Countering crime in hostile environments: Securing vulnerable humanitarian aid workers in Papua New Guinea

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COUNTERING CRIME IN HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS: SECURING VULNERABLE HUMANITARIAN AID WORKERS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Abstract

Crime is a core issue for companies and more recently for NGOs working in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The nation is facing major challenges as crime levels rise exponentially across the country. Erstwhile un-affected humanitarian operations were often seen as immune from criminality, but now have become just as likely to be targeted as any other organisation. Consequently, there is a need to adopt security measures, but maybe not necessarily as draconian as those used hitherto by major companies. People-centered, locally-owned is a concept whereby the local population is encouraged to protect the delivery of health services and aid from humanitarian providers. The inclusive approach challenges previous concepts of what is required to protect workers in intimidating and dangerous areas. A mind-set change is required. The proposed multi-layered approach stems from defence-in-depth strategies. Although such a strategy is still primarily based upon the security risk assessment process, at the core of all operational security required in challenging environments, it also requires a proactive approach combined with engagement with the local population based around the Aid-security-triangle. The methodology used interpretative analysis of relevant literature underpinned by personal interviews with selected stake holders in the PNG during 2014.

Keywords
Aid-security- triangle, hostile environments, locally-owned, multi-layered, NGOs, operational security, people-centred

INTRODUCTION

The ability to operate in hostile environments, especially for health workers from humanitarian agencies, has become fraught with personal danger. No longer are these activities any more immuned from attacks than those of multinational organisations (Stoddard & Harmer, 2010, pp. 2-3). However, their capability to withstand such attacks is limited by their lack of resources. This paper assesses whether an alternative approach is possible by first assessing the current crime situation followed by reviewing the risk based approach commonly used by security professionals; and then offering a potential model.

The capacity to counter crime in societies where law and order hardly function is difficult enough; but this is also aggravated by a lack of official data making it difficult to provide substantiated analysis of how grave the problem actually is. Unfortunately, Papua New Guinea (PNG) is such a country. Racked by severe economic and social problems, the country also has a steadily rising crime rate, together with the inability for law and order to deal with it or its ramifications (Boama & Stanley, 2007; Haley & Muggah, 2006; McDonald, 2005; The World Bank, 2014; Weber, 2008). In addition corruption has become part of the social fabric of the country.

Crime and violence are widely viewed as serious obstacles to development in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The full scale of crime and violence in PNG is difficult to assess, given the scarcity of national- level studies and a distinct urban bias in most available studies. Yet various surveys estimate that violence victimization rates in PNG are among the highest in the world.(Lakhani & Willman, 2012, p. 3)

Anecdotal evidence is rife, as are the newspaper reports on all aspects of the impact of crime in PNG. Reports related to urban crime point to the underlying reasons including high levels of poverty, healthcare, education and lack of basic infrastructure (Bourguignon, 2001, pp. 171-190; MacDonald, 2008; The World Bank, 2014).

The primary factor is considered to be the failure of law and order to bring civil stability, followed by high levels of corruption. The major urban centres of Port Moresby and Lae are at the top end of this scale as seen in Figure 2 (Lakhani & Willman, 2014).

The capability to counter crime requires an understanding of how grave the problem is, and in which specific areas, before any substantial effective action can be taken. Crime is insidious in developing countries and its impacts affect all sections of society (Bourguignon, 2000, pp. 197-221; Del Frate, 1998; LaFree & Tseloni, 2006). Therefore, undertaking a comprehensive security risk assessment is necessary to fully understand the nature and scope of the problem.

A Risk Assessment requires an all-inclusive understanding of the social, economic and political factors before successful and meaningful security managed programmes can be implemented or even suggested.(Andersen, Garvey, & Roggi, 2014; World Bank, 2014) Based upon these criteria, this paper assesses how this necessary security management process can be accomplished given the far-reaching restraints that are present in undertaking any process in PNG.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used interpretative analysis (Walsham, 2006; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2013) of relevant literature underpinned by personal interviews with selected stake holders in the PNG during several visits in 2014.These visits included the remote areas of the Highlands and the major urban centres: Port Moresby, Moro, Hides, Tari and Lae.

