

SECURITY ASSESSMENT

A26

The aim of a security assessment is to understand the security situation sufficiently to enable the team to plan their security measures appropriately.

The team leader normally carries out a security assessment before a final decision is taken to deploy, and certainly before the arrival of the main team. It is done preferably by an assessment visit and, where a visit is not possible, by remote assessment.

A security assessment visit should be long enough to achieve its aim. Factors influencing the length of the visit include:

- ▲ The level of insecurity
- ▲ The experience of the person/people making the assessment
- ▲ The number of people making the assessment
- ▲ Geographical size of the area
- ▲ Complexity of the political situation
- ▲ Weather
- ▲ Other local events, e.g. holidays, festivals
- ▲ Availability of key interlocutors such as local leaders
- ▲ Availability of transport
- ▲ Availability of good maps
- ▲ The severity of humanitarian need. If many people are dying, a more rapid security assessment may sometimes be necessary, to allow the programme to begin as soon as possible – but this is a matter for careful judgement since too rapid an assessment can be dangerous.

The most important requirement of a security assessment is to talk to the people who will best explain the security situation. These may be many different types of people, for example:

- ▲ Ordinary residents, selected at random in a representative variety of locations
- ▲ Local leaders, such as mayors, elders, village heads, governors, politicians
- ▲ Women: often a special effort is needed to meet with women (separately from men, if possible, since their opinions and information may be significantly different from those of men)

- ▲ Religious leaders
- ▲ Staff of local NGOs
- ▲ Staff of international humanitarian organisations (both national and international staff)
- ▲ Business people
- ▲ Diplomats
- ▲ Other knowledgeable people, such as former humanitarian staff, academics, etc

Informal conversation often yields the most useful information, although with local leaders a more formal style may be appropriate, depending on the culture. The person assessing will wish to know the answers to a large number of questions, including:

General situation

- ▲ What is happening in the political arena?
- ▲ What is the economic situation? What are the main sources of income? How much poverty is there, and what causes it? Is there high unemployment?
- ▲ What is the social make-up of the area?
- ▲ What local religions are there, and how many people follow them?
- ▲ What is the history of the area?

Threats

- ▲ What are the main threats to humanitarian organisations in this area?
- ▲ What types of crime are there, and how much?
- ▲ Do these threats vary by area, or by type of humanitarian organisation?
- ▲ Do they vary at different times of day, or times of the year?
- ▲ Are different types of staff threatened in different ways? (E.g. national, international, male, female, or staff of a particular ethnic group.)
- ▲ Are some threats different for nationally-recruited staff and their families?
- ▲ What security incidents have there been in recent months and years?
- ▲ Have any of these incidents involved humanitarian or other international organisations?
- ▲ Are there any threats originating from outside the area? How can one get information about these?
- ▲ Are there any terrorist threats? If so, are they serious enough that specialist advice on anti-

SECURITY ASSESSMENT

A26

terrorism security measures will be necessary?

Local attitudes

- ▲ What are the most appropriate ways of winning acceptance from local people?
- ▲ How well is the work of humanitarian organisations understood by local people and leaders?
- ▲ What is the attitude of local people, and local leaders, to humanitarian organisations at present?
- ▲ What rumours are circulating? Is there truth in them? What do they reveal about local attitudes?
- ▲ Are any local groups or individuals hostile to humanitarian organisations?
- ▲ How would my particular organisation be viewed locally?
- ▲ What would be the best ways for us to explain our role to local people and leaders?
- ▲ What impact would our arrival have on local opinion?
- ▲ What impact would our presence have on the security of local people?
- ▲ Would our work be valued by local people and leaders?
- ▲ How would international staff (of various kinds and nationalities) be viewed?
- ▲ How would national staff (of various kinds) be viewed?
- ▲ Are there any cultural practices or issues that we should be aware of?
- ▲ Are there any corruption issues to consider? Will we be able to work here without paying bribes?
- ▲ Are any nationalities or ethnic groups especially vulnerable in the local context?

Local authorities

- ▲ Do local authorities require humanitarian organisations to register? What conditions are imposed, if any?

Our organisation's profile

- ▲ Should we adopt a low, medium or high profile when we deploy?
- ▲ Are there suitable places for our offices, warehouses and accommodation?
- ▲ Are there any issues that might affect our impartiality? For example, will we need to

work on both sides of a front line, or among several ethnic groups, to demonstrate our impartiality?

- ▲ How can we ensure that we remain independent, and perceived as such? For example, should we locate our office or accommodation deliberately far from the residence or office of prominent local leaders?

Protection

- ▲ What protection measures are we likely to need?
- ▲ Will we need to use armed guards (normally only in extreme circumstances – see Annex 13)
- ▲ What security-related equipment will we need?

