their weapons are information, communication, and collective action. There is field craft for all of this that civilians have mastered countless times in analogous contexts. With planning and practice comes their calmer execution of contingency responses when threats arise. Confidence, however, comes first and foremost because response is organized around the social units they trust.

A word about gender and age. Every segment of a population can add to the larger group’s survival. Women and children are vital to preparedness. This paper does not itemize actions specific to them but urges their consideration in each module at “√ Other subjects...” Much is known about the unique vulnerabilities *and capacities* of women and children amid conflict. Notably, their experiences as conscripts, voluntary or not, prove their ability to partake in violence—which in turn proves their ability to prepare for and avoid violence. Advisors will be apprised of this. They will consider where gender or age-specific tactical actions (there are many) could be “nested” within the larger context of community policing, warning and preparedness. But beyond that it may not be wise to separate women or children out for targeted programs. This risks conceptually and tactically isolating them from families and communities under threat. If for example the rape of women or recruitment of children is happening opportunistically in the context of concurrent attacks against the larger populace, then the varied levels of threat and response should be integrated (nested), not segregated.

A word about “militarization”. It would be easy to conflate style with substance and label some of the tactics cited in this section as “militaristic”. Yet *today* we hire private military experts to give our expatriate aid workers security advice that is paramilitary in form. Our work in disaster risk reduction around the world is paramilitary in form. Our work in community policing, said to help preserve the civilian character of aid settings, is paramilitary in form. Our resources have often become a symbiotic part of war economies. Our humanitarian intelligence on conflict often resembles military intelligence. Our work has us campaign against war crimes. Our work has often placed us under armed umbrellas, militarized camps, and national security creeds—situations that threaten the basic civilian character of aid. The ways that we currently allow our work to be “militarized” make the options suggested in this paper pale in comparison. But we do not see ourselves as the slightest bit martial. The powerful role that labels and self-image play in our work will be visited later in this paper.

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Five proven skill clusters form the backbone of community risk reductions such as policing wed to unarmed local early warning and response. Warning and response are at the heart of the matter: what civilians do or fail to do in the first minutes of violent contact affects their families and assets for years to come. The skill clusters are: information management, communications, safe sites, safe movement, and set threat response. The advisory modules listed below largely differ from the similar-sounding skill sets which we teach expatriate aid workers.

Module ~ Information management. Gathering, analysis, and dissemination of information or “humanitarian intelligence” helps civilians be more aware of and better able to respond to a wide range of threats and opportunities. As Kofi Annan has claimed, “information on conflicts... can be as vital a requirement for distressed populations caught in areas of violent upheaval as shelter, food, water and medical services.”⁴³ These advisory modules are “information”. Discreet messages between at-risk locals are information. All families and communities learn to process intelligence at some level. Some research finds their methods “often highly developed and far superior to those of the aid community.”⁴⁴ Often—but not often enough. Far too many civilians are still utterly unprepared for violence. As Fred Cuny noted, many endangered civilians “simplify complex decisions by relying on habit, instinct, simple cues, or trial and error.”⁴⁵ Habit, instinct and simple cues can turn obsolete when violence reaches new thresholds. Trial and error is a deadly way to learn that the rules have changed. People’s instincts do change and improve with time—but in the meantime they should improve their capacity to gather information broadly and look at it systematically. And in supporting any local “grapevine” it may help to establish cross-checks for verifying assumptions or rumors. It may also help to emphasize discreet ways of acquiring information even if it is from open sources.

The aid industry already has many sets of threat indicators to choose from. They have us pay more attention to shifts in civilian behavior (stripping assets, stockpiling, less traffic on roads or in public places, leaving the area, etc.); shifts in military behavior (changes in command, strength, and morale; alterations in patrol; movement of fresh equipment and supply; unusual intelligence activity; increases in garrison size, upgrading of roads or extension of outposts; laying more mines, etc.); and shifts in treatment of aid workers. This advisory module might include:

- √ Basic orientation to threat indicators, collection and assessment
- √ Discreet word-of-mouth networks (and recruitment for same)
- √ Discreet observation
- √ Commercially available radio scanners
- √ Public domain satellite images (when there is access to sources like Google Earth)
- √ Short and long-range patrolling
- √ Track or spoor recognition
- √ Misinformation: ruses that can keep civilians out of harm’s way
- √ Elicitation and recognizing infiltration
- √ Other subjects and tactics that might be appropriate

Module ~ Communications. Communication *is essential* to all civilian priorities amid violence. It is key to being forewarned of violence. It shares life-saving advice, whether to quickly act or stay calmly in place. It sends word of economic opportunity (labor, barter, foraging, lending, remittance). It brings comfort by getting word in to those who are “cut off”. It sends word of their suffering to the outside world. It makes possible the coordination required for what can be the safest asymmetrical reply to violence: a dispersed network.

Communication interlaces safety (warden) nets and social webs. It might also include wiring to external parties.[†] Sophistication can range from courier to Twitter with *many* choices in between. Selection turns on the adaptability and sensitivity of a technology. There are two important things to remember about technology. One is that it may be as basic as the “bamboo telegraph”. Another is that any ICT platform intended for humanitarian or warning purposes (and there are many emerging today) must be plugged into a willing and organized local response. If it is not, it risks being as unhelpful as a blind airdrop onto an unprepared drop zone. A preparedness advisor might simply give guidance on communications systems and protocols—or an agency might provide hardware as well. In this vein, private entities are helping establish radio nets for at-risk minority communities in eastern Burma. Such early warning offers civilians enough time to perform their threat response drills and survive.

Controlling powers often think it important to control radios. But then, so do civilians. One survey found that 85% of the males in Afghanistan owned a working a radio—despite the Taliban’s ban on “all forms of modern communications” both for religious and counterinsurgency reasons.⁴⁶ In Colombia, commercial radio was co-opted as communities “hid messages in local radio broadcasts to warn people of danger.”⁴⁷ This advisory module might include:

- √ Line of communication—implies *chain* of reporting; for example, a warden system
- √ † Groundwork for *coordination* with external responders (police, army, peacekeepers) that synchronizes first response (rehearsed evasion?) by locals with follow-on response by outsiders
- √ Compartmentalization and need-to-know protocols
- √ Basic radio operation (or other telecom equipment, if feasible)
- √ Off-the-grid mobile power sources (hand crank, foot pedal, truck battery pods, etc.) for telecom
- √ Simple codes and counter-eavesdropping (recalling that UN agencies and major NGOs sometimes encrypt their messages)
- √ Low-tech signaling (line-of-sight or range-of-hearing in relays: mirror, shuttered light, flags, fires, whistles, foghorn, etc.)
- √ Mass media (print, cassettes, radio) for leaders to convey calm or solidarity or instructions
- √ Courier systems
- √ Broken communication: families agree upon a specific newspaper and day of the month in which they can discreetly post their location if they have become hopelessly separated
- √ Other subjects and tactics that might be appropriate

Module ~ Safe sites. A residential site, whether a community or camp, is safety’s starting point. A settlement’s physical geography and human demography impact daily safety as well as any chosen early warning and response system. (Demography here refers to the safety implications of a group’s size, composition, and distribution. Optimal groupings are described in a monograph related to this paper.⁴⁸) There is ample security doctrine to draw upon, but the endless ingenuity of civilians offers the most relevant best practices for safe discreet sites. Many of their tactics have to do with blending: selecting clothing colors and crop patterns that merge with the flora and shelter materials that match their surroundings. The goal is to trick the eyes of the pilot—or the nearby patrol. String up artificial canopy. Make a concealed bivouac. Dig underground rooms for supplies and services. As has been oft-proven, subterranean rooms are easily ventilated and can be hidden with camouflaged trap doors; they can even have entrances dug beneath the water line of riverbanks. Cook only at night or use Dakota-style fire holes that absorb smoke. Work at night, as IDPs in Burma often do. Do not allow noise when threats are near. Guatemalan Indians devised ways to prevent roosters and turkeys from revealing their presence to the Army. Congolese farmers switched from ruminants to guinea pigs which were more easily hidden and transported when families had to flee. Do not let trails form on the approaches to a site. Vietnamese built “bridges of bamboo with cables that released at one end to disappear into the water and then, when needed again at night, raised up by hand-powered winches.”⁴⁹ This both hid and disabled the approaches to their sites. These examples barely begin to tell the story of civilian ingenuity. It is a difficult life. But if deadly groups cannot be accommodated then they must be avoided. This advisory module might include:

- √ Site selection: Stay or go? (Safety and sustenance lead the list of deciding factors)
- √ Optimal site formations (Optimal number of people? Consolidated or dispersed or networked?)
- √ Secure ingress and secondary egress
- √ Observation or listening posts (along likely ground or air approaches)
- √ Perimeter alert (manned but perhaps enhanced with tripwire alarms); concentric rings and relays
- √ Variable-range patrols (interdiction is optional and up to the community)

- √ Blast walls, trenches, pits, tunnels and bunkers
- √ Improvised secondary/night shelters
- √ Concealment; traceless encampment; discipline with light, noise, and cook smoke
- √ Discreet daily access to foraging, firewood, water, etc.
- √ Integrated community policing—early warning—early response—evacuation plans
- √ Other subjects and tactics that might be appropriate

Module ~ Safe movement. Movement creates exposed and unsafe situations. Too often civilians lose or leave our care and walk right into roadside robberies, ambushes, abductions, and anti-personnel mines. Husbands, fathers, and sons are seized at roadblocks—never to be seen by their families again. Wives, mothers and daughters are raped. Amid flight, many children are separated from their families. Yet people knowingly attempt risky travel due to dire need for safety, sustenance, or service. Much of this can be avoided with the mastery of basic tactics. During years of experience, Angolan *deslocados* came to know optimal methods, routes, and formations for travel. Likewise, Salvadoran *masas* learned to move in remarkably evasive *guindas*. But experience is a teacher that exacts a high price. How many more might have survived the race from Srebrenica to Tuzla if they had a basic knowledge of disciplined flight? Mastery of just one tactic can preempt many atrocities: it is often better to move parallel to roads rather than on them. It is not convenient, but experience shows that the more difficult route is frequently the safest. There are many lessons or “best practices” for safe movement that can be shared which touch on:

- √ Advance relocation of slow-moving elderly or infirm
- √ Optimal travel group size and formation
- √ Route selection
- √ Cached food and medical supplies en route (since displaced persons very often take grave security risks to acquire these necessities while in flight)
- √ Stolen or counterfeited forms and stamps for travel documents
- √ Agreed-upon locations to reunite (rally points)
- √ Map and grid coordinate reading and other forms of orienteering
- √ Off-road travel and night travel (day travel may require cash for bribes)
- √ Traversing difficult terrain; taking advantage of inclement weather to move
- √ Blending in the terrain and counter tracking
- √ Noise discipline
- √ Recognizing landmine clues; retracing steps; knowing to mark, warn and inform
- √ Recognizing the layout of ambush and blocking points typical to the combatants
- √ Other subjects and tactics that might be appropriate

Module ~ Threat response. “Immediate action drills” help civilians quickly react in safer ways to various kinds of weapons and assaults. Preparedness support can adjust to any habits or weaknesses of threatening groups. It also stresses giving each person a duty. This single act has psychological and tangible results: people focus on their assigned jobs rather than their natural fears. One gathers livestock, another grabs the pre-packed necessities, another does a headcount, another starts planned diversions, and so on. With planning and practice comes their calmer execution of contingency plans when threats arise.

Federation and ECHO security manuals teach staff automatic action response to air attack, ambush, pursuit, grenades, shooting, bombing, looting, hijacking, landmines and more. The latter says “there is no substitute for training staff in reacting to the outbreak of fighting. [Teach] them the practical skills then practice those skills until they can do them themselves.”⁵⁰ Tactical threat response is part of the guidance that expatriate aid workers get from private companies and consultants. Civilians need this

preparation too. As Ishmael Beah says in his remarkable book, *A Long Way Gone*, “In a matter of seconds, people started screaming and running in different directions, pushing and trampling on whoever had fallen. No one had the time to take anything with them. Everyone just ran to save his or her life... Families were separated and left behind everything they had worked for their whole lives... *We had yet to learn these things and implement survival tactics, which was what it came down to.*” ⁵¹

The bulleted actions below stress community threat response. **But response for individuals or groups at risk can be nested within community preparations.** For example, tailored precautions for a leader who has been death listed might include the provision of personal communication equipment or establishment of a secret sleeping location. A woman at risk of rape might consider moving in groups or with escorts or telling an attacker she has an STD. A child at risk of conscription might be well advised to attend hidden classes, limit nonessential movement, memorize regrouping areas, etc. Otherwise, for the community at large, this advisory module might include:

- √ Essentials of a lightweight “Go kit”
- √ Integrated community policing—early warning—early response—evacuation plans
- √ Automatic response to varied forms of bombardment or incoming fire
- √ Automatic sound[†] and light^{††} response to disorient, delay, or deter lightly-armed night raiders (†megaphone, foghorn, pyrotechnics?) (††flare, spotlight, pyrotechnics?)
- √ Broken evacuation: fall back dispersal and regrouping plans (to family level)
- √ Evading infantry sweeps or encirclement
- √ Delaying, decoying, or diverting hostile pursuit
- √ Brush fires or smoke pots to conceal escape
- √ Recognizing and reacting to ambush sites
- √ Extrication from mined areas
- √ Skill in first aid and simple surgical fixes
- √ Other subjects and tactics that might be appropriate

III. Economic Survival

How They Respond

Below is a partial list of ways locals often respond to violence when their prior livelihoods cannot yet safely be pursued. They may use some of these alternatives in peacetime but can come to rely upon them to an exceptional degree amid crises. “By their very origin, all coping mechanisms are sub-optimal... They are imperfect and can become more exploitative as crisis intensifies. Yet they represent the best informed response to crisis, because they are developed by those whose lives and livelihoods are most vulnerable.” ⁵² Behind unorthodox, unsustainable steps with elements of self-inflicted harm there often are calculations that we must respect.

Y/N
We assist ?

Alternative access to assets		▼
Subsistence agriculture	At-risk civilians very often rely on planting for consumption rather than cash. While not usually a bid for full autarky it can be a viable response to collapsing staple harvests and markets. As William Shawcross said of Cambodia, it was “a land blessed with extraordinary fecundity and natural abundance... Almost every relief official involved in the relief operation readily agreed on what few of them have said publicly—that the threat of famine had been overestimated... because we had forgotten the importance of secondary crops.” ⁵³ Subsistence farming and gardening both tend to be “conflict-resistant” because they do not rely on systems and inputs that are disrupted by conflict such as cash transactions, markets, trucking, storage, fertilizer, veterinary services, and more. Subsistence is also a tactical step: non-market sustenance is acquired at scattered and discreet locations, reducing the incidence of predation. It tends to be low input and low output. <i>This is counterintuitive—and may even feel anti-development—to we in the aid community who have long promoted advances in agriculture, yet “those most capable of coping with disaster are</i>	N

