

Collaborative Learning Approach to NGO Security
Management

Acceptance White Paper

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I. INTRODUCTION

The increase in major security incidents over the past decade (Stoddard, Harmer, and DiDomenico 2009) has forced non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to continually respond to new security threats and adapt to dynamic security environments. The key security management challenge these organizations face is how to facilitate their mission and activities in a country *and* reduce exposure to safety and security risks in difficult operational contexts. To accomplish this, many organizations subscribe to ‘acceptance’ as their primary approach to security management with some complement of ‘protection’ and ‘deterrence’ measures.¹ The principles that guide acceptance closely match the values of most humanitarian and development organizations. As such, gaining acceptance has long been recognized as essential to their work and central to securing access to populations in need.

Despite the fact that most NGOs claim to base their security management strategy on acceptance, a number of factors hinder the NGO community’s understanding of the mechanisms of acceptance, and therefore its efficacy. Few organizations have explicit policies and documents that outline how to operationalize an acceptance approach and many policies fail to systematize or clearly articulate acceptance as a distinct security management approach. As a result, few guidelines exist to help staff systematically implement acceptance or to determine the

degree of acceptance an organization has achieved in a given location at a given time. The general lack of practice-based policies on acceptance is accompanied by a corresponding lack of mechanisms to monitor acceptance. Determining whether staff members are taking specific actions to promote acceptance in communities is problematic without standards by which to measure results. In short, acceptance is neither well-conceptualized nor consistently operationalized by many NGOs. Determining the efficacy of an acceptance approach to security management must answer, first, whether an organization is deliberately and actively implementing an acceptance approach, and second, whether an organization has gained and maintained acceptance and to what degree.

Few guidelines exist to help staff systematically implement acceptance or to determine the degree of acceptance an organization has achieved.

The implementation of an acceptance approach is further complicated in environments where international military actors are actively engaging in counter-insurgency activities (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan) or where international institutions or actors are viewed as highly politicized (e.g., Pakistan, Sudan²). In contexts with international military actors and government contract agencies in particular, it can be challenging for NGOs to carve out a distinct and humanitarian profile. In addition, the efficacy of acceptance may be limited in highly criminalized environments (e.g., DRC). These environments present additional

¹ A protection approach “uses protective devices and procedures to reduce one’s vulnerability to the threat, but does not affect the threat itself. In security terms this is called hardening the target.” A deterrence approach “aims to deter a threat with a counter-threat. It ranges from legal, economic or political sanctions (not necessarily by aid agencies) to the threat or use of force” (HPN 2010, 55).

² The ICC indictment of President Bashir of Sudan led to the expulsion of more than a dozen NGOs in Sudan in 2009.

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challenges for implementing an acceptance approach to security management. Any advances in acceptance in these environments will be necessarily based on a better understanding of acceptance and the mechanisms for implementing it at the organizational level.

The goal of this paper is two-fold: (1) to document and build on current understandings of acceptance; and (2) to identify issues and challenges in implementing an acceptance approach to security management. In doing so, we build on existing resources to advance a comprehensive conceptual and operational understanding of acceptance that articulates the ‘who’ and ‘what’ of acceptance and the key challenges to its implementation. A more comprehensive concept of acceptance advances our collective understanding of the components necessary to implement an acceptance approach and suggests building blocks to determine the presence and degree of acceptance.

The first section of this white paper explains how the paper fits into a larger project on NGO security and acceptance. The aim of the project is to generate a better understanding of acceptance as a concept and the mechanisms for implementing an acceptance approach to security management, as well as to document the specific ways in which acceptance and other security management approaches affect national staff. The second section describes the history and evolution of the concept of acceptance and reviews existing definitions. At the end of the section we articulate the ‘who’ and ‘what’ of acceptance. The third section examines three major challenges to an acceptance approach to security management. The

paper concludes with some implications for the application of acceptance approaches to security management and directions for further study.

II. A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING APPROACH TO ACCEPTANCE

This white paper serves as a key document in an on-going collaborative research project on acceptance and NGO security, funded by the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The project and this white paper build on already established concepts of acceptance, and expand on this knowledge through research about how humanitarian and development organizations and their staff members conceptualize and implement acceptance. Through this research, the project team hopes to better understand whether or not and under what circumstances acceptance can be an effective security management approach for NGOs. The project team is comprised of Michael O’Neill and Faith Freeman (Save the Children), Larissa Fast (Kroc Institute, University of Notre Dame), and Elizabeth Rowley (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health). Madeleine Kingston and Oliver Behn (European InterAgency Security Forum) provided extensive feedback on the white paper and are collaborating on various stages of the project.

In late 2010, the project team convened two International Security Consultations, one in Washington, DC and another in Geneva. Participants included security focal points and directors from a range of U.S. and European-based humanitarian and development organizations. These consultations aimed to document the current understanding of acceptance at

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the organizational level and explore its strengths and limitations. Many of the themes articulated in this white paper derive from the consultations, even though we have not explicitly labeled them as such. Participants raised a series of issues and questions, and identified many components of acceptance. We thank the consultation participants for their insights and comments. In this white paper we expand upon these ideas and conceptualize acceptance in a more holistic and comprehensive way than has been done previously.

Participants and other interested individuals will have the opportunity to comment on the document, which will inform an upcoming regional security consultation in East Africa and subsequent field research in Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan (scheduled for April 2011). The collaborative field research will test some of the ideas about acceptance proposed here. We will revise this document based on these multiple sources of feedback toward the end of the project (anticipated autumn of 2011). In this way, this version of the white paper is a living document, open and responsive to feedback and field realities. The white paper is available on our online discussion and information-sharing forum, Acceptance Research (<http://acceptanceresearch.wordpress.com/>). We invite readers to contribute to the discussion on acceptance by posting comments and responses to the paper on the online forum.

III. THE CONCEPT OF ACCEPTANCE

The Evolution of Acceptance

The concept of acceptance can be traced to the founding and development of the International Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC). Gaining consent from warring parties, a forerunner of 'acceptance,' was a critical condition for gaining access to victims of war in order to provide assistance. The ICRC attributes its acceptance in most conflict-affected countries in large part to adherence to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence (Brugger 2009, 436). The ICRC's unique position established by international humanitarian law, its global reach, and the broad range of unique and systematized services that it offers to civilians and belligerents, from prostheses to prison visits, give it a degree of name recognition and credibility that few other organizations can equal. Most multi-mandate organizations have similarly based their application of acceptance on their mission and values, and have sought to gain the acceptance of communities through good programming and by demonstrating humanitarian principles (HPN 2010, 57).

While many organizations had previously incorporated some form of acceptance into their basic programming strategies, acceptance gained additional recognition as a security management approach through the publication of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Good Practice Review 8, *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments* (GPR8), first published in 2000 (van Brabant 2000) and revised in 2010 (HPN 2010). An organization's overall security management strategy is ideally informed by an analysis of the context, actors, and the organization's own programs and values to determine the most appropriate security management measures.

