Security Risk Management

Assessing Decision-Making Processes in Local and International Humanitarian NGOs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This briefing paper aims to help understand the institutionalization of security risk management (SRM) processes and procedures in the humanitarian sector, focusing on international and local humanitarian NGOs. It also addresses the relation of these processes and procedures to risk-taking and risk aversion, and identifies how SRM compares to the wider management of risks in the humanitarian sector.

Although SRM in the humanitarian sector has increasingly gained the attention of professionals, policymakers, and academia, an assessment of how SRM is included in decision-making processes and how it affects risk-taking and risk aversion remains largely missing. This paper, based on semi-structured interviews, an online survey, and an in-depth literature review, provides an overview of current practices within humanitarian organizations and offers critical donors' perspectives on this aspect. Thereby, the paper intends to inform policymaking on SRM and help to effectively address security risks at an organizational level.

The institutionalization of SRM within humanitarian NGOs varies considerably, from integration in policies and entire project cycle management to ad hoc decisions on security risks. A one-size-fits-all approach to the institutionalization of SRM does not exist. Instead, SRM processes depend on an organization's structure, culture as well as operational environment.

The underlying research of this paper found **no clear-cut relation between the institutionalization of SRM and a humanitarian NGO's risk-taking/aversion**. Understandably, based on a humanitarian organization's mandate, mission, and operational objectives, in conjunction with individual risk perception, an organization is more or less willing to take risks. However, its risk appetite does not need to be necessarily influenced by SRM processes within an organization. For example, questions of program criticality positively influence humanitarian NGOs' willingness to accept risks. **All humanitarian organizations analyzed had some kind of risk-threshold as part of their SRM systems**. However, further research is needed on the relation between these thresholds and negative risk transfer practices.

Compared to other risks, security risks still tend to get less attention within humanitarian organizations. However, instead of seeing security risks as separate, many organizations are deciding to opt for an integrative risk management approach that embraces security together with other risks such as fiduciary, legal, and reputational risk.

It is clear that **SRM plays a relevant role within various humanitarian NGOs** and that they are increasingly dedicating financial as well as human resources to enhance and further institutionalize SRM procedures and processes. However, some questions and issues remain open with regards to SRM, especially in partnerships with or between international and local NGOs. The existing practices of negative risk transfer – the transfer of risks to an organization that has limited capacity to manage such risks – need to be addressed and practicable standards for risk sharing, based on evidence, must be developed.

"Security is not only about risk management as such, but also a lot about moral and legal duties. It covers the two elements."

Representative of humanitarian INGO, Interview F, 2019

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

GISF   Global Interagency Security Forum
HEAT   Hostile Environment Awareness Training
ICVA   International Council of Voluntary Agencies
INGO   International Non-Governmental Organization
INSO   International NGO Safety Organization
INSSA   International NGO Safety & Security Association
NGO   Non-Governmental Organization
SRM   Security Risk Management

It is important to note that this study is intended to provide a critical reflection on SRM, not a statistically representative assessment of all local and international humanitarian NGOs and their donors. The paper is based on eleven in-depth, semi-structured interviews with security managers of local and international humanitarian NGOs, key experts with experience in SRM in the humanitarian sector, as well as donor representatives. The results of an online survey and in-depth literature review complement this information.

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1. SECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Security risks have always been part of humanitarian action due to its objective to reach populations affected by various insecurities such as war and conflict or natural disasters. While violent attacks against humanitarian workers and infrastructure have increased over the last two decades in absolute terms and specific contexts,[1] Security Risk Management (SRM) in the humanitarian sector has attracted increased attention following several court cases for neglect of Duty of Care by humanitarian organizations.[2] Various security coordination platforms and professional security management networks (e.g., GISF, INSSA) have developed standards, guidelines, databases, and training programs for humanitarian workers. NGOs and private security companies have entered the "humanitarian security market" to provide consultancy, training, as well as protection services (e.g., RedR, INSO).[3] SRM was further discussed at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) 2016, but despite efforts to strengthen risk management processes within humanitarian organizations, preliminary findings in existing literature suggest that they often remain insufficient to mitigate risks for employees.[4]

