

# Security Management and Risk Management Strategies in Humanitarian Field Environments: A Conceptual Analytical Approach

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper presented an overview of security management in humanitarian field environments. It critically examined security risk management strategies applied by humanitarian organizations in insecure environments. The paper asserts that the advancement of contemporary humanitarian security management framework discourse is inextricably linked to the increased violence against aid workers. This was on the background of surge in humanitarian crises primarily caused by armed conflict, which displaced millions of people. The advancement led to the development and implementation of systematic humanitarian security risk management strategies to lower security risks in order to meaningfully operate in insecure environments. Addressing security risks in humanitarian operations entails embracing a mix of security risk management strategies suitable to the environment and context. The aim is to lower security risks to levels that allow safe and secure humanitarian operations. The article is guided by the conceptual analysis approach. The approach examines contemporary humanitarian security management framework advancement in field environments. It critically explores and analyzes the different dimension, concepts, and perspectives of security risk management in humanitarian environments. Sound humanitarian security risk management strategies allow humanitarian personnel to stay and deliver, enabling humanitarian work to continue in insecure environments.

**Keywords:** Humanitarian security management, Security strategy and Security risk management strategies.

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## 1. Introduction

The contemporary humanitarian operational environment has inherent security risks which must be navigated if aid is to be delivered to vulnerable communities in need. Humanitarian operations are conducted in some highly insecure field environments with active armed conflict or post conflict situations with diverse security risks. Humanitarian operations are also conducted in fragile and volatile environments beset with high crime rates, including cybercrime and human trafficking, religious fundamentalism, terrorism, extremism, civil unrest, and natural hazards among other dangers. To meaningfully operate in insecure environments, humanitarian organizations have responsibilities at both conceptual and operational levels to develop and implement security risk management frameworks that realistically address security threats and risks in their operating environments. According to Bickley [ 1], a security risk management framework is a “set of policies, protocols, plans, mechanisms and responsibilities that supports the reduction of security risks to humanitarian staff, operations and aid beneficiaries”[p.14]. Good security risk management framework supports and allows humanitarian organizations to operate in insecure environments. In this regard, adopting security risk management strategies suitable to specific contexts is critical in humanitarian operations, if aid is to be delivered safely and securely. It is not possible to reduce risks to zero as residual risk always remains. Therefore, it is particularly important for humanitarian organizations to have in place processes that mitigate impacts when undesirable events occur.

The paper presented an overview of security management in humanitarian field environments. It critically examined security risk management strategies applied by humanitarian organizations to operate in insecure environments. The aim is to improve humanitarian practitioners' understanding of security management practices in insecure humanitarian field environments. The paper also seeks to enhance their knowledge of security risk management strategies applied in humanitarian field environments to help them with decision making when needed. The paper contributes to the body of knowledge for scholars, policy makers, researchers and others interested in scaling up their knowledge on security practices in insecure humanitarian field environments. The paper argues that sound humanitarian security risk management strategies allow humanitarian organizations to stay and deliver in complex and insecure field environments. In this regard, the positive contributions of good security risk management strategies as enablers of safe and secure humanitarian operations were examined. Their short comings were probed. Recommendations to improve their efficacy, in a world that is facing "surplus of multilateral challenges and a deficit of multilateral solutions" were proffered [2].

## **2. Conceptual Analysis**

This paper takes a conceptual analysis approach as the methodological guideline. Conceptual analysis explains the meaning of concepts [3]. According to Furner [4], conceptual analysis "precisely defines the meaning of a concept by identifying and specifying the conditions under which any entity or phenomenon is classified under the concept in question" (p.233). In this regard, conceptual analysis is about conceptualization of phenomenon. Conceptualization produces specific, agreed-on meaning of the concept and describes the indicators used to measure the concept and its different dimensions [5]. The key concepts explored are humanitarian security management, security strategies and security risk management strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence and United Nations Security Risk Management (SRM) approach.

## **3. Humanitarian Security Management**

The contemporary advancement of humanitarian security management framework and the development and implementation of attendant security risk management strategies is linked to the increased dangers in the humanitarian operational environment. This is so particularly in insecure environments which in most cases are 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 [6, 7]. To put into perspective, the security context of contemporary humanitarian operations is explored in following section 3.1.

### **3.1 The Security Context in Humanitarian Field Environments**

Humanitarian operations in insecure environments are conducted in field environments characterized by one or more and a mix of the following:

- i. International armed conflict. That is, conflict between two or more sovereign states. Contemporary examples include Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Afghanistan. This context inevitably causes internal and or external displacements of people. Humanitarian aid has to be delivered to affected communities wherever they are.
- ii. Internal armed conflict. That is, an environment where there is active fighting (including cross border) between the state and one or more internal armed groups (rebels/ insurgents). Civil war and rebellions are in this category. (e.g., Syria, Somalia, Sudan, DRC, Yemen, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Iraq, Myanmar). This context causes displacements (internal or external) and affected communities have to be assisted wherever they are.
- iii. Post- conflict. Countries that experienced international armed conflict and or internal armed conflict (civil war) and remain fragile. Typically, this was fighting between the state and another state (international) and or the state fighting one or more organized armed groups within the same country or with group/s based outside the country. In some countries it was organized non-state armed groups fighting each other within same country. Examples of post conflict include Colombia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Iraq, Central Africa Republic (CRA). This context may interfere with or disrupt humanitarian operations.
- iv. Terrorism and fundamentalism(particularly religious) from internal and external groups targeting state actors/ governments, country security forces (including law and order entities) and civilians, causing substantial displacements and or disruption of delivery of humanitarian and development assistance

(e.g., Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Yemen, Somalia). The affected communities have to be assisted wherever they are.

