Violence against aid workers and the operational response

Humanitarian Outcomes
Presentation for ICVA: 1 February 2010
Aid Worker Security Database

- Tracks major incidents of violence against aid workers
  - *Major incidents* = killings, kidnappings, attacks resulting in serious injury
  - *Aid workers* = employees/contractors of NGOs, Red Cross and UN agencies providing aid in humanitarian contexts

- Records date, location, organization, type of staff, tactics used, and motive (where possible)

- Data from media sources & public reports, internal reports from organizations/security consortia, and verified by organizations
Sharp increase in attacks against aid workers in the past four years

- Average annual number of major attacks in 2006-08 increased by 177%
- 2008 was worst year recorded for aid worker attacks
  - 122 killed
  - 76 seriously wounded
  - 62 kidnapped (survivors)
  - At least 12 large NGO programmes suspended in six different countries after serious attacks.
- 2009 appears similarly violent
Attacks: absolute numbers

Violent incidents against aid workers

Year | Count
--- | ---
1997 | 30
1998 | 20
1999 | 15
2000 | 25
2001 | 30
2002 | 35
2003 | 40
2004 | 45
2005 | 50
2006 | 65
2007 | 70
2008 | 90
worker population in the field

Global attack rates per 10,000

Graph showing the global attack rates per 10,000 from 1997 to 2008.
International staff of NGOs showed highest increase of attack rates

- Rates for international (expatriate) staff spiked upward in 2006-2008
- However, long-term trend still shows attack rates for national staff rising relative to internationals
- NGOs continued to have highest casualty rates of all types of aid provider
- Only the ICRC showed an overall *decline* in attack rates over the past three years
by three most violent contexts

- Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sudan (Darfur) accounted for over 60% of all violent incidents against aid workers.
- More pronounced clustering of incidents in a smaller group of countries than seen in previous years.
- When controlling for these three settings, global attack rates are seen to decline slightly – reflecting advances in operational security management.
Countries with most aid worker attacks, 2006-2008

- Pakistan: 12
- Iraq: 12
- Chad: 13
- Sri Lanka: 20
- Somalia: 68
- Afghanistan: 77
- Sudan: 94
Methods of violence

- Surge in kidnapping: 350% increase in 2006-2008
  - Favors international staff as targets
  - Political (visibility) and economic benefits for perpetrators
  - Collusion between criminal and political elements

- New tactics affecting aid workers: suicide bombings, IEDs

- Most dangerous aid work setting remains the road
Most common means of attack, 2006-2008

- Ambushes/attack on the road: 30%
- Individual attack/assassination with small arms: 19%
- Kidnappings: 25%
- Armed incursions: 9%
- IEDs and bombs: 6%
- All other: 11%
Increasingly political motivations in attacks

- Politically motivated incidents rose relative to purely economic crime, or incidental violence (personal disputes or “wrong place, wrong time”)
- Attacks with political motives: 49% of known total in 2008, up from 29% in 2003
- Afghanistan NGO Security Office reports major shift – 65% of attacks now perpetrated by AOGs as opposed to criminals
- Reflects a broad targeting of aid enterprise as a whole
In the most dangerous contexts, no good options

- Remote management/contracting – shifts risk to nationals
- Low profile – creates distrust and cuts off links
- Deterrent approaches – militarizing aid?
- Pulling out/scaling back – beneficiaries suffer
Providing aid in the most insecure environments

- Disassociation from political actors – necessary but insufficient
- Understand level of threat – ‘acceptance’ is not a viable security approach where aid has become a wholesale political target
- Do not let extreme environments dictate security models elsewhere. Continue efforts to improve:
  - Information sharing, and joint tracking and analysis
  - Risk assessment and mitigation for national staff, partners, and beneficiaries