For those organizations subscribing to an acceptance approach, defining and conceptualizing acceptance has proven challenging. Attempts at formulating a

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definition are complicated by the broad nature of acceptance and its many intersections with other areas of organizational operations. Some suggest that a precise definition limits the creativity and flexibility that an acceptance approach necessarily implies, the fear being that

There is little consensus on what acceptance means, what steps must be taken to gain acceptance, and how an organization can determine whether it is accepted in a given area.

acceptance is thus reduced to a mechanistic “checklist” for individuals to tick off. The ICRC and IFRC, for example, do not define acceptance. Instead, they indicate what it comprises and what affects it. The ICRC understands acceptance as linked to a broad range of operational choices and values that affect perceptions, levels of

trust and acceptance among stakeholders (Brugger 2009, 436). However, other security professionals value a definition for the focus and coherence it can provide to individuals and organizations wishing to implement an acceptance approach, helping distinguish what defines good practice. Even so, many organizations have not developed an operational definition of acceptance and instead rely on a sense of “we’ll know it when we see it.”

For those organizations that do define acceptance, their starting point is generally the definition presented in the original and revised GPR8 (see Appendix A for this and other definitions of acceptance). Even among organizations that may have a definition of acceptance, few have developed security plans and policies that incorporate the nuances and details advanced in the original GPR8. For example, definitions often focus on

engaging with the “community at large” instead of providing specific guidance on the categories of actors who are critical for acceptance (Rowley, Burns and Burnham 2010, 6). The revised GPR8 defines an acceptance approach as one that “attempts to reduce or remove threats by increasing the acceptance (the political and social consent) of an agency’s presence and its work in a particular context” (HPN 2010, 55).

Despite the fact that almost all organizations mention acceptance as at least a part, if not the main focus, of their security approach, there is little consensus on what acceptance means, what steps must be taken to gain acceptance, and how an organization can determine whether it is accepted in a given area (Fast and O’Neill 2010). Furthermore, the effectiveness of acceptance as a security approach is linked to the overall management and programming of the organization. The following sections seek to expand on current definitions of acceptance to present a comprehensive conceptualization of acceptance that accounts for the cross-cutting and complex nature of acceptance.

Toward an Expanded Concept of Acceptance

Fast and O’Neill propose the following expanded definition of acceptance: “acceptance is founded on effective relationships and cultivating and maintaining consent from beneficiaries, local authorities, belligerents and other stakeholders. This in turn is a means of reducing or removing potential threats in order to access vulnerable populations and undertake programme activities” (Fast and O’Neill 2010, 5-6). Acceptance, therefore, is not only a matter of addressing existing threats in order to protect staff, but of ensuring access and

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enabling programming. Given the dynamic nature of the contexts in which aid agencies operate, acceptance must be continually sought, monitored and maintained over time. Conceptualizing acceptance in this way involves thinking about **who** and **what**.

Who

The “who” of acceptance can be divided into three different questions: **who gives consent, who is accepted and who works to gain acceptance?** First, who gives consent, is of critical importance. At a basic level acceptance must include at least some degree of tacit consent from those who can obstruct program activities or cause harm to NGO personnel and beneficiaries. Key actors who might give their consent (or confer their acceptance) for an organization’s presence and activities include host governments, local leaders, militant groups, the community at large (Slim 2004, 2 and 9) and “all those who can affect the security of ... agencies” (Bruderlein 2004, 7). These groups of key actors can be broken down into sub-groups. For instance, local leaders can include local government officials, religious authorities and traditional leaders. In countries where the host state does not embrace an organization or its activities, the organization might face additional difficulties or be unable to secure access to populations. At a minimum, without permission from the host state to operate an organization lacks legitimacy or legal standing.

Second, asking who is accepted has to do with the transferability of acceptance. Is acceptance limited to a specific staff person or a particular group of staff members? Acceptance may be based on that group’s work on a particular program or on a shared characteristic such as

gender, religious affiliation, class, caste or ethnicity. At what point does the acceptance gained by an individual transfer to the organization that the individual represents? Organizations must consider whether consent transfers from one level (i.e. the individual) to another (i.e. the organization). Moreover, the dynamics of acceptance for national and expatriate staff will likely differ. For national staff acceptance may change depending on whether they are from the area, their gender or ethnicity, and other characteristics that have meaning or importance in the context. Given the dynamic and sometimes fleeting nature of acceptance, a clear understanding of who is accepted, and why, is imperative.

The “who” of acceptance can be divided into three different questions: 1) who gives consent, 2) who is accepted, and 3) who works to gain acceptance?

The third question relates to who within the organization works to gain acceptance. Those charged with security management cannot be the only ones involved in gaining acceptance. While the nature of acceptance relates directly to the security of staff, gaining and maintaining acceptance can be affected by decisions made in many other areas of an organization. Any effort to systematize an acceptance approach will involve working with program development, staff selection and other personnel outside of the usual parameters of security management.

Program and field staff are key players in gaining and maintaining acceptance, since they are in direct contact with local communities and other stakeholders. There are many other staff, however, who

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directly affect an organization's levels of acceptance. Guards and drivers, for instance, interact with community members on a regular basis. Other staff include the public relations and communications staff who are responsible for communications and external messages and the logisticians and procurement staff who contract for the purchase and delivery of goods and supplies. The role of these staff members in promoting acceptance, though less visible, may have a profound effect on local perceptions of the organization, and thus its levels of acceptance.

What

The "what" of acceptance is directly tied to two interconnected issues: how an organization conceptualizes acceptance, and whether an organization takes deliberate actions to generate consent

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carries out a program that benefits the community, therefore it is accepted). It presumes the need to do nothing more than provide beneficial services in order to automatically generate consent. *Active acceptance*, in contrast, must be continually negotiated, monitored, and maintained. Conceptualizing acceptance in this way, as we do in this paper,

from stakeholders. Conceptualizing acceptance as synonymous with good programming, for example, easily leads to a passive security approach. *Passive acceptance* assumes that consent derives from good works (i.e. an organization

suggests the need for **proactive engagement in activities and actions to gain and maintain consent** from stakeholders and takes account of the idea of **degrees of acceptance** and the **dynamic nature** of consent.

An organization adopting an active acceptance approach engages in a number of actions to gain acceptance. It may reach out to a variety of constituents and educate the community about what the organization seeks to do and why. An organization may provide assistance based upon humanitarian principles and/or community-defined needs. Through these activities an organization hopes to gain some degree of acceptance. Experience indicates that the degree of acceptance follows a continuum with tolerance at one end (e.g., "we don't really like you but we want what you bring or do; therefore we tolerate your presence") to full acceptance at the other (e.g., "we value what you provide and want you to stay; therefore we will work to make sure you are safe and do all we can to ensure you don't leave").

