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.
There will always be mass violence. There will always be horrific times when we “outsiders” cannot shield civilians despite our avowed responsibility to protect them. Millions died amid internal conflicts in the last 15 years, and there is absolutely no guarantee that the next 15 years will be any better. That is the starting point of this paper: our capacity to protect is very much in doubt. Even when we do “save” civilians it is very often only because they saved themselves first—surviving violence by their wits and wiles for months or years, and then running a deadly gauntlet to reach our camps or safe havens.

Many observers note the critical importance of civilian self-protection, but it appears there have been very few systematic attempts to inventory their tactics and strategies. By and large we “appreciate” civilians’ remarkable capacity for self-preservation but do not act upon it. This preliminary inventory cites protections that civilians the world over have learned time and again as they survive and serve others alone amid violence. Some types of actions cited here have alone saved millions of lives.

This document has three sections: local safety, local sustenance, and local services. Life-critical sustenance and services are an inseparable part of this because civilians often see them as central to their security, often take physical risks to obtain them, and often die in far greater numbers from the collapse of such elemental things than from direct physical violence. The biggest killers amid conflict are not guns or blades but malnutrition and disease—which at times can be anticipated and prepared for.

Each section begins with conventional local efforts to engage dangerous actors and influence events. These good efforts have limits. (In 2009, the ICRC interviewed four thousand people in eight war-torn countries. When asked what civilians living in areas of armed conflict need the most, only 3% chose “to influence decisions that affect them.”) Each section then progresses toward the less conventional actions that civilians attempt. They are often efforts to survive the actors and events that they cannot influence. These too have limits—but tend to be deliberate, balanced, sequenced calculations by the people themselves.

Many of these actions have at time received ad-hoc support by outside agencies, and many others could be supported by well-situated agencies that hire certain additional expertise. (This is the subject of another Cuny Center paper, Preparedness Support, describing how qualified aid agencies can in some situations help brace beneficiaries, local staff and partners for violence while working under the gun.) This document does not urge the support of any particular action; as an inventory it only illustrates what civilians at times do. Self-protection is not a panacea, nor is it easy to support. Yet of all protections, those for physical safety as well as life-critical sustenance and services depicted here will be the last ones standing because they rely on the abilities of the very people who are left standing alone as violence shuts the world out.

This inventory is not comprehensive and the taxonomy used is just one of many plausible ways to organize this discussion. Much here could be debated and rearranged, but the big picture is this: we often lack the capacity to protect, they often learn this
capacity on their own, and we can at times help them with this lethal learning curve.
# How Civilians Survive Violence

## Physical Safety

### Accommodation†

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal engagement</th>
<th>Traditional engagement</th>
<th>Non-formal engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence violent powers and events through organized focus on</strong></td>
<td><strong>Customary processes for justice and peace</strong></td>
<td><strong>Persuade threatening powers that populace is compliant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good governance, rule of law, human rights, autonomy, etc.</td>
<td>Custom law</td>
<td>Comply with demands for intelligence, manpower and material, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, prevention, etc.</td>
<td>Traditional authorities/arbiter of law</td>
<td>Bend to the breaking point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint, lobbying, advocacy, media, etc.</td>
<td>Traditional processes for redress, restitution, intergroup mediation, etc.</td>
<td>Do not overtly organize, speak out or act out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest, nonviolent action</td>
<td>This spills over into many social norms (like public shunning as sanction or deterrent), religious rites (for reconciliation that ends blood feuds or for forgiveness that brings those with blood on their hands back into the community fold), etc.</td>
<td>If compliance becomes too harmful to oneself or endangers others, locals often fake or exaggerate their cooperation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open opposition as long as possible</td>
<td>- Delay, deceit, misreporting, underperforming, selective obedience, etc.</td>
<td>- Delay, deceit, misreporting, underperforming, selective obedience, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When open opposition too dangerous and accommodation not deemed possible</td>
<td>- Transition underground: political struggle</td>
<td>- Transition underground: political and armed struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Disengage</strong></td>
<td>- Transition underground: political and armed struggle</td>
<td>- Transition back: very common to continue probing for reengagement and a formal end to violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Millions survive by managing unequal power relations in non-formal ways, probing for tradeoffs and exemptions to violence and oppression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>† This means compliance in the pragmatic, not partisan, sense. Civilians try to keep concessions survivable while preserving some autonomy and dignity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family and village-level efforts to engage power-holders tend to be non-formal and localized, far below more official domains in which governments and civil society “engage” each other. They may have little to do with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Accommodation here means an effort, ranging from engagement to appeasement, to contain dangerous situations and improve physical safety.
**Present threatening powers with a false identity**

Fake identity documents; alter accent, attire, mannerisms, etc.

- Civic processes between citizens and duty-bearers redressing grievances within the rule of law. Instead, they occur between unequal parties, with the weaker calculating which concessions are the least harmful.
- Feigned (partial) submission is often seen as a way of being at once compliant *and* defiant.

At the breaking point, locals often disengage from and avoid abusive powers.

Outsiders promoting civil society or nonviolent action might urge locals to “speak truth to power”, not fully recognizing the dangers of continued engagement.

**Persuade followers to remain nonaligned and peaceful**

Leaders engage those in populace most at risk of being cowed, incited, attracted, or feeling no choice but to “take sides in a conflict”

- Counter belligerent fear or hate propaganda, slanderous myths, etc.
- Dampen ardor of young males about real nature of war and warriors
- Provide young males outlets (both real and symbolic) for a sense of duty, manhood, respect, honor that might be luring them to violence
- Address safety and life-critical sustenance and services so as to reduce the push/pull forces that can lead to desperate enlistment, premature flight, or preemptive attacks on others
- Make an exaggerated show of self-policing

Such self-policing requires social mobilization—communication of persuasive information—to reinforce a community identity against violence.

Psychological and material forces stoking conscription can at times be reduced. This is conflict management where people live, work and sleep.

Nonalignment or nonviolence may prove unrealistic or even dangerous.