In academia as well as policy papers, **the institutionalization of SRM[i] in the humanitarian sector and its role regarding risk aversion are hardly addressed –especially regarding local humanitarian NGOs**. According to the literature, SRM in partnerships between international humanitarian non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and local/national humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) remains undermanaged and under-resourced, especially with regards to local NGOs which often bear the greatest security risks.[5]

Notably, **the willingness to accept risk or risk appetite is subjective**. While one employee might decide that the security risk in a certain area is acceptable, another might argue for the opposite. Such decisions can be influenced, among others, by past experiences of individuals or organizations, an organization's mandate, or the humanitarian approach it follows. Furthermore, setting risk appetite requires awareness of different contexts. For instance, providing the organization with new cars might lead to fewer traffic accidents or car breakdowns. At the same time, driving around in new cars in certain contexts can increase the risk of humanitarian workers

to be targeted.[6] Hence, among other factors, SRM aims at reducing the influence of individual risk perception in decision making and enabling employees to reach those most in need while ensuring the security of staff members.[7]

A universal definition of "good SRM" for the humanitarian sector does not exist.[3] The Good Practice Review (GPR) 8 on 'Operational Security Management in Violent Environments', a widely recognized reference guideline for SRM in the humanitarian sector, describes "good" SRM as keeping residual risks to a minimum through procedures that reduce the impact and probability of security risks. It further states that risk-taking should be justified by the potential benefits of specific activities.[8]

SRM in this paper is understood as a **preventative process focused on identifying physical security risks and managing and mitigating them to an acceptable level.**[8] It further refers to the implementation of security strategies (acceptance, protection, deterrence) within an organization.[9]

Although often used interchangeably, the terms **security and safety can be differentiated**. While security risks are defined in this paper as potential threats to life by external acts of violence, aggression, or crime (random or targeted) against humanitarian aid workers, assets, or property, safety refers to "unintentional or accidental acts, events or hazards".[10]

Building on existing literature on SRM processes within humanitarian INGOs,[11] **this study addresses the gap concerning the institutionalization of SRM – its inclusion in decision-making processes and organizational culture – in humanitarian INGOs and local NGOs. Additionally, this paper examines the relationship between SRM and risk-taking/aversion in humanitarian NGOs and their governmental as well as multilateral donor agencies.** Thereby, risk aversion refers to a tendency to avoid or a non-acceptance of greater levels of residual risk for life-saving programming,[12] while risk-taking refers to the willingness to do so. An organization's risk appetite describes the level of this willingness.

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i *Schneiker (2018) defines institutionalized SRM as: "systems [which] include security policies (e.g., on which security strategies to follow) that result in concrete procedures (e.g., for how to conduct risk assessments or evacuations) and are supported by institutionalized structures (e.g., security training) and staff (e.g., security managers)" (pp. 108/109).*

2. HUMANITARIAN NGOS, DONORS AND SECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT

"There are basically three things in security analysis. There are your guts, there's the organization, and there's the technicality."

Expert, Interview E, 2019

Institutionalization of Security Risk Management

As our case studies of humanitarian NGOs show (see boxes), **different forms of institutionalized SRM in humanitarian NGOs can be identified in practice: centralized, decentralized, and ad hoc**. While for one organization SRM might be placed at the Senior Management at headquarter level (centralized), it can be more suitable for another to have a more localized approach (decentralized) or even ad hoc processes in place, depending on the respective organizational structure, resources available, and operational risk environment.

There is no right or wrong concerning a specific kind of SRM or its type of institutionalization. However, **objectivity in SRM processes is necessary**. Consequently, some form of structural SRM is required to avoid judgments solely based on an individual's perception of security risks.

This leads to another important aspect stressed in the interviews which relates to the understanding of **SRM as a participative process across an organization** involving not just staff specifically dedicated to security. This **can prevent a disconnect between decisions taken by Senior Management at headquarter level and those made by field staff**. Integrating staff in the drafting of SRM policies also improves acceptance and is important to ensure understanding and respect of SRM. Thereby, internal transparency within an organization regarding security risks, including accessible security reports and guidelines for all staff, optimally becomes part of an organization's culture.