In each of these areas, interviews took place with the key stakeholders involved with working with or for local and international organisations; as well as with villagers and politicians. These interviews included the law enforcement, local security providers including those involved with the Emergency Services. Additionally, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were interviewed including: World Vision, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Australian Volunteer International, Oil Search Health Foundation and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

The objective of the research was to assess whether an alternative approach to security provision was possible in PNG, as had been suggested in other hostile environments by some advocates (Childs, 2013; Duffield, 2010; Stoddard, Harmer, & DiDomenico, 2009; Van Brabant, 2000).

CURRENT SITUATION

The current Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) recommends, "Exercise a high degree of caution" , because of the high levels of serious crime (DFAT, 2014). In addition, levels of crime are seen to be rising significantly; particularly in urban areas where un-employment, drug use and alcohol fuelled attacks are becoming more prevalent.

Crime rates are high, particularly in the capital Port Moresby, Lae, Mt Hagen and other parts of the Highland provinces (Guthrie, 2012; Lakhani & Willman, 2014). "Levels of crime and violence in PNG are high, and have remained consistently so over more than a decade. The homicide rate – considered the most reliable indicator of overall crime – was 10.4 per 100,000 habitants in 2010...amongst the highest in the world"(The World Bank, 2014)

The violent attack on a trekking party in September 2013 demonstrates that serious crimes can occur in any part of the country (Fox, 2013). Ethnic disputes continue to flare up around the country. Disputes can quickly escalate into violent clashes. Such clashes not only create danger within the immediate area but also promote a general atmosphere of lawlessness, with an associated increase in opportunistic crime. Car-jacking is an ever-present threat, particularly in Port Moresby and Lae, as are street robberies and house break-ins (see Figure 3).

There has been an increase in reported incidents of sexual assault, including gang rape, and foreigners have often been targeted. According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), " the country as a

whole has one of the world's highest rates of sexual violence" (OSAC, 2011, p. 1) A woman in PNG is still considered a chattel with few rights and is often at the mercy of men folk in her community, especially in the Highlands. Crimes are often opportunistic and frequently occur without warning. There are multiple social factors involved including drugs, alcohol and despair. The chewing of Betel-Nut is wide spread for its mildly euphoric effect and is considered similar to cocoa leaves, or khat in East Africa (Armstrong, 2008; McDonald, 2005).

The ability of the police to confront and deal with the rising crime levels is questioned. Falling moral linked to a lack of resources, such as vehicles, only amplifies the inadequacies of the police. Although attempts have been made to make policing more inclusive, the tribal differences, especially in the urban areas, make this a tall order to accomplish. Corruption is rife, which undermines any attempts to improve the structure through Australian Federal Police (AFP) training (Australian Federal Police, 2013; Dinnen, 2001; McLeod, 2009; Niugini Nius, 2014).