**Cut deals with threatening powers, most often for**

- Recognition of neutrality / inviolability of a designated site or sanctuary (a peace community or zone, hospital, church, etc.)
- Separation of combatants from civilians
- Reprieve from conscription
- Time-limited reprieve to get inoculations, evacuate specified vulnerable groups, etc.
- Waiver of “taxes”
- Freedom of movement

*Note: Civilians might assure this deal-making with a payment*

Cut deals with threatening powers, most often for

- Recognition of neutrality / inviolability of a designated site or sanctuary (a peace community or zone, hospital, church, etc.)
- Separation of combatants from civilians
- Reprieve from conscription
- Time-limited reprieve to get inoculations, evacuate specified vulnerable groups, etc.
- Waiver of “taxes”
- Freedom of movement

*Note: Civilians might assure this deal-making with a payment*

Dominant powers and social blocs are not monolithic. Persecuted civilians often find useful ties to well-placed moderates, sympathizers (or pragmatic opportunists). This creates opportunities to eke out “humanitarian space”.

Such engagement poses risks. At times, a “good deal” is not being killed in return for cash, food, conscripts and intelligence. This lends more fuel to the conflict.

**Avoidance**

**Mobilization and preparation**

**Mobilization (requires a mindset)**

Trusted influentials among the populace turn peoples’ thinking toward more vigilance and planning

- “Go & see” visits to, or “come & tell” survivor testimonials from, adjacent areas of conflict provide proof or persuasion of certain protection risks or opportunities
- “Bamboo telegraphs” (local systems of gathering news the world over) provide conviction of the need (or not) to mobilize
- Culture, experience, and trusted influentials mix in ethereal ways to

Hundreds save their lives by physically avoiding violence. Their tactics and strategies become safer and more effective with increased experience.

It is abnormal for people to plan their own displacement, especially if habit, instinct and simple cues fail to detect that violence has reached a dangerous new threshold. For this reason,
persuade civilians that they have the cultivable capacities to survive mental readiness is as vital as tactical preparedness. Credible leaders and facts can alter a mindset of complacency or denial and clear the way for serious planning. Chance favors the prepared mind.

**Preparation (requires a skill set)**

Certain crisis skill sets are continually reinvented across cultures and epochs. Here is an incomplete and imperfect listing:

- Information
- Communication
- Safe sites
- Safe movement
- Threat response

These skill sets comprise hundreds of optional tactics. They also are the building blocks of strategies like community policing, warning and flight. Though not the focus of this document, such skill sets also undergird civilian efforts in analogous situations, whether that of civil society brutally forced underground, or communities learning skills and making plans in advance of natural disaster. All these efforts reveal civilian inclinations and mastery in the face of deadly threats.

Whether civilians respond to danger by staying or going; whether they react at a community, household or individual level; whether in response to machetes or monsoons, raids or rains—preparation always matters and certain strategies and tactics consistently seem to apply. Preparedness is largely about shortening the deadly learning curve.

Many of the optional tactics listed below entail risk. On a case-by-case basis, people must decide the greater risk: getting systematically prepared for violence—or not?

**Skills and tactics by which communities avoid violence**

**Information**

*Information gathering*

- Radio: public service broadcasts
  - Incident bulletins warning of areas to avoid; moderates urging calm, dispelling rumors, etc.; lost persons tracing hour; skits on situational awareness; commentary on the purpose of aid or peacekeeping missions; features on preparing ORS treatment, food security tips, contents of a flight kit; etc.
- Other mass media (print, cassettes, video) from leaders conveying calm or solidarity or instructions, etc., if advisable
- Discreet word-of-mouth networks
  - Classic grapevine or “bamboo telegraph”
  - Paid informants
  - Family member in armed group learns about its intentions and strategies, impending operations, death lists, etc.
  - Travelers’ networks, especially merchants
- Discreet observation
  - Monitor belligerents’ preparations, movements, placement of landmines, etc.)
  - “Go & see” visits; “come & tell” survivor testimonials.
  - Tapping groups with extraterritorial scope and mobility (national NGOs, INGOs, missionaries, etc.).
- Commercially available radio scanners
  - Public domain satellite imagery (like Google Earth) confirm damage to infrastructure, aid route planning, etc.
- Short and long-range patrolling or scouting.

Nothing is more essential to civilians amid violence than timely and accurate information. With it they may be forewarned of violence. They get life-saving advice, whether to quickly act or stay calmly in place. They learn of economic opportunity (labor, barter, lending, remittance). Information brought to those who are “cut off” brings comfort. It gets word of their suffering to the outside world. It enables the coordination required for what is often the safest asymmetrical response to violence: dispersed networks.

Public service broadcasts can have limits and risks. Stations can be shut down; staff harmed. Seemingly benign messages on political/military situations can have unintended consequences. Word of a distribution can lead predators to their prey. Content needs to be carefully considered, and plans for mobile or remote broadcasting perhaps prepared.
**Track or spoor recognition**

**Information assessment**

- **Awareness of priority threat indicators**
  - 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.
  - Shifts in political behavior—many indicators, but most often: rise of powers with dangerous backgrounds, passage of restrictive laws, vilification of supposed “enemies”, clamp down on media and civil society, etc.

- Cross-verify reports from varied sources
  - Access first-hand accounts deemed reliable from conflict areas
  - Access sources of news deemed reliable for interpretation of events

**Information protection**

- Compartmentalization and need-to-know protocols
- Simple codes and other ways to reduce eavesdropping
- Cover stories
- Avoid infiltration
  - Protocols to evaluate or interdict transients or newcomers
  - Passwords to determine “friend or foe” when encountering others
  - If apolitical informants spy due to intimidation or desperate need, consider if the threats they face can be lowered
  - Populations segmented into close-knit groups are well-suited to detect attempted infiltration

**Disinformation**

- Deterrent rumors of powerful patronage, rampant STDs, etc.
- Altered time and/or place of market, school, and worship activities
- Fake documents, misleading communiqués, bogus landmine markers, false trail signs, and other ruses to keep civilians out of harm’s way
- False impression that properties are abandoned, pillaged or uninhabitable

**Communication**

- Paths of communication
  - **Lines**: kinship lines are most confidential communication nets
  - **Circles**: concentric circles of trusted contacts
  - **Cells**: nonhierarchical network with strict compartments
  - **Relays**: cross-factional cooperation; requires discreet “hand-off”
  - **Wired in**: outside watchdog groups wire warning in; need nexus with local communication networks
  - **Wired out**: alarm wired out to trigger prevention or intervention

