Security Risk Management Strategies in High-Risk Environments

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ABSTRACT: Security risks in humanitarian operational environments are diverse and complex and require systematic approaches to address them. The paper presents an overview of security risk management in high-risk humanitarian contexts. It critically examines security risk management strategies adopted by humanitarian organizations to deal with insecurity in high risk environments. Addressing security risks in high-risk humanitarian environments entails embracing some or a mixture of security risk management strategies suitable to given contexts. The aim is to lower security risks to levels that allow safe and secure humanitarian operations. Sound humanitarian security risk management strategies allow humanitarian personnel to stay and deliver, enabling humanitarian work to continue in high-risk environments. In this regard, humanitarian organizations have cardinal responsibilities to develop and implement security risk management policies, procedures, processes, practices, and measures that address inherent security risks in high risk environments**.**

Keywords: Duty of care, High-risk environments, Humanitarian security risk management, Security strategy and Security risk management strategies*.*

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1. Introduction

The current millennium has witnessed a surge in humanitarian crises in many regions of the world, primarily due to conflict [1]. There have been record numbers of forced displacements requiring enormous humanitarian interventions and assistance. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the estimated number of displaced people by the end of 2022 was 108 million driven by the crisis in Ukraine [2]. Responding to humanitarian crises and delivering assistance to the people in need has significant security challenges. The humanitarian operational environment is plagued with inherent security risks which must be navigated if aid is to be delivered to communities in need. Several studies and reports have confirmed that in the numerous and diverse humanitarian crises in the world, insecurity remains pervasive and represents significant challenges to humanitarian operations particularly in high-risk environments. High-risk environments are associated with any or a mix of, general insecurity, armed conflict, fragile post-conflict situations, weak or nonexistent governance and security systems, widespread violence, international law and national law violations, human rights abuses, political instability or repression and civil infrastructure collapse [3, 4]. For the United Nations (UN), high-risk environments are duty stations eligible for danger pay as determined by the International Civil Service Commission(ICSC) based on local conditions of safety and security, health care, housing, climate, isolation, and level of amenities/conveniences of life [5].

Humanitarian operations are conducted in some high-risk environments fraught with active armed conflict or in fragile post-conflict contexts, characterized by high levels of crime, terrorism, fundamentalism, extremism, civil unrest, hazards and other dangers. The environments require systematic security management to meaningfully manage security risks. Addressing insecurity in high-risk humanitarian environments compels humanitarian organizations to adopt security risk management strategies suitable to the specific contexts. This is to lower risks to acceptable levels that allow humanitarian activities to continue. Acceptable risk is the level of risk organizations are willing to take in order to implement their programs or mandates [6]. Security risk management strategies generally applied by humanitarian organizations in high-risk environments are Acceptance, Protection, Deterrence and Avoidance. The United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) employs the Security Risk Management (SRM) approach. The security strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance are incorporated in the SRM approach [6]. The security strategies define strategic organizational security management posture. This vanguards the development and implementation of appropriate security risk management policies, practices, processes, procedures, and measures that are area and context specific. Sound humanitarian security risk management strategies are enablers of safe and secure humanitarian operations, including protection of aid workers and aid beneficiaries. Their aim is to lower risks to acceptable levels [6].

There are several studies and reports on humanitarian security risk management in complex environments. Most of the studies and reports have acknowledged the importance of systematic security risk management in humanitarian operations in order to meaningfully operate in high-risk environments. For example, studies by Egeland *et al.,* [7], Jackson and Zyck [8]*,* both commissioned by UN OCHA, and a study by Kadwo [9].
Egeland *et al.,* [7] examined humanitarian security management in twelve complex emergencies with different risk patterns. The security risk management strategies that generally applied in complex security environments were examined among other humanitarian related security themes. The study highlighted that security risk management was a significant concern for humanitarian organizations in complex security environments. The study provided some good security practices that would enable humanitarian work in high-risk security environments. A follow up independent study was conducted by Jackson and Zyck [8]. The study found out that there were contextual, institutional, and operational changes since Egeland *etal.,*[7] study. Humanitarian operational environments had become more complex with increased security risks and that security risk management posed significant challenges to humanitarian organizations in highly insecure environments.

Kadwo [9] explored security risk management strategies in complex emergencies. The study investigated how the implementation of security risk management strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence and risk transfer by the UN in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Northeast Nigeria impacted on the delivery of humanitarian projects in complex emergencies as perceived by humanitarian practitioners. The study concluded that the security risk management strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and risk transfer were widely used by the UN and positively impacted the timely delivery of aid in complex emergencies. Other significant reports include periodic reports of the United Nations Secretary General to the UN General Assembly on Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel and Aid Worker Security reports published by Humanitarian Outcomes.

The three empirical studies above, among other studies, are significant in the field of humanitarian security management. However, there remain gaps in scholarly work on humanitarian security management in high risk humanitarian environments. One particular scholarly gap is on how good humanitarian security risk management strategies have significantly enabled humanitarian operations to continue even in some of the most complex, volatile, fragile, conflict-affected, and high-risk environments. This paper helps to bridge that gap and is part of the academic discourse on humanitarian security management in high-risk environments. It contributes to the body of knowledge for scholars, policymakers, humanitarians, governments, researchers,

and others interested in exploring the concept of humanitarian security management in high- risk environments.

2. Security Risk Management in High-Risk Humanitarian Environments

Humanitarian high-risk environments are associated with pervasive insecurity including violence against aid workers and aid beneficiaries. The environments are insecure, complex, unstable, and provide challenging working conditions with diverse security threats and risks [5]. Ensuring that humanitarian organizations carry out their mandates requires implementing security risk management strategies that address the security risks in the environment. Examples of UN classified high-risk environments include Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Central Africa Republic, Mali, Niger, Eastern DRC, Northern Nigeria and North Eastern Kenya [5].

Humanitarian security risk management is primarily concerned with managing security risks in humanitarian operational environments [7]. Humanitarian security risk management is about identifying the threats in the environment and coming up with security policies, processes, procedures, practices, and measures that address the risks caused by the threats. The security threats in aid delivery service are diverse. For the UN security management system, the threats come from categories of crime, terrorism, armed conflict, and civil unrest while safety threats are from hazards [6]. Some of the security threats seen in high-risk humanitarian contexts include bombing, armed attacks, improvised explosive attacks, ambush, kidnapping/ abduction, robberies, shooting, thefts, intimidation, gender-based violence among many others. Hazardous threats include natural disasters (flooding, cyclone, tsunami), road traffic accidents, air accidents, and fire accidents. The security risks include death, injury, and health related risks, for example, illness, stress, and psychological and mental problems. The main objective of humanitarian security risk management is to manage the security risks in humanitarian operational environments in order to maximize service delivery opportunities [7]. Security risk management must enable humanitarian organizations to carry out their mandates while at the same time managing staff security risks [10].

Humanitarian security risk management is also about ensuring the security and well-being of humanitarian personnel during their work and daily lives. It includes the security of humanitarian operations (to be able to access and deliver humanitarian assistance with no hindrance) and the security of aid beneficiaries before and after receiving humanitarian assistance [7,8]. While states are primarily responsible for the security of humanitarian personnel, operations and aid beneficiaries, humanitarian security risk management allows for greater protection of aid workers to do their work; their ability to conduct humanitarian operations in safe environments, including the unimpeded access to the crisis affected communities; and the safety of the aid beneficiaries [7,8]. Security risk management determines how inherent risks in the humanitarian operating environment should be addressed leading to the development and implementation of security risk management policies, procedures, processes, and measures that address the security risks in the environment.