- v. Presence of localized armed groups pursuing localized interests (tribal/ community/ militias/ vigilantes/ youths). The groups intermittently disrupt or interfere with humanitarian and development activities if their interests, or demands are not fulfilled by governments, humanitarian organizations or others. Typically, such groups are found in conflict and fragile post conflict countries with weak law and order systems and or experiencing general insecurity. ( e.g., Yemen, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Somalia, CRA, Colombia, Libya).
- vi. Presence of armed combatants or ex-combatants in displaced persons camps (e.g., refugee or internally displaced persons (IDP) camps) and in local communities. The groups or individuals could be the de facto authorities in their localities. In some contexts, they create parallel administrative structures, disrupt effective civilian administration of the camps, and interfere with humanitarian operations. This is typically found in refugee and IDP situations.
- vii. High crime levels with significant impact. For example, armed robberies, theft, kidnapping and abduction, vehicle hijacking, human trafficking, gender based violence e.g., rape, cybercrime and extortion affecting local communities, displaced persons (refugees and IDPs) and other aid beneficiaries, humanitarian personnel and organizations. Organized and transnational criminal groups also pose significant threats to humanitarian operations in some contexts.
- viii. Civil unrest (demonstrations/protests/strikes) by citizens, displaced persons (refugees and IDPs), and host communities causing intermittent disruption of humanitarian services for a variety of reasons including non-fulfillment of certain expectations.

Humanitarian operations are therefore conducted in very complex environments with significant security challenges which must be navigated if humanitarian aid is to be delivered to communities in need. Security is a shared responsibility between states, humanitarian organizations, donors, communities and individuals. States have the greatest and elevated responsibilities and accountabilities to provide security to everyone in their territories. However, the reality in some of the humanitarian crises, particularly in high risk environments, is that, some states are not always able to provide reliable and consistent security to citizens, aid beneficiaries and humanitarian operations. Moreso, to vulnerable groups such as refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs, who are sometimes wrongly labelled as a security threat. This places some burden on humanitarian organizations, compelling them to go the extra mile to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, operations, and aid beneficiaries to the extent possible. Sound humanitarian security risk management must significantly contribute to safe and secure humanitarian operations particularly in high risk environments.

### **3.3 What is Humanitarian Security Management?**

Security management in an organization is generally centered on the protection of staff, assets, and operations of an organization from internal and external threats. To achieve this, security policies, procedures, and measures that address the risks from the threats must be developed and implemented. According to Ridley [8, p.3), security management is,

*“the practice of identifying and managing risks to an organization's people, assets, and operations. It involves developing and implementing strategies, policies, and procedures to mitigate these risks and ensure the safety and security of the organization. It also involves assessing the organization's vulnerabilities, establishing appropriate security measures, and continuously monitoring and improving the security posture. It is an essential function of all organizations”.*

The primary objective of security management is the protection of an organization from internal and external threats. This is achieved by continuously assessing vulnerabilities, developing, and implementing appropriate security risk management measures to address risks in the environment. In humanitarian operations, security management must confront threats and risks humanitarian organizations face in their daily operations and continuously addressing their vulnerabilities to these risks. Humanitarian organizations must be able to cope with unforeseen and conceivable events to provide a sense of stability to humanitarian work [9].

Humanitarian security management focuses on the protection of aid workers and humanitarian operations, access to, and safety of the affected populations in need of humanitarian assistance. It also takes up the implementation of essential security risk management policies, procedures, processes, practices, and measures to address the threats in the environment. Humanitarian security management arguably is concerned with

safety and security of humanitarian personnel, the ability to conduct humanitarian operations in safe and secure environments and the ability of the aid beneficiaries to access and receive aid safely. In this regard, humanitarian security management centers on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel during their work and daily lives. It enhances the ability to access the community in need and deliver humanitarian assistance with no hindrance. It is also concerned with the security of aid beneficiaries to receive aid without being harmed. The security of the trio (personnel, operations, and beneficiaries) is vital as it has serious security implications to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Where the trio faces security risks, delivery of humanitarian assistance is disturbed, compromising the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

The objective of humanitarian security management is to allow humanitarian organizations to carry out their mandates to meet their stated objectives while managing security risks in the environment [10]. Systematic humanitarian security risk management is therefore crucial to assist organizations to determine the security measures to be implemented to reduce security risks in the operational environment [10]. Security risk management also requires humanitarian organizations to define their philosophical approach to security management [11]. 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 an organization. Effective and sustainable security risk management requires substantial resources, staff time and effort.

### **3.4 The Evolution of Humanitarian Security Management**

Security management in humanitarian operations can substantially be traced after the second world war. This is when many of the humanitarian organizations including UN agencies and intergovernmental organizations were founded to provide humanitarian relief and rehabilitation assistance, and address humanitarian and development challenges of the time [12, 13]. Security management in humanitarian organizations was then not institutionalized, structured, coordinated, and professionalized. According to Kadwo [14], “the post second world war period presented its security challenges but was broadly permissive of a *laissez-faire* security management system, emphasizing host nation security guarantees” (p.27). The reliance on security assurances from host governments by humanitarian organizations worked well in different contexts of humanitarian operations, post second world war up to 1990s. For the UN, the UN flag was seen as good enough for the protection of the UN personnel and assets and to be identified as a neutral, impartial, and benevolent actor in world affairs[15]. Targeted attacks and other malicious acts against the UN were then generally perceived as isolated events and were dealt with on case by case basis [15].