- Compartmentalization and need-to-know protocols

- Various forms of radio
  - **Basic operation**
  - **Ways to avoid eavesdropping and jamming**
  - **Operation of other telecom platforms, if feasible**
  - Internet, sat phone, mobile phone, Flickr, Twitter, Ushahidi, etc
  - Off-the-grid mobile power sources (hand crank, foot pedal, truck battery

---

**Civilians need quick verification of micro-level events more than analysis of macro-level trends based on math and computer models. They need ongoing real-time facts about threats and must push that awareness from the edge of their residences as far out as possible.**

**Outsiders can save lives by listening to civilians, then by sharing advice and experience (often based on lessons learned by other civilians in other conflicts.)**

**Outsiders may help bolster local information strategies and structures—and if deemed risky, STOP THERE, leaving locals to draw their own conclusions and take their own actions.**

**Chain of reporting that interlaces a safety net with a social web is particularly strong.**

**Any ICT platform intended to aid local warning (are many now emerging) must be plugged into a willing and organized local response. If it is not, it may be as unhelpful as a blind airdrop onto an unprepared drop zone.**

**† Alarm wired out often includes coordination with external responders (police, army, peacekeepers) that synchronizes first response by locals with follow-on response by outsiders.**
pods, electricity kiosks, etc.) for telecom
Low-tech signaling (line-of-sight or range-of-hearing in relays: mirror, shuttered light, flags, fires, whistles, foghorn, burning tires, etc.)
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safe sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimal locations; sites often chosen on basis of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure ingress and secondary egress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable access to life-critical sustenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimal site formations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidated: when deterrence and communal action are priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersed: when low-profile evasion is priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networked: when low-profile and occasional communal action are priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation or listening posts (along likely ground or air approaches)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perimeter alert (manned but perhaps enhanced with tripwire alarms); concentric rings and relays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple system of spotters and runners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs for home alert and deterrence; perimeter tracking, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable-range patrols (interdiction is an option decided by community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blast walls, trenches, pits, tunnels, caves, and bunkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvised secondary/night shelters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment; traceless encampment, crop colors and canopies that are less noticeable from the air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid creating visible paths to settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid being followed to settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline with light, cook smoke, and noise (human and animal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discreet daily access to foraging, firewood, water, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early warning / response—evacuation plans practiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[See: “Community policing”]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safe movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advance relocation of slow-moving elderly or infirm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimal travel group size, formation, and composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger if aim is deterrence, smaller if aim is evasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May include males or armed individuals if aim is deterrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer, more difficult route is often chosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small party scouting of routes, especially just prior to transit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routes used on a frequent basis (commuting to work or sleep locations) are alternated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cached food and medical supplies en route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for living off the land (acquiring minimum of food, water, shelter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen or counterfeited forms, cards, and stamps for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False identity that reduces harassment or harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False “safe passage” documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreed-upon locations to reunite (rally points for individuals, families and subgroups)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most often, movement through dangerous territory, whether amid evacuation or repatriation, is organized by civilians themselves.
Map and grid coordinate reading and other forms of orienteering
Off-road travel and night travel
Day travel often includes cash for bribes
Practice traversing difficult terrain
Take advantage of inclement weather to move
Blend in the terrain and avoid being tracked
Noise discipline (silence, hand signals)
Use the escape services of experienced smugglers/traffickers
Landmine clues; retracing steps; marking, warning and informing
Mobile phones to call in support
Recognize layout of ambush and blocking points typical to combatants

**Threat response** (reaction “on contact”)
Lightweight evacuation supplies at the ready
Rehearsed response to varied forms of bombardment or incoming fire
Automatic sound alarm (megaphone, pyrotechnics, etc.) to disorient, delay, or deter lightly-armed night raiders
Early warning / response—evacuation plans practiced
[See: “Community policing”]
Broken evacuation: fall back dispersal and regrouping plans (down to family level)
Evading infantry sweeps or encirclement
Rapid and semi-rapid hiding practices (nesting in ground cover or climbing trees; building blinds, spider holes, covers, camouflage, etc.)
Delaying, decoying, or diverting hostile pursuit
Recognizing and reacting to ambush sites
Extrication from mined areas
Skill in first aid and simple surgical fixes

**Community policing**—early warning—early response
(Draws on many of the building block skill sets cited above)
Rudimentary patrolling, monitoring, reporting, community liaison, on-the-spot mediation, etc.: Codes of conduct
Several models:
Unarmed neighborhood watches, concerned citizen groups, crime prevention committees, and volunteer community police, etc.
Analogous situations: unarmed civilian auxiliaries to undergrounds and resistance groups
Different purposes / responses:
Warning wired to conflict prevention mechanisms, civil society and “duty bearers”
Warning wired up and out to “rescuers”
Warning wired to community [tripwire: See “Community flight”]
Warning wired to armed community members (home defense) or armed patrons [see “Arming”]

*Community policing has a very long history, elements of which can be found in most traditions across the world. UNHCR and aid NGOs have fostered it in many conflict settings.*

The ability of such groups must be matched to the threats they are policing against. Outsiders at times think such action entails whistles and wearing tee-shirts; or fences and white flags. In reality, they often need upgraded skills for coping not just with lawlessness—but with war.