	<i>those who live in the least sophisticated but most self-reliant societies.”</i> ⁵⁴	
Foraging	At-risk civilians commonly turn to hunting, fishing, and the foraging of natural resources. <i>We may tend to think this activity is marginal, but we have been proven wrong before. As Alex de Waal noted, “During [Darfur’s] drought-famine of 1984-85, perhaps two million people survived on [the nutritious berry] mukheit, often for months. It was a far bigger factor in survival than food aid.”</i> ⁵⁵ In addition to foraging for consumption, at-risk civilians very often harvest natural products which they can sell such as firewood, water, grass, poles, and more. They also sometimes turn to scavenging crops already planted by others but which lie idle in combat zones. <i>Beyond isolated examples of advocating patrols and escorts for women collecting firewood, protection literature does not indicate that aid agencies have supported foraging. Rather than support the skills of safe movement we are more inclined to offer income generation alternatives to lessen the need for foraging.</i>	N
Diversifying	At-risk civilians very commonly deal with risk by diversifying their livelihood options, creating a buffer against future shocks. They respond with measures that range from a calibrated shift in investment on up to substitution with whole new economic activities. Although these new alternatives might be marginal and barely sustainable they sometimes provide enough to ensure economic survival. <i>Aid agencies thus often try to offer as many choices and options for livelihood as possible. They have been quite creative in providing at-risk populations with new livelihood assets and options—including ones that wean civilians off dangerous coping alternatives.</i>	Y
Emergency movement or migration	Unconventional movement for the sake of economic survival ranges from short-term commuting to longer-term labor migration or actual flight. Often civilians opt for partial displacement and shadow settlements that allow them to stay within commuting radius of their besieged homes. Often they send family members away for gainful labor when their usual livelihoods are disrupted. And often they flee. As Fred Cuny noted, when or where they flee “is as much an economic survival strategy as it is [an escape] from conflict.” ⁵⁶ Atypical movement also includes discreet circuitous transit in order to safely access markets and aid settings. The ability to move or not is often at the crux of economic survival. “Avoidance and escape is the most visible form of response to protection threats... [It has] direct impacts on livelihoods... enabling people to carry out some livelihood strategies, such as farming and accessing markets (to sell or buy goods and seek employment).” ⁵⁷ <i>But safe movement in conflict settings requires unconventional skill sets that we rarely discuss with at-risk populations.</i>	N
Emergency Separation	Families often choose to break apart for specific security and economic reasons. It is a matter of “choosing to disperse in different locations in order to minimize risk and maximize opportunity.” ⁵⁸ One pattern is for able-bodied family members to leave the home area to pursue earnings that can be remitted back to the family. Another is for able-bodied family members to stay behind and continue working and watching the family’s assets, while the other members are sent to safer or better-provisioned locales. The latter strategy serves to get the more at-risk people out of a conflict zone while leaving others behind to safeguard assets that are vital to the family’s longer-term recovery. It is a long-term calculation often made in awareness of the short-term risks of splitting up the family—the primary unit of protection. <i>But own work is steeped in the concept of vulnerable persons, most especially women and children who are alone. We are far more apt to foster (re)unified families than facilitate separations even though locals widely choose this tactic.</i>	N
Social networks	At-risk civilians almost universally rely on social norms and networks of lending, sharing, pooling, collective laboring and more. Much has been written about the social security net formed by these ties of affinity that need not be repeated here. <i>Aid agencies with backgrounds in development or developmental relief tend to be aware and supportive of such networks in local associational life.</i>	Y
Money networks	Civilians rely ever more on local lending and distant remittances when their livelihoods are disrupted. The ability to purchase on credit or borrow even modest sums of money can forestall desperate measures. Commercial and noncommercial loans continue amid many conflicts and offer some stability to peoples’ lives. Even in the free-fire zones of Burma, loans are the primary means of coping. ⁵⁹ Meanwhile, foreign remittances exceed all private flows of investment and official development assistance and are countercyclical in that diasporas give more at the very	N

	moment when aid agencies, donors, and investors withdraw due to imminent crisis. “Evidence from refugee camps suggests that access to remittances is one of the most significant economic resources for refugee households.” ⁶⁰ It might surprise most of us to know that even “refugees can and do remit substantial amounts of money to their countries of origin.” ⁶¹ The refugee—who in our iconography is the sufferer in need of rescue—is many times the rescuer. <i>Remittances are “a form of action with major humanitarian implications... but largely go unnoticed [by us].”</i> ⁶² <i>To the extent that we do notice this coping response we may have misplaced concerns about shadowy diasporas and informal cash transfer mechanisms and constraints due to new anti-terror money laundering laws. Evidence of the life-support role that remittances play in conflict settings is widespread. But aside from urging by some researchers and the occasional cell phone project intended to expedite such transactions, the aid community has done little to support it.</i>	
External relief	Emergency relief is a vital option that millions avail of. It is an option that they pursue either exclusively or in combination with other livelihood alternatives.	Y
Shadow & Coping economies	Millions survive conflict for one reason: Never—even in a failed state—has everything failed. Ordinary people engage in petty smuggling or unregulated resource extraction. Black markets appear; hoarders, smugglers, fixers, and money changers abound. Pockets of food deficit and food surplus are bridged by entrepreneurs. Some profit while others more downstream stay barefoot—but alive. Banking and transport get reinvented. Every need gets commoditized. Such economies offer hope “to people with few alternatives of survival.” ⁶³ As Fred Cuny once noted, “In many situations, understanding and manipulating market forces can be far more important and effective than classic relief operations.” ⁶⁴ By one account, “The vigor with which capitalism thrust itself from under the ground in which the Khmer Rouge had tried to inter it was quite extraordinary.” ⁶⁵ By another, “smuggling saved Bosnia”. ⁶⁶ In shadow commerce, compliance with unwritten codes can matter even more than communal identity: groups in conflict with each other still often have economic dealings together. Such “connectors” have been in evidence in Darfur and many other conflicts. Shadow commerce is also a peacetime phenomenon: “Trillions of dollars move outside of legal reckoning yearly; millions of people are involved.” ⁶⁷ But when conflict does arrive, then those well-worn routes and connections take on life-saving significance. <i>“War economies, shadow economies, and formal coping and survival economies are closely intertwined, and there are no clear boundaries between them.”</i> ⁶⁸ <i>And yet “a distinction needs to be made between illegal activities by ordinary people designed to meet their basic needs because they have no other option, and deliberate asset-stripping of certain groups as a strategy of war or to accumulate personal wealth.”</i> ⁶⁹ <i>At times we do make distinctions about a shadow economy if it furthers our lifesaving efforts. For example, “in Afghanistan, warlords, profiteers, traders, and aid agencies all use the same moneychangers (sarafis) and money transfer systems (hawala).” These systems had “links with the war economy” but were also “central to many people’s coping and survival”.</i> ⁷⁰ <i>We did the same in Somalia. But on the whole—if we happen to think about such markets we feel an aversion to them. Said one senior economist with UNDP, “We have a serious interest in figuring out how people actually survive in these seemingly impossible conditions; how the informal markets affect the economic realities of the country. But like most formal agencies, we are bound, by mandate, to dealing with formal economic arenas.”</i> ⁷¹	N
Pay offs	At-risk civilians commonly pay—fees, taxes, bribes—in order to pursue their economic survival. They consider the trade-offs of pay-offs. For example, paying off would-be attackers will cost precious money in the short term, “but may be beneficial in the long term if it enables people to retain their access to land, or maintain mobility to carry out livelihood strategies.” ⁷² <i>We may feel that payoffs reinforce the violence and corruption already afflicting a society. But two important points are lost on us. One is that personal greed leeches war mobilization policy. Strategies to strip civilian assets (food, labor, supplies) are sapped when, for a bribe, soldiers or cadres chose not to enforce demands for contraband and conscripts. This means less fuel for conflict. The other point, less a justification than a contextual irony, is that we ourselves pay controlling powers enormous “costs of doing” business in a war zone. In some crises these costs reach into the hundreds of millions. Yet we probably never consider small scale cash transfers for civilians who simply need a pittance of money for permission to move down the road to market.</i>	N
	Strip and transfer assets	
Redeeming	At any given time, even poor members of a community often have assets which we may not “see”	N

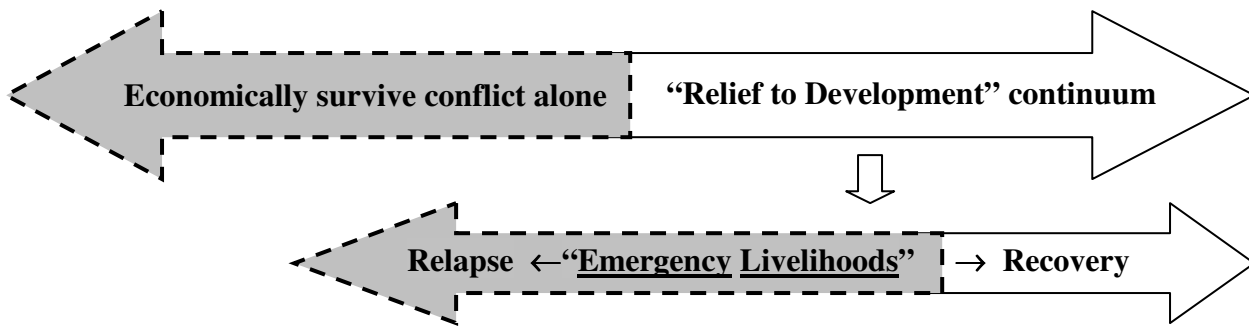
	such as debts or rent due to them, and savings, loans, or shares locked up in an enterprise. These are resources that can be pulled out of harm's way and used as an emergency fund if flight becomes necessary. Anything that is collected, withdrawn, or divested can later be re-deposited and reinvested. <i>But to us, any such divestment, however temporary, might seem anti-development. Protection literature does not indicate that aid agencies ever encourage at-risk civilians to begin collecting redeemable assets in the face of growing violence.</i>	
Caching	At-risk civilians sometimes conceal or bury objects that are of emergency value and/or attract the possibility of violent theft. <i>Protection literature does not indicate that aid agencies support civilians in the arts of caching (even though it is a widespread practice in natural disaster preparedness). Indeed, there are too many examples of civilians asking agencies to delay or divert the delivery of conspicuous aid supplies because they are attracting violence.</i>	N
Liquidating	In countless way survival can be purchased. Thus selling and converting assets into portable or concealable currency is a very common civilian tactic. Some in Burma trade valuables for small amounts of gold or silver jewelry. Sri Lankans “often invest in moveable items such as jewels rather than in assets that cannot be hidden or taken” in flight. ⁷³ Cambodians hid their gold from the Khmer Rouge then used it when moneychangers and merchants reappeared. Liquidated assets need not always be carried through a conflict zone but rather can be sent to safe repositories. For example, as Turkish persecution approached in 1914, “some Armenians remitted, through bank and post office, large sums to themselves in places to which they were supposed to be going.” ⁷⁴ That is, they forwarded their assets to themselves. In today's age of wireless transfers there are of course even more options for moving liquidated assets. The key point is to act in advance. <i>To us, liquidating assets that have been long labored for may seem like the antithesis of progress, and protection literature does not indicate that we support this measure. Indeed, we often give locals commodities that they immediately liquidate for the sake of safety, mobility, and flexibility.</i>	N
Dismantling	In today's war economies asset stripping can be literal. When in the path of looting marauders, families are known to dismantle housing material and bury or sell it before attackers do. The classic example is of the metal roofing taken from structures in Somalia and sold across its borders. In El Salvador during the 1980s many civilians disassembled their homes and used the material to construct shelters near their hidden farm lots. Likewise, rather than leave their corrugated zinc roofing to the approaching RPF, many Rwandan Hutus stripped and took it as a trade item or buried it, often being able to salvage it on-site months or years later. Some Karen who flee their homes in Burma risk returning between army patrols to dismantle and haul away roofing material. <i>Despite such precedent, protection literature does not indicate that aid agencies have ever supported dismantling properties. Though it keeps precious resources with civilians and out of belligerents' hands, we would reflexively feel dismantling is defeatist and anti-development.</i>	N
Temporarily forfeiting	In conflicts around the globe civilians cede their land and fixed properties with every intention of reacquiring them someday. <i>Aid agencies sometimes support civilians in this effort by encouraging them to safeguard all the documentation that will be necessary to later reclaim their properties. Otherwise, aid agencies do not proactively support “planned” abandonment of immobile assets. Rather, we are understandably focused on asset creation.</i>	N
Scorching	In some conflicts, civilians burn portions of their home lots or farm lots and recede to the hills, leaving marauders empty handed and eager to move on. Villagers in Darfur (and Kordofan) were reported on a significant scale to “deliberately burn pasture in order to keep [armed] pastoralists away from their land, and to avoid conflict.” ⁷⁵ As is often noted, assets can become liabilities amid conflict; “living on fertile land in Darfur opened people up to attack...” ⁷⁶ In El Salvador partially destroyed homes were left unrepaired to create an impression that they were abandoned. And amid Rwanda's genocide, some people would help Tutsis into hiding, burn their homes, and tell the Interhamwe, “Look, we have killed them for you.” For this purpose houses were burned in Nyannza. ⁷⁷ In Burma, sympathetic troops at times “set fire to undergrowth on the edge of villages, and reported that the settlement in question has been destroyed.” ⁷⁸ The appearance of having already been burned out and looted can sometimes prevent deeper harm to life and livelihood. <i>But for aid workers, a scorched earth tactic is extremely counterintuitive. Protection literature does not indicate that aid agencies have ever supported this measure.</i>	N

How We Respond

There has been a disconnect between the ways that we respond to threats facing civilians' economic survival and the ways that they do. Firstly, as just noted, the local responses that we are apt to support are: turning to social networks, diversifying livelihood options, and accessing relief. But the *many* local responses that we *are not* apt to support include: subsistence agriculture, foraging, emergency movement, emergency separation, money networks, shadow and coping economies, pay offs, redeeming, caching, dismantling, liquidating, temporarily forfeiting, and scorching.

Secondly, as the oft-cited “Relief to Development” continuum shows, our response to conflict and “post-conflict” settings is *relief* then *development* programming. Our view tends to be that life support today will progress to a better life tomorrow—it will not regress to yesterday. It belies a presumption that our presence and programs will continue when in fact the opposite is often true. Over the past three years program suspensions globally have doubled each year. ⁷⁹

Our work includes efforts to provide, protect, and promote civilian livelihoods—but usually does not help *prepare* livelihoods for systemic violence and collapse—a reality that locals might one day have to face and improvise responses to on their own. Adding to this disconnect is the fact that the “framework” for our emergency livelihoods work tends to be complex and expatriate-led. This seems to run counter to the basic conceptual premise of the “livelihoods approach” as described by Chambers and Schafer: “a livelihoods approach is simply one that takes as its starting point the actual livelihood strategies of people.” ⁸⁰ This suggests that the way forward (shaded in grey below) might actually be a step backward toward this starting point: find more ways to support and improve upon the *broader* range of economic survival strategies that people adopt when facing violence alone.



Promising trend: emergency livelihoods. “The possibility that humanitarian agencies should do more than simply provide basic relief goods in responding to situations [of chronic instability] forms the underlying rationale for the application of a *livelihoods approach*.” ⁸¹ It was and is an evolution for agencies usually focused on saving lives in the present to take a forward-looking interest in supporting livelihoods. In moving us from mere technical delivery of relief, the emergency livelihoods approach has brought much more realism to our relief-to-development view of things.

Take emergency livelihoods to the next level. This seems to have been, however, one of those rare times when forward-looking innovators would have been wise to look back over their shoulders: violence can come back and undo everything; indeed it often does.

◆ We tend to presume our presence and programs will continue: If we offer livelihood programs that need peace to flourish *but then* separate from them mid-conflict—we fundamentally fail. Seldom has the long debate over “linking” relief and development dealt with the fact that in many cases *neither* relief *nor* development will be sustainable. The “first generation” of debate on relief and development “presumed a neat transition and that crises were temporary.” The “second generation” took a less linear view and conceded that crisis could be considerably protracted—but still largely focused on

transitioning to post-conflict.⁸² Indeed, most of our emergency livelihoods work has taken place in relatively stable, recovering areas. Despite warnings in the literature about resumption of violence and the need to be flexible and help brace civilians for future shocks, there is not much evidence that we anticipate and contingency plan for *worst case economic scenarios*. “There remain obstacles to engagement [amid] ongoing conflict and chronic political/economic crisis, and has been little by way of programmatic innovation. Arguably, attention has focused largely on addressing old problems, rather than anticipating new ones.”⁸³

The emphasis is on staying “engaged”. We generally operate as if we expect early recovery at best or chronic instability at worst. Either way we proceed as though our presence and programs can be sustained if we wisely engage certain “policies, institutions and processes”. Prior to the eviction of numerous aid agencies from Darfur there was substantial focus on working toward “early recovery.” We were locked into looking forward with few plans for sliding backwards. “Detailed contingency plans did not exist before the expulsions.”⁸⁴ When we think about *dis-engagement* it goes into a different box or silo called “evacuation” which pays little heed to the preparedness of our beneficiaries to economically survive violence alone. The following shift would enhance emergency livelihoods:

- Presume that our continued presence and programming is possible
-
- Plan on forced separation and an end to our presence and programming

◆ We provide, protect, and promote livelihoods⁸⁵—but do not help prepare them for the worst: *Provision* is still the main focus of our efforts. It aims to meet the basic needs of at-risk populations via the distribution of commodities, cash and vouchers, and help with certain services (cook stoves, grinding mills, etc.). *Protection* of livelihood is said to encompass a range of activities. Some are directly protective, such as offering services in-situ so as to preempt dangerous migration, or fostering more diversity of livelihood options so as to substitute for dangerous local coping practices. Such conflict-sensitive programming is undoubtedly saving many lives. Other activities in this category seem more related to production than “protection” per se. These include efforts to assist with the recovery of local assets and to offer income generation programs. *Promotion* of livelihood is most associated with developmental relief and ranges from typical livelihood income generation on up to efforts to improve civilians’ strategies and assets by strengthening institutions and influencing policy. These steps are suited to post-conflict settings.

Today’s livelihood experts bring strong analytic skills to bear upon political and war economies. Their awareness of local dynamics linked to macro policies, institutions, and processes can lead to interventions that do no harm *and* that help civilians avoid coping tactics that self-inflict harm. Their “livelihoods framework” has helped aid agencies more carefully *enter* situations of chronic conflict and political instability. But a necessary complement to this good work is to also help agencies more strategically *exit* situations that are collapsing. Will our efforts to provide, protect, and promote livelihoods be sustained upon separation? That is, will they be portable, adaptable, and applicable to where locals will go or what they will face next? If not, then a fourth avenue—that of livelihood *preparedness*—must be pursued. There is much that emergency livelihoods experts can bring to preparedness support. The following shift would enhance emergency livelihoods:

- Provide livelihood (relief)
- Protect livelihood
- Promote livelihood (recovery)
-
- Prepare livelihood for violence alone

◆ Our work is often premised on their vulnerability and our capacity: There is due reference in emergency livelihoods literature to the importance of supporting local capacity for surviving crises. But there is also a concurrent and far more insistent theme found that emphasizes locals’ vulnerability. Many observers agree with Jaspers, O’Callaghan and Stites that “livelihoods frameworks adapted for complex emergencies consider vulnerability central to all elements of the framework.”⁸⁶ This does not

incline us to recognize and build on local abilities. Another issue is that today’s emergency livelihood approaches tend to be so complex that they still are driven by outsiders. One report says they require “sophisticated analysis” and a “professional cadre”.⁸⁷ Another finds “there are few people with the experience and skills to design and implement livelihoods activity in complex emergencies. In addition, skilled local people may have fled the conflict.”⁸⁸ If we have difficulty finding locals of the desired skill level to work with, then we are overshooting the critical audience. We will not build capacity broadly—at the very moment when supporting widespread local capacity is paramount.