In any case, **context-specific analysis and knowledge must be included in all forms of SRM**. This can range from the input of local Security Managers to conversations with partners. For instance, **organization B** developed a comprehensive planning process that, among others, can be used for a security and risk analysis. It combines all information on a specific area and is used to decide if a program is implemented or not. It also helps to draft security plans for the country as well as the regional level. Through this, the management tried to ensure that the procedures are clear and followed by staff members, including those who might not always be "security-minded".[13] The information on and analysis of security risks should be part of any decision-making on activities and programs. This is not yet a common practice in all organizations. However, the interviews conducted suggest that this is increasingly the case and that SRM processes are gaining in importance.

Organization A: Large, Western Europe-based humanitarian INGO (→7,000 staff). Major security risks include collateral damage in conflicts and assaults on personnel and assets. A Global Security Manager is supported by a team of around ten people at headquarter level. In total, around 130 staff are concerned with SRM related tasks at regional as well as country level. This reaches from international Security Managers and fulltime Security Officers or Security Coordinators (national staff) to Security Focal Points.

Organization B: Large, Western Europe-based humanitarian INGO (→2,000 staff). Main security risks are collateral damages due to "being at the wrong place at the wrong time", and exposure to armed groups. At headquarter level, a Security Risk Advisor provides context analysis and assessment, but is not always fully involved in decision-making processes on where to implement projects. At country level, some missions have a Security Officer/Coordinator but SRM is often part of the portfolio of the Head of Mission, Area/Field Coordinator or staff who serve as Security Focal Points.

Organization C: Local, South Asian humanitarian NGO operating in a "high-risk" context with more than 450 staff and 16 regional offices. Its main security threats include: Exposure to armed groups, security threats when refusing clientelism and corrupt practices, and accusations that can endanger the security of its staff. Organization C employs a Security Manager at the headquarter level as well as Security Officers at the regional/district level.

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Before a project of **organization C** gets approved, the Project Manager must consult with the Security Officer to draw up a security plan. This is a two-stage process in which the Security Officer consults with other security managers of humanitarian INGOs and NGOs present in a certain area. It also includes visits to the proposed program site and coordination with the potential beneficiaries as well as different local authorities (e.g., relevant state agencies, armed groups, community leaders).[19]

Monitoring and Evaluation

All humanitarian NGOs interviewed stated that they had reporting systems in place that were analyzed regularly and used to provide lessons learned. They all revised and updated their policies and procedures periodically. Monitoring the implementation of these measures was described as difficult by all representatives.

Organization A tried to tackle this through an internal compliance system and a self-assessment for the different offices which is to be completed every four months. Additionally, the SRM unit conducts field visits at least every four years to audit and review the offices.[14] Similarly, **organization B** tries to ensure the implementation of SRM through field visits as well as an online platform. However, in most offices monitoring depends on the style of management and how "security-minded" the person in charge is which is difficult to manage for the Security Advisor.[13] According to a report on **organization C**'s website, experts of a private international company that provides consultancy on security for humanitarian NGOs reviewed the security policy and procedures recently.[15]

Security incident reporting systems provide for a better understanding of current security threats and trends that can support SRM processes. Following Cunningham and Lockyear (2016), reporting systems should be understood as useful since they allow for "structure, objectivity, and reference points" to tackle the subjectivity of risk-taking.[16]

The **donors interviewed (see boxes) did not hold previous security incidents against implementing partners**. Instead, it depended on the type of incident and the ability of an organization to show that incidents were analyzed, and triggers identified to avoid similar situations in the future. Specifically, **donor A** was not reluctant to continue funding if a humanitarian organization could adapt its approach after identifying what provoked the incident.[17]

Contract Negotiations

Sound SRM requires resources that can be obtained through more transparency in contract negotiations with donors. Literature suggests that security costs need to be justified and communicated in program design and negotiations with donors.[18] None of our interviewees working for humanitarian organizations was directly involved in negotiations with donors. However, the representative of **organization A** stated that the results of the security risk assessment are usually part of the project proposal and are shared with donors. The interviewee stressed that sustaining a comprehensive SRM at headquarter and regional level requires more money to be spent on the organization especially since donors are demanding compliance and oversight.[14]

> **Donor A:** Western European, governmental donor organisation. For donor A, the ability of a local NGO to deliver on a project (incl. access, i.e. its ability to manage complex environments with different and sometimes competing actors) was more important than asking specifically for SRM processes, although these two aspects were understood as being complementary. Consequently, donor A never speaks about security directly with local organizations. However, it is aware of the need for local capacity building to avoid "risk dumping" or "risk transfer".