Influential people and groups

- ▲ Who are the most influential leaders locally?
- ▲ What ethnic groups are there, where are they, and who are their leaders?
- ▲ What other organisations (e.g. military, police, civil, political, business, religious, cultural) have influence locally?
- ▲ What are the aims of these groups?
- ▲ Where do these groups draw their power from?
- ▲ How are they perceived by local people?
- ▲ What are the relationships between all these groups?
- ▲ What permissions, from whom, will we need to do our work? How long will it take to get those permissions?

Staff

- ▲ Are there any issues concerning recruitment of national staff? Will there be any problems finding people of the right abilities? Will a fair recruitment process be possible?
- ▲ Will national staff face risks because of their work?
- ▲ What security measures would need to be provided for national staff homes, and for their travel to and from work?
- ▲ Is it more appropriate to use national or international staff? Male or female? In what proportions?
- ▲ What key posts are essential to security? Will we be able to fill them?

SECURITY ASSESSMENT

A26

Movement and access

- ▲ How much freedom of movement is there for humanitarian organisations?
- ▲ Will we have access to the areas we plan to work in?
- ▲ Is there a curfew in place? Give clear details of times for different locations.
- ▲ Are there feasible evacuation routes?

Property

- ▲ Will the organisation's property be safe?
- ▲ What risk is there of the organisation's goods contributing to violence? (If, for example, they are stolen and sold.)
- ▲ What is the attitude of the authorities towards the property of humanitarian organisations when a programme closes?

Insurance

- ▲ Is there a reputable local insurance provider?

Site security

- ▲ Will it be possible to have a secure office, accommodation and other sites?

Security forces

- ▲ How well does the local police function?
- ▲ How disciplined are the local armed forces?

Overall

- ▲ Does the likely benefit of our work outweigh the security risk?
- ▲ Will the organisation's presence endanger others?

It is important to be aware that some information may be inaccurate, either deliberately or accidentally. Checking key information with a variety of sources should help to minimise this risk.

Documents may be available which help to answer the above questions. Relevant documents may come from a wide variety of sources, including:

- ▲ UN or NGO reports, and old archives
- ▲ Media reports and articles – local and international
- ▲ Academic papers
- ▲ Government publications

Many useful documents are available on the internet. Some useful sources include:

- ▲ ReliefWeb www.reliefweb.int
- ▲ UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) www.irinnews.org
- ▲ UN Humanitarian Information Centres (HICs) www.humanitarianinfo.org
- ▲ International Crisis Group www.crisisweb.org
- ▲ AlertNet www.alertnet.org

It is essential during an assessment visit to get a feel for the area. How best to do this depends on the area. It may be helpful, if it is safe to do so, to:

- ▲ Walk through various parts of the main town(s)
- ▲ Visit markets and chat to traders and customers
- ▲ Drive down important roads, stopping to talk to people from time to time
- ▲ Visit out-of-the-way villages and talk to people

In some cases, it may not be safe to do some or all of these things. Since you are on an assessment and may not know the area well, it will be necessary to take advice from a trusted source on what is safe to do – and preferably to be accompanied by a reliable person who is familiar with the area and can help ensure that you stay safe.

When talking with local people during an assessment visit, there is a danger of causing misunderstanding. Depending on the culture and context, your short visit may be taken as a promise to return, bringing aid with you – even if you clearly explain the reason for your visit and are careful to make no promises. This could cause problems for you or for other humanitarian workers.

If you are not familiar with local customs, it can be easy to cause offence without realising it, particularly when asking questions. If your visit is quick, that alone can cause offence in some cultures, where taking time to greet and talk is an important part of politeness.

These considerations should be taken into account when planning an assessment – and may result in deciding not to visit certain locations or people but

SECURITY ASSESSMENT

A26

to find out security-related information in another way.

Ideally, the assessment should be written. This allows senior managers to check and approve it. It enables easy dissemination to other team members. It also leaves a record on file, for evaluation and accountability purposes.

A possible outline structure for a security assessment is as follows:

- ▲ Location, date and author
- ▲ General situation
- ▲ Local authorities
- ▲ Threats
 - List of threats
 - The likelihood of each threat occurring
 - The likely impact of each threat, if it occurred
 - Threats can helpfully be plotted on a chart – see the end of this Annex
- ▲ Our vulnerabilities to the threats
- ▲ Security measures needed to minimise those vulnerabilities
- ▲ What liaison will be required with other organisations
- ▲ Conclusion:
 - Does the likely benefit of our work outweigh the security risk?
 - Will the organisation's presence endanger others?
 - Recommendations

If the humanitarian need is very urgent there may not be time to write the assessment in full: in this case a summary should be written. In extreme cases, where action is required in a matter of hours, senior managers may give permission for the security assessment not to be written. In this case they should normally record this decision, with their reasons, in order to explain why normal good practice has not been followed.

See also the Threat Impact Chart in Annex 38.