The objective of security risk management is to allow humanitarian organizations to carry out their mandates to meet their stated objectives while managing security risks in the environment. Systematic humanitarian security risk management is therefore critical to assist organizations to determine the security measures to be implemented to achieve acceptable risk levels. Security risk management also requires humanitarian organizations to define their philosophical approach to security management [7]. This leads to the development and implementation of area and context specific security risk management strategies. Humanitarian security risk management, like any risk management, is a complex and costly exercise for any organization. In this regard, effective and sustainable security risk management requires substantial resources, staff time and effort.

2.1 Security Strategy

Security strategy "is the overarching philosophy that explains and justifies the application of approaches, and use of resources that frame organisational security management" [7, p. xv]. The security strategy defines the overall strategic organizational security management posture. It is particularly important for humanitarian organizations to have a security strategy as both conceptual and operational basis for security management. Defining security strategy is a strategic organizational decision. It leads to the development and implementation of security risk management strategies which address the security risks in the operational environment.

Classically, three broad security approaches are used by humanitarian organizations, especially humanitarian Non-Governmental Organizations(NGOs), and other independent humanitarian organizations such as, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC). The security approaches are *Acceptance, Protection* and *Deterrence*. They are classically referred to as the "Security Triangle" [7]. They combine to form an overall organization security strategy [7]. The strategies are widely applied in complex and high-risk humanitarian environments. Other strategies such as *Avoidance* emerged in some humanitarian contexts. The strategies are continually refined to consider complex evolving developments in humanitarian operational environments. This has necessitated a review of humanitarian security risk management framework in some contexts to consider realities on the ground. The UN system typically follows the UN Security Risk Management (SRM) approach to manage risks [6]. Significantly, acceptance, protection and deterrence strategies are incorporated and compatible with the UN SRM approach and are widely used by UN agencies in high-risk environments [6,9].

Before expounding further on the security risk management strategies applied by humanitarian organizations in high risk environments, it is prudent to examine statistics of some reported security incidents in humanitarian field environments. This helps to contextualize why security risk management is critical for humanitarian organizations.

2.2 Humanitarian Security Incidents

The past two decades have witnessed increased violence against aid workers and humanitarian operations causing casualties and disruption of humanitarian activities [1, 8, 9]. The volatility in the humanitarian operational context, particularly in high-risk environments, has significantly contributed to the advancement of humanitarian security risk management discourse aimed at addressing the risks. The UN and other humanitarian personnel are and have been targeted by both state actors and non-state actors in various parts of the world with grave consequences. For example, on 19 August 2003, a vehicle-laden bomb destroyed the UN's headquarters at the Canal Hotel, Baghdad, Iraq. The bomb killed 22 persons, including the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Iraq, and wounded more than 160 others [11]. The UN subsequently passed Security Council Resolution 1502, which declared deliberate attacks against humanitarian organizations or peacekeepers a war crime [12]. There have been humanitarian casualties in their line of work in many countries and NGOs are particularly affected as highlighted in two reports, the UN Secretary General Report 2022 [13], and Aid Worker Security report 2022 [14].

The UN Secretary General Report [13] summarized incidents of United Nations personnel affected by safety and security incidents over a 10-year period (2012 - 2021) which fell under the United Nations security management system. The incidents had an average of 1557.3 and the peak was in 2015 when 1819 incidents were recorded. The incidents against UN personnel included murder, thefts, robbery, arrest and detention, gender based violence, abductions, home intrusions, intimidation and harassment, road traffic accidents, and aviation accidents. In 2021, safety and security incidents affected 1,652 United Nations personnel compared with 1,458 in 2020, representing a 13 per cent increase. This increase was attributed to an increase in incidents of robbery, arrest and detention, and incidents of intimidation and harassment. In the 10-year period, the

fatalities of UN staff (excluding peacekeeping forces) resulting from violence were at an average of 12.7. Most of the fatalities were a result of criminal acts. The average of crime incidents against UN personnel was 900.3. Fatalities from road traffic crashes were at an average of 11.7. Abductions of UN personnel were at an average of 13.3.

The Aid Worker Security report 2022 [14] summarized incidents from humanitarian organizations including the UN for a 10-year period (2012 – 2021). The summary was in terms of, number of incidents, aid workers victims, numbers killed, numbers injured, international and national victims among other summaries. The average total aid worker victims for the 10 year period was 381.9. The average fatalities was 122.7 while average injuries for the same period were 152.1. The main contributor of aid worker casualties was crime and armed conflict. A critical highlight of the Aid Worker Security report 2022, was that, in 2021 attacks on aid workers claimed more lives than in any year since 2013, with 141 reported fatalities. South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, Ethiopia, and Mali, all high risk environments, were identified as the most violent contexts for aid workers with the highest numbers of attacks, victims, and fatalities. The report also highlighted that there were more NGO casualties compared to UN casualties and that local staff of NGOs were the most affected.

The two reports illustrate why it is important for humanitarian operations to prioritize staff safety and security of humanitarian personnel. The reports also reflect the dangerous environments in which humanitarian personnel are working. In this regard, it is vital for humanitarian organizations to have in place security risk management strategies that realistically and effectively address humanitarian personnel safety and security concerns and aid beneficiaries' security. Security risk management strategies need to ensure that humanitarian operations continue smoothly even in the most insecure environments. Humanitarian organizations must continually adapt to the challenges of operating in extraordinarily complex and volatile security environments.

2.3 Security Risk Management Strategies
Sustainable security risk management strategies must confront most of the dangers in the environment to achieve acceptable risk. The security risk management strategies should ensure that humanitarian operations continue smoothly even in the most insecure environments. The adoption of particular security risk management strategies involves a wide range of decisions, including the allocation of the requisite resources and determination of what is acceptable risk. There are several security risk management strategies applied in humanitarian operations to address risks in the operating environment.

2.3.1 Acceptance Strategy
Acceptance aims at removing or reducing the motivation to target and attack aid workers and humanitarian operations [1]. Bickely [15] defines the acceptance approach as "practices to build a safe operating environment through consent, approval and cooperation from individuals, communities and local authorities" (p.72). According to Egeland *et al.*, [7], acceptance is "actively building and cultivating good relations and consent as part of a security management strategy with local communities, parties to the conflict, and other relevant stakeholders and obtaining their acceptance and consent for the humanitarian organization's presence and its work" (p. xiv). Acceptance security risk management strategies include developing and building sustainable relationships with the diverse actors (state and non-state including non-state armed actors, conflict parties, communities, aid beneficiaries). In this regard, it is critical to understand the actors in a given context and local community dynamics [16]. It is important to strengthen context analysis, strengthen accountability to aid beneficiaries and follow principled humanitarian action for acceptance strategy to be sustainable [1, 16,17]. UN agencies, humanitarian NGOs and other independent humanitarian organizations (e.g., ICRC) actively implement acceptance risk management strategies in their operations. However, the scope differs from organization to organization according to the mandate, funding, size, complexity of operational

area among other considerations. The acceptance strategy requires substantial effort, commitment, and staff time to build.

Acceptance has traditionally been the cornerstone of the humanitarian security risk management approach. It was sometimes taken for granted by humanitarian organizations who assumed that building good relationships with local actors and communities was a guarantee to safety and security of humanitarian personnel and operations [7. 8, 9, 17]. This significantly changed in the late 1990s and 2000s when actors in some humanitarian contexts, particularly conflict, had little or no regard for acceptance [16]. Therefore, acceptance has limitations and is particularly affected by contextual factors in high risk environments. In some contexts, such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Somalia, some armed non-state actor groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Boko Haram in Nigeria did not (still some do not) view humanitarian work as being neutral and impartial [8, 16]. Building acceptance in such contexts was difficult as humanitarian organizations became "legitimate targets". It has been particularly difficult in some high risk contexts for the UN to build acceptance despite the prominent humanitarian role of some of its agencies such as UNHCR, World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The UN has sometimes been perceived as a political actor compromising its independence, neutrality, and ability to build acceptance [9, 18]. The reality on the ground requires that acceptance be complemented by other strategies, for example, protection, deterrence, and other security approaches. Acceptance does not mitigate every risk. Particular focus is now on principled humanitarian action which includes practical application of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, transparency, accountability, adherence to standards, attention to quality and quantity of aid, and addressing complaints to gain acceptance [1, 7, 8].