*Warning wired to external duty-bearers or rescuers too rarely yields an effective response.*

**Community flight**
Unplanned flight
Planned flight—triggered by attack and early warning tripwire
Planned flight—preemptive self-displacement, absent an direct attack

*Many suffer human and material losses in unplanned flight—and, if they could “go back in time,” would surely plan ahead. This affirms the whole concept of*
Gender-based violence occurs in differing contexts each of which shape steps for avoidance. GBV attempted by a few lightly armed me might be foiled by communal work and housing arrangements. But GBV attempted by larger armed groups opportunistically amid attacks on the community calls for women’s precautions nested within larger community preparedness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills and tactics by which individuals avoid violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss locations and situations to avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational awareness/planned threat response: homes, fields, roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidate housing, within cultural norms and economic dictates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Might deter smaller assaults in which GBV is opportunistic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family home extensions or community compounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disperse or hide housing, within cultural norms and economic dictates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Might foil larger assaults in which GBV is strategic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men take on women’s work roles inasmuch as cultural norms and work needs allow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce nonessential movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimal travel group size, formation, and composition (See above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deterrent escorts while in transit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimize or alter resource gathering to lessen exposure to danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build water points at closer or more optimal locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase water catchment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy firewood; use less wood (cook stoves, food w/ less cook time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift towards livelihoods that lessen exposure to danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s microenterprise mobile telephony doubles as communications net for safety purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress and walk as a male or an old woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut hair to resemble a male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold someone’s baby so as to appear not a virgin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be unattractive—dirty one’s face, wear foul-smelling clothes; persuade attacker one is menstruating, has a rash, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabricate rumors of rampant STDs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual relationships with male “protectors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockpile post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) kits to neutralize HIV infection and pregnancy resulting from rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss dilemmas of sexual violence so as to reduce secondary assault visited upon victims: social rejection, economic marginalization, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss any culturally grounded ways to reduce stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare local nets to immediately assist victims of sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare community contacts/nets for widows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women participate in community policing, support peacekeeper operations, inform the design of camp layout, etc., thereby reducing incidence of gender-based violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Women may bring unique advantages to diffusing tense situations and (re)building trust across factions

**Children**
- Preemptively relocate to safer areas, often with kin
- Develop situational awareness; discuss situations and locations to avoid
  - Learn the habits of recruiters, traffickers, etc.
- Discourage nonessential movement; discuss smart movement
- School as a safety focal point:
  - Use safe movement practices in transiting home and school
  - Teachers impart basic safety messages at school
  - Waive school fees to keep more children in school and out of danger
  - Add income generation into school to keep more children attending
- Establish alternative sites:
  - Hidden classrooms, worship services, sleeping shelters, etc.
- Agree upon what to do and where to meet if separated
- Make identification bracelets for infants and children, if advisable
- Prepare community contacts/nets to do temporary adoption
- Discuss the purpose of peace operations in the region and of mandates that they may have to protect children
- Raise landmine awareness
- Discuss dilemmas of abduction

Much is known about the unique vulnerabilities and capacities of women and children in conflict. Their experiences as conscripts, voluntary or not, prove their ability to partake in violence—which in turn prove their tactical ability to prepare for and avoid violence.

**Young (military-age) men**
- If duties like travel to market expose men to suspicion, conscription, etc., women may take their place
- Communication net to warn of recruitment sweeps
- Fein disability; appear unsuitable for conscription
- Men dress as women

**Elderly & infirm**
- Preemptively relocate vulnerable or slow-moving individuals
- Elders with previous crisis experience advise others on ways of improving safety and attaining life-critical sustenance
- Older men and women at times hold social stature that enables them to intercede and diffuse violence

**Exposed leaders, service providers, activists**
- Though physically alone, raise profile (if advisable) in media, in the advocacy of local and global civil society, INGOs, etc.
- Conversely, lower profile (if advisable)
  - Lay low, blend in
  - Low-profile operations [see Life-Critical Services]
- Seek backing of powerful patrons
- Safe houses (single or network) and alternate sleeping quarters
- Alternate identity documents
- Adequate communications at residence
- Standard precautions for movement/commuting
- Use the escape services of experienced smugglers/traffickers

Exposed leaders include those in formal public or institutional structures (elected officials, civil society figures), professionals like doctors, teachers, religious leaders, or others who stand up for their people. Outside support of such dynamic leaders fosters their self-awareness, skills and activism and often contributes to positive change in society and governance.

Self-awareness and activism can, however, also increase leaders’ vulnerability. Engagement means exposure. Outsiders do
Proactive information-collection on threats such as bogus arrest warrants, road blocks, death lists, etc. not often foresee unintended consequences; we seldom help leaders brace for reprisal. Yet with a false sense of security in our presence and imprimatur, they delay preparation for their own survival.

### Affinity Groups

**Protective social units and networks**

**Stay together, pull together**
- Plan for keeping the group intact in the face of pending violence
- Plan for regrouping if involuntarily separated by violence
- Plan for staying linked even while *voluntarily* separated (a very common method of pursuing safety, sustenance, and services)
- Plan for safety of exposed leaders who are lynchpins of affinity groups
- Resist the fear and hate mongering that demagogues use to fabricate new affinity groups based on violence toward others; friends/neighbors *across the new communal divide* agree to risk sheltering one another
- Reinforce spiritual strength, solidarity, and dignity
- **Collaborate for safety**
  - Primordial groups and networks of affinity provide safe refuge when governments, institutions and society are polarized or atomized by mass violence
  - **Collaborate for sustenance**
    - This social architecture undergirds innumerable strategies for obtaining and sharing life-critical sustenance
  - **Collaborate for services**
    - These units and networks are distribution pathways for life-critical services and the primal motivation to serve others regardless of risk

Affinity groups save the lives of millions. They become safer and more effective with increased experience.

Affinity groups are households, social nets, customary subgroups and communities apart from formal state or institutional structures. Such social units and networks are often as important to survival as material resources; often civilians’ first asylum, first line of protection.

Many survivors attest that, more than anything else, spiritual strength and sense of solidarity enabled them to endure.

Kin relations and social ties can exclude marginal groups. They may condone discrimination by gender, age, faith, caste, etc. Such affinity groups may even foster communal violence, a risk that any outside agency must be aware of and avoid. IDPs forced into cities, urbanites forced into the countryside, and returnees back from long absences often do not benefit from such relations or ties.