To effectively monitor whether or not staff are working to actively gain acceptance or to gauge their understanding of acceptance may require the development of specific verifiable "indicators". It is important to balance flexibility and adaptability to the context and changing circumstances with a range of activities and assessment tools that monitor whether staff are working to actively gain acceptance and help to determine levels of acceptance over time. A comprehensive understanding of what acceptance is and what activities effectively implement an acceptance approach to security management will provide the foundation for developing such tools.

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Acceptance, however, cannot be reduced to only a set of formulaic activities. Any degree of consent for an organization's presence and activities may be fleeting, and is dynamic and responsive to changes in context. NGOs operating in Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake discovered that an initial welcome dissipated over time as frustration increased with the slow pace of reconstruction, and in some cases over opposition to the perceived values that NGO programming promoted (see Wilder 2008). It is for this reason that organizations should also determine reliable means to assess whether or not they have gained (or still maintain) acceptance. The dynamic nature of acceptance means that trying to assess acceptance with a checklist of activities or defined set of output indicators could be detrimental since it may create a false sense of acceptance (i.e. if one checks all the boxes, one has gained acceptance). Organizations cannot presume to have acceptance even if they have completed certain activities and assessed the specified indicators (with positive results), much in the same way that acceptance is not synonymous with good programming or consent from a beneficiary community.

Acceptance – Key Components

At the international consultations on acceptance, participants highlighted the lack of systematized understanding of how to achieve acceptance within their organizations and among staff at different levels. This section further examines many of the key components of acceptance that participants identified as critical for the *effective implementation of an acceptance approach* to security management. It also addresses the need to think systematically about acceptance and how it can be effectively applied by an organization. This section, with insight from other sources (not only those specifically addressing

Acceptance: Key Components & Cross-cutting Components

- **Principles and Mission**
- **Stakeholder and Context Analysis**
- **Relationships and Networks**
- **Programming**
- **Negotiation**
- **Communications**
- **Staffing for Acceptance**
- **Image and Perceptions**

acceptance), aims to build a useful and more comprehensive concept of operational acceptance for readers. The key components this section examines are: Principles and Mission, Stakeholder and Context Analysis, Relationships and Networks, Programming, Negotiation, and Communications.

Principles and Mission

All organizations have mission statements, values, or principles that guide programming and other decisions. These values are diverse and often in tension. For humanitarian agencies, the traditional humanitarian principles of impartiality (delivering assistance proportional to need and not discriminating based on ethnic, religious, or other characteristics), independence (financial and political) and neutrality (not taking sides) are vital to fostering acceptance. Many multi-mandate organizations base their mission on a shared notion of humanitarian compassion but embrace other values and operational principles like “do no harm” (Anderson 1999), protecting children's rights, eliminating poverty or creating sustainable livelihoods. Multi-mandate organizations may subscribe to “needs” or “rights” based approaches or engage in advocacy efforts that are in sync with their values and operational principles, but that may

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compromise their neutrality, impartiality or independence (Van Brabant 2010, 14; HPG 2007).

Regardless, an organization's principles, mission, and values and how these are perceived are central to applying an acceptance approach to security management. These must be consistently demonstrated in practice and not simply stated (van Brabant 2010, 15). Organizations need to clearly articulate and consistently apply their guiding principles and values, understand how these shape their mission and programming, and how these, in turn, might affect their acceptance in a given location. In some contexts, certain principles may be valued more than others depending on the needs of the community and the cultural, social and religious environment. Studies in diverse areas, including Pakistan and Iraq, show that humanitarian values have universal appeal. How these values are demonstrated or implemented, however, may depend on the cultural, religious or historical context. For instance, in Iraq, notions of charity in Islam resonate with the humanitarian principle of providing assistance based on need alone (Hansen 2008, 120-122). The overlap and differences between local values and the mission and principles of organizations have implications for the way organizations can provide assistance and gain acceptance. Similarly, in Pakistan, steadfastly demonstrating humanitarian principles in a manner that shows and earns respect according to local norms was as important for NGOs to do as communicating and defending these principles (Featherstone and Abouzeid 2010, 6).

Stakeholder and Context Analysis

The objective of stakeholder analysis is to

accurately identify and analyze the motives, attitudes, capabilities and relationships of actors who might influence programmatic success, including security. Context analysis (see HPN 2010, sections 2.3 and 2.4) examines the environment and circumstances in which an organization operates, with a particular focus on how context and organizational values, mission and programming might interact. An organization should identify how its programs (e.g., type of program, who it serves), presence (e.g., hiring of staff, office/housing rental, wages), or activities (e.g., assistance, capacity-building) will affect different stakeholders and how they in turn might react. While the community at large may respect an organization, a particular individual or group may perceive the organization as a threat. In short, organizations must ask: "who benefits, who loses, who is bypassed by...programme[s]?" (van Brabant 1998, 118). This question prompts organizations to consider how program design and activities influence social, political and economic power structures and what unintended consequences they may have (van Brabant nd, 20-21).

Stakeholder and context analyses can help determine the appropriate parties to engage in dialogue and negotiation in order to enhance staff security. National staff will have a key role to play in identifying stakeholders, contextualizing messages and acting as organizational interlocutors (HPN 2010, 58). Stakeholder and context analyses can also highlight the potential limitations of acceptance, by identifying actors who neither gain nor lose from the organization's activities or presence but who may see an attack against the organization, its staff or its resources as a political, criminal, or financial opportunity. In forming a security strategy in a given location, organizations

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must therefore consider the limitations of an acceptance approach and devise alternative approaches appropriate to the context. These analytical tools are critical to effective security management and the appropriate application of an acceptance approach.

Relationships and Networks

While positive relationships with beneficiary communities are necessary to gaining acceptance, it is important to recognize the limits to a community's capacity to protect an organization's programs or staff. It is therefore advisable to identify and cultivate relationships with other actors, especially those who have the power and influence to negatively or positively affect an organization's security and programming, and cultivate relationships with them. The revised GPR8 emphasizes that relationships must be built through "active outreach" to a wide range of stakeholders. Staff must invest time into building relationships for which excellent social, interpersonal and communication skills are necessary (HPN 2010, 58). In addition, staff must have a nuanced understanding of the meanings conveyed by such details as where meetings take place, who leads or participates in meetings and the ability to listen and show respect (HPN 2010, 61-62).

Programming

Acceptance is widely recognized as connected to good, effective and responsive programming that meets the needs of a community. Community participation, consultation and partnership are often key elements of effective programming. The ability of an organization to meet people's needs and do this in a transparent and accountable way is often critical for how the community perceives an organization. Conversely, a

program that is seen to be negatively affecting a community (or a subset of the community) may lead to disaffection and security incidents. Nevertheless, even if programs meet the needs of beneficiaries, they may adversely affect specific actors and/or change political, economic and social power structures. Insofar as good programming is an essential component of acceptance, acceptance cannot be *assumed* from good programming alone. Even the most successfully and well-accepted projects involve organizations that encounter security threats for a variety of other reasons completely unrelated to programs (e.g., association with particular or controversial agendas, such as girls education or counter-insurgency efforts).