In contrast, **one donor was willing to increase funding for SRM processes due to the context organization B was operating in**. Furthermore, the SRM process positively affected relations with donors. Even in the case of a security incident, the organization could show that all preventative and responsive measures had been in place to protect its employees and respect its 'Duty of Care' towards them. In general, the organization tends to add expenses for SRM in contracts even if not specifically asked for.[13]

> **Donor B:** Multilateral donor organization. As for governmental donor organization A, the representative of donor B argued that the ability of a local NGO to deliver on a project was more important than asking specifically for SRM processes, although these two aspects were understood as being complementary. However, humanitarian organizations that can show how they are managing risks have an advantage in the selection process.

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All donors interviewed for this report welcomed more transparency in contract negotiations with separate budget lines for SRM. Furthermore, sustaining a comprehensive SRM at headquarter and regional level requires additional money to be spent on the organization. While this might not directly affect aid recipients, the funds are needed to enable or enhance the quality of programs by ensuring that implementation is not disrupted or terminated due to security incidents.

> **Donor C:** Multilateral donor organization. It does not ask at all for SRM in contract negotiations. Furthermore, its representative argued that it can be difficult to assess whether the SRM of an INGO or local NGO is "reasonable". To tackle this, donor C is trying to identify global parameters for contract negotiations that can help Security Officers to evaluate if a partner organization can manage the risks associated with implementing a certain project.

Security Training and Capacity Building

In **humanitarian INGOs, security training for international staff is widely institutionalized** and recognized as an important part of SRM. This seems to be **different for local staff, where training is shorter and less frequently offered** than that for international employees.

The representative of **organization A** highlighted the importance of training for staff before being deployed to the field. A Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) within the first six months of employment constitutes a minimum standard for all international staff deployed to medium-risk and high-risk countries. Recently, an individual safety training program was established for national staff. The training lasts for three days and every local staff member is required to take part every four years.[14]

Since local staff is often responsible for the implementation of programs in high-risk areas, **INGOs and donor organizations must ensure that security training for local staff has a high priority in SRM**. This leads to another important issue: **How to support local organizations to ensure the safety of their staff**.

While training and capacity building is often understood as the sole solution, it seems that these **efforts can remain without a lasting effect if they are not tailored to specific contexts**. To the contrary, they can reinforce the dismissal of SRM

as a "Western" concept if they are not context-specific. For instance, the two interviewees representing **organization C** argued that their knowledge and understanding of the context gave them an advantage over INGOs which often struggle to fully grasp the underlying socio-cultural/political hierarchical structures and how they relate to each other.[19]

> "The problem for us on the ground is that security trainings done by INGOs do often not consider local and traditional rules."
>
> *Humanitarian Worker of Organization C, Interview K, 2019*

Hence, **capacity building should be understood as a joint activity, building on existing capacities and knowledge**. In this process, the implementing organization and INGO or donor must work together on equal footing, considering that the former is responsible for the implementation of SRM processes. This includes ensuring that local NGOs have the time and personnel needed for joint capacity building.

Specifically, **donor A** sees "twinning" as a possible solution. In this case, INGOs work together with local NGOs, not only for the implementation of a specific project but also to enhance the capacity of their local partners. In practice, donor A tends to fund umbrella organizations that mainly provide consultancy services such as security information services and security training. This is seen as more practical as they provide services to all their local partners.[17]

Donor B distributes funds from a pool fund and argued that it can indeed be difficult to increase the money for certain projects to include capacity-building measures. If it is possible, donor B is willing to try to allocate funding to build or enhance capacity or to find a different solution. To do so, donor B stated that organizations should be transparent in the selection process to find a joint solution rather than risking problems during the implementation phase.[20]

In some cases, **donor C** offers training and capacity building to implementing partners. However, donor C has no formalized procedure in place to decide when training and capacity building should be provided to implementing partners.[21]

Finally, one of the most central approaches to mitigate security risks constitutes the **negotiation of access to beneficiaries**. Organizations must ensure that they understand who is in control of a certain area and whom they must negotiate with. This entails not just a context analysis but also an understanding of how the organization and its employees are perceived by actors on the ground. This understanding and skill are optimally reinforced through capacity building.