Concern was raised by a number of individuals interviewed with regard to the increased layoffs of workers following completion of a number of construction projects, which are believed will add to an increase in crime levels. ExxonMobil and the PNG Government have recently undertaken a major construction project to build the infrastructure needed for the extraction of the natural gas found in the country (PNG LNG, 2014). Figure 1 shows the extent of the pipeline from the Highlands to the coast.
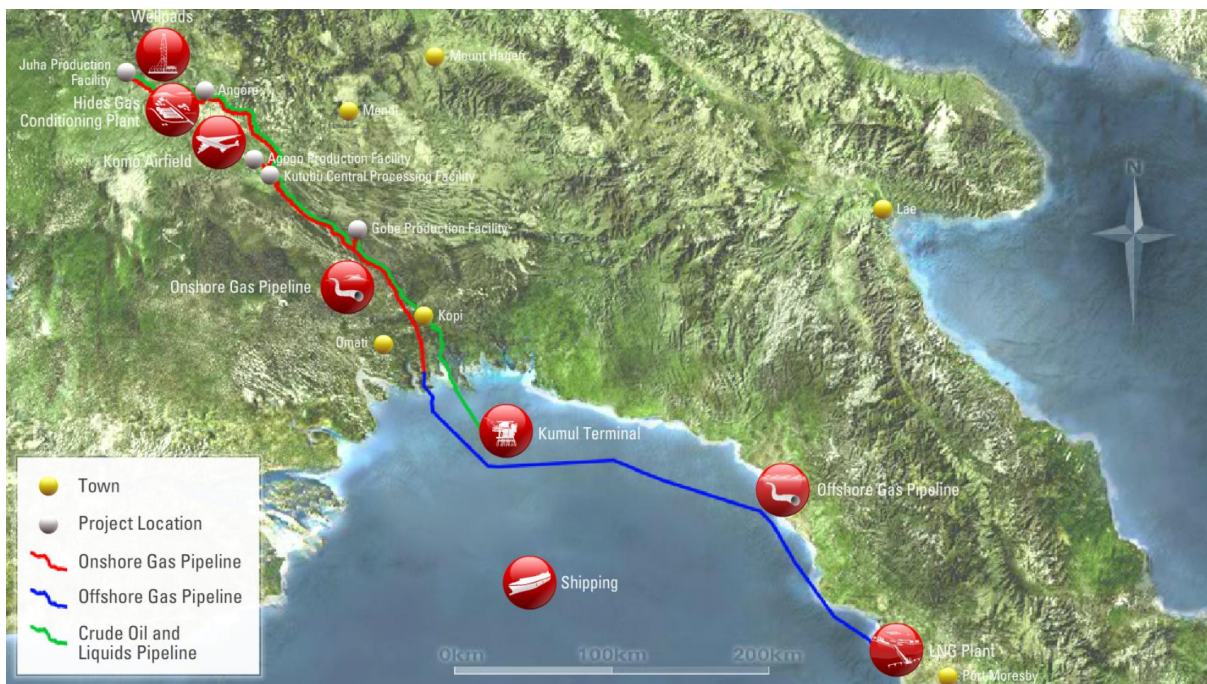

Figure 1 LNG map http://pnglng.com/project/project-map

Current Political Situation

The current situation is considered relatively stable even though PNG has been prone to a number of political crises in the recent past, which have been resolved without significant violence. The security forces (police and army) have generally exercised restraint:

> It is difficult to say whether or not the current tensions will escalate into violence...While there are tensions within the police force, they have so far been contained. The Papua New Guinea Defence Force (the army) has been in lockdown so far, with senior officers indicating that in a situation of doubt about the location of ultimate civilian authority, the army must avoid becoming involved. (Regan, 2011)

The political situation should not be underestimated as there is the potential for an armed conflict to take place within the country, which could result in serious upheavals. However, no one ethnic faction dominates political life, nor has the capacity to dominate in a country with more than 840 languages (M. P. Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2014). The present public discord between the politicians has recently manifested itself on the streets.

> The obvious venality of the political class in PNG does considerable harm, within and without. It often deprives the most isolated and poor any sort of local investment in community development, especially in better health and in education. It embitters the have-notes, and reduces their trust in the institutions of the community, including in the law. (The Canberra Times, 2014)

Although professional security personnel and academics interviewed are not inclined to feel there will be a serious escalation, the potential for conflict in the urban areas has risen substantially. Corruption is widespread, and is a major issue at all levels of government. Concern has been raised by Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop over the failure of aid to be used as intended:

> (It's) distressing to know that despite the fact that Australia invests about half a billion dollars each and every year into Papua New Guinea it will not meet one of its Millennium Development Goals. In fact, it is going backwards. (Australian News Network, 2014)

According to Transparency International's 2012, *Corruption Perceptions Index*, PNG rated 2.5 on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean), giving it a ranking of 150th out of the 176 countries on the index (Tranparency International, 2012).

There may be raised unease over certain aspects but this does not indicate that PNG is likely to become a failed state yet, "Nation-states fail because they are convulsed by internal violence and can no longer deliver positive political goods to their inhabitants" (Rotberg, 2003, p. 1). By Rothberg's (2003) criteria PNG does not yet fall fully into this category. However, there is concern it could head in that direction especially as a key indicator, namely public security, is failing. More needs to be done centrally to overcome the rising levels of violent crime (Basedau & Lay, 2009). One of the state's primary functions is "to prevent crime and related dangers to domestic human society" (Rotberg, 2003, p. 3,).