**Useful ties to patronage powers**

**Patrons intercede with threatening powers**
- Church, mosque, monastery, etc. provides buffer
- Business sector and threatening powers foster calm for profit’s sake

**Seek patronage—perhaps for a price**
- Activate or create these lines of support
  - Partial list: appeal or censure based on cultural norms of obligation; intermarry into patron lines; curry favor with threatening power, etc.
- **Seek safety**
  - Patron provides life-saving armed deterrence. The trade-off might

Patron’s motives based on social unit or social contract can range from altruistic to paternalistic and calculated. Benevolence may be principled—or conditional. For civilians who may otherwise face violence alone, a potential patron does not need to be pretty. Patrons can be self-aggrandizing, unelected, autocratic—and can exact a price for their support. It is a calculation that belongs to the civilians themselves.
be obligation to support the patron’s armed activity  
Seek sustenance  
  Patron provides life-critical sustenance to those in need. As in a classic lord-serf relationship, trade-off might be deeper indebtedness  
Seek services  
  Patron provides or pays for life-critical services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Armed Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Safety through arms**  
**Note: this document emphasizes alternatives to armed action**  
- Civilians carry personal arms  
- Civilians lay landmines outside their communities  
- Communities form self-defense groups †  
- Civilians or communities gain protection through payment, liaison, or allegiance with an armed group

† Geneva Conventions state “Civil defense organizations have humanitarian tasks… that must be respected and protected. They are intended to protect the civilian population against the dangers of hostilities… and to ensure the conditions necessary for its survival [such as] warning, evacuations, shelters, rescue, public services, etc. … the carrying of light individual weapons by civilian personnel for the purpose of maintaining order and for self-defense [is] not considered a harmful act.”

Arm activity carries obvious deadly risks.
# LIFE-CRITICAL SUSTENANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vital Influences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policies, institutions, and processes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Engage forces that affect access to assets and choice of strategies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate government support for land tenure, food and agricultural subsidies, labor standards, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest harmful private banking practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use traditional mechanisms to resolve dispute over resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge customs disallowing to women to accrue wealth or property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach accommodation with rival communities in resource disputes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal to authorities about land grabbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand police protect roads and markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut deals with threatening powers to remove restrictions on livelihood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use personal ties to win exemption from illicit taxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make deals with middlemen who can assume risks of market activity (i.e. black marketers, or entrepreneurs from a non-persecuted group; can include doing business with the “enemy”- a fairly common type of social “capital” or “bridging”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Emergency livelihood studies reveal a lot about formal and informal environments that often govern civilian choices amid conflict. Much has little to do with technical aspects of food production or income generation. Measures cited here are only a limited sampling.*

*As law and order decline, such engagement very often proves ineffective or too dangerous.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Conservation and Cushioning</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household consumption and expenditure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Adjust to reduced production, income, and market access</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alter consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat fewer meals, watered-down meals (this might include deliberate unequal impacts per age and gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn to foods that are or more safely attainable or affordable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventive recipes and processes for food preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater reliance on foraged foods and medicines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep children malnourished to qualify for feeding programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce expenditure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy cheaper items or forgo nonessential purchases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell/trade high-value foods for larger quantity of cheaper foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send household members to eat elsewhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triage spending cuts outside of food security (i.e. education, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay expenditure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase on credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpone deferrable improvements on real property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase fewer inputs (fertilizer, veterinary care, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgo terracing, weeding, etc. when too dangerous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Household adjustments can delay more dangerous choices. Those cited here are only a limited sampling.*

*There are limits to what can be squeezed from household-level asset management. There are longer-term costs to financial and human capital in some of these measures.*

*Humanitarians may view cuts and conservation as retrograde. Our focus is forward on “post conflict”, “developmental relief” and “early recovery”. We may be aware that the future might hold more violence, yet still promote development-type activity as being “protective” because it restores production, inventory, and income—thus a “cushion” against more shocks.*

---

*a This refers not to “barely making a living” but to barely staying alive. Data overwhelmingly shows that during conflict, direct violence is far less of a risk than the indirect effects of violence such as the collapse of life-critical sustenance and services. Only 0.4% of the millions of deaths across DR Congo from were attributed directly to violence. In conflicts the world over, the majority die preventable deaths due to the disruptions caused by violence (which to some extent can be anticipated and prepared for). This means millions die away from the shooting.*
Recycle resources of every kind
Conserv[e]e water and wood (efficient stoves, food with less cook time)
Sell assets for food
Pool assets and spread out risk within affinity groups
Postpone or accelerate marriages depending upon the dowry delayed or accrued; new couples postpone living independently

**Attempt to rebuild cushion of production and income**
As conditions may allow, attempt typical development activity to help rebuild a life-critical buffer, most especially in terms of food security

But amid chronic instability, our efforts to help locals restore livelihoods and assets as they existed prior to conflict might be a *maladapted response*. People may be better served by “conflict-resistant” livelihood strategies and assets—ones that withstand a slide *backward*.

### Additional Strategies and Assets

**Adjust income activity**
- Change time of work
  - Do more agricultural work at night
- Change location of work
  - Move services from store front to back room
  - Make sale of wares mobile or discreet
- Change currency of work
  - Move from unstable paper currency to barter items

**Subsistence agriculture (and gardening)**
- Farming and animal husbandry for self-sufficiency, though not necessarily full autarky
- Agricultural methods like dibble sticking, hoe farming, slash and burn, shifting cultivation, intensive gardening, etc.

This activity saves the lives of millions. It becomes safer and more effective with increased experience.

Subsistence farming and gardening tend to be more “conflict-resistant” because they do not rely on systems or inputs disrupted by conflict like 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.

**Foraging**
- Forage for food items
  - Gathering, hunting, fishing
- Forage for natural products that are marketable
- Salvage foods left in fields, valuables left in conflict zones (may or may not belong to the salvager)

This activity saves the lives of millions. It becomes safer and more effective with increased experience. It is also more effective when people are still in customary areas about which they are most knowledgeable.