Such a moment was revealed in May 2009 with the mass eviction of aid agencies from Darfur that was followed by global outcry over the “dependency and vulnerability” of beneficiaries and local staff left behind. In the aftermath it was observed that “the expulsion has raised key questions about operating modalities and humanitarian assistance in Sudan” including “the lack of local capacity to take over.”⁸⁹ Suppose instead that our aid to Darfur from 2003 onward had been more oriented toward *our* vulnerability and *their* capacity? The question might now be academic for Darfur—but there will always be more Darfurs. The following shift would enhance emergency livelihoods:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Locals’ vulnerability is central premise ○ Outside experts lead relatively complex programming | → | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Locals’ capacity is central premise ○ Outside and local co-advisors broach responses that all civilians can master |
|---|---|---|

◆ In theory, a livelihood approach starts with locals’ own responses: As Alex de Waal noted, “a livelihoods approach underscores ‘the modest impact of external relief programs, relative to the far greater contribution to survival... by people’s own efforts.’”⁹⁰ This is true and the practice of emergency livelihoods needs to be brought more in line with its founding theory. As Jessica Shafer saw in a wide overview of livelihood programs, “Humanitarian inputs generally offer a comparatively small contribution to local coping strategies that allow for people to survive in situations of chronic conflict and political instability.”⁹¹ One of the earliest writers on this subject said, “interventions to strengthen a community’s capacity to prevent or mitigate disasters are essential to ensure survival over the course of repeated crises.”⁹² Again, the way forward on the question of economic survival issue might actually be a step backward toward this starting point. The following shift would enhance emergency livelihoods:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In <i>theory</i>, a “livelihoods approach” starts with locals’ own responses | → | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In <i>practice</i>, “preparedness support” starts with locals’ own responses |
|--|---|--|

Modules for Economic Survival

People who brace their livelihoods for violence will be less desperate later: less dependent on survival sex, military recruitment, and undignified camp life just to eat. Helping prepare locals to economically survive conflict alone is compatible with our relief and development missions. Many of the efforts below can overlap chronologically and programmatically with our current work. An agency can support foraging *and* conventional farming at the same time. It can help civilians with shadow *and* open market opportunities at the same time. It can shift some money from income generation projects to micro grants for families that prepare “asset protection” or “risk reduction” plans adopting measures like those suggested in this section.

Module ~ Alternative access to assets. This advisory module includes skill sets raised under the section “Physical Safety” and puts them in the service of steps civilians take to economically survive. It aims to help make safer and more effective those steps that civilians are already attempting, or may inevitably attempt, *whether or not they are our own preferred responses*. Aid agencies and emergency livelihoods advisors are often well-positioned and well-experienced to help locals access alternative economic opportunities.

- √ *Subsistence agriculture and Foraging.* Subsistence agriculture and foraging can be considered “conflict-resistant” in that they do not rely on systems and inputs that are disrupted by conflict. (The field of “appropriate technology”, which stresses self-reliance, accessibility, affordability, and adaptability to community and changing contexts, could be one paradigm for supporting economic survival amid conflict and displacement.). Still, they are often dangerous pursuits. Intelligence on the location of subsistence and foraging opportunities and the security of those locations is vital. Livelihood advisors might therefore (1) discuss skills for such information gathering and analysis, as well as (2) the basics of forming scouting parties that could conduct it. They can also share with civilians (3) skills for safe movement and (4) how to respond to threats encountered in transit. (5) Dispersal and disguise of cultivated plots, as well as (6) changes in diet, food preparation and storage can all be discussed. Beyond this, the most useful advice can be obtained from (7) elders, acting as co-advisors, who know the ways of subsistence apart from the cash economy that younger generations might not have learned. They might also have coped with emergencies that the young have not yet experienced.
- √ *Diversification.* “Livelihood strategies that minimize risk of attack include reducing investment in assets that may be looted or stolen, or that cannot be moved...”⁹³ Advisors might thus encourage ways to diversify or substitute assets. (1) Ownership can tie one to a place (like a farm), to a process (like marketing), and to visible assets, all of which are vulnerable amid violence. But a shift to rental and day labor arrangements may lessen such exposure. (2) Movement in pursuit of livelihood often exposes civilians to danger. But a shift toward income generating and marketing activity *all in-situ* can reduce or eliminate that movement. (3) Sedentary lowland agriculture is an easy target. But a shift to remote and diverse locales and new caching techniques, or to livestock holdings, may narrow one’s exposure. (4) A shift to shorter harvest cycle crops or garden produce can improve the chance of getting food out of the ground and sold or cached before needing to flee. (5) A shift to hardy, more mobile livestock can put food/income security on a stronger war footing. (6) A shift to service skills, especially those meeting needs actually spurred by conflict, might pose a portable and profitable interim livelihood. These are gross generalities that can be refined.
- √ *Emergency movement.* Safe movement in conflict settings requires unconventional skill sets, yet everyone, regardless of their background, can learn to move undetected. Time and again civilians choose partial displacement and shadow settlements that allow them to stay within commuting radius of their homes to discreetly cultivate fields or gardens, monitor properties, and gauge when full return might be possible. But repetitive commuting to a farm lot, commercial center, or water point is risky because these destinations are often being watched. The danger of being seen or heard or eventually leaving spoor necessitates learning the (1) basics of surveillance, (2) noise discipline, (3) counter-tracking as well as (4) other “safe movement” skills cited earlier. Local or expatriate security advisors will know these rudimentary skills. And there is no substitute for local co-advisors who know their home terrain. Longer-term, longer-range emergency movement for labor migration can require additional skills such as (5) maintaining communication links and (6) using cash transfer mechanisms (cited under money networks).
- √ *Emergency separation.* Family separation is weighty decision. Indeed, this choice of theirs may be more impactful than *any decision an aid agency might subsequently make*. But the agency can help increase civilians’ awareness before they decide. It might (1) share security situation reports. Or it can (2) facilitate “go & see” visits. Is it safer or not to send some family members to a camp? Or back to their abandoned village? Separation is chosen with a security or economic benefit in mind. But might there be *alternatives* in the pursuit of safety, sustenance and services (cited in this paper) that are preferable to risks that often accompany emergency separation? With (3) discussion of alternatives, civilians can then make better-informed choices that advisors can then support.

- √ *Social networks.* See the discussion of wardens under the section “Social architecture”.
- √ *Money networks.* Local and transnational money networks need to be braced for violence. This part of the module can include advice and a transfer of resources. As crisis deepens, local lenders worry more about credit risks. But if an agency plans remote programming upon evacuation, then it might (1) arrange voucher or promissory note agreements with local banks and merchants. Using local staff or partners, the agency acts as remote guarantor, thus giving banks and merchants an incentive to continue their vital lending and purchase-on-credit.

Many reports have concluded that emergency responders should try to help support, protect, and facilitate remittances. Conflict disrupts remittance flows. Communications and safe movement are vital. Preparedness advisors can urge locals to designate (1) fallback cash transfer agents, (2) alternate communication and courier systems, and (3) default remittance destinations. They can urge locals to (4) keep documents or (5) identify proxies to do transactions. And an aid agency might (6) transfer resources like mobile phones and prepaid calling cards to help keep remittance lifelines alive. Or it can even (7) undertake “closer collaboration with organized migrants who have pledged to supply relief to their homeland.”⁹⁴ As Harvey and Savage say, “Aid agencies could benefit from drawing more on the skills and capacities of diaspora populations.”⁹⁵ Some suggest that agencies should attach “diaspora advisors” to their programs.⁹⁶ These advisors could be experts in emergency livelihood or specialists on transnational populations easily recruited from the academic or government sector. The point of supporting money networks with a proven track record is that they typically find ways to stay in service far longer than we can.

- √ *Shadow and Coping economies.* An aid agency can help locals broaden their economic options by assisting them navigate shadow and coping economies. Ground-truthed facts are needed to access these economies *and* avoid the dangerous elements with which they may get enmeshed. The test is to discern the “socially-beneficial aspects” from the “dysfunctional elements” of such economies.⁹⁷ Civilians might already be very discerning about the players involved and what risks and rules they play by. But though locals may be savvy as to the rules, emergency livelihood advisors may be able to (1) move and assess more broadly, adding to civilians’ awareness of risk or opportunity. Such advisors have important analytic skill sets (including the tools with which to triangulate and cross-check information). They can (2) share their assessment of the informal economy with local advisors and wardens and (3) mesh it with information from locals’ own “bamboo telegraph”. This part of the module can also include (4) a transfer of resources. If, for example, a black market in critical medicines exists but many cannot afford it, then an agency could consider cash transfers (run remotely post-evacuation through local staff or partners using distance finance and monitoring methods cited later) or coupon schemes limited to medicines. (5) Security advisors can discuss options for safely organizing jungle or bush markets or trading sites.
- √ *Pay offs.* Very often the only thing that stands between civilians and access to their means of production and marketing is a fee, tax, or bribe. Does the payoff go to violent spoilers or simple unpaid soldiers? Is it a phenomenon of the war economy or a continuation of corruption endemic even in peacetime? As noted earlier, locals usually consider the short and long-term costs and benefits of pay offs. Emergency livelihood advisors may be well-positioned to (1) assess the dynamics of a political/war economy more broadly. They might deem any negative impact of pay offs benign compared to the benefits of greasing civilian access to economic opportunity. If some families cannot afford such pay offs, then the agency could (2) consider general-purpose cash transfers. Experience with the provision of such transfers in conflict zones shows that families use unrestricted money to protect their livelihoods. They make purchases to improve household

nutrition, replenish production assets, and—*undoubtedly*—pay the fees, taxes, or bribes that allow them to participate in the economy.

Most notably, experts on war economy can (3) help an agency reevaluate its own part in the biggest “pay-off” of all—the presumed “costs of doing business” in a war zone. We have transactions with governing elites and military powers so they will allow us to work—giving hundreds of millions of dollars in state exchange rates, airport and seaport fees, arrays of “taxes”, paid protection rackets, rent gouging, inflated beneficiary counts, demands for a (non-needs-based) “equal cut” of aid, and more. The economies of scale we seek in big camps feed the economies of war time and again. Our actions pale in comparison to the bribe-for-economic survival noted here.

Module ~ Strip and transfer assets. Nothing in the experience of aid work inclines us to help civilians strip and transfer their assets. It might feel like we are actually helping the belligerents—*but the opposite is true*: Belligerent strategy leaves civilians *dead*, or at least *destitute* and *displaced*. Yet civilians who take preemptive steps can deny a belligerent force those first two goals. And by being wardens of their own “planned displacement” they may avoid becoming dependent wards in our camps for years. When facing violence better described as an asset-stripping enterprise than “conflict”, it is often wise to strip first. For we whose livelihood programs have long been about asset *building*, asset *stripping* sounds very counterintuitive, even heretical—until recently.

A central tenet of the new emergency livelihoods framework is that “asset ownership can be a key determinant in vulnerability.”⁹⁸ A belligerent force very often provisions or profits itself with civilian wealth and this puts civilians with visible immobile wealth quite directly in harm’s way. Pre-emptive strip and transfer of assets is a *graduated option* that people can phase in before uprooting themselves. Every action cited in this advisory module is reversible.

This module stresses *transfer* of assets either to responders or repositories. Affinity groups usually serve as “first responders” amid crises. Moving assets to this support network has multiple benefits. First, it protects family wealth. Second, it removes resources that actually invite attack and harm. Third, it keeps that wealth out of the hands of criminals and belligerents, giving less encouragement and strength to their asset stripping; less fuel for the fire. Fourth, it puts those resources into the hands of trusted first responders, strengthening that network. This is vital because such nets often become exhausted, thus requiring displaced persons to make dangerous secondary and tertiary flights.

People often try to strip first; to protect, convert or move any assets possible before being attacked. Still, those faced with violence have repeatedly proven “unable to organize in advance and forced to abandon rather than sell assets... [So too,] the aid community tends to respond only after displacement has begun.”⁹⁹ But by supporting preparedness, an aid agency can engage sooner and help civilians organize to protect their wealth. A regimen of early warning *and inducements* (like micro-grants) may provide the persuasion and planning needed to begin sequenced asset stripping before it is too late.

It is *abnormal* for people to prepare their own displacement, so mental readiness is as key as tactical preparedness. Borrowing a lesson from natural disaster warning systems, we know it is not enough to monitor and describe a threat. “Response to warning entails perceiving, understanding, believing, verifying, [and] personalizing the message.”¹⁰⁰ Messages can be conveyed through discussion more than “instruction” per se. They may be reinforced by “go & see” visits to, or “come & tell” survivor testimonials from, adjacent areas of conflict. As extension agents who work with skeptical farmers know, “seeing is believing” and “hearing (from trusted sources) is believing”. The wardens and local co-advisors described in this paper serve as those trusted agents.

√ *Redeeming.* Livelihood advisors can gain an understanding of redeemable family assets such as debts or rent due, and savings, loans, or shares locked up in an enterprise. They can then (1) urge civilians to start phased redemption of these assets before danger arrives and there is still time to convert or cache them. If anticipating flight, civilians can even (2) forward liquid assets to await

them at their intended destination points (and advisors might help with the transfer modalities). Anything that is withdrawn or divested can later be re-deposited and reinvested.

- √ *Caching.* Food surpluses, medicines, shelter sheeting, seed stock, cash and valuables can be hidden near probable flight routes and rally points. (1) Concealment and (2) weatherization skills are useful, as are methods of (3) preserving meats and fruits (salted, smoked, or dried). Two nights of heavy smoking make some meat edible for up to a month. That could be just enough to subsist on while waiting for a raiding party to leave the area. Some grains can be safely sealed and buried for several years. Hard experience shows that civilians very often take security risks to obtain such necessities that they failed to preposition—so even the most basic preparations will save lives.
- √ *Liquidating.* If widespread liquidation is going to happen, it should be spread out over time and location so the predatory instincts of buyers are not too aroused by “distress sales” (the hallmark of forced removal) and prices are not too depressed by having a lot of the same kinds of possessions and properties on the market at the same time. Livelihood advisors are freer to move and assess market dynamics and (1) report which markets support a more reasonable rate of return for given assets. If such markets are distant, then aid agencies might (2) facilitate collective or subsidized transport of goods. They might even, as Sue Lautze once suggested, (3) support “countervailing market interventions” such as “establishment of barter shops to ensure minimum floor prices for assets. While temporary and artificial, these market interventions are important strategies for supporting coping mechanisms...”¹⁰¹
- √ *Dismantling.* If a community is clearly in the path of looting marauders, then households should perhaps dismantle “marketable” housing material (especially roofing) and sell, barter or bury it. Livelihood advisors might (1) urge civilians to take such precautions, warning that if they do not, then the first cost they will face upon returning home to devastated communities may be for these materials (on an inflated market).
- √ *Temporarily forfeiting.* Abandoning property can be a tactical cession. Cases of ethnic cleansing that forever change the demography of land ownership are rare. More common challenges for a returnee are squatters or confused title status due to oral agreements, challenges in claiming inheritance, or other problems that could have been anticipated. Documentation is thus part of a deliberate plan to later reclaim property, especially land. Livelihood advisors can (1) urge locals to acquire, copy, and send vital documents (titles, deeds, birth certificates, ID cards, etc.) off-site. They also can (2) broach tactics like “loan and lien” whereby the land owner acquires a bank loan using the property as collateral. The loan provides an emergency fund for those who might soon flee. The lien creates incentive for a bank to protect the property owner’s claim against squatters. (3) Where communal and oral agreements on land occupancy prevail, advisors can ask leaders and elders how they might best assure that land norms will survive displacement and its disruption of memory, conveyances and social safeguards. Note that, when feasible, civilians try to preempt problems by visiting their properties and issuing complaints about or warnings to illicit occupants. Security advisors can (4) facilitate this oft-risky travel by sharing safe movement skills, while (5) an aid agency can express public concern about land grabs that might be underway.
- √ *Scorching.* Scorched earth tactics are an extreme example of a tenet which emergency livelihoods experts tell us: amid asset-stripping violence, possession of assets puts your life at risk. The logic holds true when assaults more resemble criminal raids than professional military sweep and hold operations. If civilians strip or burn portions of their home lots and farm lots before fleeing, then marauders may lose the stomach for pursuit and squatters may lack incentive for illegal occupation. There is no grittier cost-benefit calculation. (This challenges our mindset. Westerners in Darfur see burned villages and speak of utter devastation. The view is natural to us because much of our

equity and identity is in our homes. Without slighting their loss, the wealth of many Darfurians is not in their buildings but their livestock. This wealth is mobile and fungible.) Locals will not adopt this tactic unless convinced property is fueling violence. Advisors can provide information support. (1) “Go & see” visits, (2) “come & tell” survivor testimonials, and (3) public domain satellite images (like Google Earth) may persuade locals that the belligerents’ aim is to loot and burn—and that preemptively scorching will give them less reason to linger. A family can (4) burn its own home (after stripping poles and roofing for future use), its fruit trees (after taking grafts for future use), etc. Advisors can also note how to (5) create a false impression that properties are uninhabitable by fabricating bogus landmine markers (known only to the community), the illusion of poisoned wells or water points, the presence of curses (potent in many places), diseases, etc.