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Risk Transfer

Both donors and humanitarian organizations participating in this research were aware of **the inevitability of risk transfers in partnerships** since partnerships usually imply that the implementation of projects in high-risk contexts falls to local organizations. Hence, INGOs and donors interviewed were trying to mitigate risks for local NGOs. However, approaches varied considerably, from addressing security issues of local partners with conflict partners directly, to actively trying to enhance the capacities of local actors.

For example, before signing contracts with local NGOs, **donor A** conducts a partner risk assessment focusing on an organization's history of working in a specific context, including its networks to guarantee access to beneficiaries.[17]

Donor C is trying to implement a "risk-sharing" approach and thus relies on the risk acceptance of partner organizations. In theory, donor C is willing to take very high risks in partnerships to reach out to beneficiaries if program criticality is given. However, it sometimes struggles to find partner organizations that are willing to accept these risks. Risk-sharing for donor C includes risks for the organization itself such as program failure and the loss of resources which can have an impact on its reputation.[21]

Donors and INGOs bear the responsibility to accept and respect the partner organization's decision on whether the implementation of a project is feasible or not. Furthermore, they should openly address questions of funding for adequate SRM processes in negotiations. INGOs still receive more funding for the development and maintenance of internal structures than local NGOs.[17] The donors interviewed were aware of this. Some were willing to increase funding for local NGOs if the latter included funding for SRM into project proposals or mentioned it during contract negotiations.

For **organization A**, working with local implementing partner organizations was common practice. In 2018, the department responsible for humanitarian access in organization A established a "Humanitarian Partnership Toolkit" to standardize cooperation with local partners.[14]

Organization B preferred to directly implement projects. When entering partnerships, the organization favored sitting down with local NGOs and speak about the terms of the cooperation rather than having a general guideline in place. In some partnerships, SRM was part of the negotiations. While security plans were not shared with local partners, some joint security and safety mechanisms existed.[13]

As a local NGO, **organization C** has been an implementing partner for various INGOs and donor organizations. The representatives of organization C did not mention donor organizations asking for SRM in contract negotiations. So far, donors and partners have always accepted the Security Manager's decisions on the feasibility of a specific project. One interviewee described an incident where a multilateral donor organization tried to ensure access to beneficiaries all over the country. However, the measures taken were insufficient and the NGO still had to rely on its ability to negotiate access.[19]

Risk Appetite

In our research, we could not determine a clear **relation between the institutionalization of SRM and the risk appetite of an organization**. For instance, **organization B** had only one fulltime staff dedicated to SRM but was willing to accept high levels of risk while **organization A** had a whole department dedicated to SRM and was also willing to accept high levels of risk.

Organization A seemed to have a clearly defined risk appetite which, in certain cases, has led to the decision to stay out of certain areas if the risk assessment concluded that risks could not be adequately mitigated and/or were not relative to the objectives of the program. For **organization B** a high risk appetite was part of its organizational culture while for **organization C** it was directly aligned with its security policy. These findings suggest that **all organizations had some kind of risk-threshold as part of their SRM systems** whereas it seemed that some organizations had a more clearly defined threshold than others.

Contrary to Stoddard et al. (2016) who argue that questions of program criticality are often ignored in risk management of humanitarian NGOs, this report highlights that **program criticality plays an important role in humanitarian NGOs when considering security risks**.[12] All representatives of humanitarian organizations interviewed argued that the more they interpret a situation as life-threatening, the more willing they are to take risks associated with the implementation of programs. However, this needs more detailed research since our findings could also hint at negative risk transfer practices by some organizations. For instance, an organization may see a program as critical but at the same time decides to stay out of a specific context due to security concerns and instead assigns a local partner with the implementation of the project.

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As Neuman and Weissman (2016) highlight in their critical reflection on SRM in the humanitarian sector, **zero risk does not exist**. The authors further stress the danger of "normalizing" security risks by putting standardized SRM processes in place.[3] Building on their argument, this report argues that SRM processes can positively contribute to the security of humanitarian workers if the previous experience of frontline staff is incorporated in contextualized SRM processes instead of relying on a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Understanding SRM as "enabling" throughout an organization can only be achieved if this is considered and Senior Managers accept SRM as a valuable component of humanitarian action.

"If it's a core activity of your program and you believe in it, then you go and try to do it, minimizing the risks as low as reasonably possible, considering that zero risk doesn't exist."