**Diversifying or substituting**
- Rental or day/wage labor arrangements that free one up from ownership
  
  *Note: Ownership ties one to a place (like a farm), to a process (like marketing).*
Livelihood and marketing that entail less exposure to risky travel
Shorter harvest cycle crops that improve the chance of getting food out of the ground and sold or cached more quickly
Livestock that is more mobile
Livestock that is harder; more adapted to ecology where one is fleeing
Livestock that is less ‘unappealing’ to looters
New seed stocks adapted to ecology where one is fleeing
Service skills, especially those meeting needs actually spurred by conflict, that pose a portable and profitable interim livelihood
Remote and diverse locales, new caching techniques, livestock holdings that are more difficult targets

**Emergency movement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shorter-term commuting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The “commute” may be predicated upon safety in a shadow settlement or aid camp at night and movement to work sites by day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The commute may be daily or much less frequent, as dictated by agricultural cycle and safety concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate flight / evacuation / displacement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Emergency separation**

| Able-bodied family members leave the home area to pursue earnings that can be sent back to the family |
| Able-bodied family members stay behind and continue working and watching the family’s assets, while the other members are sent to safer or better-provisioned locales |

**Social networks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social norms and structures of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared financial risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective laboring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosting traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship exchange / reciprocity processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous social welfare mechanisms (for more “institutional” mechanisms see section on Life-Critical Services)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Money networks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal borrowing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial borrowing (banks, merchants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally pooled money for conflict-induced emergencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remittances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remittance systems are protected against disruption by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying fallback cash transfer agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning alternate carrier/courier systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuild communications, as in mobile phone systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying default remittance destinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping necessary documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding proxies to do transactions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Civilians often seek livelihood alternatives that both meet their minimum needs and also are less exposed or inviting, are elusive or quickly mobile, are well-adapted to new conditions, and may capitalize on economic needs generated by conflict.

These activities save the lives of millions. They become safer and more effective with increased experience.

These networks save the lives of millions and become more effective with increased experience.

These networks become exhausted under prolonged stress, especially without advance planning.

These activities save the lives of millions. They become safer and more effective with increased experience.

Remittances exceed all private flows of investment and official development assistance and are countercyclical in that diasporas give more just when aid agencies, donors, and investors withdraw due to imminent crisis.

Borrowing may be a maladapted response if it leads to harmful indebtedness.
**External relief**
[For locally led relief, see section Life-Critical Services]

This activity saves the lives of millions—when civilians can access it. Sometimes they must first survive alone for months or years and then run a deadly gauntlet to reach foreign aid.

External relief becomes a maladapted response if it leads to debilitating dependency. Foreign relief operations frequently shut down in the face of danger when they are most needed.

**Pay offs**
Pay fees, fines, taxes, or bribes in order to pursue livelihood activities unmolested

Buying off local enforcers assures the survival of many. Buying off local enforcers can leech war mobilization policy. Strategies to strip civilian assets (food, labor, supply) are sapped when, for a bribe, soldiers or political cadres do not enforce demands for contraband and conscripts. This means less fuel for conflict.

Another view holds that payoffs can reinforce the violence and corruption afflicting a society. This would hold true when extortion benefits a violent spoiler as opposed to a simple unpaid soldier.

**Shadow & Coping economies**

- All the above arguably are actions in the coping economy. More are cited below. There are many ways to frame this. Wartime economies operate at varied connected levels with varied but overlapping actors. The tipping point between licit and illicit, or sustainable and unsustainable, is often unclear. Never—even in a failed state—has everything failed. Economic functions get reinvented; every need gets commoditized. Some profit while others more downstream stay barefoot—but alive. As used here, “petty” means subsistence level and “larger-scale” refers to something more syndicated and profitable.

Marginal production: crafts, bricks, charcoal, etc. ⇒ grain alcohol
Registration for relief aid ⇒ multiple (bogus) registrations
Consumption of relief aid ⇒ unauthorized sale of relief aid
Petty, small-scale resource extraction ⇒ larger-scale resource extraction
Petty, small-scale smuggling ⇒ larger-scale smuggling
Petty trade in undeclared (cross-border) goods ⇒ larger-scale trade
Hoarding ⇒ price speculation and rate gouging
Petty corruption ⇒ larger-scale corruption
Begging ⇒ Prostitution; exposure to STDs/AIDS
⇒ Cultivation of outlawed products (poppy, etc.)
⇒ Drug dealing
Violent exploitation
⇒ Protection rackets

These activities save the lives of millions. They become safer and more effective with increased experience.

Wartime economy experts often stress that distinctions should be made between those who violently profit from conflict and those trying to survive amid it. This distinction is rarely found in the aid community which takes a rather “hands off” view of the shadow and coping economies. But as Fred Cuny noted, “In many situations, understanding and manipulating market forces can be far more important and effective than classic relief operations.”

Some of these actions are illicit or innately harmful to oneself or others, others can become maladapted to the point of harm. They are indicated by “⇒” here.
Remote & cross-border markets
- Organize jungle or bush markets or trading sites
- Commute cross border to safe markets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strip and Transfer Assets b</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redeeming</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect debts or rent due</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdraw savings, loans, or shares locked up in an enterprise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Anything withdrawn/distributed can later be re-deposited and reinvested.
- Unless done carefully, such action can affect the solvency of institutions and stir panic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caching</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food surpluses (esp. salted, smoked, or dried foods), medicines, shelter sheeting, seed stock, cash, documents, and valuables hidden near probable flight routes and rally points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Amid violence, physical assets can be a liability. So too, in countless ways survival can be bought. Liquidating assets is thus an extremely common tactic. Indeed, civilians often liquidate the commodities that aid agencies give them for the sake of safety, mobility, and discretionary pay-offs.
- The predatory instincts of buyers can be aroused by “distress sales” (a hallmark of forced removal) resulting in prices depressed by having a lot of the same kinds of possessions and properties on the market at the same time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liquidating</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assets are converted into portable or concealable currency such as small amounts of gold, silver, or jewelry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets are converted (whether sold, pawned, or put up as collateral) for cash that is mailed, wired, or electronically transferred to safe repositories or to first responders in one’s affinity network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Amid violence, physical assets can be a liability. So too, in countless ways survival can be bought. Liquidating assets is thus an extremely common tactic. Indeed, civilians often liquidate the commodities that aid agencies give them for the sake of safety, mobility, and discretionary pay-offs.
- The predatory instincts of buyers can be aroused by “distress sales” (a hallmark of forced removal) resulting in prices depressed by having a lot of the same kinds of possessions and properties on the market at the same time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dismantling</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strip, bury, sell or haul roofing and other building materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Civilians often save such material for reuse and avoid a future rebuilding expense.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporarily forfeiting</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In anticipation of needing to flee, civilians secure any documentation (titles, deeds, birth certificates, identity cards, etc.) that will later help them reclaim their land or fixed properties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- In conflicts around the globe civilians cede their land and fixed properties with every intention of reacquiring them someday. 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.