Negotiation

Acceptance depends in part on successful negotiations with actors at many levels, from individuals to governments. These negotiations can be formal, as in the case of negotiations with national or regional governments to establish a Memorandum of Understanding for an organization's operations. An MOU provides official consent for and legitimizes an organization's presence in a country. It is important, though not sufficient, for acceptance. Negotiations at other levels are more frequently informal, as with soldiers or rebels at a checkpoint while traveling to project sites, or with local officials at a port or airport to gain access to relief supplies. Negotiations may take place once or repeatedly depending on the dynamics of the local environment. If local actors change frequently, if armed or other

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actors lack an established chain of command, or if multiple actors operate in the same area, negotiations will likely be more complicated, prolonged, and occur more often. NGO staff must be equipped with specific communication and negotiation skills, including attention to tone, subtle changes in demeanor, negotiating styles and social meanings to build relationships and negotiate access effectively across cultural and other boundaries (HPN 2010, 62).³

Communications

Communications from the acceptance perspective refers to the explicit and implicit messages an organization projects about itself (see Anderson 1999), as well as statements other may make about an organization. Unofficial and official, informal and formal organizational communications about its mission, values, and activities should be clear and consistent. All staff including senior and junior staff, as well as drivers, guards or cleaners should be able to understand and communicate the goals and principles of the organization. This includes senior and junior staff, as well as drivers, guards or cleaners (see HPN 2010, 61). Public messages from the organization or critical statements from outside sources can also affect how an organization is perceived (HPN 2010, 62-63), as can advocacy efforts on human rights or other issues.

Information, blogs and images on organizational websites provide widely accessible information about an organization. Messages and activities in one country may affect levels of acceptance in another country. An organization may have control over the message it sends, but what others say or write about an organization, whether or not

they are affiliated with the organization and whether or not the information is true, also play a role in how communities and other stakeholders perceive an organization. Although these messages may not be part of the image an organization wants to project, they often comprise part of the image that local communities and stakeholders perceive. Monitoring print, internet, and visual media (local, national, and international) references to an organization, its staff, programs or positions and proactively defining and promoting the organizational “brand” are crucial to managing how an NGO is perceived and preventing misconceptions that may undermine the organization’s acceptance.

Acceptance – Cross-Cutting Components

Based on input from the international consultations in Washington, DC and Geneva and current writing on acceptance, we identified two key components of acceptance that have a uniquely cross-cutting nature: (1) Staffing for Acceptance and (2) Image and Perceptions. Staffing decisions *affect* all other components of acceptance (e.g., stakeholder analysis, relationship building, negotiations), while an organization’s image and perceptions are *affected by* the other key components. In this section we draw on resources on staffing and perceptions of the work of humanitarian and development organizations to connect these to acceptance and its components.

Staffing for Acceptance

Organizational personnel play a central role in promoting or hindering acceptance. Staffing decisions determine in large part whether staff have the necessary qualities to gain acceptance from communities, including the ability to communicate effectively, negotiate, and build

³ For more on negotiating with armed actors or in a humanitarian context, see Toole, 2003; Mancini-Griffoli and Picot 2004; Glaser 2005; and McHugh and Bessler 2006.

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relationships. The revised GPR8 notes the following competencies staff need to promote active acceptance approach: the ability to map out key actors and establish a wide network with stakeholders, a deep understanding of mission and values of the organization, and diplomatic and negotiating skills (HPN 2010, 69). National staff with the ability to communicate in culturally appropriate ways (non-verbal messages and local language fluency) are crucial to success as international staff often lack experience and knowledge of the culture or language of their country of assignment (Carle and Chkam 2006, 14). Organizations must also look to local communities to inform the competencies and skills their employees need. In some cases, for example, staffing for acceptance might privilege identity (e.g., nationality, region, religion, gender, social status or ethnic background) over programmatic or professional competencies.

Staffing decisions affect not only staff skills, but also perceptions of the organization through the ways in which local, national and international staff are hired, fired, and compensated. In particular, the high value often placed on English competency may limit employment opportunities for otherwise qualified locals and may limit local staff involvement in decision-making (Listening Project 2010, 4). Especially in emergency contexts, organizations often hire staff who would otherwise have worked at community-based organizations or the local government, a practice that can engender resentment among government elites. Building the capacity of local staff can offset this, since communities may be less likely to have negative perceptions that agencies are “poaching” from local organizations if they have previously invested in building the capacity of local

staff (Listening Project 2010, 8). Organizations must also be aware of pay scales and the inequity between local and international staff salaries and benefits. In addition, there may be significant discrepancy between local staff salaries and the resource availability of people in the communities in which staff are working (Listening Project 2010, 5). All of these staffing issues can affect how an organization is perceived.

High staff turnover, especially in emergency or conflict contexts, has important implications for gaining and maintaining acceptance. Short-term commitments and high turnover can negatively affect trust with communities, relationships within the organization and with external

entities, and the ability to implement effective programs (Loquercio, Hammersley, and Emmens 2006). Staff turnover also inhibits institutional learning (van Brabant nd, 17) and can result in a discrepancy between levels of individual staff expertise and institutional knowledge (Bolletino 2006, 8). High staff turnover rates necessitate a consistent induction and orientation process to ensure new staff understand the value of and can demonstrate requisite competencies for the context. Apart from the negative effects of turnover for programming, these issues can hinder an organization’s ability to promote a consistent message or to build and maintain relationships necessary for acceptance. In cases where

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acceptance is linked to an individual staff member, the organization may lose stakeholder consent for its presence and activities.

Finally, while national staff comprise the majority of field staff in virtually all organizations, until recently their security needs and the important role they can play in promoting acceptance were often overlooked (see InterAction 2001). The trend in rates of violence up to 2006 indicated the rates of major incidents for national staff were increasing at a higher rate than those of international staff (Stoddard, Harmer and Haver 2006, 1). By 2009, though, trends showed a reversal in rates of violence with a significant upsurge in attacks against international staff (Stoddard, Harmer, and DiDomenico 2009). Importantly, rates of violence against both national and international staff continue to rise. In insecure environments, some organizations rely on national staff, often wrongly assuming that they are at lower risk of attack (Stoddard, Harmer and DiDomenico 2009, 3). This assumption fails to consider that national staff who work in unfamiliar parts of the country may be perceived as biased toward or affiliated with one local group or another (Stoddard, Harmer and Haver 2006, 45; Donini et al 2006; Donini et al 2008). Staffing policies and guidelines largely fail to consider the distinct threats facing national staff (Rowley, Burns and Burnham 2010, 4). The challenge for organizations is to translate existing practices and knowledge into current personnel policies and decisions, and to analyze the unique strengths and vulnerabilities of all staff (e.g., as national/international, and based on gender, region, religion, caste, or job description). These unique strengths and vulnerabilities should be factored into an assessment of the effectiveness of acceptance and other

security management approaches in protecting different groups of staff.

