

The Logic of Protection Approaches: Four Models to Safeguard Civilians From Harm

By FLORIAN WESTPHAL, SOFIE LILLI STOFFEL and JULIA STEETS

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In wars around the world, violence against civilian populations causes horrendous suffering. Attacks on civilians by armed groups, forced recruitments, economic extortion – civilians’ rights might be violated in a number of different ways. To mitigate or end such violations, different actors – including NGOs, military forces, religious groups, and community leaders – may try to influence conflict parties to cease attacks on civilians and instead enhance their protection. Based on our research, we identify four main approaches through which these protection actors influence how armed forces treat and behave toward civilians: (1) “naming and shaming” armed actors; (2) mobilizing influencers; (3) capacitating communities; and (4) training armed actors. For each approach, we offer abstract models that break down the underlying logic, outlining how each approach intends to change armed actor behavior – and how it can fall short of its goals or even backfire. While this report delves into the steps involved in each of the logic models, a separate summary and guide outlines practical use cases for our findings.

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1. Introduction

Every day, civilians suffer in armed conflicts. Attacks by armed forces, militias and rebel groups have left and continue to leave thousands dead or injured and have resulted in the forced displacement of millions of people around the world. In addition to direct experiences of violence, the wider impact of combat – including threats on livelihoods, famine and the breakdown of essential infrastructure – put further strain on civilian populations. International and national laws to safeguard civilians against the effects of armed conflict place the primary responsibility for protecting civilians on governments. However, states are often unable or unwilling to stop the child recruitment, mass rapes and attacks on schools and hospitals committed by non-state actors – or by state security forces themselves. A number of local and international institutions are working to help survivors deal with the consequences of such experiences and to prevent harm to civilians during conflicts.

This report is part of a research project¹ that looks into how protection actors attempt to prevent militaries and non-state armed groups from harming civilians. In this report, we identify four main approaches through which protection actors influence armed forces' conduct toward civilians and synthesize them into logic models. Systematic models have been missing from the protection community but are an important step toward bettering protection practices. For example, Reichhold and Binder (2013) call for a common conceptual basis to analyze and compare protection approaches across different contexts as part of their research on what works in protection.² From a practitioner perspective, the NGO platform InterAction also emphasizes the benefits of logic models for planning more effective protection efforts.³ This report details the logic underlying the different protection approaches and delves into their goals, the contextual factors affecting their outcomes, the risks involved for each method, as well as the indicators for an approach's success or failure in implementation. The models do not offer blueprints for specific actions toward protection, but they are meant to contribute to efforts to plan, implement and monitor protection activities within specific circumstances and contexts. In the user guide to

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- 1 The project is funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. For more information, see Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), "Protecting Civilians from Harm: How Armed Actors Can Be Made to Comply with Rules," www.gppi.net/project/protecting-civilians-from-harm and UKRI, accessed May 25, 2022 "Protecting civilians from harm: How humanitarians can encourage armed actors to comply with norms," gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FT007427%2F1.
 - 2 Urban Reichhold and Andrea Binder, "Scoping study: what works in protection and how do we know?," GPPi, March 1, 2013, accessed May 25, 2022, https://gppi.net/media/GPPi_2013_DFID_scoping-study-protection_180830_110813.pdf.
 - 3 "Embracing the Protection Outcome Mindset: We All Have a Role to Play – A Results-Based Protection Briefing Paper," InterAction, May 2020, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Embracing-the-Protection-Outcome-Mindset.pdf>. See also Victoria Metcalfe-Hough, "Advocating for humanity? Securing better protection of civilians affected by armed conflict," Humanitarian Policy Group, November 2020, accessed May 25, 2022, https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/Advocating_for-humanity_Securing_better_protection_of_civilians_affected_by_ar-jZxTIs.pdf.

this study, we provide an accessible overview of how protection actors can use the logic models in practice.

In the following, Chapter 2 introduces some of the basic terms and concepts within protection and outlines the methodology used to construct the logic models. Chapters 3 through 6 dissect each of the four logic models in depth: (1) “naming and shaming” armed actors, (2) mobilizing influencers, (3) capacitating communities, and (4) training armed actors. Chapter 7 closes by addressing some of the practical implications of each approach for efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict.