2.3.2 Protection Strategy

Protection strategy aims at reducing exposure or vulnerability to current and conceivable threats [1, 16]. Protection strategy is defined as "the use of protective procedures, physical structures, materials and devices as part of a security management strategy in order to reduce vulnerability to existing threats" (7. p. xv). A protection strategy is aimed at hardening the target and has no concern to the threat itself, and therefore it is effective to mitigate impacts of targeted attacks and to prevent opportunistic crimes [7, 16]. Typically, security risk management strategies under the protection strategy include building facilities for physical security protection, use of armored vehicles, building bunkers/safe rooms, security training, among others. Some of these only apply in high risk environments, for example, use of armored vehicles, bunkers/safe rooms, and blast resistant devices. Humanitarian organizations including UN agencies widely use protection strategies in their operations in different environments, making substantial investments in physical security of compounds. Examples include use of security guards (armed or unarmed), reinforced walls and fencing, closed circuit television(CCTV), blast resistant devices, lighting, emergency alert and response systems. The aim is to lower the impact if an incident occurs. Protection approaches are often exemplified in environments with armed conflict, high rates of crime and terrorism. The strategy is to mitigate against attacks and intrusions.

Protection strategy is not straight forward as would be assumed. Its application is sometimes affected by the context. Protection strategies or some of their aspects, have had failures in some humanitarian contexts because humanitarian organizations neglected to understand the context. For example, the adopted protection measures must not raise the profile of an organization or make it attractive to potential attackers. This might comparatively increase the security risk or lower the protection measures when compared to similar organizations in the same context. It can make the organization a soft target or high value target [7, 8, 15, 16]. Protection aspects such as high walls may lead to "bunker mentality" causing serious negative perception of the organization by the local community [7, 8]. Balancing protection measures according to the context is therefore critical for humanitarian organizations [15]. Protection strategies also carry with them

substantial costs and some humanitarian organizations, particularly local NGOs with limited funding, find it difficult to implement them.

2.3.3 Deterrence Strategy

Deterrence approach aims to deter a threat with a counter-threat. It ranges from legal, economic, security, to political sanctions applied to the agent posing threat [15]. It can also include the use of force [16, 17]. Deterrence is to prevent a threat by posing a counter-threat, including the use of armed protection, as part of a security management strategy [7, 17]. UN humanitarian operations widely use deterrence and there are several security risk management measures under deterrence. The use of UN armed peacekeepers in the protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel is a typical deterrent security risk management measure used by the UN [16]. Another deterrent measure is the use of armed protection from state security forces and in some instances non-state armed actors e.g., armed militias and armed private guards [16]. Sanctions or threats of sanctions against individuals or groups destabilizing humanitarian operations, by the international community individually or collectively, is also a deterrent strategy. Sanctions may include arms embargoes, travel bans, financial or diplomatic restrictions and referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) [7, 16]. Deterrence is particularly affected by contextual factors in high risk environments and humanitarian organizations need to critically analyze this [7, 16]. For example, application of sanctions by the international community against some states, groups or individuals may have serious operational, political and security ramifications for humanitarian operations in some contexts. The expulsion of 13 international NGOs from Sudan in 2009 after the indictment of then Sudanese President Bashir by the ICC is a case in point [1].

Humanitarian NGOs generally used to have serious reservations with aspects of the deterrence strategy. For example, the use of armed personnel in their work. It was seen as compromising their neutrality leading to negative perception of their staff, work, and organizations, making them potential direct targets of attacks [7, 16, 17]. During the past two decades this position appears to have significantly changed as NGO staff have been targeted for attacks leading to a shift in the modus operandi by some [7, 16]. Some NGOs now prefer collective approaches to security under the Saving Lives Together framework [8, 13]. Examples of collective security include, joining humanitarian convoys under UN peacekeeping armed escorts or government provided armed escorts. In humanitarian environments with high crime rates and or violence, program or project activities are guarded by armed persons (state or non-state). For example, distribution points, warehouses, and office compounds, organized individually or collectively [8, 13].

2.3.4 Avoidance Strategy

Avoidance means either not to engage or withdraw from a specific geography due to presence of higher risk [19, 20]. Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) [16] refers to avoidance as removing a whole organization from the threat, either temporarily or for good. Remote management and risk transfer are part of the avoidance strategy [7,18,21]. UN organizations typically practice avoidance by transferring project or program implementation to their implementing partners, who are mostly NGOs [16]. In this way, UN organizations also transfer security risks to NGOs as legal entities to manage. Avoidance as a security strategy is contentious, particularly, some aspects such as remote management and risk transfer. It has been argued that avoidance impacts negatively on quality and effectiveness of humanitarian intervention with limited accountability [17, 18, 19,]. In some contexts, the avoidance strategy encourages the tendency to more easily avoid insecure areas even if there is great need [17, 18, 19, 21]. Avoidance must be seen as one of many options available to manage security risks.

2.3.5 UN Security Risk Management Approach

The safety and security of UN personnel and operations are significant challenges particularly in high-risk environments. Complicating this is the fact that, the UN is sometimes viewed, by some entities, as a political actor and therefore not a neutral and impartial actor in some humanitarian contexts such as in conflict and

post-conflict environments. [8, 9, 18]. UN personnel and operations have become both deliberate and opportunistic targets in some high-risk environments [13,14,18]. Yet, humanitarian needs are enormous and continue to grow with many humanitarian crises in the world. Given the magnitude of humanitarian needs and the consequences of failing to meet them, the international community, governments, and affected communities expect the UN and other humanitarian organizations to intervene and provide humanitarian assistance. Any risks in the operating environment are certainly expected to be dealt with, enabling humanitarian organizations to stay and deliver. The UN Secretary General [13] aptly explained the situation.

> *The international community continues to call upon the United Nations to respond to complex and multiple crises marked by geopolitical divides, complex international and regional contexts, rising political tensions, economic shocks, social unrest, violent extremism, inequality, and climate disasters. Agile and responsive risk management is a fundamental condition for the United Nations to manage these shifts effectively and continue to fulfil its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and the mandates bestowed by its Member States* (para. 75)

The reality on the ground, in most humanitarian operations, is that it is incomprehensible that UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners (NGOs) would even think of not assisting persons in need, let alone abandon them in their time of need, because of insecurity. UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners must consider all security risk management options available to stay and deliver aid to the communities in need. This is the bottom line.

The UN security management system (UNSMS) typically follows the UN Security Risk Management (SRM) approach to manage security risks [6, 22]. The SRM process was launched in 2004 as a "system–wide managerial tool to analyze and manage safety and security risks to United Nations personnel, assets and operations" [22, p.52]. The SRM approach has been reviewed and updated accordingly to consider complex developments in both the humanitarian and development environments. It is important to highlight that while the SRM approach remains the primary UN security risk management strategy, aspects of the security strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance are extensively applied by UN agencies and are widely integrated and compatible with the UN SRM approach [1,9]. Some of the security measures implemented under the UN SRM approach fall in categories of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance making both UN and NGO approaches harmonious.