The dependency on host government security guarantees and the UN flag in humanitarian work considerably changed in the 1990s and 2000s, particularly in high risk environments. This was on the background of significant rise in humanitarian crises, primarily due to conflicts and escalation in incidents of targeted violence against aid workers in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, and Iraq [11, 16]. High profile incidents included the murder of six International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) staff in Chechnya in 1996 and the 2003 bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad. The Baghdad bombing killed 22 people including the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative for Iraq and wounded more than 160 others [17]. The UN subsequently passed Security Council Resolution 1502, which declared deliberate attacks against humanitarian organizations or peacekeepers, a war crime [18]. Following the bombing in Baghdad, an independent panel on the safety and security of United Nations personnel (Ahtisaari panel) was commissioned by then UN Secretary General in September 2003 [19]. The panel recommended a new security approach for the UN. Then, the United Nations Security Coordinator coordinated the activities of the United Nations field security management system. However, different UN entities, offices and peacekeeping missions had their different safety and security services departments independent from the UN field security management system with no central direction [15]. The independent panel also recommended the harmonization of the UN security management system [19]. The United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) was formally established in January 2005 to manage the safety and security of UN personnel, assets, and operations worldwide.

In the 2000s, humanitarian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and other independent humanitarian organizations, such as ICRC, significantly invested in security management after being targeted by diverse armed and non-armed actors and the need to operate in highly insecure environments. The thrust was that, security risks should be systematically managed for humanitarian assistance to be delivered safely to communities in need. This led to the development and implementation of security management frameworks and adoption of security risk management strategies suitable to the operating contexts. Specifically, additional and new security

guidelines, security plans, policies, procedures, security risk assessments, security incidents databases, recruitment of dedicated security staff, formation of security organizations dedicated to humanitarian organizations (e.g., International NGO Safety Organization (INSO), Global Interagency Security Forum), among other many initiatives were implemented [20, 21]. Importantly, some major donors supported these initiative to enhance the safety and security of humanitarian operations and staff [20, 21].

#### 3.4.1 Humanitarian Security Management and Human Security

The advancement of contemporary humanitarian security management framework discourse can be identified with human security conceptualization. Human security paradigm evolved in the 1990s and prioritizes the protection of individuals and places the human being at the center of the global security system [22]. The essential elements incorporate issues such as economic security, political security, environmental security, food security, health security, community security and personal security [23]. The human security paradigm among other issues, focuses on the root causes of insecurities, the broader scope of threats faced by individuals, people centred solutions, context specific approaches to security, multi-sectoral approach, and the involvement of many actors [24]. According to the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security [25], “human security complements immediate humanitarian efforts, and helps to shape long-term solutions that put people on the path to sustainable development” (p.2).

According to Gomez and Gasper[26], “human security is a flexible approach that can be tailored to different and specific contexts and topics, and it requires understanding the particular threats experienced by particular groups of people and the participation in the analysis process by the affected people” (p.2). In this respect, human security is relevant and applicable to the many problems faced in humanitarian work, including insecurity. The fact that safety and security of humanitarian staff and operations, and aid beneficiaries are core elements of humanitarian assistance makes human security approach pertinent to humanitarian work in all contexts. According to Massari [22], the human security concept has been used to justify humanitarian military and non- military interventions necessary to protect violations of human security in emergencies which involve conflict, civil war, or natural disasters.

Humanitarian security management framework progress in the 2000s is thus linked with human security paradigm evolution. The critical relationship between human security and humanitarian security management is their same approach to address root causes of insecurities, the broader scope of threats faced by individuals, people centred solutions and context specific approaches to security [24]. These are concerns apparent in all contexts of humanitarian operations. Therefore, human security paradigm was a valuable additional framework in the development of security management policies, processes and measures suited to confront the complex and interconnected challenges in humanitarian operational environment.

#### 3.4.2 Humanitarian Security Management Codification

The surge in violence against aid workers and humanitarian work in general, on the background of increased humanitarian crises, progressively advanced humanitarian security management discourse. Humanitarian security management discourse is therefore generally a recent development. It significantly advanced in late 1990s and 2000s as a professional stand-alone security discipline to address insecurity in humanitarian work in order to meaningfully operate in insecure environments [27]. Significantly, given the surge in humanitarian crises, the magnitude of humanitarian needs and the consequences of failing to meet them, the international community, governments, and affected communities expected humanitarian organizations to intervene and provide humanitarian assistance. It was incomprehensible that humanitarian organizations would even think of not assisting persons in need, let alone abandon them in their time of need, because of insecurity. Security risks in the operating environment were certainly expected to be dealt with, enabling humanitarian organizations to stay and deliver humanitarian assistance.

According to Beerli [27], the humanitarian security management framework was “formally codified in 2000 as a distinct form of expertise that differs from other methods of protecting personnel and assets” (p. 72). Humanitarian security management emerged as a “technocratic-managerial approach to “insecurity” and a professional practice which touched not only on the organization of humanitarian operations but equally on the daily lives of field staff (p.72). The origin of humanitarian security management is traced to the evolving trends of systematic analysis, performance of risk analysis, systematization of bureaucratic tools and procedures designed to manage insecurity, contingency planning, professionalization of security staff and security planning processes to predict and eliminate “unjustified risks” [27,28, 29].

The advancement of humanitarian security management framework led to the development and implementation of systematic humanitarian security risk management strategies to lower security risks in order to operate in insecure environments. Specifically addressed by the evolving security management framework was the professionalization of humanitarian security management. This involved allocation of requisite financial resources to security management, development and implementation of appropriate security policies, security plans, crises management systems, contingency plans, standard operating procedures and duty of care policies. Also addressed were systematic security analyses, context specific security risk assessments, systematic data bases and incident reporting systems, security collaboration and networking, safety and security training and capacity building, and deployment of security professionals. Significantly, embedding security management in humanitarian organizations mandates [1. 27].