LOCAL CRIME SITUATION

Criminality remains a major problem being virtually endemic in the major urban areas, if somewhat sporadic. This takes all forms, with robbery often evolving into physical violence common. This can be in the form of car-jacking holding up individuals and demanding money with menaces. Extortion is also common with local government officials not immune from this kind of behaviour.

Criminals known as 'Raskols' in local parlance, use code names as a form of gaining self identity, and often operate in groups of between 10 – 20 members all from a common, often poor background with no real future (Nibbrig, 1992). These 'Raskol' gangs often have members from many different traditional areas and their bond and determination is strong and often transcend traditional cultural boundaries and norms of behaviour (Dinnen, 2001, p. 3) . The use of weapons is fast becoming a growing trend, with a substantial percentage of crimes reported now believed to involve the threat or use of weapons, including guns (Alpers, 2005). Most weapons used in robberies are illegally obtained or manufactured. These range from modern, high-powered factory made weapons to home-made guns and knives:

> Papua New Guineans face violence at every turn, including from the police, who should be protecting them ...The government should call a halt to police abuse and bring any officers responsible for crimes to justice. (Lakhani & Willman, 2012, p. 6)

A recent World Bank briefing paper on the social and economic impacts of crime in PNG indicates a large proportion of criminal activity involves violence, and this is increasing in certain areas. The research found that

PNG experienced 'hotspots' of crime and violence that are overwhelmingly concentrated in urban areas and the Southern and Western Highlands (Lakhani & Willman, 2014, p. 9).

Up to date or accurate statistics are hard to come by for PNG but those cited in the World Bank Report of 2012/14 indicate that Lae remains one of the more dangerous areas of the country, as can be seen in Figure 2,with rising trends in all areas of crime (Lakhani & Willman, 2014, p. 6).
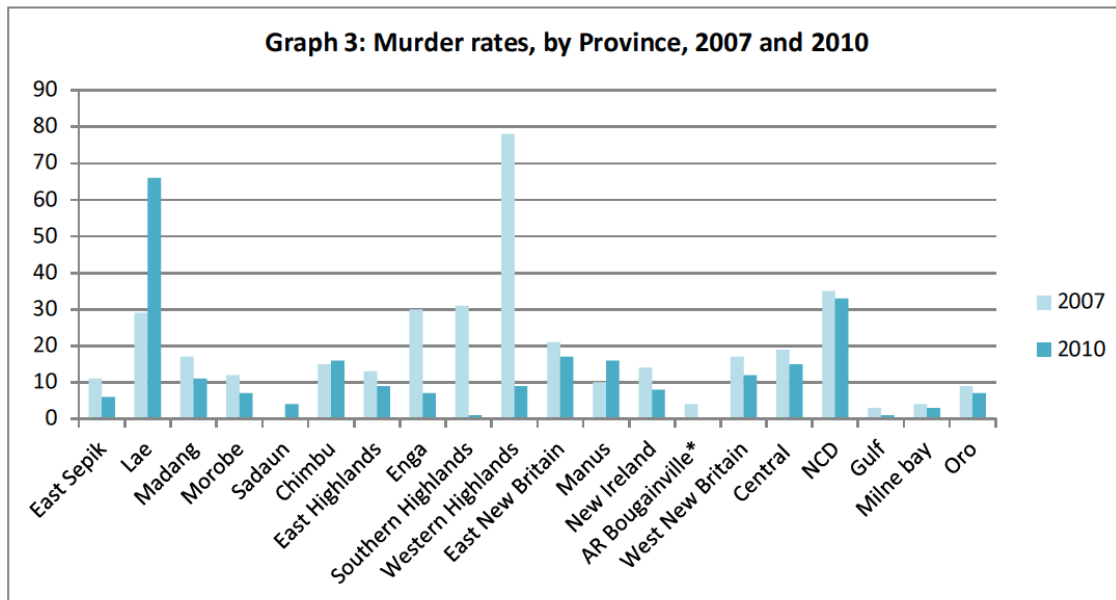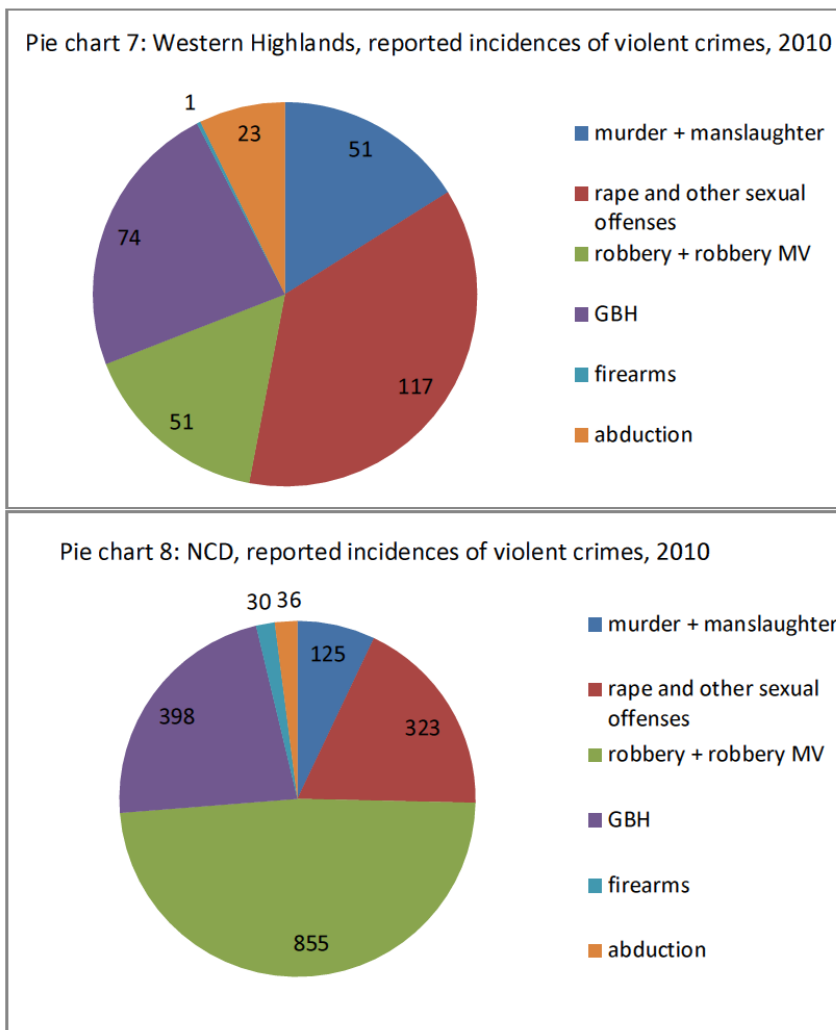