The UN Security Policy Manual (SPM) [22] defines security risk management as an analytical procedure that assists in assessing the operational context of the UN. It identifies the risk level of undesirable events that may affect United Nations personnel, assets, and operations. It provides guidance on the implementation of cost-effective solutions in the form of specific prevention and mitigation strategies and measures. The aim is to lower the risk levels for the UN by reducing the impact and likelihood of an undesirable event (para 5). The SRM [23] process is a

> *structured approach to evaluating security risks to ensure that a comprehensive threat and risk analysis leads to effective security decision making and to the implementation of security Risk Management measures. The SRM process endeavors to be a) fact -based, logical, and systematic, b) globally applicable in a consistent, de-politicized manner c) reliable (achieve similar results when different people use it), d) valid (accurately represent the security environment on the ground), and e) user-friendly without being over-simplistic* (para 16).

The UN SRM approach helps identify threats that the UN may face and determine an appropriate response. The SRM model uses a structured approach in order to identify threats and risks that may affect UN personnel and operations. Security decisions are then made based on risk levels. Security risk assessment (SRA) is an

integral part of the SRM approach. SRA is the process of identifying the threats which could affect UN personnel, assets, or operations. It looks at the UN's vulnerability to these threats while assessing the risks to the UN in terms of likelihood and impact. It prioritizes assessing risks while identifying prevention and mitigation strategies and measures. Security risk assessments are area and context specific, helping to narrow down those threats which must be addressed in a particular environment. The SRM approach emphasizes the need to identify the threats in the operational environment and come up with safety and security measures (preventive and mitigation) to address the threats with the aim of lowering the risk.

The threats which must be addressed under the SRM approach fall into the categories of armed conflict, terrorism, crime, civil unrest, and hazards [22]. The risks to the UN are assessed in terms of likelihood and impact. The SRM process consist of 9 steps which interact as shown in following Figure 1.

Source: UN SRM process, Dec 2015

Figure 1. UN security risk management process structured approach

Fig 1 shows the UN SRM model which is a structured nine step approach to assess security risk. The nine steps are interrelated and as such no particular step is more important than the other. However, step 6 is particularly significant. This is the step where security risk management measures (preventive and mitigation) employed to reduce the vulnerability of likelihood and/or impact are identified. The likelihood and impact of threats are then evaluated to determine the risk. This leads to the development of security policies, procedures, practices, and measures which are then implemented at the local level to reduce risks to acceptable levels. The security risk measures implemented address specific threats under the general threat categories of armed conflict, crime, terrorism, civil unrest, and hazard in a particular geographical location and for a specific time frame. The security measures implemented are in broad categories of security management procedures, physical security, equipment and supplies, medical, telecommunications, vehicles, and training. Some of the security measures implemented in these categories can specifically be classified as relating to acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance strategies. For example, compound physical security measures such as high walls and presence of armed guards at UN compounds are both protection and deterrence measures.

The major strength of the SRM approach is that it aims to lower risks to acceptable levels so that humanitarian and development activities can be conducted safely. Reality on the ground is that this is not always possible as residual security risks remain in some high-risk environments. Another strength of the SRM approach is that it is area and context specific. This means that security policies, procedures, processes, practices, and measures

adopted are specifically relevant to a given context. Weaknesses of the SRM approach include the fact that, it requires good knowledge of the context and analytical skills to be able to identify all or majority threats and risks that may affect UN personnel and operations in a particular context. These skills might not be readily available in all high-risk environments where UN agencies operate. Further, reducing risks to acceptable levels is better said than done in high-risk environments as the situation is sometimes super fluid making it difficult if not impossible to anticipate each and every situation. The SRM approach also requires substantial funding and not all UN agencies are able to afford such funding without diverting resources from other needy areas.

2.3.6 Risk Reduction Security Strategies

In addition to the SRM approach and the security risk management strategies of protection, acceptance, deterrence and avoidance, other security risk management strategies applied in the field environments by humanitarian organizations include implementing risk reduction security strategies such as relocation, evacuation, and alternative work modalities[1]. In most cases these are temporary strategies. Other risk reduction strategies are Accept (different from acceptance), Control and Transfer (ACT) [22]. Accept means risk is accepted with no further mitigation[6]. This normally happens where the risk is considered or assessed low and there is no need for further action. Control means implementing security measures to control or reduce risk to acceptable levels [6]. Transfer means contracting implementation of project or program activities to other parties, that is, assigning or transferring risks to other parties [6]. Remote programming is also a risk reduction strategy. Remote programming refers to the delegation of authority to partner organizations or local staff to run specific projects and managing them remotely (i.e., not in person) [24]. Supporting and coordinating security risk management within the broader humanitarian community in a specified geographical location under Saving Lives Together (SLT) framework, robust standard operating procedures (SOPs), contingency plans, and crisis management systems are some of the risk reduction security strategies implemented by humanitarian organizations [1, 7, 8].

2.3.7 What is the best security strategy?

There is no strategy which can be labeled as the best on its own. According to Kadwo [9], acceptance is the most widely preferred approach in complex emergencies. The UN SRM approach, acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance constitute a range of security risk management options available. The different components of these approaches, all contribute to ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and sustainability of humanitarian operations. The practice for most humanitarian organizations has been a mixture of strategies considering local security realities, contexts, cultures, and conditions as the situation on the ground in most cases is fluid [7, 8, 9]. Focus is now on principled humanitarian action which includes practical application of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, transparency, accountability, adherence to standards, attention to quality and quantity of aid, and addressing complaints [7, 8].

The security strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance have substantially co-existed with the UN SRM approach [9]. There has been no substantive conflict as the approaches are compatible and in harmony. Acceptance remains very important in humanitarian operations and is essential to the security of aid workers in high-risk contexts [9, 17]. However, acceptance does not mitigate each and every risk, hence the need to mix with other approaches. For example, acceptance will not manage some threats such as terrorism, banditry and other collateral risks which might not be linked to communities benefiting from humanitarian aid

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[1] UN Security Policy Manual (2011) defines relocation as the official movement of any personnel or eligible dependant from their normal place of assignment or place of work to another location within their country of assignment for the purpose of avoiding unacceptable risk. Evacuation is defined as "the official movement of any personnel or eligible dependant from their place of assignment to a location outside of their country of assignment for the purpose of avoiding unacceptable risk"). Alternate Work Modalities are defined as "measures that limit or totally remove the number of personnel or family members at a specific location(s), short of official relocation or evacuation, with the view to limit or remove their exposure to a sudden situation that creates unacceptable residual risk, e. g. temporarily closing offices, staff work from home, creating no go areas

[6]. There is now significant focus by humanitarians on coordination of security approaches, promotion of organizations mandate, systematic security risk assessments and reaching out and forging agreements with the diverse security interlocutors including conflict parties at various levels [6, 8,13]. Importantly, adopting security risk management strategies to be context specific has become vital.

2.3.8 Security Risk Management Strategies for Aid Beneficiaries

The security strategies, though appearing to have greater meaning to the security of humanitarian personnel and operations, also address the security concerns of aid beneficiaries. Humanitarian organizations proactively address issues of insecurity affecting aid beneficiaries, and in most cases this is a collective effort. While states have the primary responsibility to ensure the physical security of aid beneficiaries who include forcibly displaced persons (e.g., refugees and internally displaced persons, (IDPs) in their territories, in practice, states are often influenced by their own security and priorities. This exposes aid beneficiaries to a multitude of security threats. Such threats come from state and non-state armed actors, errant security forces, other anti-government armed actors (rebels, militants, fundamentalists), organized crime, local hosting communities, and from the aid beneficiaries themselves [25]. In this regard, "effective states policies, and practices must allow greater access to and impact for crisis-affected populations" wherever and whenever (10, p.2).