b Today’s “emergency livelihoods” discourse stresses that overt ownership of assets can increase one’s vulnerability. Thus in many “conflicts” (often better described as asset-stripping enterprises), civilians try to strip first, converting or transferring their assets. Affinity groups usually serve as “first responders” amid crises. Transferring 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.
**Scorching**

Dissuade belligerents, violent marauders, or squatters by damaging or destroying one’s own property. This is done after:
- a feasible level of stripping, dismantling, and salvaging, and
- alternate arrangements for safety, sustenance, and shelter

Dissuade belligerents, violent marauders, or squatters by creating the impression that property is *uninhabitable*. This might be done by fabricating:
- bogus landmine markers (known only to the community), the illusion of poisoned wells or water points, rumors of curses (potent in many places) or diseases, the fiction of armed backers, etc

Civilians who perceive that their properties are drawing violence closer to them will at times destroy them. The fact (or the appearance) of having already been burned out and looted sometimes prevents deeper harm to life and livelihood.

Destruction of key assets and voluntary displacement carry clear challenges and risks.
### LIFE-CRITICAL SERVICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional Service Delivery</th>
<th>Low-profile Service Delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional staff security</strong></td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deterrence</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local providers of relief or welfare services have often survived due to these strategies. Yet this “security triangle” of strategies frequently fails to safeguard them. Though outside agencies often assume otherwise, local providers are guaranteed neither local acceptance nor enhanced protection because of their ties and knowledge. Being local can even create risks.</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional engagement to win access</strong></td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate, advocate, attempt media pressure to win consent for work</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tap protective social units and networks</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tap ties to threatening powers</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make tolerable pay-offs</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These strategies, though often successful, have their limits.</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low-profile Service Delivery</strong></td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When conventional service delivery becomes too dangerous, local providers sometimes adopt tactics of anonymity and avoidance in order to continue helping their people. Sometimes, as our local staff or partners, they even do this with our support when we are forced to pull out and work through them remotely. Locally led low profile service delivery has won praise in several settings. The challenges it faces stem not from the strategy per se, but from the tactics chosen. Such work can be safer and more efficient; such operations can have both a low profile and popular acceptance.</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These activities save the lives of millions. They become safer and more effective with increased experience.</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign agencies outsource risky work to local staff or partners via “remote management”. Tactics for low-profile service delivery such as cited here can help that work become safer.</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly, low-profile work can be labeled subversive, and local providers do often try to assure their security by being wholly transparent with and subordinate to parties in a conflict. This document deals instead with those times when openness will either get them killed or end any meaningful aid. In such situations, they must be able to survive violence before they can serve amid it.</td>
<td><img src="red_x.png" alt="Red X" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

––

This refers to services addressing killers like disease and malnutrition. Data overwhelmingly shows that during conflict, direct violence is far less of a risk than the indirect effects of violence such as the collapse of life-critical sustenance and services. Only 0.4% of the millions of deaths across DR Congo from were attributed directly to violence. In conflicts the world over, the majority die preventable deaths due to the disruptions caused by violence (which to some extent can be anticipated and prepared for). This means millions die away from the shooting.
### Information

#### Information gathering

**Awareness of priority threat indicators**
- 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.
- Shifts in political behavior—many indicators, but most often: rise of powers with dangerous backgrounds, passage of restrictive laws, vilification of supposed “enemies”, clamp down on media and civil society, etc.
- Shifts in treatment of aid workers—increased surveillance or harassment of service delivery, changes in the application or interpretation of law as it affects such work

**Discreet word-of-mouth networks**
- Social units and networks
- Paid informants
  - Close coordination with trusted influential among the populace on security updates, needs assessments, details of upcoming distributions or services, monitoring and evaluation

**Commercially available radio scanners**

**Public domain satellite imagery (like Google Earth)** confirm damage to infrastructure, aid route planning, etc.

**Discreet observation**

**Foster constant situational awareness in every worker**

#### Information assessment (and ‘actionability’)

**Cross-verify reports from varied sources**
- Access first-hand accounts deemed reliable from conflict areas
- Access sources of news deemed reliable for interpretation of events

**Anticipate** the scenario(s) which an assessment might yield; **proactively** consider and build staff consensus for actionable response(s) even before a critical threshold is crossed

#### Information protection

**Compartmentalization**
- Need-to-know protocols; physical separation of certain information, operations and staff

**Be aware of surveillance; take steps to co-opt or avoid it**

**Document safety**
- Burn rubbish; have most sensitive exchanges in person rather than on paper; minimize paper trails on projects, purchases, etc., watch for signs of illicit entry or tampering at offices; computers under lock and key; password access; files encrypted, file backups stored off-site; removable media; clean disk security; anti-virus and firewall software; etc.

**Safeguard identities of staff and beneficiaries**

**Confidentiality:**
- for work with victims of abuse and sources of sensitive information

---

As Macrae and Leader say, accurate information on conflict is “a precondition for effective and principled humanitarian action.”

Safeguarding information is especially important in aid agencies that politically sensitive activity such as human rights, civil society, good governance, rule of law, ending impunity, and social justice.

Mary Anderson notes “strategies for delivering aid secretly thwart thieves’ need for knowledge.”

Phillipe Le Billon adds “keeping the time and location of delivery secret can reduce opportunity for looting. Risks can be displaced by publicly announcing a food convoy in a different location.”
## Cover stories
Avoid infiltration
- Be aware of predatory efforts to learn/abuse operational details, or political efforts to discredit the organization
- Do more detailed vetting of possible new hires
- If apolitical informants act due to intimidation or desperate need, consider if the threats they face can be lowered
- Base hiring decisions partly on affinity ties—family, tribal, party or other connections—while retaining checks on abuse

### Disinformation
Distributions or services onto a mobile or irregular or unannounced basis with advance notice limited to the parties needed to assure its effectiveness
- Manipulate information such as planting errant reports, fake rumors, forged documents, maps with misleading marks, or phony radio orders

## Communication
A layered mix of low-to-high tech communications, as appropriate
- Prioritize equipment that is suitable for a discreet and mobile workplace and train on it far enough in advance
- Simple sources of power off the electrical grid
- Need-to-know only protocols
- Keep communications undetected, undeciphered, or deniable
- Flat, cell-based contact networks apt for a discrete and dispersed workplace
- The most effective networks are often built on groups of affinity