To meaningfully operate in insecure environments, humanitarian organizations have responsibilities to develop and implement security management frameworks that realistically address security threats and risks in their operational environments. A security management framework guides humanitarian organizations to address and mitigate threats and risks in their operating environment. It allows humanitarian organizations to systematically engage risks to fulfil their mandates and keeping staff and aid beneficiaries safe from harm. The objective is to address risks humanitarian personnel, operations, and aid beneficiaries face to the extent possible. In this regard, humanitarian organizations must develop and implement security guidelines, policies, procedures, processes, practices, and measures that address inherent risks in the humanitarian operational environment [10]. The goal is to lower or reduce security risks in the operating environment. To achieve this, humanitarian organizations have to first define their philosophical approach to security management. That is, their security strategy.

#### **4. Security Strategies in Humanitarian Field Environments**

Humanitarian organizations have responsibilities to proactively define their security strategies to operate in insecure environments and achieve stated objectives. A security strategy “is the overarching philosophy that explains and justifies the application of approaches, and use of resources that frame organisational security management” [11, p. xv]. The security strategy defines the overall strategic organizational security management posture [10]. It is particularly important for humanitarian organizations to have a security strategy as both conceptual and operational basis for security management. As a strategic organizational decision, a security strategy leads to the development and implementation of context specific security risk management strategies which address the security risks in the operational environment.

Classically, three broad security strategies or approaches are applied by humanitarian organizations, especially humanitarian 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” [11]. They combine to form an overall organization security strategy [11]. Other strategies such as *Avoidance and Risk transfer* emerged in some humanitarian contexts. The strategies of Acceptance, Protection and Deterrence and to some extent Avoidance and Risk transfer, are widely applied by humanitarian organizations particularly in complex and high-risk humanitarian environments. The scope of implementation of the strategies differs from organization to organization depending on the mandate, funding, size, complexity of operational area, risk threshold, among other considerations. The UN system typically follows the UN Security Risk Management (SRM) approach to manage security risks [30]. Significantly, acceptance, protection and deterrence strategies are incorporated and compatible with the UN SRM approach and are widely used by UN agencies particularly in high-risk environments [14, 30].

Acceptance aims at removing or reducing the motivation to target and attack aid workers and humanitarian operations [10]. Bickely [1] 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.*, [11], 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 is premised on humanitarian work and staff being accepted by and within the communities they work. This is generally based on understanding, assumptions, or belief that local communities

and authorities will or are willing to cooperate and consent to the humanitarian work in their locality. As such, there is no *prima facie* desire to harm humanitarian work and staff. The fluid dynamics of contemporary humanitarian work means the reality on the ground is sometimes unique in some contexts, posing serious challenges to acceptance. Section 5.3.1 discusses this.

Protection strategy aims at reducing exposure or vulnerability to current and conceivable threats [31, 32]. 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” (11. 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 [11, 32]. Protection strategy is approached with variations depending on the humanitarian context and realities on the ground. This is discussed in section 5.3.2.

Deterrence strategy aims to deter a threat with a counter-threat. It ranges from legal, economic, security, to political sanctions applied to the agent posing threat [1]. It can also include the use of force [32, 33]. Deterrence is to prevent a threat by posing a counter-threat, including the use of armed protection, as part of a security management strategy [11, 33]. In humanitarian contexts deterrence strategy was classically primarily associated with armed protection and was seen as a last resort [32, 33]. Contemporary humanitarian operations have seen some variations on how deterrence is approached and implemented in high-risk environments. Section 5.3.3 discusses this.

Avoidance strategy has emerged and advocated for in some humanitarian contexts though it remains contentious. Avoidance means either not to engage or withdraw from a specific geography due to presence of higher risk [34, 35]. Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) [32] refers to avoidance as removing a whole organization from the threat, either temporarily or for good. Childs (33) and Renouf (36) see avoidance as a tactic within any of the three main strategies of acceptance, protection, and deterrence.

The UN security management system (UNSMS) follows the UN Security Risk Management (SRM) approach to manage security risks [30, 37]. 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” [37, p.52]. The SRM [38] 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 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, and deterrence are extensively applied by UN agencies and are widely integrated and compatible with the UN SRM approach [14, 31]. Some of the security measures implemented under the UN SRM approach fall in categories of acceptance, protection and deterrence making both UN and NGO approaches harmonious.

There are numerous empirical studies on the application of security management strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence and others in humanitarian field environments. Most of the studies acknowledged the importance of humanitarian organizations to adapt context specific security management strategies to deal with inherent security risks in the humanitarian field environments. One of the pioneer compilation on security management strategies in humanitarian operations is the *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments: A Field Manual for Aid Agencies* published in 2000 [39]. This is commonly referred to as Good Practice Review Number Eight (GPR 8 ). The GPR 8 was revised in 2010 [ 32]. According to Beerli and Wiseman [28], conceptualized for the first time in GPR 8 (2000) are three ideal security strategies for humanitarian organizations. The strategies are *Acceptance, Protection and Deterrence*[39].

The three strategies “constituted a range of options from ‘soft’ to ‘hard’, meaning, seeking acceptance and consent; adopting protective procedures, and using protective devices; and threatening with sanctions or

counter-violence” (39 p.58). While recognizing the fact that acceptance was the most appealing to humanitarian organizations particularly NGOs, GPR 8 (39) recommended a combination of the strategies. Importantly, the security strategies had to address specific security threats and risks in the environment considering the different humanitarian operational contexts (39). The revised GPR 8 [32] emphasized the importance of the security strategies of acceptance, protection, and deterrence to be context specific, choosing a mix of the most appropriate strategies for the environment, assessing and adapting to what other humanitarian organizations were doing in same context. Significantly, the realization that no strategy or combination of strategies would reduce risk to zero.