For some UN agencies such as UNHCR, ensuring the safety and security of persons under its mandate is a strategic responsibility and challenge, and it is at the core of the UNHCR protection mandate [25]. The persons under UNHCR mandate are generally forcibly displaced persons. For example, refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers and others. Stateless persons also fall under UNHCR mandate though not necessarily forcibly displaced. Security strategies must ensure their physical security and protection in all contexts of humanitarian operations. Humanitarian security risk management strategies must allow humanitarian organizations to reach vulnerable communities in need.

The UN and the greater humanitarian community implement security risk management strategies to ensure the safety and security of aid beneficiaries. In most cases they do this collectively. Collective security is premised on the general interests of humanitarian organizations in a specific geographical area to share the security resources available for the common good. The objective is to reduce risk to the greatest extent possible for both aid beneficiaries and humanitarian personnel. For example, there may be need for the deployment of armed security forces from governments (sometimes non-state armed actors) to support humanitarian operations in areas with high incidences of violence or high crime rate. This is aimed at ensuring that law and order is maintained and aid beneficiaries' access and receive humanitarian assistance safely. These are both protection and deterrence strategies and are provided to humanitarian organizations collectively. Such practices were found in refugee and IDP camps in Sudan, Darfur, South Sudan, Chad, Kenya, Bangladesh among many other countries [1]. The UN peacekeepers sometimes provide humanitarian organizations with collective security (e.g., armed escorts or area security) so that they carry out their mandates. Examples are found in South Sudan, DRC, Mali, Central Africa Republic, and Niger [26].

Applying the UN SRM approach, security risk assessments assist in identifying threats which affect aid beneficiaries leading to the implementation of security measures to lower risks. For example, if there is prevalence of serious crime levels against aid beneficiaries in forcibly displaced persons' camps, community policing can be explored. This is about a community taking ownership of some aspects of their security by actively being involved in localized policing, thereby contributing to a safer community. Examples of community policing can be seen in refugee operations in Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Chad, and Uganda [1]. Security risk assessments also help to identify and address some of the common threats that affect aid beneficiaries. The threats include kidnapping, robberies, gender-based violence, demonstrations, riots, tension and conflicts between communities, presence of armed combatants, abuse of power, human trafficking and many other threats which happen in humanitarian aid delivery. From the

security risk assessments, UN agencies may decide to actively support governments and their security forces in the maintenance of law and order. Such support can be in the form of building police stations, providing equipment such as motor-vehicles and motorcycles to enhance their mobility. Training is also conducted to law enforcement agencies in humanitarian law, human rights law, refugee conventions, community policing and several other areas. All this support is to lower the risks, ensuring communities and aid beneficiaries live in safe environments. Examples of such support can be seen in refugee and IDP operations in Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Bangladesh, and Uganda [1].

3. Duty of CARE

The primary approach to security risk management in the UN is the SRM process. Linked closely to the SRM approach is the duty of care approach. Duty of care is also applied by other humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian organizations have moral, legal and financial obligation to ensure staff security, staff well-being and health and to proactively address conceivable risks stemming from the work environment [7]. The United Nations High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) [27] defines duty of care as "a non-waivable duty on the part of the organizations. This is aimed to mitigate or otherwise address foreseeable risks that may harm or injure humanitarian personnel and their eligible family members" (p.4). The objective of duty of care is to address conceivable risks stemming from the work environment and is a security risk management strategy. Duty of care and security risk management are inextricably linked but not interchangeable. Duty of care in the UN consists of two aspects- security management and staff occupational health and safety. Security management addresses staff insecurity, linking security risk management to the protection of staff from intentional and malicious acts. Staff occupational health and safety focuses on protection and promotion of the health and safety of staff at workplaces and the prevention of work-related injuries and diseases [27].

Conceivable risks must be mitigated by humanitarian organizations to fulfill duty of care to staff. Under the duty of care framework, the following indicate duty of care: good security practices, policies, and procedures; security preventive and mitigation measures; security risk assessments; contingency plans such as relocations and evacuations plans; appropriate insurances for staff in event of injury or death; crisis management plans; and balancing between benefits and risks (program criticality) in high-risk environments. So are occupational health and safety policies and practices promoting the well-being of staff members. For example, medical care and psychosocial support [7,27].

The duty of care confers to organizations as employers, non-waivable responsibilities, and accountability   to their staff. Nonetheless, duty of care also requires staff to behave in a responsible manner by not exposing themselves to harm. No matter how good organizational security, health and well-being policies may be, irresponsible conduct by employees will expose them to risks as individual staff members and as team members. In this vein, humanitarian organizations must invest in appropriate duty of care training and support and embed duty of care in their operations.

4. Contributions of Security Risk Management Strategies

The SRM approach has generally worked well for the UN in different environments including high-risk ones. The SRM has allowed UN agencies to operate within the acceptable risk thresholds, though not always, as residual risk constantly remains. The SRM approach has been particularly successful for UN humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and WHO, allowing the agencies to continue operations even in some of the most complex and dangerous environments in the world [1]. This is exemplified in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Sahel region, Iraq, DRC, South Sudan, Nigeria, Myanmar, and Sudan among other high-risk countries [1]. In situations where the risk has become unacceptable the agencies have implemented temporary risk reduction strategies such as relocation, evacuation, and alternative work modalities to avoid unacceptable risks.

Makova [1] highlighted that the UN SRM approach had worked very well for the UN and UNHCR in particular. The SRM approach had allowed the UNHCR to continue with operations in hard duty stations of Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, and Bangladesh among other high-risk environments. For the UNHCR, helping those in need calls on the UNHCR's workforce to operate in areas of high uncertainty and risk. However, given the magnitude of humanitarian needs and the consequences of failing to meet them, everyone including the international community, and aid beneficiaries (refugees, IDPs, local communities and others) expect the UNHCR to stay and deliver [1]. The SRM approach recognizes that risk can be reduced but never eliminated, and that the aim of security risk management is to achieve an acceptable level of risk. It is possible for injuries or even fatalities to occur even after appropriate security measures have been applied.
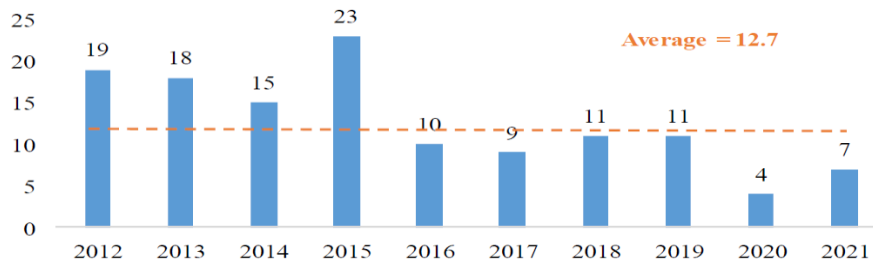
The SRM approach emphasizes on systematic security risk assessments which are area and context specific. It narrows down on threats which must be addressed in a particular environment. This has allowed humanitarian and development activities to be conducted by UN agencies in high-risk environments. The SRM approach, arguably, has minimized the number of incidents, casualties, and fatalities of UN staff in all contexts of UN operations. This should be judged in proportion to the UN staff population worldwide and those in emergencies. To put in into perspective, the UN had about 83 400 civilian staff in 2012 and the number grew to about 120 000 staff in 2021 [28, 29]. As of 2020, about 66 000 UN civilian staff were working in emergency situations with substantial numbers in high-risk environments [30]. The following figures, 2 and 3, show the United Nations personnel affected by safety and security incidents and fatalities of UN in all operational contexts for a 10-year period, 2012- 2021.
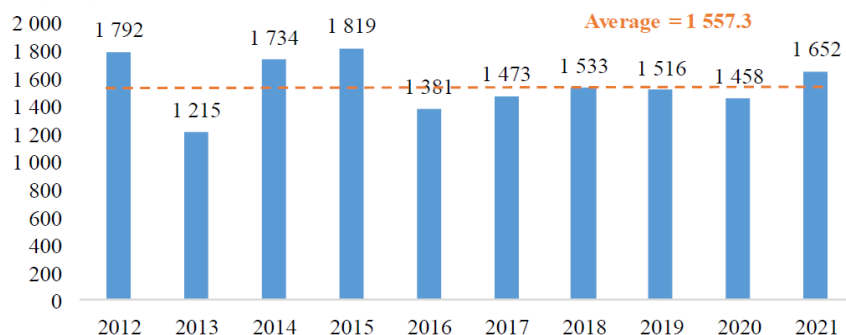
Source: UN Secretary General Report (A/77/362 21 September 2022)