2. Concepts and Methodology

What is preventive protection?

Before examining the different protection approaches, it is worth exploring what we mean by ‘preventive protection’. The Inter-Agency Standing Commission (IASC), the humanitarian system’s main policy-making body, defines protection as “all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e., international human rights law (IHRL), international humanitarian law (IHL) and international refugee law (IRL)).”⁴ For the purpose of this report, we chose to focus on a subset of protection activities that aim to end patterns of harm against civilian populations and prevent their future occurrence, rather than to deal with the consequences of past harm against civilians. To foster effective protection activities, Reichhold and Binder (2013) stress the importance of using a structural approach to change the policies and behavior of those actors that have a negative impact on civilian safety.⁵ Given that we are looking at protection activities that are system- and future-oriented – rather than incident- and past-oriented – we use the term ‘preventive protection’ in our research.⁶

Preventive protection fits into the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) commonly used ‘egg model’ of protection in two ways. This egg model of protection differentiates between responsive action, remedial action and environment-building activities.⁷ Preventive protection focuses on responsive actions “intended to pressure the relevant authorities (...) into taking measures to stop the abuse and prevent its recurrence” and relates to environment-building activities, which “aim to change policy, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour, seeking structural changes in law and attitude.”⁸

4 “Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action,” Inter-Agency Standing Committee, October 14, 2016, p.2, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/inter-agency-standing-committee-policy-protection-humanitarian-action>.

5 Reichhold and Binder, “Scoping study,” p. 5.

6 The same term was used to describe efforts by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) “to attenuate the causes of displacement, so that persons will be allowed to remain in safety and dignity in their homes.” Bill Frelick, “‘Preventive Protection’ and the Right to Seek Asylum: A Preliminary Look at Bosnia and Croatia,” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 4: no. 4 (1992): pp. 439–454, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/4.4.439>.

7 Sylvie Giossi Caverzasio, ed., “Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards,” ICRC, May 2001, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/0783-strengthening-protection-war-search-professional-standards>.

8 “Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy,” p. 31.

Who are preventive protection actors?

A broad range of entities are involved in preventive protection efforts to influence the conduct of armed actors toward civilians. These actors include: international and national humanitarian, human rights and peacebuilding organizations; national or local actors, such as religious and traditional leaders, political parties, the media, and communities in affected areas; and security actors like UN peacekeeping forces, state armies and, in some cases, even non-state armed groups – which, although they themselves use violent means, can also act to enhance the protection of civilians by influencing the conduct of other armed actors that they support.⁹

How did we research preventive protection approaches?

While a wide range of different actors attempt to influence the conduct of armed actors toward civilians, they generally rely on only a limited number of approaches to do so. To identify the key types of interventions and their underlying logics, we used a mixed qualitative approach. Alongside interviews with protection organizations and researchers, the research team analyzed both the academic and ‘grey’ literature and held two online workshops with a range of organizations working in preventive protection.

For the research project, we conducted a total of 148 interviews with a range of entities involved in preventive protection, including UN agencies, NATO and other armed forces, as well as civil society organizations from around the world who do humanitarian, human rights and conflict management work. The team also interviewed 23 academics working in international relations, conflict and peace studies, peacekeeping, legal studies, humanitarian studies, and human rights. In addition, we consulted academic literature from fields including peace and security studies, conflict resolution, negotiation, human rights, and humanitarian action. The research team also analyzed documents that protection organizations produced about their own work as well as external assessments of preventive protection activities by consultants and research institutes.¹⁰

We developed the logic models using an iterative process: The research team created a first draft of the models based on an initial round of interviews and literature and document review. This draft was then verified and further refined through additional interviews and an online workshop with protection actor staff. As such, the logic models are neither depictions of an ideal version of each approach nor a mere description of

9 See, for example, the NATO policy on the protection of civilians which acknowledges that in some situations NATO’s task will be “to protect civilians from conflict-related physical violence or threats of physical violence by other actors.” The policy adds that the protection of civilians “includes both military and non-military activities, where the military leads certain activities while playing an enabling and/or supporting role on others, to prevent, deter, pre-empt, and respond to situations in which civilians suffer physical violence or are under the threat of physical violence.” “The Protection of Civilians Allied Command Operations (ACO) Handbook,” NATO, March 11, 2021, p. 7, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://shape.nato.int/resources/3/website/ACO-Protection-of-Civilians-Handbook.pdf>.