Source: RPNGC crime summary statistics. * Referred to in the RPNGC crime data as 'North Solomons' or 'Solomons'.

Figure 2 (Lakhani & Willman, 2014, p. 5)

Another important aspect related to crime is the high number of physical attacks directed against women (Broekhoff, 2012; I. Lewis, Maruia, & Walker, 2008). Minister Michael Malabag, "reported that up to 68% of women in PNG have suffered violence; up to a third have been raped".(Human Rights Watch, 2014, p. 374). Therefore, it is important to emphasise that female staff require greater consideration in terms of both the type and levels of protection provided for them, than their male counter parts; regardless of gender equality issues in the work place. The charts in Figure 3 indicate the high level of rape and sexual assault. These figures would be much higher but reporting of incidences by women often results in brutal beatings, further violence and stigmatisation by the village. Consequently, many women refrain from reporting the incidences.

Pie Charts 7 & 8: Comparing the composition of 'violent' crime

Pie chart 7: Western Highlands, reported incidences of violent crimes, 2010

- murder + manslaughter: 51
- rape and other sexual offenses: 117
- robbery + robbery MV: 51
- GBH: 74
- firearms: 1
- abduction: 23

Pie chart 8: NCD, reported incidences of violent crimes, 2010

- murder + manslaughter: 125
- rape and other sexual offenses: 323
- robbery + robbery MV: 855
- GBH: 398
- firearms: 30
- abduction: 36

Source: RPNGC data for NCD and Western Highlands Province, 2010

Figure 3 (Lakhani & Willman, 2014, p. 13)

Despite the reports of high levels of crime, these are not significantly different from those experienced in other developing countries and are comparable to similar countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America where major multinationals and NGOs are operating (UNODC, 2013). Consequently, it is considered still possible to manage the security and safety of personnel with a series of selected, directed approaches.