Figure 2. United Nations personnel affected by safety and security incidents 2012-2021

Fig 2 shows that security incidents against UN civilian personnel (i.e., excluding peacekeeping forces). The incidents had a 10-year average of 1557.3. The peak for the 10-year period was in 2015 when 1819 incidents were recorded. This was attributed to increased direct attacks on UN premises and vehicles. From 2016 the incidents have been moderately fluctuating, falling below the 10-year average for five consecutive years between 2016 to 2020. Perhaps, this reflects the advancement in security risk management in the UN system which offered better protection to UN personnel. Though the incidents are not aggregated by contexts e.g., high-risk or non-high-risk, majority most likely happened in high-risk environments as alluded to in UN Secretary General report and Aid Worker Security report [13, 14]. That the incidents were below the 10-year average between 2016 to 2020 is instructive, suggesting the SRM approach progressively playing a positive role in containing the incidents. Further, in proportion to the 66 000 UN civilian staff (as of 2020) in emergency situations, which include high-risk environments, where majority of the incidents likely happened, the number of incidents per year during the 10-year period cannot be judged as very high or catastrophic. However, this does not in any way imply that the number of incidents is acceptable. The aim of the security risk management is to lower risks to acceptable levels in order to operate in a particular environment.

25
23
20 19
    18
15   15
10   10   9   11 11
                              4   7
0
2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021

Average = 12.7

Source: UN Secretary General Report (A/77/362 21 September 2022)

Figure 3. Fatalities of United Nations personnel resulting from violence

Fig 3 shows that the fatalities of UN staff (excluding peacekeeping forces) resulting from violence have not substantially risen maintaining a 10-year average of 12.7. The fatalities fell below the 10-year average for six consecutive years between 2016 and 2021. According to the Secretary General report [13], most of the fatalities are a result of criminal acts. The statistics shown in Fig 3 though not aggregated by contexts e.g., high-risk or non-high risk, arguably, appear to suggest that the UN SRM approach managed to keep fatalities not high. In proportion to the 66 000 UN staff numbers (as of 2020) in emergency situations, which include high-risk environments where majority of the incidents likely happened, the fatalities per year during the 10-year period cannot be judged as very high or catastrophic. However, this does not in any way imply that the UN fatalities are acceptable. There is nothing like acceptable losses with human life in humanitarian operations. One life lost is one too many. However, the reality of the humanitarian operational environment is that residual risks always remain, and casualties will be there even after appropriate security risk management measures have been applied.

The security strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance are widely applied by humanitarian NGOs, UN agencies and other independent humanitarian organizations such as Red Cross particularly in high-risk environments. Studies by Egeland *et al,* [7], Jackson and Zyck [8] and Kadwo [9] confirmed this fact. The scope of implementation differs from organization to organization depending on the mandate, funding, size, complexity of operational area, risk threshold, among other considerations. Determining to what extent these strategies have worked for humanitarian NGOs and other independent humanitarian organizations individually and collectively is a complex task. It differs depending on various factors. Risk acceptance levels also differ between local and international humanitarian NGOs. The following Table 1 shows the summarized statistics of major attacks on aid workers for a 10-year period 2012 to 2021

Table 1: Major attacks on Aid Workers: summary statistics, 2012-2021

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of incidents	170	265	192	150	163	160	229	276	283	268
Total aid worker victims	277	474	333	290	295	315	409	481	484	461
Total killed	71	159	123	111	109	140	131	125	117	141
Total injured	115	179	89	110	99	103	147	234	242	203
Total kidnapped*	91	136	121	69	87	72	131	122	125	117
International victims	49	60	33	30	43	28	29	27	25	23
National victims	228	414	300	260	252	287	380	454	459	438
UN staff	48	115	64	44	71	48	70	37	58	55
International NGO staff	97	142	152	173	161	109	186	260	228	198
National NGO staff	92	145	71	39	40	84	128	154	168	187
Red Cross/Crescent Movement**	27	58	43	31	21	74	25	16	28	11

* Survivors, or whereabouts unknown
** Includes International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and national societies

Source: Aid Worker Security report 2022

TABLE 1 gives a summary insight of the major aid workers attacks for a 10-year period from 2012 to 2021 [14]. The total number of aid workers in emergency settings as of 2020 were estimated to be 632 000, rising 40% since 2013 and 90% were national staff [30]. The exact number of aid workers in high-risk environments were not available making it difficult to make a comparison of casualties in proportion to the aid worker population in these contexts. The 10-year average fatalities was 122.7 while average injuries for the same period were 152.1. The average total aid worker victims for the 10-year period was 381.9. For four consecutive years from 2018 to 2021, aid workers victims were above the average. This was attributed to increased attacks of aid workers in high risk contexts of South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, Ethiopia, and Mali [14]. It can be argued that casualties including fatalities were at those levels and possibly not more because of the implementation of security risk management strategies by humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian organizations, particularly UN agencies and International NGOs, take security risk management seriously as there are serious legal and financial repercussions under duty of care to ensure staff safety and health and well-being. In proportion to the 632 000 humanitarian staff in emergency settings which include high-risk environments, the aid worker victims including fatalities cannot be judged as catastrophic. However, one casualty is one too many and all efforts must be made to prevent casualties. The reality of most high risk humanitarian environments is that risk can be reduced but never eliminated. Injuries and in some instances fatalities will occur even after appropriate security measures have been applied.

The adoption of the stay and deliver approach by UN agencies and the greater humanitarian community also recognizes that risk can never be entirely eliminated. The stay and deliver framework emphasizes that humanitarian organizations have an obligation to stay and deliver, where feasible, even in environments with insecurity and health hazards such as COVID-19 and Ebola [7, 8]. According to the findings of the study by Jackson and Zyck [8], humanitarian organizations expressed the desire to stay and deliver and this had been internalized in highly insecure environments. In this vein, the stay and deliver framework allowed the delivery of humanitarian assistance in high-risk environments. The stay and deliver approach also considers the impact of an intervention versus the security risks in the environment (program criticality) and is mandatory for the UN in high-risk environments [6]. High profile examples where the stay and deliver approach has applied, delicately balancing between the benefits of the activities and the risks involved include, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, South Sudan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Colombia, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Somalia [1, 7, 8, 9, 13, 31].

The duty of care framework requires humanitarian agencies to take necessary and practical steps to address workplace dangers to enable staff to work in safe and secure environments. For the UN, duty of care has placed moral, legal, and financial obligations to UN agencies to ensure staff security, staff well-being and health. In this regard, UN agencies have policies, processes, procedures, and measure that address duty of care in high-risk environments [27]. For example, UNHCR duty of care policy requires the organization to take reasonable and practical measures, in terms of security, medical, administrative, and psychosocial support. The objective is to ensure that staff members are able to perform their functions effectively and efficiently in complex, volatile and challenging environments [27]. The application of duty of care in humanitarian operations ensures that staff are protected from security and health related dangers, allowing operations to continue in high risk environments [7].