10 The literature and documents most immediately relevant for this paper are listed in the bibliography (Annex 1).

selected protection contexts. Instead, the models summarize the most commonly used protection approaches and abstract from reality to reveal the mechanisms of action for how each approach is intended to work – but also how it may fail.

The logic models were developed with a global lens: interviewees and literature and workshop participants contributed perspectives from a variety of different contexts. As part of the larger research project¹¹ into which this study is embedded, we also conducted a case study of the protection dynamics in the post-ISIS areas in northern Iraq. At times, we underline the findings in this paper with examples from Iraq in order to illustrate the real-life implications of these abstract arguments – in the hope that this also facilitates the models’ transferability to other contexts.

The four approaches – which are (1) “naming and shaming” armed actors; (2) mobilizing influencers; (3) capacitating communities; and (4) training armed actors – can complement each other. The same protection actor may use several approaches in parallel, or different protection actors may coordinate their approaches to ensure that their interventions reinforce one another. In addition, not all protection approaches that are currently implemented fit easily into the proposed logic models. Many approaches involve or are complemented by direct interactions with armed actors. These interactions often vary strongly based on the local context, and they are therefore difficult to capture in a model that is meant to generalize beyond individual projects. Only one of our logic models – training armed actors – builds primarily on direct interactions between protection actors and armed actors.

11 GPPi, “Protecting Civilians.”

3. “Naming and Shaming”

Armed Actors

Example: The Release of Children from Military Imprisonment in Nigeria

In 2019, a human rights organization published a report based on interviews with 32 children in Northeast Nigeria who had been imprisoned as suspected members of a non-state armed group. According to the organization, thousands of children had been held in the military prison without formal charges, some for years. The government initially denied the report and disputed that it had detained children. However, within days of the report’s publication, the first children were released from the military barracks in which most of the interviewees had been held. According to the organization, the government freed more than 330 children during the six months following its report.¹²

Publicly calling out armed groups or specific governments for their forces’ behavior toward civilians is a long-established strategy of protection actors to draw attention to incidents of civilian harm. In particular, human rights organizations often publicly criticize the behavior of armed actors and draw media attention to the harmful deeds of armed groups. This is done with the aim of increasing the pressure from public opinion and influential stakeholders to exercise restraint toward civilians.¹³

Step one: Protection actors provide evidence to media actors, influencers and/or the public.

To start “naming and shaming” efforts, protection actors must collect and analyze data and anecdotal evidence around the harm done to civilians. Once such acts are documented, protection actors’ criticism of the armed actor’s behavior is then relayed to the media, published in reports by the organization itself, or both. To “name and shame” armed groups, protection actors highlight conduct toward civilians that violates international or national laws and other relevant norms. Especially for non-

12 See e.g., Jo Becker and Anietie Ewang, “Nigeria Releases More Children and Youth from Military Prison,” March 8, 2020, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/08/nigeria-releases-more-children-and-youth-military-prison>.

13 Sarah Holewinski and Marla B. Keenan, “A Conversation with the Center for Civilians in Conflict on Preventing Civilian Suffering,” *The Fletcher Forum for World Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2014): p.16, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45289703>.

state armed actors – whose peculiar status under international law obstructs holding them accountable – previous commitments to upholding certain norms play an important role as a normative point of reference.¹⁴ Protection actors’ criticism, which can focus on a specific behavior or relate to armed actors more generally, can be expressed through public statements denouncing particularly egregious instances of harm committed against civilians, as well as through long-term public campaigns on issues such as the illegal recruitment of children or the use of antipersonnel landmines. At times, protection actors publicly call on governments and intergovernmental entities to prosecute or impose sanctions against armed actors accused of misconduct.¹⁵ For a more positive approach, some protection actors have attempted to incentivize armed actors to better their behavior by publicly acknowledging improvements in their conduct while insisting that more changes are still needed.