Other empirical examples are studies by Egeland *et al.*, [11], Jackson and Zyck [20], both commissioned by UN OCHA, and a study by Kadwo [14]. The study by Egeland *et al.*, [11] and the follow up study by Jackson and Zyck [20], asserted that the security strategies of acceptance, protection, and deterrence were very significant and relevant in addressing security risks in humanitarian operations. The strategies were widely applied by humanitarian NGOs, UN agencies and other independent humanitarian organizations such as Red Cross and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) particularly in high-risk environments. The study by Kadwo [14] also concluded that the security 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.

Security strategies define strategic organizational security management posture. This vanguards the development and implementation of appropriate security risk management strategies in the form of policies, practices, processes, procedures, and measures that are area and context specific. The security risk management 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. Sound humanitarian security risk management strategies are enablers of safe and secure humanitarian operations, including protection of aid workers and aid beneficiaries[10]. The following section 5 defines what is security risk management. It then discusses specific security risk management strategies applied in humanitarian field environments, particularly high risk contexts.

## 5. Security Risk Management Strategies in Field Environments

Ridley (8, p14) defines security risk management as “the process of identifying, assessing, and mitigating security risks to an organization's assets, operations, and personnel. It involves a systematic approach to identifying potential security risks and implementing measures to reduce or eliminate those risks”. The UN Security Policy Manual [37] 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 (37, para 5). For some UN agencies such as the UNHCR (40), security risk management is about systematically understanding, analyzing, and prioritizing security risks and addressing those risks through effective preventive and mitigating measures. The aim is to achieve acceptable risk by balancing risk and importance (criticality) [40].

Humanitarian security risk management determines how inherent risks in the humanitarian operating environment should be addressed. It allows humanitarian organizations to fulfill their mandates and achieving their stated objectives while at the same time ensuring the protection of their staff from harm. Safe access to communities in need of humanitarian assistance is a critical part of humanitarian security risk management. According to GISF[41], “humanitarian security risk management allows greater access to and impact for crisis affected populations through the protection of aid workers, programs, and organizations”. For Umbrelia [42], “humanitarian security risk management is intended to ensure physical and mental condition, as well as reputation, personnel, material and status of organizations during humanitarian operations”. This is achieved through adopting and implementing security risk management strategies that address security threats and risks in particular contexts and environments.

Sustainable security risk management strategies must confront most of the dangers in the humanitarian environment to reduce risk to acceptable levels enabling safe and secure humanitarian operations. Security risk management strategies should ensure that humanitarian operations continue smoothly even in the most insecure environments and must address specific context threats and risks. The adoption of specific security risk



management strategies involves a wide range of decisions, including the allocation of the requisite resources and determination of what is acceptable risk. This leads to the development and implementation of context specific security risk management strategies. The security risk management strategies are regularly reviewed and updated accordingly to consider complex developments and evolving situations in both the humanitarian and development environments. Humanitarian organizations have cardinal responsibilities to ensure security risk management strategies they adapt are relevant and are enablers to their operations. The security risk management strategies under the different security strategies are explained below.

### **5.3.1 Acceptance security risk management strategies**

Acceptance security risk management strategies include developing, engaging in and building sustainable relationships with the diverse actors in a particular geographical location, environment or context. This leads to acceptance by the local actors enabling humanitarian activities to proceed safely. The actors could be state, non-state including non-state armed actors, conflict parties, local communities, influential groups, or individuals (e.g., religious leaders and traditional leaders) and aid beneficiaries. Also included are other humanitarian actors in same environment. Other acceptance security risk management strategies include implementing participatory programming approaches, accessibility, visibility and presence in area of operation, community engagements and accountability to beneficiary communities. Regular community feedback forums, attending to beneficiary community complaints, progressive employment opportunities for locals including promotion of diversity, inclusion and equity, addressing the quantity and quality of aid and effective communication are also acceptance security risk management strategies.

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 and risk toleration, among other considerations. Acceptance strategy has traditionally been the cornerstone of humanitarian security risk management approach[1]. The approach has been found to be inadequate in some humanitarian contexts necessitating a mix with other approaches to suit the environment. Acceptance risk management strategies also require substantial effort, commitment, and staff time to build.

Aspects of the acceptance security risk management strategies were sometimes taken for granted by humanitarian organizations. For example, some humanitarian organizations assumed that building good relationships and understanding with local actors and communities was a guarantee to safety and security of humanitarian personnel and operations [11, 14, 20,33]. For the UN, the UN flag was seen as good enough to gain acceptance[15]. This significantly changed in the late 1990s and 2000s when actors in some humanitarian contexts, particularly conflict, had little or no regard for acceptance and this has continued to date in some humanitarian contexts [32]. 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. Good intentions of humanitarian work, does not or did not necessarily translate into security and acceptance, depending on the actors and context. In this regard, it is critical to understand the actors in a given context and local community and security dynamics [32]. It is particularly important to strengthen context analysis, strengthen accountability to aid beneficiaries and follow principled humanitarian action for acceptance strategy to be sustainable [10, 32,33].

Acceptance strategies have been particularly affected by contextual factors in high risk environments[10]. In some contexts, such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan Yemen, Somalia, Mozambique Nigeria and Burkina Faso, some armed religious fundamentalist groups have been disruptive to humanitarian operations. The armed groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS) and associates in Iraq and Syria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Al Qaeda and their affiliates in Afghanistan, Yemen Pakistan, Mali, Mozambique, Burkina Faso and Boko Haram in Nigeria, did not (still some do not) view humanitarian work as being neutral and impartial [20, 32]. Building acceptance in such contexts was difficult as humanitarian organizations were considered “legitimate targets”. This has not changed in some of these humanitarian contexts. 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)[10].The UN has sometimes been perceived as a political actor compromising its independence, neutrality, and ability to build acceptance [14, 43].