Image and Perceptions

The image and perceptions of an organization are central to acceptance, and are affected by a variety of factors, including global dynamics and whether an organization and its staff successfully implement the components of an acceptance approach at multiple levels within the organization. For instance, the image of an organization relates directly to its relationships, communications and programming. Perceptions of an organization that are largely localized and dynamic may also be linked to global dynamics or influenced by messages accessed through global media. One incident, misunderstanding, or deliberate or inadvertent display of partiality could have negative implications for an organization's acceptance. Even if an organization has had a history of integrity and respect in a community, one incident can undermine how that organization is perceived (see Carle and Chkam 2006, 18). Similarly, actions, statements, or associations at a headquarters level can negatively or positively affect acceptance at the field level and from one country to another. Managing perceptions requires that the messages an organization projects are consistent throughout the organization and across contexts.

Organizations often rely on impressions or speculation that they have a good reputation, failing to appreciate the precarious nature of perceptions and how they change. The dynamic nature of perceptions and acceptance makes it critical that any efforts to assess perceptions take place on a recurring basis. A recent MSF study on perceptions of the organizations' work in Yemen revealed that the perceptions of local

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communities did not reflect the image that MSF sought to project nor its mission and values. These findings resulted in changes in the organization's work in Yemen and the implementation of specific steps to increase their staff's understanding of the local culture and improve communications with the community (Haddad 2009, 28-30). In short, this example illustrates how accurately assessing perceptions can enable organizations to design more effective programs, communicate more clearly with the community, and remedy perceived shortcomings, all of which will contribute to gaining and maintaining acceptance.

Another important factor that influences acceptance is staff behavior and composition. In addition to the skills outlined in the previous section, staff should dress and behave in ways that show respect for cultural and social norms and for the rules governing personal/professional conduct, such as male/female interaction or alcohol consumption (HPN 2010, 64-65). The composition of an organization's staff may also affect perceptions of an organization, its values and espoused principles. Employing diverse staff who live in urban and rural settings, or represent different regions, ethnicities, religions or other social groups, creates a "defendable mix" of personnel that not only brings diverse views and skills to an organization but projects an image that affects local perceptions of the organization. Employing such a mix of personnel, may in some situations, require modifications to mostly skills-based recruitment and hiring criteria (HPN 2010, 63).

Perceptions are also influenced by how an organization operates in the field – including where its offices are located, what types of vehicles staff drive or how

wealthy it appears in comparison with the local population. As these attributes reflect an agency's operating style rather than necessarily its purpose or values (Slim 2004, 6), managing them in a manner that promotes acceptance, though important may require largely cosmetic changes. The modus operandi of an organization is determined by decisions made at various levels in the organization and across departments. Decisions on funding sources, for instance, can affect whether an organization is seen as independent. Depending on the context "branding" with donor logos may either positively or negatively affect an organization's acceptance. Various departments, whether based at headquarters or in the field, need to consider the ways decisions on staffing, program design, funding and other issues may influence the acceptance of an organization. This is impossible without a greater awareness of acceptance within organizations, including what it is, how it relates to security, and how their work affects it.

In sum, gaining and maintaining acceptance is not only predicated on the values, principles, programs and relationships an organization exhibits in the field but also by a much broader range of variables that affect local perceptions of the organization. In order to understand this complex relationship, organizations and their staff need to better understand how operational choices, program design and outcomes, and global dynamics influence the perceptions of local communities and other stakeholders and how these in turn affect the security of their staff and operations.

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IV. CHALLENGES FOR AN ACCEPTANCE APPROACH TO SECURITY MANAGEMENT

Implementing an effective acceptance approach is complicated by factors beyond the definitional issues and key components identified above. This section identifies three key organizational and environmental challenges for successfully applying an acceptance approach to security management. These issues arose at the international security consultations in Washington, DC and Geneva, where participants noted that each of these challenges complicates efforts to systematically apply an acceptance approach. Below, we explore these specific challenges with the aim of stimulating thought on how organizations can begin to address these issues and adapt their current practices to enable more effective approaches to acceptance.

This section first explores the challenge of implementing acceptance within centralized and decentralized security management models. The second issue relates to the challenges and differences of implementing an acceptance approach in different contexts. The final challenge is a paradox related to the transferability of acceptance.

Structuring Security Management: The Implications of Centralized and Decentralized Security Management Models on Implementing an Acceptance Approach

While “security” is an area of personal responsibility for all individuals working for NGOs, “security management” refers to the organizational activity of managing or mainstreaming security throughout an organization (see van Brabant 2001). Two distinct models characterize security management within humanitarian,

The use of a centralized or decentralized model directly influences an organization’s approach to implementing and mainstreaming an acceptance approach to security management.

development, and multi-mandate organizations.⁴ The use of one model or the other directly influences an organization’s approach to implementing and mainstreaming an acceptance approach to security management. Some organizations, especially larger relief and development organizations, have created separate

security departments and established security director positions at headquarters offices, thus centralizing security leadership, management and accountability. Many of these organizations have corresponding regional or country level security focal point positions. Examples include Save the Children, World Vision, CARE, UNDSS, and security units within various UN agencies. Other organizations have chosen to decentralize security, allotting responsibility for security management to country directors and integrating security more fully within programming departments. Examples include the ICRC⁵, some MSF sections, and Concern.

These security management models offer advantages and disadvantages. In choosing the more centralized security department path, an organization signals the importance of and a commitment to security management and establishes a clear locus of responsibility for security and security management. This

⁴ See Kingston and Behn (2010) for an examination of risk management across organizational and operational levels.

⁵ For a succinct explanation of ICRC decentralized security approach see <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/5xsqwe.htm>.

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encourages organizations to recruit security staff on the basis of security qualifications and experience, under the assumption that security, like agriculture or public health, is a recognized and valued specialization and profession with a particular expertise. Establishing a security point person and champion within an organization is a means to develop organizational focus, by collecting and analyzing data, information, and best practices that are then disseminated throughout the organization. In general, a centralized security management system more clearly delineates accountability for overall safety and security management. The risk of a centralized approach is that security management becomes a separate organizational silo, disconnected from programming and administrative planning and decision-making. Identifying specific security management personnel may inadvertently encourage field staff to push off responsibility for security to the security focal points and security directors, thus abrogating personal responsibility. A centralized approach may promote the imposition of technical responses to operational problems at the expense of meaningful policy debates (Bruderlein 2004, 4-5), leading to accusations and complaints from staff that security management inhibits rather than facilitates programming.