Protection actors use different channels to ensure that their concerns are made public and tailor the content they provide accordingly. In addition to using their own websites and social media channels, protection actors often try to appeal to media outlets likely to directly reach key audiences, including the wider public as well as an armed actor’s leadership, rank-and-file members and key supporters. In some (rare) cases, protection actors may not want their involvement to be publicly known and therefore provide the media with documented evidence of violations without seeking any visibility for themselves.

To maximize public knowledge of an armed actor’s misconduct, protection actors often build temporary alliances, issuing joint statements on behalf of several organizations. To make it easier and more attractive for media outlets to report on their concerns, protection actors are increasingly focused on how to best ‘package’ the evidence and expertise they provide. Many organizations have started to provide content produced to professional standards, such as audio-visual material to interest news programs, television channels and social media content creators in their criticism of armed actors. Some organizations have also invested in training spokespeople to be good at ‘getting the message across’ on different media channels.

Protection actors not only employ these methods to reach the armed actors in question and the public at large, but also to mobilize stakeholders with an influence over the armed actor. This approach is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 “Mobilizing Influencers” below.

14 See, for example, the Deeds of Commitment or Unilateral Declarations that Geneva Call has convinced various non-state armed actors to sign. Geneva Call, “How we work,” last accessed September 6, 2021, <https://www.genevacall.org/how-we-work/>.

15 Metcalfe-Hough, “Advocating for Humanity,” p. 3. One concrete example is the call in 2021 by more than 50 international and Congolese NGOs on the Kinshasa government to “adopt a clear strategy for holding those suspected of criminal responsibility for grave human rights violations accountable.” “DR Congo: Prioritize Justice for Serious Crimes,” Human Rights Watch, April 29, 2021, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/29/dr-congo-prioritize-justice-serious-crimes>.

Step two: Protection actors’ public statements and media coverage of their criticism lead to greater awareness among the general public and influential stakeholders.

If successful, a protection actor’s public criticism will provide the media with stronger evidence on armed actor misconduct, draw media attention to the harm done, and increase the media’s willingness to report on the issue. Together with the protection actor’s own communication efforts, this improved media coverage should make both the general public and influential stakeholders more aware of the harm done to civilians.

Ideally, media coverage and heightened public awareness will increase pressure on the armed actor to react to the accusations. Different media channels may ask the armed actor or its allies – for example, the national Ministry of Defense or political parties closely associated with non-state armed groups – for a public statement. In turn, political actors could react to public demands for accountability by using more formal channels like parliamentary debates or questions. Different stakeholders may respond to public reports of armed actor misconduct by demanding a formal investigation through national legal mechanisms or international channels, such as UN commissions of inquiry or fact-finding missions.

The awareness raised by the “naming and shaming” approach to armed actor misconduct can also be key to creating synergies with other approaches. For instance, the data on instances of civilian harm can also be used by affected communities in efforts to improve armed actor conduct (see Chapter 5 “Capacitating Communities”). Moreover, a key target group of awareness raising campaigns are influencers, who may then use their bilateral channels with armed actors to demand explanations and changes to their behavior from behind the scenes (see Chapter 4 “Mobilizing Influencers” below for more detail). Protection actors may also use the increased public scrutiny of the armed actor as an opportunity to offer their support to help the armed group improve its forces’ behavior (see Chapter 6 “Training Armed Actors” below for more detail).



Success factors: Media reach and the protection actor’s perceived credibility influence whether “naming and shaming” raises general awareness.

A number of signs can indicate whether the “naming and shaming” approach is on the right track to influence public opinion and exert pressure on the armed actor.

If the intervention is working...

...the protection actor is able to collect relevant and credible evidence and present it in an accessible format.

...the targeted media recognizes the issues raised by the protection actor as pertinent and welcomes the evidence, expertise and content provided.

...the media outlets run the story frequently and give the public criticism a good deal of visibility.