IV. Local Service Delivery

How They Respond

Like us, local service providers *try but are often unable* to gain humanitarian access by winning the consent of controlling powers. Yet they are then quicker to see that if accommodation is not working, then discreet tactics give them a last chance to save their own people. **Note: Local providers can be both receivers and providers of preparedness support:**

(1) Local providers can receive preparedness support in the form of advice about how to more safely and effectively provide services amid violence. Either the local provider or an international partner can hire the needed advisors. (See “Recruiting Advisors”)

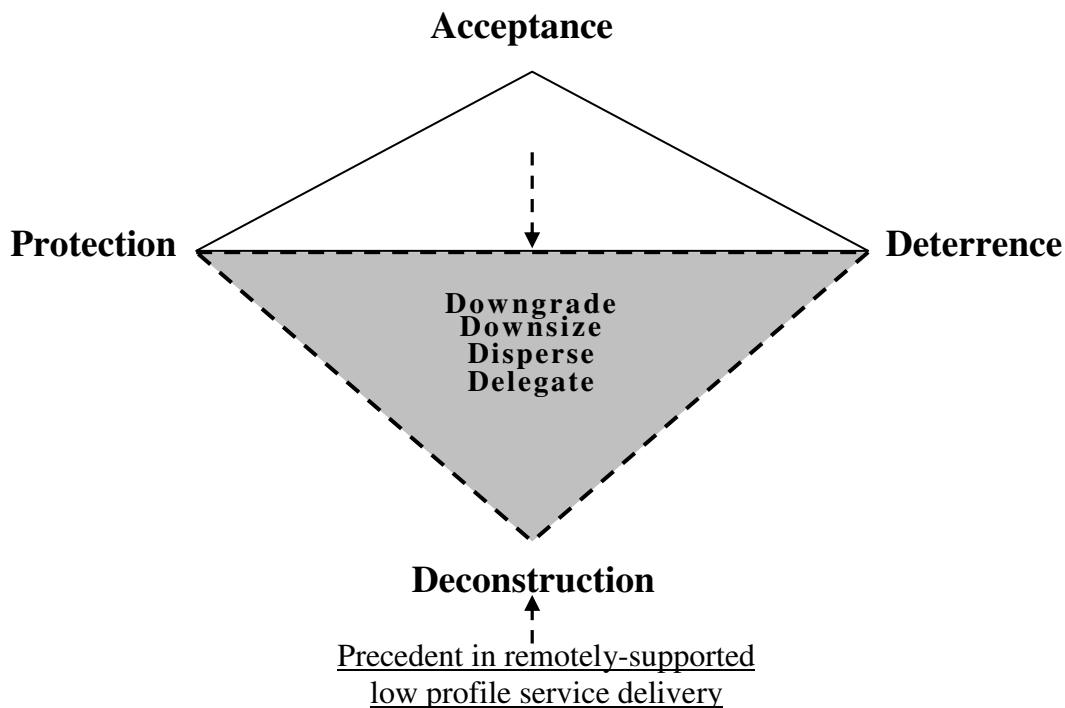
(2) Local providers also can offer preparedness support to a populace in the form of advice about physical safety and economic sustenance. The question of whether a local provider is qualified to act as a platform for preparedness support is the same asked of an international aid agency: Is it well-grounded on site (having good situational awareness, local trust, and local backing) and can it acquire the type of advisors described in this paper? Not all “local” providers are well-grounded. Some have more access to and affinity with rural populations than others. Some have missions (like development, disaster risk reduction, and aid) more organically attuned to community life and death than others (like civil society NGOs). But on balance, history shows there are many local service providers trying to protect and prepare local populations for violence—and innovating the most practical responses.

Avoidance and anonymity. When health workers in *El Salvador* faced violence they sometimes transitioned to unmarked worksites; cached their equipment and supplies; evaded roadblocks by traveling at night; used pseudonyms and secret supply routes; made use of simple, improvised, and inexpensive technology; and prepared staff mentally for arrest, imprisonment, and physical abuse.¹⁰² When violence in Burma threatened local aid groups, staff replaced them with “smaller structures focused on facilitating survival.”¹⁰³ By changing their work mode from clinic to backpack, various discreet providers in Burma have reached hundreds of thousands. Likewise, in *Iraq*, *Chechnya*, and *Afghanistan* the local staff of international agencies “adopted very low profiles or even ‘clandestine’ modes of programming. This involves no agency branding, and the use of private cars... In Iraq, [some agency] staff have no fixed address, do not use their real names, and operate without knowing the identity of their colleagues.”¹⁰⁴ “Humanitarianism in Iraq has in effect gone underground, with implementing organizations adopting covert operational styles: working from multiple locations, avoiding branding and logos and varying travel patterns...”¹⁰⁵ These are examples of how local service providers sometimes use avoidance and anonymity to reach their people after attempts to gain consent from controlling powers failed. (Clearly, local providers sometimes assure their security by being absolutely transparent with and subordinate to parties in a conflict. This paper deals instead with those times when openness will either get them killed or end any meaningful aid.)

How We Respond

There has been a disconnect between the ways that we respond to threats facing local service providers and the ways that they do. Traditionally we see ourselves in a business of self-evident good and not been inclined to hide our identity or leave the bricks-and-mortar infrastructure we worked so hard to build. We usually have a firm idea of what good local service providers should look like: a lot like us. We expect them to have sizeable “absorptive capacity” and “surge capacity”. We think in terms of growth and increased program delivery. Local partners need to be more complex because we are complex. The purpose of our capacity building often is to make them “better sub-contractors” for our needs. They are coached and cloned to “conform to the management standards of outsiders.”¹⁰⁶ In essence, we model them after ourselves—even though our own highly evolved aid machinery, with all of its administrative, logistical, and financial capacity, is not well designed to survive violence. The local staff and partners that we leave behind must be able to survive violence before they can serve amid it. But it seems, as Abby Stoddard contends, that too “many international agencies have taken indigenous preparedness to mean simply filling local warehouses with relief supplies. This approach [is] driven by consideration of the capacities and interests of the international providers as opposed to the realities and needs on the ground.”¹⁰⁷

As the oft-cited “security triangle” denotes, we try to keep service delivery safe through strategies of acceptance, protection, and deterrence. Aid programming has often survived due to these strategies, but few would disagree that they have their limits and we must do better. The “*acceptance strategy*” tries to reduce risk by securing political and social consent for our presence and our work. “[This] is the closest to humanitarian principles...[but] can be difficult in practice.”¹⁰⁸ Some find an “increasing perception that the ‘acceptance’ model of security for aid agencies no longer works” and is waning.¹⁰⁹ The “*protection strategy*” entails hardening ourselves as a potential target with protective procedures and devices. But as the creator of the “security triangle” himself concludes, “Hardening the target may be a necessary but not sufficient, security strategy. It reflects a reactive and besieged mentality.”¹¹⁰ The “*deterrence strategy*” aims to “deter a threat by counter-threat. This ranges from legal, economic or political sanctions to a counter-threat of defensive or offensive use of force.”¹¹¹ Despite its mixed record, many consider deterrence by third parties to protect life-saving services to be a legitimate last recourse when acceptance and protection methods fail. Regardless, deterrence is rarely offered.



When the triangle collapses we evacuate. Yet the perils of evacuation—ending life-critical services and abandoning local staff or partners—have given rise to *remote programming* whereby expatriates pull out but maintain a working relationship with local counterparts who continue to run programs. This outsourcing of risk, with its pragmatic and moral implications, at times has also led us to support unorthodox *low profile* actions by local providers as they do all they can to survive and serve. In these scenarios, precedents have arisen that suggest a way forward (shaded in above below) which this paper advocates: support the capacity of local service providers to operate with a low profile. Consider this “security diamond” which essentially adds a lower canopy of security to the conventional triangle.

With our *staff* we use the security triangle and do not typically promote a mindset or skill set for avoidance and anonymity. With our local service *partners* we stress institution building. We expect them to be bricks-and-mortar institutions with an address. This dictates an open workplace that one inevitably must try to protect through efforts at acceptance, protection, and deterrence. When these strategies fail, then local providers often resort to avoidance and anonymity—and this has led to best practices that we should think about. But until recently we have given “[fairly little] thought to the coping strategies of local organizations.”¹¹²

Promising trend: Remote and low-profile programs. Aid work that falls under the rubric of “remote programming” can be cataloged by how *we* fit (do we *control*, *support* or merely *subcontract* operations?) and who *they* are (local staff or partners? civil society groups? commercial operators?). Varied forms of remote programming have been used in Angola, Uganda, Sudan, North Korea, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Kosovo, Somalia, Chechnya, Palestine, Darfur and the DRC and have won qualified praise in several of these deadly settings. By now virtually every mainstream aid agency has operated remotely in one fashion or another.

When we escape conflict zones and leave our local staff or partners to run the shop it is a tribute to their bravery, integrity, and ability. It is also testimony to our courage to trust. That trust is built on strong relationships. The record shows that locals perform “remotely” with the requisite neutrality and impartiality. The record shows that remote operations help us continue to reach millions with vital aid in situations we might have abandoned a decade ago. The general *strategy* of remote programming is solid. It is a strategic response to an immutable reality: in the most dangerous of settings, they stay and we go. At its best, remote programming can be intentionally developmental and thoughtful about preparedness support. But the operational *tactics* that we agree on with them must be ones that better support their *safety* as well as their *efficiency* and their *acceptance* by the communities they would serve. This has not always been the case.

Take remote programming to the next level. Aside from removing risk-averse foreigners, remote programming has, “not necessarily overcome the operational constraints to service delivery that led to its adoption in the first place”.¹¹³ Those constraints are driven by insecurity. A 2004 ECHO report found that, “There has been little examination of the security implications of [remote management] operations for national staff.”¹¹⁴ But the implications are evident: our local staff and partners are easy targets with a street address. They are made vulnerable by a fixed infrastructure and riskily exposed as they handle very alluring assets. We give them the office keys and a public promotion at the same moment such a high profile could put them at great risk. “Working for an international agency exposes national staff to risks they are unlikely to face otherwise.”¹¹⁵ Unless they fall under the deterrent protection of clan or community, working for absentee bosses like us can put them in harm’s way. “Statistical analysis points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that aid work is becoming increasingly dangerous for national staff, and safer for international staff.”¹¹⁶ One contributing factor has been our willingness to let local counterparts run remote aid operations that have not been adequately retrofitted for heightened violence. We are outsourcing more risk than necessary.

◆ Remote operations can be safer: As an aid community we have been stung by the charge that our local staff are first tier targets for whom we offer second-class protection. “National staff receive a disproportionately low share of training and material resources” for security.¹¹⁷ Moreover, “few organizations have a specific policy on what security-related equipment would be handed over to national staff or local partners” upon evacuation.¹¹⁸ Thus many feel that our local counterparts’ safety in remote work turns on *equity*—locals getting the same security assets (i.e. training and equipment) that expatriates do. Unfortunately, *equity alone does not adequately improve the safety* of local service providers. After all, those same assets did not keep expatriates feeling safe enough to stay.

In asymmetrical situations where our unarmed counterparts face brutal violence, safety comes from new tactics and new aid architecture. This architecture forms “a workplace” both discreet and mobile. Most of the private security advice we now hire is premised on visible delivery and static properties that require harden-the-target type protections. Conversely, hide-and-move-the-target type protections require a mindset and skill set that we have only recently begun to embrace. We have only just begun to learn about this new security envelope—and much of that learning has been generated by local staff and partners themselves. Fortunately, the combination of local experience and expatriate expertise—the private security sector can easily respond to a scope of work for the advisory modules described in this paper—forms a strong foundation for better protecting local service delivery. The following shifts would enhance remote and low-profile programs:

- *Safety* via equity: training & equipment on par with that given expatriates
-
- Safety via adaptability: new tactics and new aid architecture for asymmetrical threats
- Safety via a deconstructed (low) profile

◆ Remote operations can be more efficient: Efficient service delivery stems from the *operational freedom* to move, assess, talk face-to-face, and deliver and monitor goods or services. Without such freedom, agencies can be reduced to blind forays out of hardened humanitarian bunkers. “Bunkered agencies or those that move under armed [deterrence... are constrained by] the security ‘bubble’ that envelopes them... [they are] insulated from vital information about the communities and contexts where they work.”¹¹⁹ Without unimpeded information, communication and movement they are inefficient. But operational freedom is largely a matter of learning and applying tactics suited to a given environment. This is a challenge. In Iraq, “only the most competent operational agencies have found ways to overcome the prevailing loss of proximity to affected Iraqis and their communities ... [Their efforts] can be credited with keeping the flow of vital assistance moving even during the most violent crisis periods.”¹²⁰

Service providers with asymmetric skills in information management, communications, safe sites, safe movement, and threat response—advisory modules described in this paper—can operate with more freedom and efficiency. Specifically, they can better appraise security, befriend communities, do needs-based assessments, and discreetly provide and monitor goods or services. In doing this they stand more accountable to parent agencies and donors.

But even creative operational freedom will not meet accountability and efficiency standards if those standards are not realistic. Fred Cuny once said that dire emergencies require “a simple field-accounting system that is easy to use, easy to carry, and places the emphasis of trust on the user.”¹²¹ Yet the Feinstein Center reports that accountability “has been taken, in general terms, to the point of dysfunctionality.”¹²² Unrealistic standards actually put lives at risk. At best, as Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss warn, “slavish adherence to strict standards of accountability can be the enemy of creative action...insistence upon it can impede lifesaving action”¹²³ At worst it creates a perverse incentive for agencies not to even attempt or continue programming. The following shifts would enhance remote and low-profile programs:

- *Efficiency* via conventional assessment & accountability standards → ○ Efficiency via tactical operational freedom to assess & be accountable
- Efficiency as measured by realistically adjusted standards

◆ Remote operations can have a *low profile* and *popular acceptance*: As said earlier, winning “acceptance” is the security method closest to humanitarian principles. Even when aid moves toward a low (deconstructed) profile, acceptance remains a core objective. A low profile strategy with *the right* operational tactics helps providers maintain humanitarian access to and presence among a populace. But some observers conclude the opposite, reasoning that a low profile comes at the expense of popular acceptance. They might be faulting a wise *strategy* for the flawed *tactics* used to implement it. Or they might be equating “transparency” with “acceptability”; conflating “presence” with “visibility”.

To say we must choose between visibility or rejection is an either-or fallacy. First, there are many shades between visible and invisible, thus many more choices than this false dichotomy would imply. Second, historical analogies show overwhelmingly that overt visibility is not needed by a movement to ensure its acceptance from and coordination with a population. Undergrounds and resistance groups across many cultures and conflicts have had discreet symbiotic relationships with their compatriots. The same can be said of civil society brutally forced to adopt avoidance strategies in many countries. Consider how often these movements have survived asymmetrical odds against occupiers and tyrants. Consider how their success often turned on maintaining acceptance from and coordination with the populace—and that they achieved this while laboring under a low profile. They worked outward from concentric circles of trust. They devised need-to-know protocols so that their clandestine efforts could be “visible enough” to trusted influentials among the populace without also being needlessly visible to hostile parties.

Aid agencies in hostile settings face a similar need to adapt. As Hugo Slim argues, “Creativity needs to be brought to ways of moving beyond simple camps and distribution centres toward a new focus on enabling networks.”¹²⁴ In the testing ground of Iraq, “the agencies that have succeeded in sustaining safe access and operations over time, often in the face of dramatic programming shocks... have created and nurtured networks of knowledgeable and reliable local facilitators and fixers.”¹²⁵ Today in Iraq, “networks for relief have been established through close contact with local leaders, understanding political structures and *building up trust* with the population, *whilst at the same time retaining a low profile*.” [emphasis added]¹²⁶ Therefore trust and a low profile can go together if operations are enabled by tactics for an active presence and meaningful contact. “Active presence does not necessarily mean a large footprint or presenting an attractive target.”¹²⁷ In Iraq, “networks and relays have been used effectively to overcome mobility constraints on staff.”¹²⁸ Those networks often follow the networks of affinity and social architecture, cited earlier, that undergird popular acceptance. The following shifts would enhance remote and low-profile programs:

- *Acceptance* via publicly visible acts that demonstrate humanitarian intent → ○ Acceptance via being “visible enough” to trusted influentials among the populace
- Meaningful contact through local networks, need-to-know protocols, etc.

Modules for Local Service Delivery

Some say that we have offered little “beyond the familiar mantra of ‘capacity building’” to help locals cope with the risks of remote and low-profile programs.¹²⁹ A 2004 UNHCR review concluded locals are “ready and willing to undertake responsibilities [when foreigners evacuate, but that] “there is no systematic preparation of national staff members for such contingencies.”¹³⁰ This paper advocates a more systematic approach to their preparation by offering advisory modules that are attuned to the

realities of violence. Note: Although the following modules are mutually reinforcing, agencies do not need to implement all of them or at least all of them at the same time. Agencies can carefully phase down into a low profile just as they would carefully phase back up into an open profile.

Module ~ Physical safety for local service efforts. If a good regimen of training and equipment proves not good enough to keep expatriates from evacuating, then it is not good enough for the locals who are left behind either. It is the right capacity support for the wrong situation. Preparedness must reflect the environment and embrace asymmetrical thinking. A local provider must be able to survive before it can serve; it must adopt field craft for discreet operational freedom if it is to serve effectively. We have begun to accept this in ad-hoc and isolated ways. But we are far from being as professional or systematic about this as we could be.

