



Center for Civilians in Harm's Way

PREPAREDNESS & Development Aid

This paper is one in a series that examines how the act of helping civilians brace for violence can complement and benefit efforts in many fields related to peace and conflict.

Local capacity for self-preservation has powerful implications for protection, human rights, nonviolent resistance, development aid, disaster risk reduction, early warning and response, humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, and security sector reform, as well as efforts to manage conflict, reduce recruitment into violence, mitigate displacement, and prevent conflict returning.

The knock-on effects of civilians being better prepared for inexorable violence have scarcely been considered (even within the field of protection). Nothing else has such crosscutting potential as preparedness: It is the hidden common denominator of our work.

Aid service providers will often be the best situated to support local preparedness. But by getting better joined up with such providers, the practitioners in these other fields may see a very impactful multiplier upon their work on the ground.

Anticipate and limit conflict's disruption of development

1. There is no sector of development work that cannot be undone by violence. "One in every three development dollars was lost over the last 30 years due to reverses from conflict or disaster."¹ As is said, "Conflict is development in reverse." How can helping to mitigate such impacts *not* be a core concern of the development community? (Conflict also forces evermore funding from development aid to humanitarian aid. How can helping reduce that trend *not* be a core concern of the development community?) As USIP's Nancy Lindborg contends, "we will need to double down on our efforts to shock-proof development."²
2. There are many ways to lessen the destruction of what development work has accomplished. In regard to private assets—families and communities facing violence often find unconventional ways to cushion and conserve, adapt and substitute, or strip and transfer their assets. In regard to public assets—civilians often create temporary "workarounds" that bridge the damage being done to infrastructure (of transportation, electricity, water, banking & finance, health, and education) until the day peace and reconstruction can occur.
3. While there is under such circumstances a net degradation of development gains, these efforts keep many more assets and modified services in play than would be the case otherwise.
4. But more is involved here than the self-interest of protecting development investments. There is, according to Mary Anderson, a "special responsibility" for development agencies working in areas prone to strife or war to *anticipate* dangers and *address* people's vulnerabilities and capacities through their work.³ Quite arguably, such responsibility can even take on shades of "liability" when it is the modernity, western values, secular humanism, or (conversely) overt

faith-based messages of “development” work itself which draw attack. How can anticipation of these responsibilities and liabilities *not* be a core concern of the development community?

Stay relevant to people in harm’s way.

5. The key word above is “anticipate.” A development organization that does not adapt its mission in the face of growing conflict, risks losing its relevance to the populace. Should a *health* agency that provided walk-in services continue this practice even if beneficiaries’ access is increasingly blocked by violence—or should it develop a discreet mobile outreach capacity?
6. Should *agriculture* extension agencies keep promoting standard farming and animal husbandry practice even if it is increasingly vulnerable to predation—or should they adjust somewhat and help civilians diversify into livelihood options less subject to attack? For instance, 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 helping mitigate the impacts of conflict and displacement on development.)
7. Should an agency that works with communities in a *banking, lending* and *finance* sector that is increasingly disrupted by conflict perhaps shift some of its focus to helping locals brace their non-formal banking and remittance networks to better absorb the coming blows?
8. As violence grows, do agencies concerned with *food security* or *health* not have an obligation to anticipate the impacts of a collapse of sustenance and a breakdown of service infrastructure and realign their work accordingly? For example, concerns like malnutrition and disease can be fairly preventable during normal times. But should such agencies working in locations of deteriorating security not expect and plan for a “new normal” in which these two threats become far more dangerous than direct violence ever will?
9. Support of local preparedness enables agencies to get development work onto a conflict footing. Violence will indeed set progress back—but a foundation of readiness will better enable locals to devise or attain life essentials during the months or years that may pass until they access humanitarian relief. The aid industry has long lamented its “relief-to-development” gap. Yet from a civilian perspective, the gap between development’s collapse and relief’s arrival is far deadlier. Preparedness should be built when development—not relief—agencies are still on the scene. But a stove-piped view of our collective work has inhibited this approach.
10. Hundreds of methods by which locals try to bridge this transition with ad-hoc sustenance and services of their own are detailed in the Center’s companion report: *How Civilians Survive Violence: A Preliminary Inventory*.⁴ Praise of civilians’ resilience should err by romanticizing. Local providers and populations do not spontaneously know all they will need to about survival. For a deadly period they may first rely, as Fred Cuny noted, on “habit, instinct, simple cues, and trial and error.”⁵ Typically there is a lethal learning curve—but systematic sharing of what has been learned elsewhere can help shorten that curve. Sharing information and animating action is what development aid agencies *do best*.
11. Helping locals brace for the worst is of course a very sensitive undertaking and development practitioners must take care to do no harm. Yet the dictum has sides, one for commission and the other for omission: neither put them in harm’s way—nor leave them in harm’s way ill-prepared.

Strengthen the security of local counterparts.

12. Another key word above is “responsibility.” To some degree, all development agencies assume a “duty of care” for their local *staff* and, to a lesser extent, their local *partners* as well. But studies

repeatedly indicate that agencies' support for their local counterparts' security largely remains ad-hoc and belated.

13. However, preparedness support which adjusts the architecture and field craft of aid delivery will help keep local staff and partners safer as violence closes in. Local providers themselves often lead the way in devising discreet profiles and practices so as to operate more safely and effectively amid danger. International partners have begun to experiment with supporting this, as is described on the Center's report, "Why Should We Help Locals Brace for Violence?"
14. Preparedness support is premised on the possibility that international partners may have to withdraw. Clearly, a local provider who is going to face violence alone needs to be safe before it can serve. For this reason, the local counterpart is the first to benefit from preparedness support. It then pivots, takes the lead, and works with local communities on their own preparedness options.
15. A strategic transition like this is something that every development aid agency should proactively strive for. It is described further in a companion paper from this series, "Preparedness and Humanitarian aid."
16. Preparedness support can help development agencies protect development gains, put aid work on a conflict footing, and strengthen their "duty of care" to local counterparts.

Endnotes

¹ Nancy Lindborg, *From Fragility to Resilience*. Found at: <https://www.usaid.gov/frontiers/2014/publication/section-4-from-fragility-to-resilience>.

² Nancy Lindborg, *From Fragility to Resilience*, USAID, 2014. Found at: <https://www.usaid.gov/frontiers/2014/publication/section-4-from-fragility-to-resilience>.

³ Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising From the Ashes*, Westview Press, Boulder and San Francisco, 1989; p. 33.

⁴ Casey A. Barrs, *How Civilians Survive Violence: A Preliminary Inventory*, Center for Civilians in Harm's Way, 2012.

⁵ Barry N. Stein and Frederick C. Cuny, *The Contemporary Practice of Voluntary Migration: Repatriation during Conflict, Reintegration amidst Devastation*, Michigan State University and the Center for the Study of Societies in Crisis, 22 February 1994; p. 9.