Humanitarian Worker of Organization B, Interview G, 2019

On the other end of the spectrum, **risk aversion needs to be part of the debate on SRM** and should not be deemed as a weakness when communicated openly and justified. This implies that donor and partner organizations have to ensure that artificially grown levels of risk appetite are not reinforced by their (funding) practices.

Integration of Security Risk Management in Wider Risk Management Processes

In contrast to pre-existing research that identifies the prevalence of a "siloed" approach to different risk areas – tackling different risks separately – in humanitarian NGOs with security risks having top priority,[22] the findings of this paper's underlying research suggest that **INGOs still rank other risks such as financial or reputational as more relevant than security risks**. However, they are often interlinked. For instance, security incidents due to insufficient or absent SRM processes can influence the reputation of an organization and its ability to secure funding. Hence, organizations should not separate or prioritize one risk over another, and SRM should be a fundamental part of integrated risk management. 93% of the participants in the online survey mentioned explicitly to have an **integrated risk management system in place that embraces security risks.** The same holds for the INGOs interviewed for this study.

Due to the **interconnectedness of different risks**, existing research stresses the potential value that the management of operational security risks can have for the assessment and management of other risks.[22] Following this argument, the aspects discussed in this paper may be considered when analyzing the institutionalization of risk management beyond solely focusing on security risks.

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3. ADDRESSING THE KEY ISSUES

Institutionalization of Security Risk Management

SRM plays an important role in various humanitarian NGOs due to the nature of humanitarian action. However, **a one-size-fits-all approach to the institutionalization of SRM does not exist.** Instead, SRM varies considerably from organization to organization, and SRM processes depend on an organization's structure and culture as well as its operational environment.

While some organizations have a whole department dedicated to SRM, others have just one fulltime position throughout the entire organization. In general, responsibility for SRM seems to be part of the portfolio of different positions within an organization. Security training and security management plans are standard in the majority of INGOs that participated in this research. For local NGOs, the results were different, and security management plans and guidelines were less frequent. Additionally, security training seems to be little localized, with less training for local staff and volunteers. This hints at a gap between the adoption of the 'Localization of Aid' agenda, as well as partnerships based on a risk-sharing approach, and their implementation. Importantly, the interviews of this research project revealed that it remains unclear how a risk-sharing approach can look like in reality. The recommendations presented in the following chapter of this paper provide some possible measures on how to minimize risk dumping or negative security risk transfer practices.

Donors interviewed were not specifically asking for SRM processes in contract negotiations but showed a willingness to direct more funding towards SRM and related capacity building processes. Hence, a relation between reluctance to fund humanitarian NGOs that do not have (institutionalized) SRM processes in place could not be established. However, the expert interviews also showed that this depends on the donor. While some ask for SRM processes in contract negotiations, others do not. This finding was confirmed by the survey in which representatives of humanitarian organizations stated that more than half of all donors demanded SRM processes. Transparency in contract negotiations with donors can help to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to sound SRM processes.

In all forms of SRM, context-specific analysis and knowledge need to be taken into account. Furthermore, it is important to include these aspects in security training and capacity building processes, be they conducted by external or internal agents. Monitoring as part of SRM was found to be difficult for humanitarian organizations but may contribute to lessons learned and allow to focus on context-specific SRM procedures.

Security Risk Management and Risk Appetite

A direct relation between a humanitarian organization's institutionalization of SRM and risk appetite seems to be inexistent. Depending on a humanitarian organization's mandate, mission and operations, an organization's risk appetite may vary. However, this does not necessarily correlate to the existence of SRM processes within a humanitarian organization. In other words, the level of risk an organization is willing to accept (risk appetite) appears to be linked to factors other than the basic use of SRM processes in the organization. This does not suggest that SRM plays no role in the development of a risk appetite statement, just that factors beyond the SRM process itself influence the willingness to take or avoid risk. The factors that influence risk appetite is a topic that deserves more examination outside of this study. In contrast to SRM, program criticality seems to be directly related to humanitarian NGOs' willingness to accept security risks. Further research is, however, needed, on what constitutes a considerable risk appetite especially in relation to risk dumping.