Acceptance should never be assumed and goes beyond just aid delivery as community relations are complex and sometimes fluid [33]. What is acceptable today does not necessarily mean it will be accepted tomorrow. Further, acceptance environment is dynamic and may change depending on many factors which include, evolving context, impact of the programs being implemented or changed perception of an organization by local actors. 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. [10,11,20]. It is very important for humanitarian organizations to invest in wholistic and systematic approaches to acceptance and not piecemeal approaches. For example, building relationships with all stakeholders, implementing participatory programming approaches, accessibility and regular community feedback forums, progressive employment opportunities for locals including promotion of diversity and accountability to beneficiary communities among other acceptance approaches, should not be treated in isolation or as independent activities. They must be approached as components of an overarching acceptance strategy. Substantial effort, commitment, and staff time have to be invested in this.

Acceptance does also not mitigate every risk and has had limitations addressing targeted criminal violence, fundamentalism and terrorism which are common in some humanitarian contexts. The reality on the ground requires that acceptance be complemented by other strategies, for example, protection, deterrence, and other security approaches[10].

### **5.3.2 Protection Security Risk Management Strategies**

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/tools. Humanitarian organizations including UN agencies widely use protection risk management strategies in their operations in different environments, making substantial investments in physical security[10]. 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[10]. The strategy is to mitigate against attacks and intrusions. Protection strategies must be based on sound security risk assessments. Security risk assessments help humanitarian organizations to identify the threats in their environment and their vulnerability to these threats leading to the implementation of context specific protection security measures.

Protection risk management strategies application is sometimes affected by the context and humanitarian organizations need to critically analyze the contextual dynamics. Protection risk management 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[10]. 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 [ 1, 11, 20, 32]. Protection risk management strategies such as high walls may lead to “bunker mentality” causing serious negative perception of the organization by the local community [11, 20]. Balancing protection measures according to the context is therefore critical for humanitarian organizations [1]. Protection strategies also carry with them substantial costs and some humanitarian organizations, particularly local NGOs with limited funding, find it difficult to implement them. The practical realities in humanitarian field environments, particularly high risk is that protection be complemented by other strategies, for example, acceptance, deterrence, and other security approaches.

### **5.3.3 Deterrence Security Risk Management Strategies**

Security risk management strategies under deterrence strategy include the use of armed protection, application of sanctions and use of force. Aspects of deterrence are widely used in some humanitarian operations in some contexts. UN peacekeeping and humanitarian operations widely use deterrence. For example, 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 and by extension to willing NGOs [32]. 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 by UN agencies [32]. Sanctions or threats of sanctions against individuals or

groups destabilizing humanitarian operations, by the international community individually or collectively, is also a deterrent security risk management measure. Sanctions may include arms embargoes, travel bans, financial or diplomatic restrictions and referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) [11, 32]. Sanctions or threats of sanctions are ordinarily applied and implemented by states. Humanitarian organizations have no such capacity.

Classically in humanitarian operations, deterrence security risk management strategies were seen as a last resort as they were primarily associated with the use of armed protection. Humanitarian NGOs and independent organizations such as ICRC, generally had serious reservations with armed protection. It was seen as compromising their neutrality leading to negative perception of their staff, work, and organizations, making them potential direct targets of attacks [11, 32, 33]. During the past two decades this position has significantly changed in some humanitarian contexts as humanitarian NGO staff have been specifically targeted for attacks leading to a shift in the modus operandi by some [11, 32]. The security dynamics in the humanitarian environment have significantly evolved with the threat environment being complex, unpredictable and fluid, with diverse actors. Armed protection has become first line of protection to humanitarian operations in some humanitarian contexts, particularly high risk environments. For example, contexts with active armed conflict, experiencing terrorism, religious fundamentalism or high crime levels. For the UN, use of armed protection, be it armed state protection, armed peacekeepers, or non-state actors armed protection (e.g., armed private guards) by UN agencies has been a common practice in some humanitarian contexts based on security risk assessments of a country or area.

The untenable security situation and dynamics in some humanitarian contexts necessitated a review of deterrence security risk management strategies by humanitarian NGOs. Some humanitarian NGOs now prefer collaborative approaches to security under the Saving Lives Together framework (SLT) [20, 44]. The SLT framework provides a collaborative approach to security management between UN and NGOs, particularly in complex environments and is a basis for security cooperation and coordination in humanitarian operations [20,44]. Examples of collective and collaborative 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 [20, 44]. In such situations, humanitarian NGOs decisions on the application of deterrence security risk management strategies are based on security risk assessments.

There are assertions that sanctions or threats of sanctions against individuals or groups destabilizing humanitarian operations are sometimes subtly agitated for by some humanitarian organizations in some humanitarian contexts. Whether this is a fact or perception, and the extent, is not for this paper. However, the application of sanctions by the international community against some states, groups or individuals may have serious operational and security ramifications for humanitarian organizations and 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 [10]. The humanitarian NGOs were labelled as being part and parcel of the “conspiracy” against Sudan government and its people [10].

Deterrence security risk management strategies are also sometimes affected by contextual factors in high risk environments and humanitarian organizations need to critically analyze this [11, 32]. It is particularly important to analyze the local actors, security threats and risks of some operational contexts to determine whether deterrence should be applied. In environments where local actors, particularly armed non-state actors, have no respect or little regard to humanitarian work even if it is benefiting their community, there may be a need to consider deterrence security risk management strategy, such as armed protection, for the good of the greater community. Deterrence may also be the most ideal approach in contexts with high crime levels. The use of armed guards would be considered. There might also be a need to safeguard humanitarian assistance and assets from thefts, looting and expropriation by some groups or individuals, particularly armed. The reality and context on the ground determine the best approach to deal with the threats and risks. In diverse humanitarian field environments, deterrence strategies are complemented by other strategies, for example, acceptance, protection, and other security approaches.