A paper this brief cannot describe all the field craft that can keep local providers physically safer. Also, the final elements of this advisory module need to be determined on site. This module follows the same structure as the earlier section on “Physical safety” and many of those options can be of use to local providers, especially if they are trying to blend into society and be safe like everyone else while working. Generally-speaking, the field craft may fall under the following skill clusters:

√ “*Information management*”. Despite our visceral dislike of the word, we are routine producers and consumers of humanitarian “intelligence” on human rights abuses and political or military actors who cause them. Why? As Macrae and Leader say, access to accurate information on conflict “can be seen as a precondition for *effective and principled* humanitarian action.” [emphasis added]
¹³¹ Expatriate aid workers now know methods of gathering, assessing and channeling sensitive information. Preparedness advisors can (1) share such methods with our local counterparts as well. This module can also cover use of (2) signal scanners and (3) word-of-mouth networks. Notably, civilians often rely upon traveling merchants as well as family members at military posts for tips; the UN has used informants. Moreover, locals have their own facts and judgments that can be very well-sourced (whether “open source” or not) so advisors might (3) discuss how to support local methods and “grapevine” networks. As the section “Disperse staff” notes, social networks are often both the destination *and* the source of information.

Information also must be managed, perhaps by masking (denying) or manipulating (degrading) the facts available to violent groups. Such groups need knowledge to act. As Mary Anderson says, “Strategies for delivering aid secretly thwart thieves’ need for knowledge.”¹³² Phillipe Le Billon adds that “keeping the timing and location of deliveries secret, can reduce opportunity for looting. Risks can also be displaced by publicly announcing a food convoy in a different location.”¹³³ This is classic disinformation. Advisors might share methods of masking information such as (4) compartmentalization, (5) document safety, and (6) cover stories. They might discuss ways to (7) manipulate information such as planting errant reports, fake rumors, forged documents, maps with misleading marks, or phony radio orders. This breaks from our liberal democratic notions of transparency. But imperiled service providers do not live in liberal democracy—and they can be killed without these precautions.

√ “*Communications*”. Any agency equipment that is suitable for a discreet and mobile workplace should be (1) transferred in time for locals to train on. Advisors can (2) share ideas about a layered mix of low-to-high tech communications; there is plenty to choose from. (3) Indigenous forms of a bamboo telegraph should never be overlooked. (4) Simple sources of power off the electrical grid can be set up. (5) Flat, cell-based contact networks and (6) need-to-know only protocols can be agreed upon. These can be set up in ways that keep parent agencies, partners, donors, and recipient communities properly informed. Methods of (7) keeping transmissions undeciphered or undetected can be shared. Koenraad Van Brabant’s landmark aid security manual describes how agencies can

“encode information that would give away your position or movements”; how to use “metaphoric expressions will give you room for ‘plausible denial’.” ¹³⁴

- √ “*Safe movement*”. In some situations, aid agency vehicles might unwisely reveal the occupants’ identity or expose them to violent theft. If so, it may be best to pull the vehicles out and discuss options for (1) private or commercial transport, or (2) pack animals for off-track travel. Advice can cover the basics of (3) night and off-road movement as well as (4) selecting and varying routes and alternating transport. One of the best asymmetric advantages that local providers will have is *initiative*. Advisors can stress (5) using the choice of when, where, and how to move to their full advantage. The aid agency might also consider (6) provision of and training on GPS and GIS gear. At times, safety of movement hinges upon the patchwork landscape of ethnic, religious, or political factions. In this case advisors might (7) share experiences in which local providers have used multi-faction networks “to orchestrate *relays* where goods, equipment, sensitive information, cash or medical cases are handed off from one cell or staff member to another, sometimes many times, in order to get safely from one place to another.” ¹³⁵
- √ “*Threat response*”. Automatic response to threats at a workplace, or while moving, or on contact with aid recipients might be discussed and rehearsed. As noted next, a *workplace* can be greatly downsized and a workforce dispersed. Threat response might thus focus more on evasive measures for *individuals* than on evacuation plans for entire organizations. Hence, advisors can discuss with local counterparts (1) fallback plans for when a portion of their operating network is compromised. The *movement* options cited above can be augmented with fixed response to dangers during transit. Advisors can discuss (2) landmine awareness and (3) evasive driving techniques such as we teach to expatriate aid workers. They might also cover how to (5) anticipate and react to the ambush layouts and blocking points typical to belligerents. Lastly, *contact* with beneficiaries during distribution of aid must be discreetly planned and conducted so as not to draw threats closer to them—as so often happens with conventional aid. (6) The size, location, and limited advance notice of distributions can all be considered in this part of the module.

Module ~ Deconstructing institutions. “*Safe sites*”. At an architectural level, local providers often “deinstitutionalize” in the face of violence. We may find this counterintuitive, indeed contrary to our goals of “institution *building*”. Yet the lessons that local and international providers are learning about avoidance and anonymity have telling implications for the aid “workplace.” Deconstruction entails flattening hierarchies; moving from static platforms to networks. Some describe it as work while “dissolving” into society. In place of echeloned formations and office trappings might be more rudimentary and devolved structures with decision-making pushed down to the ground. “Virtually all successful operational organizations in Iraq have decentralized decision-making on security matters to staff on the ground who are most capable of making sound decisions about their own safety.” ¹³⁶ The aim is to be too small to fight over; too scattered and too smart to become a symbiotic part of conflict. Cash transfers might replace warehoused commodities. The provider’s communiqués may be wireless and its transport roadless (i.e. off road). Working while “cut off” is natural under this architecture.

- √ *Downgrade identity*. Aid programing “is deeply predictable. It is easily read, anticipated and obstructed” by abusive parties. ¹³⁷ Amid the worst of conflicts, having staff “who readily identify themselves as humanitarian workers, is not only an invitation to trouble..., but is also unnecessary to operational effectiveness.” ¹³⁸ In Iraq, many local counterparts, with the assent of remote parent agencies, have taken numerous steps “to downplay their identity as humanitarian actors and thus decrease security risks.” ¹³⁹ Preparedness advisors thus might describe options in which providers (1) stop branding, or at least furl flags and remove magnetic sign logos when it seems wise, (2) ditch or falsify identification, and (3) obscure the agency’s paper (and funding) trail. They might

discuss how aid agencies have at times finessed their identity by (4) having media outreach, but no operational footprint, (5) revealing their identity only at distribution or service times, (6) giving all credit for their work to local partners, (7) discreetly co-locating with another, more accepted entity, (8) disguising themselves as something they are not, (9) “partial disclosure” of their work to trusted, influential actors only, and (10) going into periods of “hibernation”. All of these tactics of selective transparency have been used in Iraq, some by UN and mainstream aid agencies through their local proxies. Advisors also might discuss the tactics of (11) publicly closing an agency then quietly reconstituting it with no legal personality or authorization, or (12) publicly conducting programs that belligerents will tolerate, while privately aiding groups most at risk.

This last tactic is how Raoul Wallenberg (joined by the Papal Nunciature, Red Cross, and several embassies) and Varian Fry rescued Jews from Nazi persecution. Of course, Wallenberg, who used deception, bribery, bogus documents, false front safe houses, and more, to save as many as 100,000 from extermination, is today revered as the quintessential humanitarian. And Fry’s discreet agency is the predecessor of today’s International Rescue Committee. If we as humanitarians today are unwilling to alter our public image in order to save lives, then we may not be on the right side of history while it is happening. In pondering the world’s weak response to history’s genocides, Samantha Power once asked, “How can something so clear in retrospect become so muddled at the time by rationalizations, institutional constraints, and a lack of imagination?”¹⁴⁰ Fortunately, some of that humanitarian imagination is alive in Iraq today.

- √ *Downsize infrastructure.* The main attraction and objective of attacks on aid often is its *properties* not its personnel. The prime targets are offices, motor pools and warehouses. These structures are emblematic of “humanitarian space” but if that phrase is distilled down to its essential meaning, it simply means the ability to conduct humanitarianism—and we do not want the existence of offices, motor pools and warehouses to interfere with that ability. Fortunately, these features of our aid “footprint” can be downsized, dispersed, or done away with. In various conflicts where aid was endangered it shifted from offices to homes and from warehouses to innocuous buildings. Security advisors can (1) share ideas about the selection, safety, and networking of this new “workspace”. (2) Portable office apparatus for computing (laptops?) and communications (sat-phones?) can be discussed. Likewise, there does not always need to be an expensive standing motor pool that attracts warring groups. (3) An assemblage of porters, pack animals, carts, or contracted motor vehicles might provide ad-hoc transport that can get a distribution done and then melt away.
- √ *Disperse, monetize, or outsource supplies.* The NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq notes that some members “restrict the accumulation of assets.”¹⁴¹ This denies warring thugs more contraband to feed conflict. In this vein, preparedness advisors can discuss methods of either (1) scattering warehouses or (2) breaking large distributions into smaller ones. To the extent that commodities must be handled, advisors can (3) stress that supplies should rarely sit for long. This argues for last minute local acquisition and quick distribution. There may also be need to *rethink* our reliance on commodities and storage. Advisors can (4) share the known benefits and methods of cash transfer programs in conflict zones. Careful protocols make cash a more elusive target than commodities. Practice shows that cash is used wisely by recipients and can stimulate local markets.

Advisors can (5) share experiences in many places of outsourcing supply distribution. In Somalia during the chaos of the 1990s, WFP was able to monetize food with Somali merchants who safely and efficiently moved it through their own clan-based networks. In Iraq, many aid agencies have “minimized the need for stockpiles and warehouses by entering into agreements with local suppliers who ensure that certain minimum stocks are on hand in their own premises. This relieves the organisation of the need to maintain a high-profile facility... The business uses its own community connections to ensure that its assets are secure. Often these local suppliers have far greater capacity

than humanitarian organisations to dispatch goods over a broader area.”¹⁴² Capacity support can also cover options such as (6) cash vouchers, (7) commodity coupons, and (8) promissory notes with local merchants. Such measures essentially turn shops into “aid warehouses”. To the degree that the long vulnerable logistical tail that we have become accustomed to can be privatized and localized, aid operations may become more conflict resistant.

- √ *Disperse staff.* “The organizational template most useful... in repressive contexts is network oriented rather than hierarchical.”¹⁴³ There are various net formations to choose from, but a common task is to find the right balance between safety and coordination. Preparedness advisors might (1) discuss how small groups can independently work and resources themselves—but also converge for scaled up joint action. It is classic asymmetry about which much has been written elsewhere. “A proven alternative to [aid] staff mobility is to have staff focal points that collectively cover a broad geographic area, (2) forming an in-house network of cells or individuals that work independently when staff mobility is poor, but interdependently when it improves. Such networks are being employed by a wide variety of organizations.”¹⁴⁴

Staff dispersal not just a matter of physical geography but social geography as well; not just an issue of their safety but *also* of leveraging the trust they exercise within varied segments of the populace. This refers again to networks of affinity. Trust is the password to access, especially in conflicts that are communally, militarily, or geographically fragmented. This then involves (3) “basing hiring decisions partially on community ties—family, tribal, party or other connections.”¹⁴⁵ Advisors, expatriate and local staff should all (4) discuss what the composition of a dispersed, discreet workforce would look like. Some experience shows that, “Where staff are already known or connected to one-another, these relationships have helped to minimize staff accountability problems because team members feel obligations to one-another, as well as to the organisation. In the experience of several agencies who follow this practice, it results in a staff that is self- policing... There are obvious theoretical pitfalls to hiring through relationships, including the dangers of nepotism or of delegated staff members “stacking” an organisation so that it becomes biased towards a particular tribal, religious or other group... In practice, however, such risks have been avoided by ensuring careful oversight from mature and experienced international staff and trusted field coordinators.”¹⁴⁶

- √ *Disperse beneficiaries.* At times, the part of our aid architecture that most needs deconstructing is the iconic—but often dangerous and unlivable—*camp*. We know that massing civilians into camps, while creating a useful economy of scale for us, has many drawbacks. Perversely, our camps can become vectors of disease, social dysfunction and part of war strategies and war economies. They hold human and material resources that competing powers almost have no choice but to fight over. As is now well documented, camps create “opportunity structures” for belligerents to find sanctuary, recruit fighters, control civilians, draw “legitimacy” from that control, and divert aid to their cause. When this happens our camps become part of the very architecture of war strategy. As William DeMars once said succinctly said: “War attracted mercy—and mercy transformed war.”¹⁴⁷

Fortunately, advisors can now (1) cite the experience of mainstream aid agencies that altered their large and static camps. They have tested “flexible, small-scale” operations that “minimize external resources” and “focus on moveable, transferable” aid.¹⁴⁸ Both WFP and CARE have decentralized when the threats of attack and looting existed, dispersing beneficiaries, convoys, and distribution areas. As but one example, in Lulingu, Zaire, CARE prevented refugee concentration because it invited attack. Some 8,000 refugees were dispersed over 105 sites, or about 75 per encampment. To manage this, CARE had 30 monitors, or about one monitor per every 3.5 sites.¹⁴⁹ Experience shows that the dispersion of beneficiaries can sometimes be managed and sustained, in part because

it promotes more *local integration* and *self-sufficiency*. Such efforts toward autonomy create wise economies that might more than offset whatever is lost in our own economy of scale.

Host powers normally govern the status of camps, not NGOs. It might not be possible to disperse beneficiaries after they have concentrated under camp control. Advisors might then (2) discuss possible agency “outreach” to uprooted civilians who have not yet chosen to enter camps. Might service at their ad hoc, dispersed locations be preferable to them and the aid agency than service in a crowded camp that has, for example, become dangerously militarized?

- √ *Delegate work.* A critical aspect of the aid workers’ role—is to know the limits of that role. Local staff and partners should be aware when another entity might have a comparative advantage doing the same work that they are attempting. Western aid—and the locals affiliated with it—is suspect in wide swaths of the world. An “aid agency” is not always the best vehicle or right cultural construct for doing sensitive relief work. In Iraq the more accepted entity might be a mosque. In Somalia it might be a clan-based network; in Uganda, a private contractor; in the Philippines, a civil society group; in El Salvador, a community-based organization; or in Eritrea or Burma, the welfare wing of a reliable armed party. Advisors can (1) assist with *mapping* of such actors. Mapping shows their roles, their relationship with civilians, their track record, their current humanitarian access, and more. If we trust our local staff and partners enough to outsource our work to them, then we should also trust and support their judgment in delegating work to third parties.

Module ~ Remote support. Aid agencies can continue supporting local staff and partners after their expatriates evacuate even if *conventional* finance, supply, and monitoring is not possible. The groundwork can be laid while offering preparedness support. Although remote arrangements have now been proven and praised in several conflicts, they also have shortcomings. The most serious flaw—the safety of those to whom we hand the office keys—has been discussed here. But there are sometimes other weaknesses tied to how we remotely manage programs that advisors can address.

- √ *Distance intelligence.* This portion of the module can include both a transfer of resources and advice. Even after we pull out we can provide local counterparts “humanitarian intelligence”. Sources may include our (1) regional situation reports and (2) satellite images. Public domain satellite photos are increasingly put to humanitarian applications—but rarely put in the hands of our local staff and partners. Interpretive imagery (small area / high resolution satellite photos with annotations and analysis) can help local counterparts with decisions such as judging the severity of neighboring attacks or choosing routes for transit. Beyond this there is now a surge of information and communication technologies intended for humanitarian use. These ICT platforms employ mobile telecommunications, satellite imaging, geographical information systems, the Internet and more. Preparedness advisors can sort through them and (3) suggest which might be the best fit for the agency and its local counterparts. It is easy to get excited about technology-based solutions. But (4) protocols and preparations must be ready in-situ as well. *Protocols* necessary to safeguard information could run counter to the web-based culture of openness and aid agency aspirations for information-sharing. *Preparations* to ensure effective community-based responses to technology-driven warnings may get neglected. There needs to be “last-mile connectivity” and ways to “plug” distance intelligence and ICT-platforms into local response. An apt analogy is that of an airdrop being only as effective as the preparations at the drop zone. The ground needs to be prepared, for example through a trained warden/response network.

- √ *Distance finance.* This portion of the module covers the use of cash (or cash equivalents) and markets for aid purposes. Fred Cuny often observed that even in times of severe deprivation the problem may not be supply failure so much as demand failure (as when conflict blocks *access* or makes goods too expensive to *afford*—both of which lower demand). This finding is the premise

of cash transfers, vouchers, coupons, and promissory notes. Advisors could share best practices for transfers routed in formal and informal ways. Agencies that are going to evacuate or be expelled can be advised to (1) pick a trusted proxy to channel deposits to in case the authorities freeze their bank accounts. Another lesson has been (2) “make creative use of existing financial mechanisms.”¹⁵⁰ There are shadow banking systems in place throughout the world, and one can now tap the experience of aid agencies having used these. Informal cash transfer agents are just one node in an array made possible by the globalization of finance and communications.

Money can be routed to varied end-users: (3) *Service providers* can be sent cash to purchase and deliver goods. The menu of options cited in this section on “Local Service Delivery” help make that purchase and delivery happen. (4) *Merchants* can be contracted/subsidized to buy and deliver goods. As Fred Cuny and many others have confirmed, big merchants buy and transport food, shielded by their own negotiated or hired protection. Small village traders use pack animals to reach remote areas and move at night to avoid bandits or belligerents. Cases in which merchants moved food when aid agencies were unable include Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Cambodia.¹⁵¹ Livelihood advisors can discuss mapping market potential and merchant partners. (5) *At-risk civilians* (including *host families*) can be given cash directly to purchase goods. Field experience now shows that such transfers can be well-targeted, are used wisely by recipients, have very positive impact, stimulate supply and lower cost, and can be less prone to diversion than commodities amid conflict. Cash transfers have “potentially far-reaching consequences for the ways in which humanitarian relief in emergencies is managed and delivered”.¹⁵²

Other mechanisms such as (4) cash vouchers, (5) commodity coupons, and (6) promissory notes may add administrative work vis-à-vis the merchant partners but give the provider more control over what money is used for. Each method has its own strength. Cash vouchers, redeemable only by the authorized holder, lessen the risk of carrying cash. Commodity coupons protect recipients from price inflation and currency devaluation. Promissory notes to designated merchants basically create standby supplies on location. Though there is now precedent for these methods, the findings of experts years ago still apply: local market potential is largely untapped by the aid community. Thomas Weiss concluded that “ignoring this capacity [is] an unfortunate but frequent occurrence in humanitarian operations.”¹⁵³ Such observations return us to the importance of supporting local capacity and the value of emergency livelihood experts versed in the role of markets and cash amid emergencies.