A number of solutions are proposed by many different commentators which hinge upon the ability of state actors to provide the structures necessary for a stable state (Baker & Scheye, 2007). However, it has been found that in most cases the ability to operate in hostile environments rests with the ability of the actual organisation to take control of as many aspects of its operating structure as it can safely manage. The 'Multilayered' approach as argued by Baker (2007), whereby regardless of who provides the security services, the required end result is a net benefit for all incorporating local ownership (Talentino, 2007). Thus the 'people-centred, locally-owned' approach matches what is proposed in this paper by the research, which is dominated by a risk based approach (Andersen et al., 2014).

Risk based Approach

The tried and tested approach for working in hostile environments is to adopt and maintain a risk based approach to all their activities by conducting full risk assessments before activities are undertaken (Bailey & Doleman, 2013; World Bank, 2014).

The WDR 2014 argues that people can successfully confront risks that are beyond their means by sharing their risk management with others. This can be done through naturally occurring social and economic systems that enable people to overcome the obstacles that individuals and groups face, including lack of resources and information, cognitive and behavioural failures, missing markets and public goods, and social externalities and exclusion. (World Bank, 2014, p. v)

All the risks must be carefully assessed and dealt with using appropriate risk controls (Chapin & Akridge, 2005; Garcia, 2006; King & Murray, 2001). No task should be allowed to proceed if the risk remains at 'High' after the treatment process. Therefore, in order for a task to proceed for operational requirements, the organisation must formally accept the potential consequences; if this was 'high' or 'extreme' this would require senior executive/Board authority. Setting up what is termed a Risk Escalation Protocol (REP) is the functional approach to achieving this requirement and thus assigning responsibility. Figure 4 provides a matrix for a REP.

Risk Acceptance Escalation Protocol		
Level of Risk	Actions required	Appropriate Sign Off
Extreme	Immediate executive management action needed to prevent, mitigate or avoid risk	Board
High	Senior management attention needed to prevent, mitigate or avoid risk	Executive General Manager
Moderate	Long term management action required to prevent, mitigate or avoid risks	CEO/ General Manager
Low	Risk can be managed using general preventive security planning and procedures	Managers

Figure 4 Risk Escalation Protocol Matrix

Once mitigation measures have been agreed and put in place, a further assessment needs to occur to confirm that mitigation measures are capable dealing effectively before the task can proceed.

It should be noted that 'High Risk' cannot be delegated downwards within an organisation; it remains the responsibility of the most senior manager and ultimately the Board. In the event of an incident occurring they will be deemed in law to have accepted the risk and ultimately the consequence. Legislation in Australia and worldwide has placed the responsibility for signing off on the risk for a company firmly on the heads of the most senior management. Accordingly, prosecution for 'corporate manslaughter' is a real possibility, especially as in PNG, which follows Australian legislation through case law precedence in Health and Safety Law (Belcher, 2002; Bittle & Snider, 2006; Dunlop, 2004; Hill, 2003; Sarre & Richards, 2005; Wheelwright, 2004).

AN ALERNATIVE MODEL PROPOSED

Currently Aid and humanitarian agencies work with a security triangle (Figure 5) based upon: acceptance, deterrence and protection (Childs, 2013, p. 65; Martin, 1999, p. 4; Van Brabant, 2000, pp. 11-14). Acceptance being foremost, "to remove or reduce the threat by seeking widespread acceptance for one's presence and work among the populations and from the official and de facto authorities" (Brabant, 1998, p. 112)
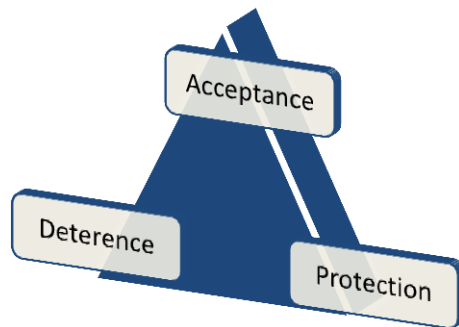
Figure 5 Adapted from the Aid Agencies Security Triangle (Martin, 1999, p. 4)

Building upon the acceptance approach would be the use of the full security risk assessment process, coupled with ensuring the mitigation measures have been accepted through the REP. The research indicates adding a further series of layers would enhance the strategy further.