Organizations choosing to decentralize security usually do so by integrating security within programming units. With this structure, security management is often designated to personnel within emergency departments, since it is presumed that these contexts involve more risk for organizations, or to country directors or heads of mission as the person with overall responsibility for decision-making in a country. Within these organizations, security decisions tend to

be more directly linked to programming needs and security management is often incorporated into general planning and management. In some cases, however, the lines of responsibility become blurred, without clearly designated responsibility for implementation or ensuring compliance with security policies and procedures across an organization. This is especially true in the absence of clear job descriptions that specify security responsibilities and the repercussions or punitive measures for a failure to institute effective security management. In such cases everybody's business becomes nobody's business, as security management is linked only to specific individuals and not systematized or mainstreamed within an organization. Another challenge may be determining who should consolidate and analyze specific safety and security data, which staff member takes the lead in case of a critical event (e.g., abduction, staff death), and the composition and function of a crisis management team.

Discussions of acceptance should be linked to programming, management, and organizational culture and not confined to those with responsibility for security management.

Clearly then, how an organization structures security management in its organizational chart and where the portfolio and responsibility for security rests directly influences the ways that security management features in program development, implementation, and organizational management. Likewise, the organizational culture (e.g., related to its mission and principles, history and evolution, appetite for risk) influences with whom and where the responsibility for

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security management rests, how it is implemented, and its interactions with other units within an organization. These cultural and structural factors, in turn, influence how and where *acceptance* is discussed (or not discussed) within the organization. In both structures, discussions of acceptance should be linked to programming, management, and organizational culture and not confined to those with responsibility for security management.

Organizations with centralized structures are perhaps more likely to face horizontal/*who* challenges while those with decentralized structures are more likely to encounter vertical/*what* obstacles in discussing acceptance. Within organizations that centralize security, the danger is that acceptance becomes a “security issue” rather than a general approach to programming or management. It is likely that fewer senior or even field staff would concern themselves with “acceptance” even as they pay attention to factors related to good programming. Thus, dispersing responsibility for acceptance – or who is involved in gaining acceptance – presents a challenge, as does systematizing an acceptance approach into grants, programming, and management structures. Within organizations that decentralize security, the danger is that acceptance becomes synonymous with and confined to good programming. As a result, it is possible that an acceptance approach will be relegated to passive (vs. active) acceptance. In this way, determining the “what” of acceptance, beyond good programming, will likely pose a greater challenge. These organizations may struggle with ways to think about and look for compliance, application, and assessment of acceptance measures.

Contextualizing an Acceptance Approach

While the principles and values of an organization are clearly linked to acceptance, the challenges inherent in cultivating acceptance in different contexts – emergency as opposed to development contexts, stable vs. violent or natural disaster contexts – have received less attention. In a development context, organizations often have long histories in communities and seek to implement programs in ways that directly involve communities through capacity-building and local partnerships. The type of work, continuity over time, and relative stability of the context facilitate the building of relationships and networks in the communities in which an organization works. These, in turn, help to cultivate acceptance.

While many organizations also have long histories in countries experiencing natural disasters or complex emergencies, the instability inherent in a sudden natural disaster or eruption of violence, the plethora of new actors, and the type of programming all complicate acceptance in emergency settings. In responding to a disaster or complex emergency, organizations may expand into new areas or countries where they have had little or no previous experience. In any emergency context, immediate and often life-threatening needs receive priority attention, as staff focus on the task at hand, sometimes at the expense of building relationships to enhance acceptance, mapping stakeholders, and analyzing a continually changing context. Nevertheless, it is important that organizations think of effective ways to communicate their values and mission and to adjust programs in response to feedback in emergency settings. For example, one organization posts large

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signs in front of distribution centers stating who qualifies to receive assistance and what assistance they can expect. Others provide a 24-hour call-in number or have boxes available in displaced persons camps for receiving feedback and complaints.

The Transferability of Acceptance

A final challenge relates to the transferability of acceptance from individuals to groups to organizations and vice versa. There are three levels at which acceptance can be gained: (1) for individuals or group of individuals within an organization; (2) for an individual organization; and (3) for the NGO community as a whole. The paradox is that individuals build acceptance yet this acceptance is meant to scale up to the organizational or even the NGO community level. For scaling up to be successful, acceptance cannot be uniquely linked to a single individual or organization. It is equally unwise to assume that acceptance for one individual or program or organization automatically transfers to others, or to rely on others to build transferable acceptance. It is more likely that the actions of one individual or organization can undermine carefully cultivated acceptance for others, while the reverse does not necessarily hold.

(1) Individuals or groups of individuals within an organization. For organizations with a strong organizational culture, the task of building and transferring acceptance between levels may present fewer internal obstacles, since the acceptance built by each individual staff member tends to translate to the agency as a whole. For other organizations, this translation may pose a significant challenge, especially when the mission of the organization is unclear or less compelling to community members.

Likewise, if staff loyalty to the organization is weak (an issue when people see their work as a job vs. a vocation or if they don't believe strongly in the principles and goals of the organization), if organizations cannot clearly and persuasively articulate their missions, or staff turnover is high, building acceptance may prove more challenging. In these cases, there is a possibility that one individual may gain acceptance only to have another staff person dismantle it or to have acceptance disappear when the individual leaves the organization.

(2) An individual organization. The transferability of acceptance is a particular problem where multiple types of actors operate in close proximity or contested areas, where military actors and private security companies operate in the same physical space as humanitarian, development, or multi-mandate NGOs, or where individuals change jobs and move from one organization to another. For acceptance to work in these contexts, highlighting one's distinctiveness and creating distance from other NGOs or between NGOs and other actors (private entities, including private security) may prove desirable. The idea of "distinction," or the ability for an organization to distinguish itself from other, apparently similar organizations is important at the organizational (vs. individual) level, as it allows an organization to articulate and persuade others of its unique mission and values.

Acceptance cannot be uniquely linked to a single individual or organization. It is equally unwise to assume that acceptance for one individual or program or organization automatically transfers to others.

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The multitude of actors in many of today's conflict contexts adds to the complexity of gaining organizational acceptance in an environment with tens or hundreds of actors providing assistance of some kind. This is especially true in places where some NGOs may be perceived as acting as implementing agents for western, Christian, or neo-colonial powers. For example, there is some evidence that the more traditional NGO actors in Afghanistan have been successful in building acceptance, in part by distinguishing and distancing themselves from private aid contractors. After several devastating attacks in 2004, the ICRC, after careful analysis, determined to re-affirm acceptance as its primary security management tool, applied a more systematic approach that emphasized its unique position as a neutral and independent organization and actively (though discretely) engaged potentially threatening stakeholders in negotiations for access to vulnerable populations (Stoddard 2009, 3). According to some observers, the renewed attention on building acceptance by traditional NGOs may have yielded security dividends, as the more traditional NGO actors in Afghanistan have experienced fewer attacks in 2010 than organizations contracting to NATO governments (Nordland 2010).