√ *Distance monitoring.* Some are concerned about losing managerial control under remote programs. But with foresight, an agency can (1) build the program skills (needs assessment and impact evaluation, or new best practices in local and triangulated methods of monitoring aid amid conflict) of its local staff or partners before events force it to pull out. Even after withdrawal, apparatus such as the “Visio-emergency system” used by Télécoms sans Frontières can stream live video to parent agencies or patrons. Preparedness advisors may (2) share information on this and other monitoring technologies. Unscheduled e-audits can show inventory or disbursements. Since this will not work everywhere, lower-end gear such as a cell phone camera may achieve some of the same. (Cell phone cameras are now transmitting firefights from war zones!) In this way, actual stockpiles, purchases, and recipients are confirmed and discussed *in real time*. (3) Field-testing long before evacuation can winnow out best approaches and work out glitches.

Of course distance monitoring is not just a matter of technology; it is about working with people who are under great stress. We have a vital obligation to (4) do whatever possible to mitigate the stress that they (and, for locals, their families) face. “Field and support staff in Iraq and Amman credit *supportive management* as the single-most important enabler of their work.”¹⁵⁴ There is growing literature on better support for expatriate aid staff under duress in conflict zones. As in

other ways, we lag behind in using important lessons to benefit our at-risk local counterparts. Preparedness support would end this neglect.

√ *Distance consultation.* Some are concerned about losing sector expertise under remote programs. But the notion that experts always need to be on site to confirm or consult on technical matters is evermore belied by “distance work” arrays the world over. Portable computer-based *diagnostic* tools have heralded an era in which experts and lab facilities do not always need to be on site. The great alarm raised about a “loss of life-saving expertise” when aid agencies were expelled from Darfur served to reveal that aid agencies, many which had been in Darfur for years, had not used that time to adequately train locals in certain technical roles *or* to assure that any essential expertise was just a key stroke or video screen away. If an agency has the foresight to provide (1) hardware and software, and (2) training, then generalists among its local staff or partners can, for example, use telemedicine to quickly diagnose and respond to threats of epidemic.

The preceding sections outlined advisory modules in support of local capacity for physical safety, economic survival, and local service delivery. Our “first responsibility is to understand the strategies that communities adopt at times of extreme risk.”¹⁵⁵ But “the ways in which conflict-affected people understand, prepare for, and respond to the threats remain relatively unknown to humanitarian practitioners. However, it is clear that these processes are central to people’s ability to withstand and survive conflict.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, except for some tactics that general “humanitarian practitioners” can safely offer, preparedness support requires the use of local and foreign advisors with special experience that we have not sought before.

V. RECRUITING ADVISORS

The success of the advisory modules described above depends in great part upon the abilities of the advisors themselves. As noted at the outset, there are many people with the unconventional skills and hard-won experience to save lives in violent settings. There exist foreign and local individuals capable of offering preparedness support advice. It is our job to find them.

Foreign advisors. Three types of foreign advisors can be used in offering preparedness support. They are *aid workers* who can offer non-specialized advice, *emergency livelihoods experts* drawn from applied academia, and *unarmed unconventional security experts* drawn from the private security sector.

(1) Aid workers can do a variety of things posed in this paper *if they have* the requisite situational awareness and trust of the local community. They can talk with women and children about locations and situations to avoid. They can talk with families about preparing caches or flight kits, protecting documents, redeeming assets, coaching children (what to do and where to meet if separated, etc.), recognizing landmines, backstopping remittances, and much more. Or they can provide information support by facilitating “go & see” visits or “come & tell” survivor testimonials and then let locals draw their own conclusions.

(2) Experts in emergency livelihoods can bring much to preparedness support—most especially their analytic skills based on considerable field observation. But it is questionable whether their work always bears out the basic tenet that “a livelihood approach starts with locals’ own responses.” There are many local coping responses that we, even with the guidance of livelihood experts, fail to support. For this reason there is much about the preparedness support approach that could benefit these experts and their nascent field as well. Their efforts can become even more timely and relevant by working on the cusp of violence with people on tangible tactics that heretofore have gone underappreciated.

(3) The third type of advisor, the expert in unconventional conflict and security, is—even though unarmed—the most sensitive to introduce to these situations and merits more attention in this paper.

Many NGOs, at least seven UN bodies, and USAID, ECHO, DfID, and the ICRC have contracted private security companies. We buy private security advice to protect our properties, programs, and foreign personnel—not local civilians per se.

Some agencies that are considering preparedness support may prefer to *contract* directly with a private security company to address a severe security situation in a single country program. They might not face perennial security problems requiring the full-time in-house ability to offer preparedness support. But others will want this ability embedded in their agency and will choose to *hire* such experts to become permanent employees. Making them employees could help lay to rest questions of autonomy and accountability that dog the private security industry. Housing security experts in an NGO also addresses the overriding concern about maintaining aid’s civilian character.

Many private security experts now have field experience alongside aid agencies that can make their transition to becoming an aid employee smoother. An agency can take the time it needs to steep these new hires in the aid ethos and in its own operating culture. That is how they become acceptable to the agency. But it might be difficult for us to see how former soldiers can gain the acceptance of our beneficiaries and local counterparts. Our knowledge of private security experts is limited to the scope of work we have been giving them. So far we have been buying their hard security—“protection” and “deterrence”—and might assume that the soft “acceptance” mode of security is something we alone are qualified to do. But if we crafted a scope-of-work for engaging communities and supporting their capacity to cope with violence, we would find that the private security market can supply our demand.

Preparedness support requires unconventional teaching. There are very many personnel skilled in asymmetrical conflict and counterinsurgency whose work before retiring to the private sector was just as “people-centered” and premised on gaining local acceptance as our own. Moreover, they also have linguistic skills and regional specializations that are far superior to the average aid worker’s. We may think we invented community development. Yet many of these security personnel are highly skilled in village-needs assessments and gaining the trust of locals. Their approach *goes beyond* stereotypical hearts and minds quick impact projects. It involves winning over a populace by listening and learning; tackling basic needs of security, sustenance and services; and sharing dangers with them. The skills cited in this paper are known by private security personnel of many backgrounds. But the specialized experts described here are unique in their discretion and nuance at the local level. And their greatest strength is their ability to *teach*. Aid agencies simply have not thought to look to the private sector for such skills. That talent can be hired out today. One might even find a buyer’s market for such advisors as contracts in Iraq are downsized.

It also helps to remember that “foreign” does not always mean western. There are many former soldiers with the requisite unconventional skills who come from countries of the South. They will often have a better understanding of local populations. They might share a similar regional history, language, religion, or ethnic background. They might also come from a nation emerging from its own civil strife and be personally well-practiced in realistic ways to survive conflict. Given this, they can draw deeply on experience—while perhaps drawing less attention.

Local co-advisors. Language fluency, regional specialization, and a grassroots orientation all help foreign advisors win the trust of locals. But hiring co-advisors from the locality is even more vital. Preparedness advice must build squarely upon local interpretation of local realities. As importantly, local co-advisors act as a bridge between expatriate advisors and beneficiaries, local staff and partners. Simply put: do not try to offer preparedness support without local co-advisors.

When recruiting local co-advisors for *service delivery* concerns, a key qualification might be skill in discreet relief or other forms of public welfare work. This implies personnel who are experienced in the adaptations that local service providers make amid violence. “Discreet” does not necessarily mean non-transparent or non-consensual. Low-profile and partially disclosed aid comes in a variety of shades and innovations. This vital experience in working under the gun should be put back to work.

When recruiting local co-advisors for *physical safety* and *economic survival* concerns, one key qualification might be that they are *locally respected*. An aid agency with good situational awareness will know who these people are. A second prerequisite might be *hard-won experience in surviving conflict*. People emerging from conflict “are resilient survivors with a wealth of knowledge about the threats, the psychology of perpetrators, and potential practical responses. Recognizing this [...lays] the foundation for the most effective humanitarian protection strategies.”¹⁵⁷ While a foreign advisor can talk about how to move in less noticeable ways through a conflict zone, the local co-advisor can add insight about the habits of a particular garrison. While one can give advice about fitting the essentials of a clinic onto a pack animal, the other can modify that with suggestions about medical supplies that may be locally purchased or substituted. Just as important, locals who are familiar with surviving conflict know not only how to act—but also know what motivates people to act. As in the case of natural disaster mitigation, some preparedness efforts “do not sufficiently take into account people’s subjective perception of risk and acceptable levels of risk. [The populace] holds different perceptions and adopts different coping strategies.”¹⁵⁸ Even a well-grounded foreign advisor might not fully decipher this. Again, mental readiness is as important as tactical preparedness. Yet if anyone can know the psychology of the moment and provide the motivation needed, it will be local co-advisors who have survived conflict to tell about it.

A third qualification might be *former soldiering experience*. Many aid agencies already hire former and active duty soldiers for protection. They “are often drawn from local social networks or former military or police outfits, often with no formal, legal corporate structure.”¹⁵⁹ And those hires may be for armed duty—in contrast to the decommissioned and unarmed co-advisors described here. Foreign private security advisors with past deployment in the given region often have local contacts who could help identify co-advisors with military backgrounds. That, combined with an aid agency’s situational awareness, could constitute a reasonable screening mechanism for identifying former local soldiers who do not have political or commercial conflicts of interest. “The very best teachers... are people who can teach from within the mentality and tactics of the kinds of forces” that will be faced.¹⁶⁰ No one knows the specific weapons and tactics that threaten civilians better than the local soldiers themselves. No one knows the habits and limits of specific armed units better than they do. They know much that civilians should not have to learn by deadly trial and error.

Consider too that preparedness support may be offered at a time when we are very concerned about “what to do” with former soldiers. We try to demobilize and reintegrate them. Hiring former soldiers to help teach civilians about avoiding danger can be one way for them to earn self-esteem, community respect, and income. (Youth who had *voluntarily* soldiered from a sense of duty or protectiveness may be particularly motivated to help their communities brace for violence.) It also offers a lower canopy effort to plug the “security gap” while waiting for macro security sector reforms to trickle down during “post conflict” transitions. Some experts who have worked in DDRR programs “stress the importance... of acknowledging and building on, rather than condemning or disregarding, the skills... that these young people may have learnt in combat.”¹⁶¹ Former conscripts “are an important source of information about prevention and mitigation” of threats, and sometimes “are very motivated to share that information” once restored to civilian life.¹⁶² They have already proven their worth in providing landmine awareness education.

In sum, local co-advisors with a mix of local respect and suitable skills, gained either through hard civilian experience or past military service, build authenticity and acceptance for this effort.

VI. WORKING UNDER THE GUN

To be clear, this paper takes the view that there will always be times and places in which it is too risky to offer preparedness support. Yet, as Anderson and Woodrow assert, it is possible to support the capacities and lessen the vulnerabilities of locals “in conditions of social and political upheaval, and

where the regime in power imposes limits on NGO work. It is even possible...where the situation is extremely volatile and polarized.”¹⁶³ This challenges us to be very creative; to venture far outside our comfort zone for the sake of a humanitarian imperative. In order to work under the gun an agency needs to apply all it has learned about orthodox—and unorthodox—aid operations.

Transparency and consent: things we learn then forget about saving lives. This section is about what conventional wisdom willfully forgets. Our self-image is powerful—perhaps much more so than the historical record. Too often it is an image without deep reflection. The aid world has done all the less-than-transparent and less-than-consensual acts cited below. We have done them but not embraced them. Ask any aid worker about these actions and you might get the rote reply, “That’s not how we do things.” We rigidly view them as “exceptions to the rule” and seldom internalize them or share them. These exceptions were driven by crises, not by general doctrine or tactical skill—and that is the recipe for continued ad-hoc and amateur efforts. When lessons learned are spurned, then our work remains unprofessional, unprepared, thus unnecessarily dangerous.

Discreet service. Aid work has a very powerful institutional culture with indelible iconography and self-imagery. Part of that imagery is our *visibly* doing self-evident good; the public *seeing* our offices, vehicles, and staff on the street or at a distribution site; the powers that be giving their blessing. The notion of low-profile aid has not come easily to us. As orthodox aid providers, we are oriented to a well-flagged architecture of cargo containers, convoys, and camps. Ours is centrally-planned aid delivery that may go from homeland to seaports and airports, up a chain of storage and distribution points further in country. Our bureaucracy spans oceans. Our hubs are in concentrated aid settings; “platforms” that frequently become politicized, criminalized, and militarized. Ours is a hierarchical, logistical enterprise with very clear corridors. We are infrastructure-bound Goliaths: a \$6 landmine can stop \$6 million aid convoy. Delivery goes only as far as a permissive environment allows. If our commodity chains or logistical tails are severed anywhere, aid stops.

And of course, aid has been stopped very often. What did we do in response? We have frequently shifted into nontransparent and nonconsensual modes of operation. History amply demonstrates that both we and the communities we serve have often found discreet humanitarian aid acceptable—indeed imperative. In less-than-transparent and less-than-consensual ways, aid agencies and donors have supported night flights into Biafra, backpack medics into Burma, non-OLS groups into Sudan, Mujahidin-escorted aid into Afghanistan, relief infiltrated into Central America, a land bridge into Cambodia, and an underground railroad into North Korea. In these and other situations we crossed borders without passports, visas, customs approval, radio licensing, registration, host country agreements, or any other trappings of “due respect” for the constituted powers.

Furthermore, in many cases we have practiced defensive deception. Mary Anderson’s landmark “Do No Harm” report provides examples of how aid agencies have used concealment, evasion, and secrecy to trick “warring factions and thugs”.¹⁶⁴ That phrase cuts a large swath: thuggery constitutes much of what is nominally called “soldiering” today. It is increasingly hard to discern a belligerent from a criminal. We are surrounded by war economies, war crimes, and war psychoses that we can barely understand. Despite this doubt—or perhaps because of it—we often reserve unto ourselves the right to act nontransparently. So too, in many cases we have worked through armed non-state actors without the permission of sovereign powers whose authority *we* believe is in question. That is, we reserved unto ourselves the unilateral right, in another’s country, to act nonconsensually.

In this vein, we have often thought it acceptable to outwit those we saw as outlaw powers. In Bosnia “humanitarian personnel often [deemed it] morally justifiable to find surreptitious ways of bypassing rules in order to deliver urgently needed supplies, even when this involved lies and deception.” UNHCR has admitted to smuggling civilians out of besieged areas as well as restricted goods and fuel in. UNPROFOR snuck civilians through checkpoints.¹⁶⁵ Aid actors also discreetly helped break the Serb siege of Gorazde. They moved supplies into communities adjacent to Gorazde

and from there locals took over. A “nightly trek was made by up to 500 hundred people and 50 horses, hauling about 20 tons of food, along with other commodities into Gorazde.”¹⁶⁶ Mules could handle the most clandestine trails. “It was clear to the NGOs that they were siege-busting... UNHCR knew exactly how the trail worked. All involved realized they were contradicting the UN policy of consent...¹⁶⁷ In Chechnya, under threat from Byzantine bloody factions, “most agencies... adopted a decidedly low profile.... This often involved using unmarked vehicles, not displaying agency flags and emblems, keeping movements and activities unpredictable and unannounced, and generally avoiding activities which drew attention to themselves.”¹⁶⁸ These are just a few examples of how aid workers have acted in ways they would usually find unacceptable.

This exceptionality extends to aid donors as well. Many donor governments have supported the discreet types of activities cited above. They are known to privatize and outsource delicate aid when conventional, consensual channels will not work. Sometimes enormous amounts of funding are moved this way. In 1981, solidarity and faith-based groups in Sudan formed the *Emergency Relief Desk* in order to clandestinely move aid cross-border into Eritrea where social service arms of the Eritrean and Tigrayan opposition groups ran distribution. Mainstream donors became comfortable enough with this tenuous neutrality to channel hundreds of millions in aid through the ERD to these local structures.¹⁶⁹ As another example, in the 1950s British churches formed the *International Defense and Aid Fund* in order to clandestinely channel money for the legal defense of Apartheid opponents and for relief to their families. Between the time that the IDAF was outlawed in 1966 and unbanned in 1990, some £100 million was quietly funneled through it from citizens, UN agencies, and Sweden, Norway, Holland, India, and to a lesser extent, the US and Britain.¹⁷⁰

Discreet reporting. What is the most provocative thing that an aid agency can do to host powers? Bring opprobrium and punishment down on them. We do it frequently; sometimes openly, other times secretly. This refers to the extensive human rights monitoring and reporting that humanitarians do. It has risen to the level of *policy*. Most of the leading guidance to aid workers today on how they can help protect civilians includes the recommendation to quietly monitor and report human rights abuses.

As Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier states, “giving confidential information to human rights groups might be regarded by the authorities as clandestine, suspicious, and subversive.”¹⁷¹ So we do it without the permission or awareness of our “host” powers. There has never been a human rights field report that was first taken over to the local Colonel’s office for editorial review. There has never been an NGO-host country agreement stipulating that the former may report any illegal acts by the latter. Reporting requires confidentiality so witnesses will be willing to give testimonials about abuses or war crimes. Confidentiality means secrecy. We discreetly transmit such reports out of the country.

Our reporting about atrocities is intended to have *consequences*. It is intended to help “end the impunity” that armed groups often enjoy. Ending impunity implies punishment. These reports make their way to media streams, rights campaigns, ad-hoc tribunals, truth commissions, governments, and the international criminal court. They can then become the basis for economic, diplomatic or judicial sanctions—even part of the rationale (real or rhetorical) for military intervention. “There are aid organizations who expend a great deal of effort essentially conducting investigations for the ICC. There are donors who willingly fund this sort of activity.”¹⁷² Our rights reporting is thus a direct challenge to some in power which is why we do not do it openly. Citing the risk of reprisal, aid agencies often report rights abuse privately instead of publicly. This is a clear admission that our hosts would not approve of this action and so must be circumvented by passing “delicate” information through “discreet” channels.

As A. Walter Dorn notes, “NGOs are capable of gathering information in ways that would be out of bounds for the UN... Some NGOs manage to ‘fly under the sovereignty radar’... because they can disguise or justify their investigative work.”¹⁷³ But even the UN has pushed those “bounds”. UN country offices are expected to “provide information on potential sources of conflict... it can be sent to the UN Situation Center that has a bank of fax machines equipped with encoders and decoders.” Some

staff offices now even have encryption software for their e-mail. ¹⁷⁴ Controlling powers have no idea what is being said about them. It seems there is nothing remarkable about humanitarian intelligence or counter-intelligence. As Marc Vincent observes, “Few would argue against an increased role [by aid agencies] in discreetly collecting human rights information and passing it on to more appropriate actors for intervention.” ¹⁷⁵

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None of us feel this is “how we do things” yet all of us agree that, when they became necessary, these steps saved millions of lives. So as it turns out, we actually do have a flexible mindset and an ability to learn the skill sets necessary for discreet aid. The obvious questions are: Why should we continually re-learn? And why should civilians in today’s conflicts not benefit from the learning curve of civilians in yesterday’s conflicts?

Given that the numerous examples above often involved foreign personnel and foreign programs on sovereign soil, they are *much more provocative than anything proposed here*. After all, this paper is about building on indigenous practices. It is about empowering civilians in their own homeland so that after we are forced out they can better assure their own safety. Regardless, preparedness support can be very sensitive which is why this paper has stressed cutting edge precedents (in community policing, conflict early warning, emergency livelihoods, and remote and low-profile programming) that can be taken to the next logical level.

Preparedness support is completely flexible on the questions of transparency and consent. Its final formulation is determined by you and your local counterparts’ reading of the situation at hand. You pick and chose from its menu of options. You phase your commitment to support local capacity for self-preservation up or down depending upon circumstance.

Fold in, phase in. *The beginnings of preparedness support can be almost imperceptible.* As soon as you start to fold or nest preparedness “messages” into your daily work you have essentially begun. For instance: children—avoid areas where abduction occurs, women—reduce nonessential movement and walk in groups; families—arrange reunification points. It can start with the aid workers already on staff before any advisors are even recruited. It can start by piggybacking on current projects before initiating any “stand-alone” preparedness efforts. For instance: invite wardens to that security training that you have planned for expatriate staff, and tweak the curriculum. Channel some money from your microenterprise project into micro grants for families that prepare “asset protection” or “risk reduction” plans. It can start with a phase-in that improves buy-in and future execution. For instance: local staff or partners can do *homework* on discreet service delivery by training on mobile equipment, memorizing certain protocols, identifying innocuous buildings for future use, finding merchants who would participate in resource transfer arrangements—and much, much more.

Adjust the pedagogy. Your choice of pedagogy will be influenced by how problematic a setting is and how sensitive given options are. If a setting is very tense then drop some actions or convey them through a more prudent pedagogy. After all, *capacity can be supported in a variety of ways ranging from demonstration and drill on down to discreet discussion.*

Although capacity building can at times take the form of “training” we and our donors must not limit this initiative to typical training formats led by formal “trainers”. Such format and formality can attract unwanted attention and may not even be the best way to share information. For example, the best teachers of economic survival may be *elders* who faced these threats before. The best teachers of physical safety may be *survivors* from neighboring areas who can quietly tell what steps they took to withstand violence. They bring not just tactics—but lived experiences; the telling of hard-learned knowledge that overcame any attitudes or behaviors which were barriers to survival. And some of the best formats for capacity support may be ones that are less obvious to belligerents such as “counseling” sessions, chalk talk, dramatization, and sand tables (scaled relief models of actual terrain that allow

tactical practice and planning). Many informal community teaching methods can be borrowed from the fields of disaster preparedness and landmine awareness education.

Recall too the topic of human rights and how we change our methods of communication (and our stance on transparency) depending upon the context. If we merely want to teach about rights to willing audiences, we do so in open forums. But if we want to gather facts from victims of rights abuses, then confidentiality—secrecy—is the ethical rule. We hide victims’ identities and, as noted, report abuses secretly. Same subject, altered context, different method. And it begs the question: if we can talk very discreetly with people *after* they become victims in order to report violators, then why not talk very discreetly with them *before* they are victimized so they might better avoid those violators?

Control the message. People may underestimate or overestimate risk; both states of mind can be dangerous. Either way, messages about their vulnerability (or not) should be hard-linked to messages about their capacity so they feel neither panicked nor complacent. Our ability to be of support will depend upon careful treatment of perceptions. Aid settings can be rife with rumor and propaganda. Unless we carefully convey any need for preparedness we can spark trouble. There can be a fine line between raising a “healthy respect” for danger and causing a panic. An agency with strong credibility and situational awareness (which includes monitoring how its own messages are being interpreted) can do this. Fortunately, many agencies have had experience creating refugee information networks to convey vital facts in restive camps. They know the critical role of facts *and* perceptions for locals.

Emphasize traditional themes and groups. It matters how we frame and phrase sensitive work. For that reason, UNHCR refers to its community policing with camp guards, wardens, patrols, and watch teams as “refugee empowerment.” So too, health agencies refer to violence as a “public health issue”. They monitor and report abuses under a veil of confidentiality and the aura of acceptability that comes from a health worker’s service to the elderly, women, and children. When MSF, for example, speaks out against abuses, it does so through the legitimizing lens of health work.¹⁷⁶ Likewise, some livelihood experts find that phrasing protection concerns in terms of economic threat “can provide a less contentious way of engaging in protection issues.”¹⁷⁷ The framework of traditional services and vulnerable groups can create “points of entry” that are “less threatening to authorities.”¹⁷⁸ Save the Children-US has “counseled families” on safe movement tactics as conflict draws near so as to reduce the incidence of separation. They call it “community awareness-raising”.¹⁷⁹

Many agencies do “emergency education” and “disaster risk reduction” in anticipation of natural hazards. The theme or mindset of such work parallels what is proposed in this paper. As the head of America’s foremost aid consortium says, “Disaster risk reduction can mitigate the impact of every type of hazard—earthquake, flood, cyclone, *conflict*... NGOs can implement low-cost interventions that go far to reduce vulnerabilities and increase the capacities of communities to cope.” [Emphasis added]¹⁸⁰ Such projects use many of the skill sets proposed in this paper. They: assess community vulnerability; draw up hazard maps; monitor risks; enhance local early warning through clear command and control; conduct simulation exercises and evacuation drills; identify secure shelter at safe secondary sites; train in first aid and psycho-social care; identify blood types; learn search and rescue procedures; cache supplies; assemble packs for flight; and more. Preparedness support can quite logically be framed as community risk reduction aimed at helping women, children, and families through emergencies. Controlling powers may be more likely to see this as concern for vulnerable groups—the traditional rubric of aid work. Finally, preparedness may sometimes be cast as a “crime avoidance” campaign that publicly stresses criminality rather than conflict. Political and criminal violence are very often indistinguishable. This creates an opportunity to say that the safety measures are in response to thieves and thugs (rather than a political or military entity) which might be deemed less provocative.

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Of course, even with highly capable advisors and innovative ways of working under the gun, offering preparedness support still comes down to a risk-benefit calculation.

VII. A RISK–BENEFIT CALCULATION

This paper gives a lot of attention to *physical security*, but clearly direct violence is less of a risk than the indirect effects of violence such as the collapse of *economic sustenance* and *local services*. For instance, “only 0.4% all deaths across DR Congo from were attributed directly to violence.”¹⁸¹ In conflicts the world over, the majority die preventable deaths due to the disruptions caused by violence. This means millions die away from the shooting. Likewise, the preparations suggested in this paper could often be implemented far from any belligerent. Yet having said that, even efforts to brace local sustenance and services for the impact of violence will face challenges and risks.

Inherent risk. We cannot calculate in a vacuum the risks and benefits of preparedness steps. What are the *existing* risks and which way are they trending? Risk is relative. The premise stated at the outset of this paper is that preparedness support is warranted when all other protections are failing and locals will perhaps one day suffer violence alone. If we stay with a failing course of action, then should we not be held accountable for the opportunity cost of not trying an alternative? One purpose of this paper is to force upon us the difficult question in the face of a worsening crisis: *What is the greater risk to locals—getting carefully prepared for inevitable violence, or not?* The question itself confirms that the act of bracing for violence can have unintended consequences. In supporting local ability to survive and serve amid violence we can inadvertently do harm. But by abstaining we can leave them in harm’s way with even worse consequences. So although we can anticipate risks—might there often be a *net benefit*?

We cannot generalize about the risks of preparedness support. Oftentimes it will be more feasible in a village and community development setting than in a camp and emergency relief setting. The populace of a village that is becoming worried about approaching violence might *not yet* be militarized or politicized, nor yet riddled with factions or informants. Skeptics cannot deny a temporal truth about bracing for violence: it might be too risky, too little, and too late today—but not, say, *six months ago*. Community development agencies are sometimes on the ground for years building strong situational awareness, reliable local contacts, and trust. Their local staff might be extremely brave and capable. The many thousands of such local and international agencies comprise a vast bulwark for preparedness support. As Anderson and Woodrow argue, development agencies that work in areas prone to strife or war should *anticipate* threats and address people’s vulnerabilities through their development work.¹⁸²

By contrast, agencies in camps and relief settings will at times be too new and too busy to have developed good situational awareness and reliable local contacts. Camps are unnatural polyglots and can become severely politicized or militarized. One can do more harm than good by embarking on protective preparedness without knowing the lay of the land. The target group might be internally divided or intermixed with belligerents. Such divisions might make capacity support a flashpoint, raising the chance of retaliation against the participants. Such intermixing might have us supporting the wrong people who then use these skills for the wrong purposes. (A caveat to this is that *all aid* has the dual potential to strengthen civilians *or* belligerents. If an agency has already verified that its aid in a given place is not being substantially abused, i.e. by feeding soldiers or subsidizing their purchase of weapons, then maybe it is reasonable to conclude that preparedness support would also be feasible.)

So too, the host authority in an aid setting might fear that bracing refugees or IDPs for future risk will make them too aware of dangers lying ahead and thus hesitant to go. When hosts are “actively inducing” them *to go*, such awareness is a complication. Conversely, the rogue powers sometimes found in camps may want residents *to stay* and might worry that decisions about when, where, or how to go home will devolve to the people themselves. Either way, support that raises people’s knowledge

and capacity poses a challenge to controlling powers. So the agency and its local counterparts must consider whether the support is worth possibly provoking those in power. This is not a new puzzle.

The many individuals and institutions (cited on the first page) who have encouraged us to support local capacity for self-preservation are not naive. When the ICRC, for example, advocates helping locals with conflict risk reduction before violence hits, it certainly knows the proposition poses risk. The best we can do is approach this with well-grounded assessment and well-qualified locals (wardens and co-advisors) and expatriates.

Assessment and evaluation. In order to calculate risks and benefits an aid agency is well advised to deploy to the field a team qualified to assess civilian preparedness. This team would work with a ground contact group to gauge civilian capacities and vulnerabilities in physical safety, economic survival, and local service delivery. (The Cuny Center offers a CVA tool for this purpose.) The team would also map the larger security environment with any of the tools that aid agencies already use. It would *weigh the locals' desire (or not) to be more prepared* for violence and assess the suitability of the agency to offer capacity support. After this entry assessment the team makes recommendations. It might urge “No go.” There will always be times and places when the risks of preparedness support seem too high. Conversely, it might find that some vulnerabilities can be mitigated and capacities augmented all within the bounds of tolerable risk.

An evaluation regimen for preparedness support cannot be detailed in a paper this brief. Clearly it would be anchored to any baseline established by the team entry assessment just described. *Input* indicators can include the number of civilians, wardens, and service providers participating and any resources transferred with the aim of helping them face violence alone. There are also ancillary inputs such as the number of early warning systems established, micro-grants awarded (to families that form asset-protection plans), and beneficiaries reached (by local staff or partners that were able to continue service due to their enhanced capacity). Agencies always find *outcome* indicators, or evidence of impact, harder to establish. This is especially true when proof of success is that something (like harm) did *not* happen. Key donors like ECHO concede that “quantifying a protection problem and measuring project impact can be very difficult” but add “it is important to try.”¹⁸³ The most insightful appraisal of preparedness support might be post-crisis comparison of populations that chose to participate with adjacent populations that did not. Sound conclusions can be drawn by seeing which populations best survived violence in terms of measurable physical safety, economic survival, and service delivery.

Whose risk? Whose calculation? The prior section recommended that an entry assessment “weigh the locals’ desire (or not) to be more prepared.” Suppose our beneficiaries, local staff or partners want to brace themselves for the coming violence? How do we tell consenting civilians that it is too dangerous for them to organize for their own survival?

*“They know they are on their own... they have to find their own solutions—they will go around the problem of survival one way or another, until they find a way. This is their survival. It is not the governments, or the foreigners, or the INGOs or any formal organization. The people [must] create a system to survive.”*¹⁸⁴

One critical thing to ask about a risk-benefit calculation is *whose* point of view does it come from? Those who smell the spent ordnance and flesh are more motivated than anyone else to act. For them there is no “compassion fatigue” for their own people; no lack of a “domestic constituency” for action. There is no diplomatic or bureaucratic reason for inaction; no humanitarian “alibi” or “fig leaf” for half-way measures. There is no ambiguous mandate or definition or nomenclature to endlessly debate and no “exit strategy” as a precondition for entering the fray. This is their calculus; their own survival. The strongest humanitarian actions and sacrifices are local to local. This does not make all of their subsequent actions and sacrifices wise—but it is the vital starting point.

Our local counterparts might be willing to cross a line that we feel poses prohibitive risk. But as Mary Anderson recounts, “They tell us—again and again—that they will decide and take their own chances when they collaborate with us, even up to and including death, if they believe in what they are doing. [They say] ‘We are more aware than you of where the lines are drawn.’” And, of course, “we respect this deeply.”¹⁸⁵

Neutrality. There are many parallels, both in logic and tactic, between disaster programs across the world and the kind of conflict risk reduction described in this paper. One reply to this observation is that manmade conflict, unlike natural disaster, is “political” and so helping locals brace for violence can put our neutrality at risk. The concern is always legitimate, but it does point to another disconnect: we eagerly help people prepare their escape from deadly rains—but not from deadly raids. Since some interpretations of neutrality can actually inhibit us from providing endangered locals with the most relevant kind of support, it is worth reexamining how “principle” affects our calculations.

Myths of neutrality. (1) “We are neutral”. A wide range of observers agree that humanitarians tend to be neutral in intent—but rarely in impact. The principle of neutrality forbids us to take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. Some of the advocacy that aid agencies undertake is at times perceived as a provocative violation of neutrality, but aside from that we tend not to have “ideological” agendas. Yet the question of whether or not we are seen to “take sides” can have much more to do with our work than our words. In internal conflicts, war is made on civilians and our work to prevent or undo that harm actually protects or rehabilitates one side—and puts us on the opposite side of those inflicting the harm. As Prendergast and Duffield note, it can be “impossible to be neutral within the logic of internal war.”¹⁸⁶ Lautze and Hammond add that “neutrality of intention does not necessarily translate into neutrality of fact. [...Indeed,] neutrality of impact appears impossible.”¹⁸⁷ As the Genocide Prevention Task Force concludes, “offering civilians physical safety and interrupting belligerent actions are not neutral acts.”¹⁸⁸

(2) “Neutrality protects us and those we serve”. Our adherence to neutrality and belligerents’ corresponding respect for the principle has often helped assure the rights to provide and receive aid, particularly in the earlier decades of the modern aid era. But there has never been a Golden Age of humanitarian action in which our principles were never interfered with by reality. As Fred Cuny concluded years ago, “humanitarian neutrality in a civil war is a distinctly western concept, not necessarily welcome in the third world.”¹⁸⁹ Western aid is now held suspect in wide swaths of the globe. In the minds of some “the provision of aid itself justifies attack, in that it represents an obstacle to the objectives of belligerent groups... [And in] the worst settings, efforts to ‘project an image of neutrality’ and ‘gain accommodation... do not carry much weight.’¹⁹⁰ The harmful effects upon our work of the changing nature of conflict and decline in respect for IHL has been very widely noted. Neutrality is no longer the shield for aid workers it once seemed to be. We and our local counterparts are increasingly attacked. And to the extent that abusive powers get to define neutrality (by forcing the allocation of aid to be faction-based rather than needs-based aid, or by prohibiting protection work as “meddling”)—and we concede—then the value of such “neutrality” to those we serve is diminished too. We make these concessions often. Indeed, perverse interpretations of neutrality can seal their fate. This is the challenge to aid work writ large amid internal conflicts and by no means unique to the initiative proposed in this paper.