The security strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance, coupled with risk reduction security strategies, constitute a range of security options available to humanitarian organizations to prevent and mitigate risks. They have significantly contributed to ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and the sustainability of humanitarian operations. While acceptance remains the cornerstone of humanitarian operations, the reality on the ground requires that acceptance be complemented by other security approaches. Studies conducted by Egeland *et al,* [7], Jackson and Zyck [8] and Kadwo [9] confirmed this fact. Particular focus is now on principled humanitarian action which includes practical application of

humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, transparency, accountability, adherence to standards, attention to quality and quantity of aid, and addressing complaints to gain acceptance [7,8].

The implementation of risk reduction security strategies such as ACT have allowed humanitarian operations to continue by adopting the appropriate risk reduction strategies at a given time and location in high risk environments. Indeed, local security realities, cultures, and conditions on the ground vary from context to context. Therefore, it is vital to have the right strategy or mixture of strategies for the particular operational environment. Implementing risk reduction management strategies such as relocation, evacuation and alternative work modalities as temporary measures have allowed humanitarian operations to resume when situations normalize. Humanitarian organizations regularly relocate and evacuate staff when the risk becomes unacceptable and return when things are back to normal. Some recent high-profile relocations and evacuations by humanitarian organizations are seen in Afghanistan, August 2021 and Ukraine, February 2022 [1]. Evacuation from Khartoum, Sudan, in April 2023 is the most recent high profile evacuation [32]. Thousands of humanitarian staff were either relocated and or evacuated and the majority of the staff returned when the security situation was assessed to be safe and manageable, and the staff accepted the risks.

Security risk management strategies have allowed better collaboration and coordination between humanitarian organizations and security actors, both state and non-state actors in high risk environments [1]. While engagement and collaboration between humanitarian organizations and state actors are taken for granted, it is the non-state actors, particularly armed actors, who are difficult and controversial to establish engagement and collaboration with. Engagement with non-state armed actors by humanitarian organizations including UN agencies can cause serious problems with some states who fear that such engagements can enhance legitimacy of the armed non-state actors. Yet, humanitarian assistance must be delivered to those in need wherever and whenever. The reality in some humanitarian environments is that non-state armed actors are significant players in some conflicts. They are not only in control of territories, but they even carry out quasi-state functions in those territories and have the power to block or facilitate humanitarian operations. Some of the examples of engagement with non-state armed actors by UN humanitarian organizations have been seen in Somalia, Eastern Ukraine, Eastern DRC, Yemen, and Syria [1, 33]. UN peacekeeping missions also play significant roles negotiating with non-state armed actors. For example, UN peacekeeping missions in Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Mali (MINUSMA), the DRC (MONUSCO), and Afghanistan (UNAMA) engaged with non-state armed groups to protect civilians and facilitating humanitarian assistance [26]

The security risk management strategies have recognized and allowed better collaboration and coordination on safety and security issues in humanitarian operations particularly under the Saving Lives Together framework(SLT). The SLT framework provides a collaborative approach to security management in humanitarian operations particularly in complex and high-risk environments [7, 13, 34]. The purpose is to improve cooperation on security issues between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations in complex humanitarian environments. It is a basis for formal cooperation and coordination on security in humanitarian operations in high risk environments. The SLT framework has improved collaboration on security issues between humanitarian actors, contributing to the collection, analysis and dissemination of critical safety and security information. Examples of SLT are in numerous countries including, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Kenya, Syria, Iraq, Chad etc., where UN and NGOs actively cooperate/d on security issues [7, 13]).

The security risk management strategies have allowed aid beneficiaries and other affected communities particularly refugees, IDPs and hosting communities to take ownership of some aspects of their security. They do so by being progressively involved in some security decisions which affect them, such as being involved in the community policing framework. UNHCR, governments and other humanitarian organizations successfully implement community policing in refugee operations. Community policing has had success stories in Kenya,

(Dadaab and Kakuma camps), Bangladesh, (Cox's Bazar camps), South Sudan, (Maban camps), among many other community policing initiatives in refugee contexts by UNHCR [1]

5. The Shortcomings of Security Risk Management Strategies

The security risk management strategies require substantial funding to reduce the risks to acceptable levels. Inadequate or poor funding limits the efficacy of some of the risk management strategies. The UN SRM approach requires substantial funding for the security risk management measures to be effective in lowering the risks to acceptable levels. Funding for physical security, equipment and supplies, medical support, telecommunications, transportation (vehicles, boats, air transport) and staff training are significant costs. Such funding may not be available or may be limited, making it difficult for some UN agencies to implement the security strategies without diverting resources from other important needs.

Funding for humanitarian activities has generally been depressed in many countries due to a variety of reasons including reduced donor funding and many humanitarian crises that need to be funded [8, 34]. NGOs have been particularly affected leading to some significant staff reductions or closure of some projects/programs [8]. In such situation, security funding for acceptance, protection, and deterrence strategies may not be available or may be too limited to implement the security risk strategies to acceptable risk levels. Local NGOs and community based groups are most likely to be affected by limited funding. This might persuade them to accept security risks to retain existing funding or reduced funding.

The components of the security triangle are difficult to implement in some contexts particularly in conflict and other high-risk environments. For example, acceptance strategy may prove difficult to pursue in high-risk contexts where it has little meaning to local security dynamics and security interlocutors who do not value humanitarian aid despite it benefitting their communities. Non-state actor groups such as Islamic state of Iraq and Levant (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Boko Haram in Nigeria are known to have little or no respect for acceptance [8, 16]. Also, in some highly fluid local dynamics of conflict and security, the acceptance strategy is hard to achieve where such local conflict dynamics have no time or consideration for good relations, sustainable relationships, and principled humanitarian action [6, 7,8]. In some such situations, the acceptance strategy may be costly to pursue in terms of personnel, time and resources. Further, the acceptance strategy does not mitigate collateral threats such as crossfire, crime related and contextual risks. For the UN, the assumed neutrality of its humanitarian and development work has been questioned in some high-risk environments. Some armed non-state actor groups (fundamentalists, terrorists, militants, insurgents, and rebel groups) question the independence and neutrality of the UN humanitarian and development action [6, 8, 9]. In this context, it is dangerous to rely on the acceptance strategy.

Security risk management strategies do not address self-generated risks by humanitarian organizations and or their staff. For example, misunderstandings, tensions, and animosity may occur over a variety of reasons, including poor relationships between humanitarian organizations with the state and or with non-state actors. Expulsions of humanitarian personnel or organizations by state and non-state authorities are common and the reasons are diverse. For example, in September 2021, Ethiopian authorities declared seven UN staff *persona non grata* and ordered them to leave the country within 72 hours over alleged interference in the internal affairs of the country [36]. Whether this was justified or not is a separate issue though the doctrine of *persona non* grata is not supposed to apply to United Nations personnel under article 9 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations. There have been many other expulsions including the infamous expulsion of 13 international NGOs from Sudan in 2009 after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for then Sudan President, Omar al-Bashir, on war crimes charges [1].

The security risk management strategies do not address weak coordinating mechanisms of security approaches between the diverse stakeholders (UN, NGOs, state authorities, peacekeeping forces, international forces) at different levels (national, regional, and local). This makes it difficult for some of the security risk management strategies, such as acceptance, protection and deterrence to be effective at the different levels. The chaotic scenes in South Sudan when armed conflict erupted for the second time in three years in July 2016, exemplified weak coordination between UNMISS (United Nations Mission in South Sudan) peacekeeping forces and the greater humanitarian community and also with South Sudan security agencies [37, 38]. UNMISS was accused of failing to coordinate security approaches with humanitarian organizations leaving them exposed to gross violations by armed actors primarily the South Sudan army [37, 38]. Relocations and evacuations of humanitarian personnel from Afghanistan in August 2021 also exemplified weak coordinating mechanisms. The chaotic evacuation scenes captured live on television at Kabul Airport in August 2021 represented weak coordination between the international forces and the humanitarian community. The international forces fronted by the USA prioritized evacuating their nationals leaving stranded, many humanitarian personnel from countries with no or limited capacity.