(3) The NGO community as a whole. Of the three, the idea of acceptance scaling up to the NGO community as a whole is the most tenuous and problematic. While it is conceivable that a "halo effect" might confer consent on the whole NGO or aid community in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, it is dangerous to assume that acceptance transfers or can be sustained in this way. Conversely, it is more likely that the irresponsible or inappropriate actions or perceptions of one

organization could damage acceptance for other organizations in the same area, especially if the other organizations have not adequately or convincingly distinguished themselves from the offending NGO. These aspects are more difficult to manage and require a community-wide response in which NGOs clearly articulate their separate identities and promote consistent actions and messages.

IV. IMPLICATIONS

In this paper we advocate for the need for more **strategic approaches to acceptance** in order to enhance its effectiveness as a security management approach. An organization's acceptance by communities and key stakeholders relates to how that organization operates,

We advocate for the need for more strategic approaches to acceptance in order to enhance its effectiveness as a security management approach.

how it defines its mission, how it selects and trains personnel, and the impact of its programs. Acceptance is linked to the choices an organization makes in many areas, and thus must be understood as a cross-cutting priority that is valued by all staff, not only security

personnel. An organization should consider how its mandate, mission and security management structures may facilitate or hinder the successful implementation of an acceptance approach to security management.

The discussion presented in this paper points to two important areas for future work on acceptance. The first area

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involves the **need for practical tools and guidance on how to implement acceptance-based approaches**. We advocate here for a comprehensive understanding of who and what. Missing is the “how.” What specific activities do organizations undertake to gain and maintain acceptance? While several key resources already exist, future evolutions of acceptance must include operational guidance on how to implement an acceptance approach. This includes tools and policy guidelines for organizations on how to systematize and integrate acceptance activities into all areas of program design and implementation. Any such guides must consider the implications of different security management structures within organizations and the challenges and advantages they present. These tools could, for example, investigate whether or not staff are proactively building positive, acceptance-based relationships with community members, whether they are demonstrating culturally appropriate behavior, or whether they use effective negotiation skills and can clearly articulate the organization’s mission.

The second area is the **need for tools to help monitor and assess whether and to what degree an organization has gained acceptance**. For example, perceptions directly affect acceptance, yet few organizations have developed methods to systematically gauge how the organization (its staff and programs) is viewed. Such tools and mechanisms could help determine whether or not an organization has gained acceptance in a given place, with whom, and under what conditions. Given the dynamic nature of ground realities, any tools must be replicable in order to be applied repeatedly over time. By not having methods or tools to assess degrees of acceptance,

organizations may not only put staff at higher risk, but they have no way to know how and where they need to improve in order to maintain or strengthen their acceptance. Generic tools are a start, but will require adaptation to context and organization.

Some rightly worry that the first type of assessment tool to determine whether staff are promoting acceptance may serve as a “checklist”, leading staff to believe they have acceptance if they have completed the “tasks” at hand. Acceptance cannot be reduced to a checklist, but there is room for innovative thinking to improve organizational ability to promote and assess acceptance approaches. In particular, guidelines must compliment any assessment tools by ensuring that staff have a deeper understanding of the cross-cutting and complex nature of acceptance.

Organizations that place acceptance at the core of their security management approach must give thought to consistently applying the principles that underlie acceptance as part of their overall (security) management approach. Staff members should reflect upon and understand their roles and the impact of their actions and behaviors on gaining and maintaining acceptance. Although acceptance can and should be understood and promoted at all levels of an organization, it is primarily based on what happens in the field and the day-to-day realities that field staff face. The next steps should be based on what we can learn about acceptance at the field level from both national and expatriate staff. The Collaborative Learning Approach to NGO Security Management project aims to do precisely this.

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Appendix A: Definitions of Acceptance

Definitions referenced in White Paper

Fast & O'Neill

In our view, acceptance is founded on effective relationships and cultivating and maintaining consent from beneficiaries, local authorities, belligerents and other stakeholders. This in turn is a means of reducing or removing potential threats in order to access vulnerable populations and undertake programme activities (Fast and O'Neill 2009, 5-6).

GPR8 2010

An **acceptance** approach attempts to reduce or remove threats by increasing the acceptance (the political and social consent) of an agency's presence and its work in a particular context (GPR8 2010, 55).

ICRC

Acceptance is the main pillar, the vital component in the ICRC's field security concept; acceptance of the ICRC is fundamental and indispensable in situations of armed conflict and internal violence. To be able to operate, the ICRC must first ensure that it is accepted by the parties to a conflict. They will accept its presence and working procedures if they understand its role as an exclusively humanitarian (independent and impartial) organization and the purpose of its activities, and if a relationship of trust has been established. The ICRC has no means of exerting pressure to impose its activities. Persuasion, influence and credibility are its only weapons.

It is crucial to ensure that the ICRC is accepted at least by all those who influence the course of events. However, the fragmentation of society has led to the rise of players such as warlords, transnational terrorist or mafia networks, armed resistance groups, mercenaries and paramilitary forces,

whose degree of acceptance of the ICRC is hard to assess.

In order to be able to contact all the various parties during a conflict situation, the ICRC seeks to establish channels of communication to those likely to misunderstand or reject its work. It may be difficult or impossible to have direct access to certain extremists; such alternative channels are therefore a necessary additional means of reinforcing a sound, widespread and diversified networking process.

Within the framework of its integrated operational and mobilization strategies, the ICRC gains acceptance by the relevance of its operational choices, through dialogue, negotiation and communication, by projecting a coherent image and by spreading knowledge of international humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement at all levels.

In many situations, there are two further means of reinforcing acceptance: promotion of the ICRC's activities with a view to making them easier to understand, and media campaigns to spread information about those activities. These means should not be employed unless they lead to greater acceptance. Acceptance is built up over time through action and dialogue; in the meantime, some degree of fragility and vulnerability is inevitable. Public communication approaches and messages must be conceived and developed within an integrated strategy that takes account of the security parameters applying to local, regional and global communication. Another factor conducive to acceptance is the expatriates' understanding of the culture in which they are working. If they are familiar with the local language, values and socio-cultural

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customs and rules, they can act in a manner consistent with their environment. This insight is essential if they are to be able to adjust to different situations and help make the ICRC an accepted part of the environment, to contribute to the way in which a particular society functions without having to become part of it. Poor understanding of the context and inappropriate private or professional conduct can place the acceptance and work of the ICRC at risk (Brugger 2009, 436).

Additional Organizational Definitions

Adventist Development & Relief Agency

Like the humanitarian mission, safety and security are predicated on the development of close interpersonal relationships between humanitarian workers and host-country community members. The traditional approach to safety and security has been characterized as obtaining and maintaining the acceptance and consent of host country authorities and the population-at-large for the presence and work humanitarian personnel have been recruited to perform. The operative assumption has been: ***the better integrated the humanitarian personnel become with the local culture and people, the more productive and safer they will be.*** Humanitarian organizational commitment to this integrative approach is manifested in the type of individuals it recruits, the programs it develops, and the focus of its training.