In all cases, different forms of structural SRM should be understood as contributing to an objective, "enabling" and participative process across an organization that is needed to ensure sound decision-making processes on activities and programs. Optimally, sound SRM processes result in a risk appetite which is adequate to an organization's risk tolerance. Only where security risks are not "normalized" through one-size-fits-all SRM processes but instead contextualized and built on internal experiences, the security of humanitarian staff can be optimized.

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Security and Other Risks

Compared to other risks, security still tends to get less attention within humanitarian organizations. In negotiations with donors, security risks seem to be less or equally important compared to other risks. However, many humanitarian organizations are deciding to divert more time and capacities towards the management of security risks, frequently labeled as "enabling" programs. Additionally, more organizations now opt for an integrative risk management approach which also includes considerations of other risks such as fiduciary, legal, and reputational risk.

Towards Security Risk-Sharing

Questions regarding **security risk transfer and especially negative risk transfer practices in partnerships between or with humanitarian NGOs, and how they can be avoided, remain largely unaddressed** in research. Therefore, SRM processes must be part of policy discourses on the protection of aid workers to foster knowledge exchange on the issue. As long as local humanitarian organizations and other actors, experiencing negative risk transfer practices, are not equally involved in these discourses and exchanges, it is unlikely that meaningful solutions towards a risk-sharing approach can be developed. This is especially relevant before the background that local NGOs have been underrepresented in studies on SRM. To achieve meaningful solutions, data transparency and honest dialogues are necessary conditions that need to be considered by all actors within the humanitarian sector.

"Even if you are doing it [Security Risk Management] from a risk-sharing mentality, organizations have to be very clear they are also transferring risk."

Expert, Interview D, 2019

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4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations on SRM are addressed to local and international humanitarian NGOs, their donors, as well as actors involved in agenda-setting and policymaking in humanitarian action.

Internal SRM Processes in Local and International Humanitarian NGOs

Include context-specific analysis and knowledge in all forms of SRM to ensure that security procedures are both feasible and understandable.

SRM processes, understood as a guiding framework, are only of value if different procedures are adaptable to specific contexts. Including context-specific knowledge ensures that humanitarian workers at the implementing level perceive SRM procedures as useful. This requires participative SRM processes, and consultation with frontline staff on the practicality of certain measures.

Have internal security incident reporting procedures in place and ensure that employees can report security incidents without having to fear negative repercussions.

The data collected through internal reporting systems/procedures are to be used as a source of information that needs to be analyzed and find its way into operations and SRM procedures. This data can only be meaningful if employees are encouraged to report incidents that can be ensured through procedures that guarantee full anonymity.

Ensure that SRM prevents the transfer of responsibility for incidents on individual humanitarian workers. Vice versa, humanitarian workers should not see SRM as a substitute for personal risk awareness.

Make SRM a responsibility across the organization. At the same time, informed consent on security risks need to be part of the recruitment procedures of humanitarian workers and the limits of SRM need to be clearly articulated.

Include SRM as an important part of integrated risk management approaches.

Since different risks are interlinked, SRM needs to be understood and implemented as part of broader risk management processes, such as integrated risk management systems. Only then can security and other risks be addressed effectively, and comprehensive procedures be applied which consider various risks at the same time.

Partnerships with Local and International Humanitarian NGOs

Ensure project/contract negotiations are more transparent and include separate budget lines for SRM in project proposals.

To effectively include SRM in projects, it needs to be part of planning processes and initial negotiations with donor and partner organizations. Allocating specific budget lines to SRM allows all parties to understand SRM related procedures and to justify them. Transparency concerning SRM processes in project or contract negotiations needs to become a standard in the humanitarian sector to ensure sufficient resource allocation.

Accept and respect a partner organization's decision on whether the implementation of a project is feasible or not.

Partner organizations of humanitarian NGOs and their donors need to avoid pressuring implementing organizations such as local NGOs into accepting programs and awarding them contracts if they do not have the capacity to conduct risk analysis, do not have the experience to operate in a certain context or the means to negotiate safe access for staff. Only partnerships on an equal footing can prevent negative risk transfer practices and artificially high levels of risk-taking. This requires transparency from all parties involved in a partnership.

Ensure that implementing humanitarian NGOs have the networks and contacts in place that allow for safe access.