Compromising principle in the name of neutrality. Some “suggest that by surrendering the pretence of complete neutrality, agencies jeopardize the tenuous ‘deal’ with belligerents to ensure access for relief aid to civilian populations.” But the way in which IHL is widely flouted suggests that “deal” is already extremely tenuous.¹⁹¹ Pragmatic sacrifices on the altar of neutrality are thought to protect the aid enterprise and thus human lives. That might be true over time. But in many instances, kneeling before abusive powers can mean that we will not pursue the most appropriate protections. *Since neutrality too often will not protect us or those we serve, then we need to be very careful about*

what we avoid doing in its name. If, for example, we do not support the ability of locals to endure future violence because it might get us kicked out, then, in effect, we privilege our ability to stay today over their ability to survive tomorrow. Whatever deal we in Darfur thought we had with Khartoum proved illusory. We were expelled in 2009 without ever having taken the chance to help brace locals to face violence alone. Suppose instead that from 2003 onward we had been more oriented toward *our* vulnerability and *their* capacity?

There are many principles to which we must be accountable. But the Humanitarian Charter of the Sphere Project affirms “our fundamental accountability must be to those we seek to assist.” It speaks of the “primacy” and “paramount” purpose of alleviating human suffering. The core principle of our work is humanity—not the derivative principle of neutrality as expediently interpreted by abusive groups.

Restoring neutrality by restoring local ownership. MSF’s Marc DuBois says that we “no longer control the meaning of our protection activities as interpreted by those with power, guns or blood on their hands... If people employ the humanitarian community as their protector, then any hope of neutrality vis-à-vis the perpetrators is destroyed. Instead, we become the enemy of the beneficiaries’ enemies.”¹⁹² We are the virtuous rescuers. From the fields of Solferino to the Genocide Convention; from “without borders” movements to “rights-based aid” to “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine, we cast *ourselves* as protectors while avoiding a historical fact: most civilian protection is *self*-protection. Generally-speaking, the foundation of our self-image is humanitarian rescue; the basis of solicitation for monies is humanitarian rescue; and the fig leaf for not stopping violence is humanitarian rescue. “Underpinning the logic of institutional preservation is the aid community’s ingrained belief that humanitarian action is indispensable to the survival of [conflict’s victims]... This is the axiomatic starting point for humanitarian action.”¹⁹³ Perhaps the stronger our feeling of indispensability than the weaker our belief in the “victims’” ability?

Samantha Power captures the common view of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine in saying that if host governments are unwilling or unable to protect their citizens “then responsibility vests upward to the international community”.¹⁹⁴ We hear very little about how responsibility and capacity for survival also vest downward. Instead, as one distinguished author on humanitarian aid says, we tend to quickly fall into “discussing our role as external protectors, neglecting to consider how the people themselves try to physically avoid threats.”¹⁹⁵

We have elevated ourselves to protection’s center stage—and that mission creep compromises our neutrality (and security). But by reducing this centrality we may improve perceptions of our neutrality. There are two ways to do this. First, we can deemphasize any programs of doubtful protective value: we can stop and ask ourselves if any of our activities in a given country are showing little benefit or perhaps even raising risks. If yes, we can step back from them. Our work on human rights, conflict resolution, civil society, good governance, rule of law, ending impunity, gender equity, and social justice inherently threatens abusive powers. It may be seen as much more provocative than much which is offered in this paper. Abusive powers may well be more incensed by our rights reports than by support for mothers to access black market medicines, as cited here. They may well be more angered by our political dabbling and social engineering than by efforts to prepare family livelihoods for violence, as cited here. If an effort has had a poor benefit-risk trajectory, it could be scaled back. We will not give up “ownership” of protection. So if some elements of our protection portfolio (and its marketing) are to be deemphasized, then something else needs to be emphasized.

Second, we can emphasize indigenous self-protection. After all, locals have primordial authority to help their own families and communities and do not face the same sovereignty-based obstacles to consent and access that foreigners do. Contrast our often egocentric approach with the one described here: protection built on local inclinations, shared learning and advice-giving, and local ownership. The “implementers” are those living in *their own homeland* taking steps to protect *their own people*

probably after *we are gone*. Ironically, this approach likely would be marketed as a sexy new form of humanitarian rescue. But it is harder to construe such an approach as a violation of neutrality.

VIII. THE NEXT FEW STEPS

This paper will not likely be enough to persuade operational agencies to offer preparedness support to their endangered beneficiaries, local staff and partners. Thus it is suggested that the following quite achievable steps be taken to help clarify and operationalize a way forward for them. Together these steps can provide the validation, guidance, and funding that agencies may need to pilot something like preparedness support:

- (1) Further documentation of
 - civilians' less-recognized tactics for self-preservation when facing violence alone; and
 - ways that emergency responders already support local capacity to cope with violence alone.
- (2) Expert panel to investigate and perhaps endorse
 - the tactical assumptions of an approach like preparedness support (drawing on the opinion of experts in unconventional security, emergency livelihoods, and cultural anthropology); and
 - the doctrinal implications of an approach like preparedness support (drawing on the opinion of leaders in humanitarian aid and donorship).
- (3) Further guidance for agencies that could include
 - *white paper*—a concise paper to the aid world on the justifications, limitations, prerequisites, and design of something like preparedness support;
 - *curriculum*—refined deployable “advisory modules” on physical safety, economic survival, and local service delivery in the face of violence (optional menu format);
 - *assessment*—CVA tools (re: local capacity) and self-assessment tools (re: agency’s suitability) to help agencies reach informed “Go” or “No go” decisions; and
 - *hiring guidance*—advice on hiring and preparing scopes of work for private security specialists and emergency livelihood experts who, jointly with local co-advisors, can facilitate something like preparedness support.
- (4) Funding support to agencies so they can
 - hire and deploy an assessment team;
 - hire expert security and livelihood advisors; and
 - offer micro-grants to at-risk families or communities that prepare either “asset protection” or “risk reduction” plans.

IX. CONCLUSION

Authoritative aid leaders have insisted that given how often our work is incapacitated we should invest more in local capacities for self-preservation amid violence. Support for locals' physical safety, economic survival, and service delivery tactics has never been as systematized as is proposed here. This paper has overviewed a range of ways that locals respond to threats and how our own responses—lifesaving though they are—often do not connect well. Fortunately there has been experimentation and precedent in our work that suggest ways to more effectively support civilians' self-protection.

Our work in community policing has been important for its local and tactical orientation. But this paper urges a greater community role in response (not just warning) and a shift toward policing skills more appropriate for all civilians (not just “police”) and for full-fledged civil strife (not just crime or negotiable violence). So too, “third generation” conflict early warning schemes also emphasize local control. But this paper argues for a Plan B. There is a glaring need to prepare for the failure to prevent

conflict, and to wire warning toward those actually in harm's way. The advisory modules offered could greatly enhance local capacity for *physical safety*.

Our work in emergency livelihoods has been important for extending aid work from “providing relief” to efforts that quite thoughtfully protect and promote beneficiaries’ future livelihoods. But this paper urges that we also help prepare civilian livelihoods for deadly relapses into violence; that we contingency plan for a possible forced separation from beneficiaries and an end of our presence and programming. It urges that our livelihood approaches be more rooted in locals’ own alternative and “unorthodox” responses. The advisory modules offered could greatly enhance local capacity for *economic survival*.

Our work in remote programming has been important for those occasions when it supported the low-profile work of our local staff and partners. These precedents show that we have trusted local counterparts with our operations and that they have performed with bravery and integrity. But this paper urges our support for skill sets and for a service delivery architecture (deconstructed) that can make local aid provision safer and more effective amid violence. The advisory modules offered could greatly enhance local capacity for *local service delivery*.

Along the transitions and fatal fault lines of our work, the beneficiaries we are separated from try to learn survival, and our former local staff and partners try to relearn service. But rarely in the many prior months or years that we spend with them do we try to help them anticipate and cope with those lethal learning curves. We try in many ways to prevent violence or protect them from it—yet those attempts often fail. Of all the approaches to protection that exist, the approach described here will be the last one standing because it supports the abilities of the very people who are left standing alone as violence shuts the world out. It is now time to pilot and perfect something like preparedness support.

X. ENDNOTES

¹ Hugo Slim and Luis Enrique Eguren, *Humanitarian Protection: An ALNAP Guidance Booklet*, August 2003, Draft 1; pp. 14-15. **See also:** the follow up volume by Slim, Hugo and Bonwick, Andrew, *Protection, An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies*, ALNAP and the Overseas Development Institute, London, 2005; p. 19. The authors urge interveners to “build on people’s own self-protection capacity. Humanitarian common sense affirms the value of people’s own knowledge, capacity, insight and innovation in any given situation that threatens them.... People are seldom passive when they feel at risk: they engage in a range of finely judged actions to cope, respond, adapt and survive.”

² *Fighting Back: Child and Community-Led Strategies to Avoid Children’s Recruitment into Armed Forces and Groups in West Africa*, Save the Children UK, London, 2005; p. viii.

³ Sorcha O’Callaghan and Sara Pantuliano, *Protective Action: Incorporating Civilian Protection into Humanitarian Response*, HPG Report No. 26, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, London, December 2007; pp. 4 and 35

⁴ Mark Frohardt, Diane Paul and Larry Minear, *Protecting Human Rights: The Challenge to Humanitarian Organizations*, Occasional Paper #35, the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Brown University, Providence, 1999; p. 103. The authors state that, “While much of the focus these days is on international capacity, local protection mechanisms also need more attention and support. Local people are the best judge of their own protection needs and are often experienced in coping with difficulties as they arise... At the same time, the vulnerability of local actors points to the need for well-considered strategies of outside presence and support to identify indigenous protection mechanisms and find creative ways to reinforce their efforts.” **See also:** Antonio Donini, et.al., *Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles, Power, and Perceptions*, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, September 2006; p. 17. The authors find that “humanitarian agencies in the field need to systematically acknowledge and build upon local capacities and coping strategies.” **See also:** Roberta Cohen (of the Brookings-CUNY Project on Internal Displacement), quoted in *Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced: Changing the Humanitarian Lens*, Report of the Seminar in Oslo, Norway, organized by the Norwegian Refugee Council in cooperation with the Norwegian University of technology and Science, 9 November 2001; p. 19. Ms. Cohen states that strengthening the response strategies of groups at risk is one of the most important ways we can help.

⁵ *Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy Paper, New York, December 1999; p. 7.

⁶ *Professional Standards for Protection Work*, International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, October 2009; pp. 10, 21, 23 and 24.

⁷ *Enhancing Protection for Civilians in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence*, International Committee of the Red Cross Geneva, September 2008; p. 47.

⁸ *Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons* (provisional release), Global Protection Cluster Working Group, Geneva, December 2007; pp. 10 and 13.

⁹ *No Refuge: The Challenge of Internal Displacement*, Internal Displacement Unit, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, June 2003; p. 70.

¹⁰ *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, UN Security Council, S/2001/331, New York, 30 March 2001; p. 18. **See also:** Kofi Asomani (the UN Special Coordinator on Internal Displacement), quoted in *Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced: Changing the Humanitarian Lens*, Report of the Seminar in Oslo, Norway, organized by the Norwegian Refugee Council in cooperation with the Norwegian University of technology and Science, 9 November 2001; p. 16. Asomani found that “empowering vulnerable populations is a dimension of the international community’s efforts that needs to be expanded.”

¹¹ *Humanitarian Protection: DG ECHO’s Funding Guidelines*, European Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid, Brussels, 21 April 2009; p. 9.

¹² Nils Carstensen, *Global Advocacy and Local Protection Needs: A Hit and Miss Affair?*, presented at the conference “Protecting People in Conflict & Crisis Responding to the Challenges of a Changing World”, sponsored by the Refugee Studies Center and the Humanitarian Policy Group, Oxford, September 22-24, 2009; p. 2.

¹³ Antonio Donini, et. al., *Mapping the Security Environment: Understanding the Perceptions of Local Communities, Peace Support Operations, and Assistance Agencies*, Feinstein International Famine Center, Medford, MA, June 2005; p. 62. **See also:** Ashley South, Malin Perhult and Nils Carstensen, Draft: *Conflict and Survival: Self-protection in Southeast Burma*, Danish Church Aid, Copenhagen, April, 2010; p. 3. This draft report finds that we outsiders have “our own views about what constitutes protection;” notions that we often import and impose “without examining the views or realities of local people.” Even when we “elicit local participation” it tends to be for the implementation of our predesigned objectives.

¹⁴ Sue Lautze and Dr. John Hammock, *Coping with Crisis, Coping with Aid: Capacity Building, Coping Mechanisms and Dependency, Linking Relief and Development*, for the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee, by The International Famine Center, Tufts University, Medford, MA, December 1996; p. 2.

¹⁵ Wendy James, *War and Survival in Sudan’s Frontierlands: Voices from the Blue Nile*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007; pp. 122-123.

- ¹⁶ C. Gilbert, "Studying Disaster: Changes in the Main Conceptual Tools," in Quarantelli, E. L. ed., *What is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question*, 1998, Routledge, London and New York; p. 98.
- ¹⁷ Liam Mahony, *Proactive Presence: Field Strategies for Civilian Protection*, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva, 2006; p. 73.
- ¹⁸ Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising From the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1989; pp. 11 and 13.
- ¹⁹ Kevin Heppner, *Survival, Sovereignty and Resistance: Contending Perspectives on Karen Internal Displacement in Burma*, a working paper for the Karen Human Rights Group, March 2005; p. 13.
- ²⁰ Max P. Glaser, *Negotiated Access: Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Nonstate Actors*, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002-2003; pp. 59 and 60.
- ²¹ Andrew Bonwick, *Protection in Colombia: A Bottom-up Approach*, HPG Background Paper, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, December 2006; p. 14.
- ²² Andrew Bonwick, "Protection in Colombia a Bottom-up Approach", *HPG Background Paper*, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, London, December, 2006; p. 7.
- ²³ David R. Smock, *Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict in Africa*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, February 1996; p. 7.
- ²⁴ Ian Smillie, Ed., *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*, Humanitarianism and War Project, Tufts University, Kumarian Press, 2001; p. 188.
- ²⁵ Sue Lautze, *Saving Lives and Livelihoods: the Fundamentals of a Livelihoods Strategy*, Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University; p. 17
- ²⁶ Ian Smillie, Ed., *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*, Humanitarianism and War Project, Tufts University, Kumarian Press, 2001.
- ²⁷ *Preventing Deadly Conflict: Final Report*, Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, Washington DC, December 1997; pp. xxxvi and xxxvii.
- ²⁸ Madeline K. Albright and William S. Cohen, *Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers*, Genocide Prevention Task Force, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The American Academy of Diplomacy, and the Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 2008; pp. 69 and 70.
- ²⁹ *The Brahimi Report on Peacekeeping Reform*, August 2002, Executive Summary p. 3.
- ³⁰ Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas in Action*, Polity Press, Cambridge MA, 2007; pp. 110-11. The author did considerable work for the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. He states here that one of the Commission's "essential results" was that "if a state is unwilling or unable to exercise its protective responsibilities for the rights of its own citizens, it forfeits the moral claim to be treated as legitimate. Its sovereignty, as well as its right to nonintervention, is suspended."
- ³¹ *The State of the World's Refugees 2006: Human Displacement in the New Millennium*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, May 2006; p. 79.
- ³² Roy Herrmann, *Mid-term Review of a Canadian Security Deployment to the UNHCR Programme in Guinea*, EPAU/2003/04, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, October 2003; pp. 8 and 9.
- ³³ Sorcha O'Callaghan and Sara Pantuliano, *Protective Action: Incorporating Civilian Protection into Humanitarian Response*, HPG Report No. 26, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, London, December 2007; p. 35. **See also:** *Displaced Women and Girls at Risk: Risk Factors, Protection Solutions and Resource Tools*, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York, 2006; p. 22. The report says that training and deployment of "refugee security personnel can greatly enhance the safety and security of women and children." It adds that such refugee personnel can engage in patrolling, night watch, mediation, crowd control and detention procedures.
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- ³⁵ *Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons* (provisional release), Global Protection Cluster Working Group, Geneva, December 2007; p. 192.
- ³⁶ John Mitchell, et. al., *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action in 2004: Capacity Building*, ALNAP, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2005; p. 51.
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- ³⁸ Claude Bruderlein and Fleur Johns, *Inter-Agency Expert Consultation on Protected Areas*, Harvard University, 23-24 February, 1999; p. 12.
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- ⁴³ *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, UN Security Council, S/2001/331, 30 March 2001; p. 12.
- ⁴⁴ *No Refuge: The Challenge of Internal Displacement*, Internal Displacement Unit, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, June 2003; p. 92.
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- ⁴⁷ In Colombia, threatened populations have been known to “hide messages in local radio broadcasts to warn people of danger.” There were also instances when people blew cattle horns “to warn others of the proximity of armed forces.” See: Marc Vincent and Birgitte Refslund Sørensen, Editors, *Caught between Borders, Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced*, Pluto Press with Norwegian Refugee Council, London, 2001; p. 208.
- ⁴⁸ Casey A. Barrs, *Locally Led Advance Mobile Aid*, unpublished, The Cuny Center, Washington, DC, 2007.
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