#### **5.3.4 Avoidance Risk Management Strategies**

Security risk management strategies under avoidance include remote management and risk transfer [11,36, 43]. 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 [33, 34, 43]. In some contexts, the avoidance strategy encourages the tendency to avoid insecure areas more easily even if there is great need [33, 34, 36, 43]. UN organizations typically practice avoidance by transferring project or program implementation to their implementing partners, who are mostly NGOs [32]. In this way, UN organizations also transfer security risks to NGOs as legal entities to manage. Avoidance and risk transfer must be seen as some of the options available to manage security risks.

### 5.3.5 UN Security Risk Management Strategies

The UN security management system (UNSMS) follows the UN Security Risk Management (SRM) approach to manage security risks [30, 37]. It is important to highlight that while the SRM approach remains the primary UN security risk management strategy, aspects of the security risk management strategies of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance are extensively applied by UN agencies and are widely integrated and compatible with the UN SRM approach [10,14]. Some of the security risk management measures implemented under the UN SRM approach fall in categories of acceptance, protection, deterrence, and avoidance making both UN and humanitarian NGOs approaches harmonious.

The UN SRM approach assess the operational context of UN activities, clearly identifying the threats that the UN may face in order to identify the risk levels[30]. This becomes the basis upon which security management decisions are made with the aim of lowering the risks to acceptable levels [30, 37]. The SRM model uses a structured approach in order to identify threats and risks that may affect UN personnel, assets and operations[10]. The approach instructively requires the UN system to develop and implement security policies, procedures, processes, practices and measures that are relevant, area and context specific based on security risk assessment (SRA)[10]. SRA an integral part of the SRM approach, is a 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 [10]. It prioritizes assessing risks while identifying prevention and mitigation strategies and security measures. Security risk assessments narrow down those threats which must be addressed in a particular environment and come up with safety and security measures (preventive and mitigation) to address the threats with the aim of lowering the risk [10].

The threats which must be addressed under the SRM approach are in categories of armed conflict, terrorism, crime, civil unrest, and hazards [37]. The security risk management measures implemented are generally classified as security management procedures, physical security, equipment and supplies, medical, telecommunications, vehicles and training, in a particular geographical location and for a specific time frame [10]. Typically, the security measures under the different categories to be developed and implemented relate to:

- i. Security management procedures: Security policies and practices, standard operating procedures, security protocols, contingency plans, crisis management plans etc.
- ii. Physical security: UN and non-UN compounds (office and residential) requirements and procedures.
- iii. Equipment and supplies: Equipment and supplies to be available in UN premises, other premises used by the UN, in vehicles, boats and ships and assigned to staff, etc.
- iv. Medical: Medical facilities for UN staff (and partners in some contexts), medical evacuation plans and other emergency procedures, medical equipment etc.
- v. Telecommunications: Mandatory and recommended communication equipment/tools (UN agencies and personnel), security communications systems, emergency communication systems and protocols etc.
- vi. Vehicles: Vehicles required for UN operations- armoured or soft skin, equipment required in vehicles, vehicle travelling protocols etc.
- vii. Training: Mandatory and non-mandatory safety and security training.

Some of the security measures implemented in these categories can specifically be classified as relating to acceptance, protection and deterrence security risk management strategies. For example, compound physical security measures such as high walls and presence of armed guards at UN compounds are both protection and deterrence security risk management measures. Some security policies, practices and standard operating procedures build and support acceptance. For example, policies relating to community participation in project development and implementation are aimed at building acceptance.

The major strength of the UN 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 to lower risks to acceptable levels as residual security risks always 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 the operational context most of the time is non-homogenous. As such, it is not possible for the SRM approach to apply and be consistent in all areas. Threats and risks are different even in same geographical location. This leads to generalizations about a context, leaving some areas exposed to peculiar threats and risks not envisaged in the approach. The UN SRM approach also 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 eventuality. 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.

### **5.3.6 Risk Reduction Security Strategies**

In addition to the UN 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[31]. Relocation is the movement of personnel from one duty station to another within the country to avoid risks. Evacuation is the movement of personnel from their duty station to a location outside the country to avoid risks. Alternative work modalities are measures that reduce exposure to unexpected situations that can bring risks, e.g., work from home or closure of offices. In most cases these are temporary strategies.

Other risk reduction strategies are Accept (different from acceptance), Control and Transfer (ACT) [37]. Accept means risk is accepted with no further mitigation[30]. 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 [30]. Transfer means contracting implementation of project or program activities to other parties. In this way, risk is also assigned or transferred to other parties [30]. 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) [45]. Supporting and coordinating security risk management within the broader humanitarian community in a specified geographical location under Saving Lives Together (SLT) framework, collaborative standard operating procedures (SOPs), contingency plans, and crisis management systems are some of the risk reduction security strategies implemented by humanitarian organizations [10, 11, 20, 31].

### **5.3.7 Security Risk Management Strategies for Aid Beneficiaries**

The security risk management 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., internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees) 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), criminals (organized or otherwise), local hosting communities, and from the aid beneficiaries themselves [46]. In this regard, states have responsibilities to put in place and implement policies and practices that allow greater access to and impact for crisis affected populations wherever and whenever (47). Whenever this is not always possible, humanitarian organizations complement states efforts by implementing security measures that ensure the protection and safety of aid beneficiaries and humanitarian operations.

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 [46]. 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 aid beneficiaries 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 safely. Aid beneficiaries must also not be harmed in the process of receiving humanitarian aid (before, during and after).

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 are found in refugee and IDP contexts [10]. 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 peace keeping missions in countries such as South Sudan, DRC, Mali, Central Africa Republic, among other peace keeping missions [48].

