METHODOLOGY: The study captured in-country practices through field-based reviews of 6 complex security settings (Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT), Pakistan, Somalia (remote management), and Sudan (Darfur)) and a desk review of an additional six settings (Chad, Colombia, Haiti, Iraq, Sri Lanka, and Yemen). In total, 255 practitioners and policy-makers were interviewed at headquarters and in the field.
Key messages

- **Maintaining an effective presence through risk management**: Delivering aid to affected populations in complex security environments will entail a residual risk. Senior management’s accountability frameworks should aim at promoting effective decision-making based on sound analysis rather than attribution of fault.

- **Acceptance and access require sustained humanitarian dialogue**: In today’s volatile operating environments, acceptance for humanitarian action vis-à-vis local authorities and communities, as well as access to affected populations need to be approached as a process rather than as an event, requiring presence, time, and sustained engagement with all parties.

- **Humanitarian principles matter**: Rhetoric for greater adherence to humanitarian principles needs to be matched with practice. In the past, humanitarian organizations have too willingly compromised a principled approach through close alignment with political and military actors. Member States, in turn, need to reconsider policies that impinge on humanitarians’ ability to engage with all stakeholders, as this is a basic centerpiece of acceptance-building.

- **Low-profile and localized remote programming, not bunkerization**: Security measures may need to complement acceptance-based approaches when aid workers become clear targets in insecure environments. However, a combination of localized programming and low visibility measures have enhanced local acceptance of humanitarian action in these settings.

- **Investment in national personnel’s duty of care and local partners**: Humanitarian organizations need to invest greater resources in their national staff and local implementing agencies in terms of security arrangements and capacity-building.

Key recommendations

**To humanitarian aid agencies:**

- Map highest risk settings and the type of threats involved and use this determination to allocate staff and resources.
- Invest in the development of specialized skill-sets, rigorous selection and vetting of trained staff to deploy to complex environments.
- Address inequities in the duty of care between national personnel and international staff.
- Provide financial, material and technical resources to implementing agencies to enhance responsible partnership.
- Ensure that deployed staff possess a sound understanding of the application of humanitarian principles in practice.

**To HCs, UNDSS, OCHA and the ERC**

- Ensure consistent messaging on safe, timely and unimpeded access to affected populations with relevant state and non-state actors.

**To the Secretary-General**

- Support humanitarian actors and their need to engage with all relevant actors, including non-state armed groups, in order to reach affected populations.

**To states**

- Refrain from enacting legislation and policies undermining humanitarian engagement with parties to conflict and local stakeholders.
- Host states are encouraged to engage with humanitarian actors to create conditions conducive to humanitarian action.
- Support longterm humanitarian security risk management practices and acknowledge that building acceptance takes time.
- Support field-based NGO security coordination mechanisms.
- Establish a permanent forum for donor dialogue on security coordination, for instance through the Good Humanitarian Donorship.

- **These recommendations require both a behavioral and attitudinal shift.**
- **Good practices presented throughout the report are recommended options to be considered for implementation.**

Contact

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