...there is a sustained and strong social media reaction to the protection actor’s concerns.

...political fora such as parliaments pick up these concerns or they are reflected in other events such as protests.

...public demands for formal investigations of the armed actor's misconduct increase.

...institutions formally in charge of the armed actor criticize its conduct.

...stakeholders with influence over the armed actor signal that they are concerned by the issues raised by the protection actor.

However, there are also a number of factors that can hinder the “naming and shaming” approach at this stage.

The intervention may not work if...

...the targeted media channels are afraid or unable to report on the issues raised.

...the media doubt the validity of the data presented by the protection actor and refuse to report on it.

...the media consider the protection actor – and its data – as biased against the armed actor in question.

...the reporting is used to promote propaganda instead of independent critical analysis, thus deepening social divisions.

...the media covering the protection actor's concerns have limited reach among the general public, the armed actor concerned and relevant influencers.

...influential stakeholders dismiss public criticisms of the armed actor and seek to undermine the credibility of the protection actor voicing the criticism and/or of the media outlets reporting on it.

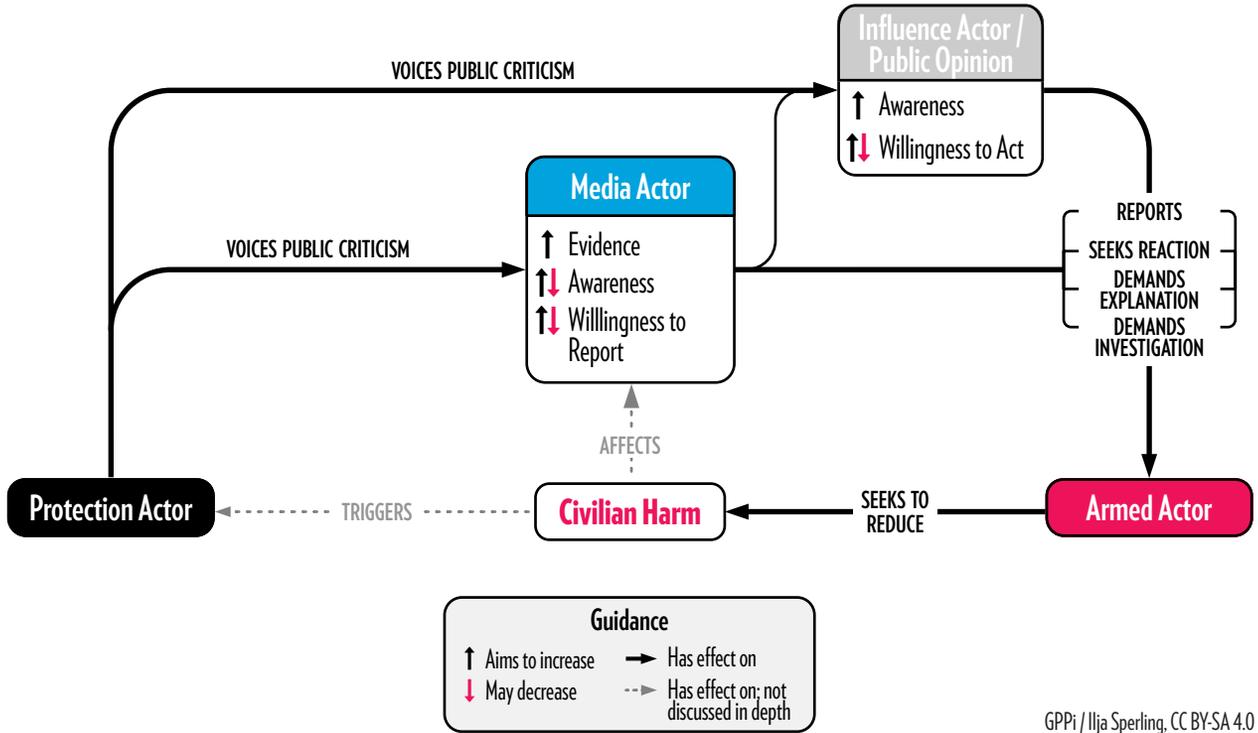
Several factors particularly influence whether “naming and shaming” is likely to raise awareness among the general public and influential stakeholders: Firstly, censorship plays a major role in the extent of public awareness around armed actors' behavior. Censorship and other restrictions on freedom of expression are a regular feature of armed conflicts. This begs the question to what extent media outlets are able to decide whether to cover the protection actor's concerns. Limits to freedom of expression can make it impossible for the media to report on an issue and restrict its discussion on social media platforms. In addition, privately owned media companies or social media platforms may choose not to feature the protection actor's criticism if they believe it could harm their economic interests. In these situations, protection actors often rely on foreign media, which may face fewer restrictions but often reach fewer people in the target country and are therefore less useful to stimulate public awareness and debate.