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. Community policing is common in refugee and IDP camps[10]. In some local communities with high crime rates community policing has also been found helpful complementing law and order security forces.

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 and providing equipment such as motor-vehicles and motorcycles to enhance their mobility. Training may also be conducted to law enforcement agencies in humanitarian law, human rights law, refugee conventions, community policing and other capacity building initiatives. The support to government is aimed at lowering risks, ensuring communities and aid beneficiaries live in safe environments. Examples of such support can be seen in some refugee and IDP operations where humanitarian organizations play significant roles complementing government efforts [10].

### **5.3.8 What is the best security strategy?**

There is no strategy which can be labeled as the best on its own. According to Kadwo [14], 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 security risk management 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 the strategies considering local security realities, contexts, cultures, and conditions as the situation on the ground in most cases is fluid [11, 14, 20]. 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 [11, 20].

The security strategies of acceptance, protection and deterrence have substantially co-existed with the UN SRM approach [14]. 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 [14, 33]. 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 targeted crime, terrorism and other collateral risks which might not be linked to communities benefiting from humanitarian aid [30]. There is now significant focus by humanitarians on coordination of security approaches, promotion of organizations mandate, systematic security risk analyses and assessments, and reaching out and forging

agreements with the diverse security interlocutors including conflict parties at various levels [30, 20, 44]. Importantly, adopting security risk management strategies to be context specific has become vital.

## 6. Duty of CARE

The primary approach to security risk management in the UN is the SRM process. In humanitarian NGOs and other independent humanitarian organizations, acceptance, protection and deterrence approaches are widely applied though to varying extents. Linked closely to these security risk management approaches is duty of care. 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 [11]. In this way they fulfill duty of care obligations. The United Nations High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) [ 49] defines duty of care as “a non-waivable duty on the part of the organizations aimed at mitigating or addressing 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 is widely applied by humanitarian organizations particularly in high risk environments. Duty of care in humanitarian organizations, particularly UN agencies, consists of two aspects, security management and staff occupational health and safety[10]. Security management addresses staff insecurity, linking security risk management to the protection of staff from intentional and malicious acts[49]. 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 [49].

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 [11,49]. So are occupational health and safety policies and practices promoting the well-being of staff members. For example, medical care and psychosocial support [11,49].

The duty of care confers to humanitarian 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.

## 7. Contributions of Security Risk Management Strategies

The security strategies of acceptance, protection, and deterrence are widely applied by humanitarian NGOs, UN agencies and other independent humanitarian organizations particularly in high-risk environments. Several studies including by Egeland *et al*, [11], Kadwo [14] and Jackson and Zyck [20] 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 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*, [11], Kadwo [14] and Jackson and Zyck [20] 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 [11,20].

The SRM approach 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 [31]. This is exemplified in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Sahel region, Iraq, DRC, CRA, South Sudan, Nigeria, Myanmar, and Sudan among other high-risk countries [10]. 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[10].

The UN 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. Makova [31] 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[10]. 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 [31]. 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 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 [11, 20]. According to the findings of the study by Jackson and Zyck [20], humanitarian organizations expressed the desire to stay and deliver and this had been internalized in many 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 [30]. 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 [11, 14, 20, 31, 44,].

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 [10]. Evacuation from Sudan in April 2023 is the most recent high profile evacuation [51]. In the three example countries, thousands of humanitarian staff were either relocated and or evacuated. The majority of the staff returned when the security situation was assessed to be safe and manageable, and the staff accepted the risks except in some locations in Sudan where the conditions remain precarious.

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 [49]. 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 [49]. 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 [11].

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 [10]. 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, 52]. 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 [48]

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 [11, 44, 53]. 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 [11, 44]).

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 [10]

## **8. 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 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 the many humanitarian crises that need to be funded [20, 53]. Both UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs have been affected by reduced funding leading to some significant staff reductions and closure of some projects/programs [20]. In such situations, 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 likely to be affected most by limited funding. This might persuade them to accept security risks to retain existing funding or reduced funding.

The components of acceptance, protection, and deterrence 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) and associates 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 [20, 32]. 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 or sustainable relationships and principled humanitarian action [11,20,30]. 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 other 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 [14, 20 30 ]. In this context, it is not sustainable 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 [54]. 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 [10].

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 [55, 56]. 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 [55, 56]. 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 [55]. Several female humanitarian personnel experienced gender-based violence including some who were raped by South Sudan government forces at Terrain hotel, Juba [55, 56, 57, 58]. 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 [55,56,57]. The security strategies of protection and deterrence failed in this instance, partly due to command failure.

## 9. 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 particularly in high-risk environments.

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 [31]. 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 [31]. 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 [59]. 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.

## 10. Conclusion

The humanitarian operational environment is complex with many security challenges particularly in high-risk environments. The development of contemporary humanitarian security management framework is directly linked to significant threats and risks emanating from the humanitarian operational environment. Violence against aid workers significantly increased in the 1990s and 2000s. This was on the background of rise in humanitarian crises in many parts of the world, primarily caused by armed conflict, which displaced millions of people. Terrorism and religious fundamentalism complicated the humanitarian operating environment in some contexts, with some armed groups being very hostile to humanitarian work. Sound security management and implementation of systematic approaches to security risk management became essential.

Good humanitarian security risk management strategies must significantly address the security threats in the operating 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 [11, 14, 20, 31]. The efficacy of some of the security risk management strategies has been subjected to scrutiny and criticism because of their failures in some contexts. Indeed, humanitarian contexts have varying safety and security dynamics. Therefore, contextualized security risk management approaches and a coordinated mixture of the strategies is critical.

The security risk management strategies must be regularly reviewed to remain relevant, considering local security realities, cultures, and conditions. 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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