MULTI-LAYERED, PEOPLE-CENTRED, LOCALLY OWNED

A concept of security gaining more credence revolves around the need to be inclusive of the local population as part of the process, rather than attempting to 'defend' against the local environment (Dijkzeul & Wakenge, 2010). This concept emerges from what is termed 'human security'(Brzoska, 2003; Paris, 2001; Tuchman Mathews, 1989). Engaging locals as part of the security-layered approach or defence in depth (Smith & Brooks, 2012), forms one of the layers, as well as convincing them they have a net gain in the services being provided for them all. From a Humanitarian and Health provision this is not so difficult to achieve, but in mining and oil and gas more difficult. However, it is considered to be the challenge for security providers as local acceptance requires a more inclusive approach, which benefits the local population as well as improving the service provision. The gains can be many fold as it vastly improves the local relationship and drops the need for armed escorts, guards and the like (Avant, 2007; Axworthy, 2001; Chandler, 2008; Donais, 2009; Krause & Jütersonke, 2005; Talentino, 2007, p. 155).

Creating the multi-layered, locally-owned, people-centred involves engaging with various sections of the local community by extending networks outwards through local recruited employees. In addition, the local communities that benefit through service provision are encouraged to ensure they provide support, security and safety to the organisation's staff. Intelligence is gathered constantly to maintain an appreciation of the levels of threat locally. In addition, continuous networking with the police, and any other security providers, all sections of the community also need to be engaged through dialogue and inclusion. Although time consuming, the proactive approach reaps many benefits long term (Bailey & Doleman, 2013).

Normally in hostile environments, NGOs have held on to the belief that as their actions were humanitarian they would be immuned from criminality. Empirical evidence suggests this is no longer the case (Donini, 2009; Fast, 2007; Gershman & Allen, 2006; Hellinger, 2004). In fact in many instances they have become the target, as they are seen as a 'cash-cow' prepared to pay to get their workers back if kidnapped (Spearin, 2008, p. 367). The goods stolen have become an integral part of the black market in many aid countries; sustaining the notion NGOs are easy money. It is now incumbent upon these organisations to accept security is as necessary to them as it is too multinationals.

Local workers need to be made to feel secure. Too often little thought is given to their welfare as it is considered they live there so they should know how to protect themselves: this is often not the case, they survive, but not safely (Hoffman, 2012). They are as vulnerable if not more so than those who come from outside of the country. Local animosities together with regular tribal clashes, particularly in PNG, need to be overcome by creating a more inclusive and harmonious interaction between all involved.

CONCLUSION

Crime presents unpleasant challenges particularly when it is violent, indiscriminate and random. By employing the multi-layered, locally-owned, people-centred approach, over and above the Aid security triangle, organisations can remain engaged with the community, but remain proactive in defending against potential threats. Security and safety require a re-alignment away from the heavily defensive and armed approach employed more frequently in PNG today. Whilst this change in approach does not provide a total solution, being proactive and engaged does offer an alternative and one that is more acceptable to humanitarian and health service providers generally.

Although working in PNG has a number of unique challenges, it is manageable with sufficient safe guards and mitigation measures in place. People are the most important asset for organisations working in the country. Ultimately, a lack of attention to the protection of this asset will have adverse clientele continuity implications. If not appropriately managed, an organisation is likely to be exposed not only in the area of liability and reputation: all organisations need to ensure they honour their duty of care obligations, but also in injury, loss or death of their personnel. Negative outcomes can be avoided by ensuring the required level of care and protection is in place at all times plus operates in support of the organisation's aims and objectives. Therefore, it is imperative that actions are taken to safeguard the wellbeing, welfare and security of the staff meets the requisites for working safely in hostile environments.

In support of this requirement, greater attention coupled with due diligence needs to be taken where the identification of security, safety and risk related threats are concerned. Actively engaging the local community is part of this proactive process; after all it is they that have the most to lose by the potential withdrawal of those that most wish to help them- the Aid Agencies.

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