The human factor in the implementation of some of the risk management strategies can also be a serious weak point. Emergency response capacity and capability has been proved generally weak in crises situations in humanitarian operations. This is despite all the well written standard operating procedures, contingency plans, and crisis management plans by the humanitarian organizations. For example, during the internal conflict disturbances in South Sudan in July 2016, UNMISS peacekeeping forces in Juba were accused of failing to protect civilians and humanitarian personnel in their hour of need [37]. Several female humanitarian personnel experienced gender-based violence including some who were raped by South Sudan government forces at Terrain hotel, Juba [37, 38, 39, 40]. This was despite the UN peacekeeping force being informed of the dire situation the female humanitarian personnel and many others were facing. The peacekeeping Force Commander was held accountable and removed from command after the response of the peacekeeping force was labelled chaotic and ineffective [37,38,39]. The security strategies of protection and deterrence failed in this instance, partly due to command failure.

6. Improving the Efficacy of Security Risk Management Strategies

For the security strategies to be reasonably effective there are several processes, procedures, and practices to be performed by various stakeholders at different levels. Governments have elevated responsibilities followed by humanitarian organizations and donors. Governments have primary responsibility for the security of everyone in their respective countries. In this regard, there should be sustained advocacy by the international community, donors, and humanitarian organizations to encourage states in humanitarian crises situations to do more. They should be encouraged to pay more attention to the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, protect humanitarian operations and the aid beneficiaries in high-risk situations.

The security risk management strategies, no matter how well designed and well-meaning they are, will only work in environments where governments proactively support humanitarian operations by fulfilling all basic security requirements of a functioning state. In this regard, active engagement and collaboration between governments and humanitarian organizations on safety and security at all levels is paramount. Equally important is the engagement with non-state armed actors, who may be controlling some territories and conducting quasi government functions in the territories. Their buy-in to allow humanitarian operations and ensure security of humanitarian personnel and aid beneficiaries is critical. Particular focus should be on principled humanitarian action which includes practical application of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. This should also include transparency, accountability, and adherence to standards. It is also critical to pay attention to quality and quantity of aid, and to address complaints in order to gain acceptance.

Security requires collective effort. Everyone must be involved from state authorities and their security systems and agencies, donors, humanitarian organizations, aid beneficiaries, to hosting communities and influential individuals (e.g., community/ religious leaders). Addressing security risks in the humanitarian field requires improving engagement and coordination on security matters between various stakeholders at various levels (local/regional/ national) and including the conflict parties. The involvement of the different stakeholders in security decisions and security solutions at different levels is of critical importance for the security strategies to work. For example, lowering risks to acceptable levels means various stakeholders at different levels must be proactively engaged in strategies such as acceptance, deterrence, protection, and avoidance. Particularly important are local solutions in some highly fluid local dynamics of conflict and security where the actors could be very diverse (government forces/ non state armed groups/ militias/ community vigilantes/ criminals). Such situations require delicate handling and diplomacy. The processes entail strengthening liaison, coordination, cooperation, and communications between humanitarian organizations and all relevant and diverse security stakeholders and interlocutors.

Donors have leveraged over many governments by virtue of them funding humanitarian operations. Donors must continuously be persuaded to engage host governments especially those failing in their security responsibilities. Host governments must be encouraged to do more to ensure safety and security of citizens, humanitarian staff and operations, and aid beneficiaries. Equally important is for the donors to seriously consider requests for security funding from humanitarian organizations and governments, particularly funding for the maintenance of law and order. The Security Partnership Project Memorandum of Understanding (SPP MoU) signed between the Government of Kenya and UNHCR in 2011 was funded by various donors to improve security in Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps in Kenya [1]. The SPP supported both hardware infrastructure (police stations/ accommodation/ new vehicles and their maintenance) and software infrastructure (training/ risk analysis/ incentives). The MoU led to significant improvement in security in Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, enabling humanitarian operations to proceed with minimum interruption [1]. This approach needs to be supported and extended to other high-risk environments where governments have challenges in funding and maintenance of law and order. Donors should seriously consider funding this approach in high-risk environments.

Security of staff starts at individual level and then at organization level, where what constitutes acceptable or non-acceptable risk is normally determined. Humanitarian organizations are responsible for ensuring that security risk management policies, procedures, practices, and measures are developed, funded, and implemented. Humanitarian agencies need to strengthen security risk management practices by prioritizing the safety and security of their personnel and ensuring security is adequately funded within their budgets. Security always comes at a cost.

Humanitarian organizations need to strengthen security risk assessments and security analyses. Security risk assessments and analyses must be area and context specific. This helps to narrow down those threats which must be addressed in a particular environment in order to develop appropriate solutions to insecurity. Standard operating procedures and contingency plans should address the everyday security challenges in humanitarian operations. Staff training and compliance with security policies, procedures and measures is critical for the success of the security risk management strategies. It is not worth the effort to put in place security risk management measures which are not complied with. Equally important is the need to put in place procedures and processes to be followed in case critical incidents such as death and injury occur. Managing psychosocial issues before and after critical incidents should be embedded in security risk management strategies of humanitarian organizations.

Humanitarian organizations need to proactively identify potential self-generated risks and address them. It is critical for humanitarian organizations to invest resources, time and effort to analyse self-generated risks.

Organization codes of conduct and training that are relevant to humanitarian principles and operations have proven to be highly successful in limiting the potential of self-generated risks in some high-risk environments [41]. In high-risk environments there may be a need for capacity building of government law enforcement and other security agencies to ensure observance of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights. Training in humanitarian law and humanitarian principles can also be helpful to ensure that some of the security strategies work on the ground. For example, such training can help to gain recognition of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance strategies.

7. Conclusion

The humanitarian operational environment is complex with many safety and security challenges. This is more so particularly high-risk environments. In order to be able to operate in such environments, systematic approaches to security risk management are imperative. Good humanitarian security risk management must significantly address the security threats in the environment with the objective of reducing the impact and likelihood of undesirable events or incidents that may affect humanitarian personnel. Sound security risk management strategies allow humanitarian operations to continue in high-risk environments and this has been validated by several studies [1, 7,8,9]. The UN SRM approach, security strategies of acceptance, deterrence, protection, avoidance, along with security risk reduction strategies such as relocation, evacuation and ACT have been enablers of safe humanitarian operations even where residual risk remains in complex and high-risk environments [1, 6, 7, 8, 9]. The efficacy of some of the security strategies has been subjected to scrutiny and criticism because of their failures in some contexts. Indeed, humanitarian contexts have varying safety and security dynamics. This necessitates contextualized security risk management approaches. The best practice for most of the humanitarian agencies is to have a coordinated mixture of security risk management strategies.

For the security strategies to remain relevant they must be regularly reviewed considering local security realities, cultures, and conditions as the situation in high risk environments in most cases is fluid. Critically, issues to do with security planning, security funding, systematic security risk assessments and analyses, contingency planning, duty of care, staff training, compliance monitoring, and deployment of security professionals must be addressed. Particular focus should also be on principled humanitarian action which includes practical application of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. This should also include transparency, accountability, and adherence to standards. It is also critical to pay attention to quality and quantity of aid, and to address complaints. Security risk management must be integrated at all stages of humanitarian programming and should be embedded in organization mandates. Security risk management strategies must be seen as a means to an end, with the end being safe and secure humanitarian operations and the safety of aid beneficiaries.

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