American Red Cross

Regardless of humanitarian intentions, if the American Red Cross is perceived in a negative light, staff members' security will be negatively affected. Conversely, projecting a positive image will help gain acceptance and develop local sources of information relating to your personal safety. It also may ensure

assistance from community members in the event of a crisis. Actions that may facilitate positive perceptions include—

- arranging an introduction and building rapport with local authorities, as appropriate, interacting with national staff members and neighbors and, if appropriate and safe, getting involved in community activities.
- learning and practicing the local language. At a minimum, be aware of polite responses and greetings, words or phrases that could be offensive, phrases useful in deterring an offender or calling for help.
- understanding local political, religious and cultural sensitivities, such as dressing and behaving in a manner considerate of local customs.
- avoiding discussions of politics, religion or any issue or group that could indicate bias or draw you into possible conflict.
- avoiding relationships that might carry personal obligations or expectations that you cannot meet or that are inconsistent with local mores (American Red Cross – Handbook, Understand How Perception Affects Security, 11).

CARE

Acceptance. Most aid organizations prefer an Acceptance strategy. It involves reducing or removing the threat by gaining widespread understanding and acceptance for the organization's presence and work. The way a program is designed and carried out, and how the humanitarian organization reacts to events, must be transparent and consistent with the guiding principles it has been communicating. If a community or government clearly understands the organization's purpose, it can become part of the security network, providing warning of possible changes in the security environment or mitigating their effects (Security Manual, 17-18).

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CHF

Community Acceptance – CHF’s methodology is specifically designed to build and encourage community participation in the development, execution, and sustainability of aid and development programs. Community ownership of program activity is essential to success. From a security perspective, good community relations promote reduced theft and limit work disruptions due to social unrest. In higher threat environments, communities may also provide guidance and warnings concerning possible risks and security practices. However, community acceptance does not provide physical protection or a security response capability, especially in the face of outsider threat groups that may seek to harm CHF or the beneficiary community. Acceptance is an important part of any security program, but it is not a security strategy, and should not be used in isolation from other security best practices (submitted by CHF staff).

Danish Refugee Council

Acceptance: Relations with the local population, and any other local residents, are probably the most important of all security measures. A good knowledge of them is vital for good humanitarian assistance, and for security.

Relationships with leaders of all significant groups, and with ordinary people of all types, greatly increase the ability of DRC to meet humanitarian needs, and to do so in a way that is safe both for local people and for humanitarians (Security Handbook, Ch. 9, 5).

Oxfam

Acceptance approaches reduce or remove threats by gaining widespread acceptance (political and social consent)

in the community for Oxfam’s presence and programme. Building positive relationships and promoting understanding of Oxfam through establishing our legitimacy as an impartial and independent humanitarian actor, achieve this. This identity must be projected clearly to all parties and communications activities (nationally and internationally) must consider this, though at times it may be necessary to keep Oxfam’s profile to a minimum. The success of this approach depends on many factors including; staff behaviour; staff diversity; type, design and implementation of programmes; community participation, choice of partners and proactive creation of relationships (Oxfam Security Policy – Approved March 2007, 6).

Samaritan’s Purse

Acceptance: Traditionally, SP has relied for their security on the goodwill of the local population. This is still the favored approach where possible. If the local population supports the work that SP is doing in their area, they will not threaten them but help them. This approach is often known as the “acceptance approach”, since it depends on acceptance by the population. To win acceptance, SP staff may need to spend considerable time listening to local people, and explaining their role to local leaders and residents, both directly and through local channels. This may include negotiation of access to areas of need; explanation of the humanitarian principles underlying the work; and response to rumors or accusations when they arise. The acceptance approach is usually not enough on its own. Every society contains some people who resort to crime, and SP staff and property may be targeted by criminals. The most frequent crime against them is probably

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theft, since they are sources of money and valuable goods in the midst of poverty. Sometimes they are the target of more serious threats such as assault, rape, kidnapping, or even murder (Field Safety and Security Handbook, 10-11).

Save the Children, US

How you and your agency are perceived has a fundamental effect on your security. It is wrong to assume that everyone will understand the concept of humanitarian aid. Similarly, do not assume that different groups in the community know who your organisation is, the work you are doing and why. Staff must be fully aware of the objectives of the programme and be able to communicate these to local people. Greater understanding may bring about wider acceptance and support among the community and local power structures for your presence and work, which ultimately will enhance your security. For example, acceptance by a community could deter those criminal elements over which they have some influence from acting against you. However, if the community is unaware of or has negative feelings towards your agency or its programme, criminal groups may feel they can act against you with impunity. Key elements of an acceptance strategy include:

Relationships. It is important to develop and maintain good relationships with individuals, community leaders, governments and authorities – even local commanders. These can ensure wider understanding and appreciation of your work which may lead to a concern for your safety. It is important to maintain a transparent balance in your relationships, but you may have to distance yourself from some relationships because of how it may be perceived by others. For example, socialising with government officials may be viewed with suspicion by opposition groups.

Participation. The way in which you identify, design and implement your

programmes will either enhance or diminish your acceptance. If the community feel they have a stake in the programme and have been consulted in its design and implementation, your overall security can be enhanced. For example, a community that is fully supportive and engaged in your programme activities may be able to use their influence to deter criminal groups in the community from acting against you.

Communication. Consider how you communicate and what you say about your agency's goals and activities in public meetings, at checkpoints or in the local bar, and what impact this might have on your acceptance. Ensure that these messages are consistent, transparent and broadly communicated to all. For example, as drivers often interact with many different people in the community, it is important that they are aware of, and can communicate positively, the agency's mandate and programme activities.

Image and perception. As well as the explicit messages you communicate, it is equally important to be aware of the implicit messages you may convey through your appearance or behaviour, or what you say and do. Your agency and its staff will convey a variety of images which in some situations may lead to misunderstandings and have a negative effect on your security. For example, excessive displays of wealth through choice of residences and offices, or of agency vehicles, may create resentment among communities and attract attention from criminal groups. Inappropriate behaviour by staff, for example, public drunkenness or unacceptable sexual relations, may not translate directly into a security threat, but could aggravate existing tensions in terms of how staff and your agency are perceived. These tensions can provide an ideal focus for those within the community who are looking to create problems for your agency (Safety First 2010, 19-20)

Acceptance White Paper

Search for Common Ground

Our approach, therefore, emphasizes acceptance; relationship building and community integration while also combining a level of protection for SFCG country staff. Maintaining a balanced, transparent, community-built and community-endorsed mission is one of our greatest assets in ensuring the well being of our staff and operations (provided by SFCG staff at consultation in Washington, DC).