## Safe movement
- Replace recognizable vehicles with private or commercial transport and alternate the chosen transport
- Replace vehicles with pack animals for off-track travel
- Route selection
  - Longer, more difficult route is often chosen
  - Routes used on a frequent basis (workers’ commute, delivery routes) are alternated
  - Small party scouting of routes, especially just prior to transit
- Cache supplies closer to intended distribution or service sites so that transit to these sites is less of a logistical or security challenge
- Master off-road travel and night travel
  - Includes traversing difficult terrain; taking advantage of inclement weather to move
  - Take full advantage of surprise and initiative; of choosing when, where, and how to move and keeping dangerous groups off-balance
- Use 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… so as to get safely from one place to another.”
- This enables service “reach” across a landscape of patchwork loyalties.
- Mobile phones to call in support
**Threat response**

Automatic response to varied forms of bombardment or incoming fire
Skill in first aid and simple surgical fixes

**Threats at a "workplace"**

- "Workplace" can be downsized and a workforce dispersed. Response thus may focus more on evasive measures for individuals than on evacuation plans for entire organizations [See Deconstruction]
- Fallback plans for when a portion of operating network is compromised
- Lightweight evacuation supplies at the ready
- Protocols for destroying records, moving or disabling equipment, etc
- Anticipate confiscation of financial assets—have back up plans ready

**Threats during movement** (beyond the Safe movement options cited above)

- Recognizing and reacting to ambush sites
- Recognizing and reacting to mined areas
- Evasive driving techniques
- Delaying, decoying, or diverting hostile pursuit

**Threats on contact with aid recipients**

- Build strong coordination with trusted influentials in the populace
  - Such coordination does not require public visibility
- Select location least likely to draw unwanted attention
- Select commodities least likely to draw unwanted attention

---

**Deconstruction (Safe sites)**

**Downsize identity**

- Stop branding; furl flags and remove magnetic sign logos when wise
- Ditch or falsify identification
- Obscure agency’s paper (and funding) trail
- Have media outreach, but operations leave no footprint
- Through intermediary, inform belligerents of general mission, so as to convey respect and avert misjudgments about the mission
- Reveal agency’s identity only at distribution or service times
- Give all credit for their work to “more acceptable” partners
- Discreetly co-locate with another, more accepted entity
- Work under pseudonyms or take on the appearance of a different type of organization
- “Partial disclosure” of their work to trusted, influential actors only
- Go into periods of “hibernation”
- Publicly close an agency then quietly reconstitute it with no legal personality or authorization
- Publicly conduct programs that belligerents will tolerate, while privately aiding groups most at risk

---

**Downsize infrastructure**

- Shift from offices to homes; from warehouses to innocuous buildings
- Rotate “office” locations
- Use portable gear for computing (laptops?) and communications (sat-phones?)
- Conversely, adopt/adapt simpler, cheaper technologies
- Replace expensive standing motor pool with an assemblage of porters, pack animals, carts, or contracted or private motor vehicles to provide

---

Classic “truck and chuck” forays can risk unsafe, inefficient, inequitable distribution of aid. The ground should be better prepared for such hit and run aid.

All of these tactics of selective transparency have been used in Iraq—some by UN and major aid agencies through their local proxies

We often equate presence with “visibility”, and transparency with “acceptability”. But there are many shades between visible and invisible, thus more choices than these false dichotomies would imply. Also, historical analogies show overwhelmingly that overt visibility is not needed by a movement to ensure its acceptance from and coordination with a population

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. Fortunately, these features of our aid “footprint” can be downsized, dispersed, or done away with.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Disperse, monetize, or outsource supplies</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cache equipment and supplies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scatter warehouses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim for last minute local acquisition and quick distribution so that supplies do not sit for long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break large distributions into smaller ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use cash transfers, commodity coupons, or promissory note systems in lieu of commodities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monetize commodities with merchants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsource supply distribution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Careful protocols make cash a more elusive target than commodities. Practice shows cash is used wisely by recipients and can stimulate local markets. Voucher, coupon, and outsourcing arrangements with merchants reduce aid’s logistical tail and turn shops into “aid warehouses”. To the extent that practices are privatized and localized, aid operations may become more conflict resistant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Disperse staff</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small groups independently work and resources themselves—but also converge for scaled up joint action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need-to-know protocols might have staff aware of the identities of only a limited number of colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare staff mentally for arrest, imprisonment, and physical abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Iraq “a wide range of [service providers employ an] in-house network of cells or individuals that work independently when staff mobility is poor, but interdependently when it improves”⁸ Moreover, the collapse of one cell does not compromise the whole network. Staff dispersal is 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Disperse beneficiaries</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discourage consolidation of beneficiary populations, especially if it has not yet occurred and is not absolutely warranted for safety purposes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experience shows dispersion of beneficiaries can at times be managed and sustained, as it promotes more local integration and self-sufficiency. Efforts toward autonomy create wise economies that may offset whatever is lost in classic camp “economy of scale”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Delegate work</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify entities that might be in a stronger position to do service delivery and seek a partnership or transfer of responsibility. In past conflicts, the more capable entity often proved to be mosques, in Iraq clan-based networks, in Somalia private contractors, in Uganda civil society groups, in the Philippines community-based organizations, in El Salvador welfare wings of a reliable armed party in Eritrea and Burma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Service providers in the mold of an “aid” or “welfare” agency need to know their limits—and the relative strengths of other possible vehicles for service delivery.
ENDNOTES


5 Mary B. Anderson and Marshall Wallace, “Challenges for Food Aid in Conflict Situations”, *Hunger Notes*, found at w.world hunger.org/articles/global/armedconflict/ Anderson.htm; p. 2.


7 Greg Hansen, *Briefing Paper #2: Operational Modalities in Iraq*, one of a series of briefing papers on NGOs’ and others’ humanitarian operational modalities in Iraq, NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq, January 2008; p. 3.

8 Greg Hansen, *Briefing Paper #2: Operational Modalities in Iraq*, one of a series of briefing papers on NGOs’ and others’ humanitarian operational modalities in Iraq, NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq, January 2008; p. 4.