Simply asking for security policies or guidelines in contract/project negotiations without taking questions of access into account can disadvantage small local NGOs that might have the ability to deliver on a project without endangering staff. Information on networks and contacts provide relevant insights into how an organization may be perceived in a specific context and can, therefore, be more relevant than lengthy and detailed security policies and guidelines.

Conduct capacity building in SRM for humanitarian NGOs as a joint activity, building on existing capacities and knowledge.

The imposition of SRM processes and procedures which neither consider local realities nor build on existing capacities and knowledge is unlikely to be of use to humanitarian field staff. Having the organization whose capacity is strengthened in the driver's seat during the whole process, can contribute to a participative approach while integrating SRM in already existing processes and making SRM an organization-specific endeavor.

Ensure that context-specific security training for local staff has the same priority as training for international staff.

The fact that local organizations often have few options to withdraw from certain activities and locations needs to be reflected in the offer of security training. Additionally, knowing the local context better does not necessarily come with less exposure to security risks. Including existing knowledge and experience of humanitarian workers in security training allows responding to an organization's real needs.

Advocacy of SRM

Address SRM processes more explicitly in policy discourses on the protection of humanitarian workers.

To ensure that SRM is institutionalized in humanitarian NGOs and the needed resources are available, SRM processes need to be addressed more specifically in debates on the protection of humanitarian workers. It is the responsibility of actors involved in agenda-setting and policymaking in humanitarian action to stress the necessity of SRM and to improve existing processes by supporting knowledge exchange on SRM within the humanitarian sector, with special consideration to local humanitarian organizations.

Actors involved in agenda-setting and policymaking in humanitarian action need to strongly advocate for security risk-sharing processes, thereby reducing the prevalence of negative security risk transfer practices.

Guidance in the humanitarian sector on SRM needs to address negative security risk transfer practices and advocate strongly for compliance with a security risk-sharing approach within the sector. Advocacy on this issue will be strengthened if a greater voice is given to actors suffering from negative security risk transfer practices in an environment wherein transparency and honest discussions can take place.

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GLOSSARY

Acceptance-based security strategies
Refers to strategies that "are based on aid workers being accepted by the local communities".[23] This is built on "the consent, approval, and cooperation from individuals, communities and local authorities".[24]

Deterrence-based security strategies
Refers to a strategy that aims at "reducing the risk by containing the threat with a counter-threat".[25] For instance, the employment of armed guards to protect compounds.[26]

Duty of Care
Legal obligations of humanitarian organizations to ensure the safety and security of their employees in the workplace under national (labor) law.[3]

Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT)
Aimed at individuals deployed, traveling to, or based in high-risk environments. HEAT is a "threat-specific personal security training, including simulation exercises."[27]

Humanitarian aid worker
Employee with an official work contract of an organization which is operationally active in humanitarian action.

International humanitarian NGO
NGO with a humanitarian mandate exercised in a country other than where its headquarters are based.

Local/national humanitarian NGO
NGO with a humanitarian mandate exercised in the country where its headquarters is based.

Organizational culture
Simply defined as "the way we do things around here". Every organization "has a culture towards security and risks in general".[28]

Program criticality
Willingness of humanitarian actors to "accept greater levels of residual risk for life-saving programming".[12]

Project Cycle Management
Tool used in the development/humanitarian sector to design, implement, and evaluate a project in different stages. The project cycle management defined in the online survey contained the following stages: assessment, design, implementation, monitoring & audit, and closure.

Protection-based security strategies
Refers to any strategy deployed by humanitarian agencies to protect its workers and assets. This can range from wearing bulletproofed vests, using armored vehicles to removing all labels of the organization from its cars or offices, and using the same cars as the local population.[29]

Risk appetite
An organization's or individual's willingness to accept a certain level of risk.

Risk dumping / Negative risk transfer practices
In contrast to risk sharing, it refers to a negative practice of the transfer of risks to an organization or individual that has limited capacity to manage such risk.

Risk tolerance
An organization's or individual's capacity to manage risks.

Security incident
Refers to "any situation or event that has caused, [...], harm to staff, associate personnel or a third party, significant disruption to programs and activities, and substantial damage or loss to organization's property or its reputation".[24]

Security risk management procedures
Specific or prescribed ways to undertake parts of the security risk management process. They can, for example, include internal security guidelines/policies.

Security risk management process
Process which encompasses all tasks, procedures, or methods related to security risk management.

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