Secondly, in polarized societies, media reporting concerning armed actor misconduct may actually deepen divisions if it is primarily used as propaganda against the 'enemy' rather than to critically examine the behavior of all armed actors. Countries at war are often highly polarized: the violence of conflict is usually mirrored by a battle for the 'hearts and minds' of the public, which is largely conducted through rival media outlets and social media propaganda campaigns. Wars often create echo chambers where specific TV channels, radio stations or newspapers only reach the armed actor that they support or to whom they are loyal, while rival outlets are dismissed as enemy supporters.

Thirdly, the protection actor's perceived credibility will have an impact on whether its concerns are reported by media and picked up by influencers. In some cases, media actors may not believe that the data and evidence presented by the protection actor represent an accurate description of the reality on the ground. They may also doubt that protection actors can be as fully independent from conflict parties as they claim to be. Further, conspiracy theories and misinformation are often rampant in conflict settings. International protection actors in particular may be suspected of

serving the interests of rich donor countries, which – even if inaccurate – can have a negative impact on their reputations.

Figure 1: “Naming and Shaming” Armed Actors, Intermediary Level



GPP1 / Ijja Sperling, CC BY-SA 4.0

As media actors, influencers and/or the wider public report on harm against civilians and demand explanations and other consequences, they may exert pressure on the armed actor. However, they could also face repercussions for their own work, which could for instance impact a media actor’s willingness to report on the issue.

Step three: Leaders of the armed actor are aware of harm to civilians and are resolved to address it.

Finally, if public criticism is successful, media coverage, public awareness and demands for a reaction from the armed group will increase the armed actor’s awareness of the problem and strengthen its resolve to address the issue.



Success factors: The armed actor's desire to maintain a positive reputation and legitimacy influence whether "naming and shaming" brings about a change in behavior.

Several signs can indicate that the armed actor is reacting to the pressure created by public criticism of its forces' behavior.

If the intervention is working...

...the armed actor shows awareness by reacting to the public criticism.

...the public discussion of the armed actor's conduct increases its willingness to try to reduce civilian harm – either because its leadership was not previously aware of the problem, or because the criticism strengthened the position of leaders and influential allies who favor more restraint toward civilians.

...the armed actor is prepared to discuss the allegations with protection actors or to cooperate with them to address the problem of harmful conduct.

...the armed actor is taking concrete actions to reduce harm to civilians.

At the same time, certain developments could indicate that the "naming and shaming" approach is failing.

The intervention may not work if...

...public criticism strengthens more radical elements in the leadership who claim the armed actor has been unjustly targeted and/or who support harming 'enemy' civilians as a sign of strength.

...the armed actor questions the credibility of the media outlets reporting on its conduct and criticizes, threatens or even attacks journalists. This may deter future media reporting on the armed actor's harmful conduct toward civilians.

...the armed actor reacts negatively to demands from influencers by either ignoring them or seeking to undermine their credibility and leverage.

...the armed actor only addresses easily modifiable issues while disregarding the more complex root causes of civilian harm or does not follow up on its promises to implement changes.

...the armed actor questions the credibility and independence of the protection actors who criticized them. As a result, the actor may even restrict the protection actors' access to people and communities who are the victims of harmful conduct by armed groups. The risk of losing access to people in need may deter other protection actors from publicly criticizing the armed actor.

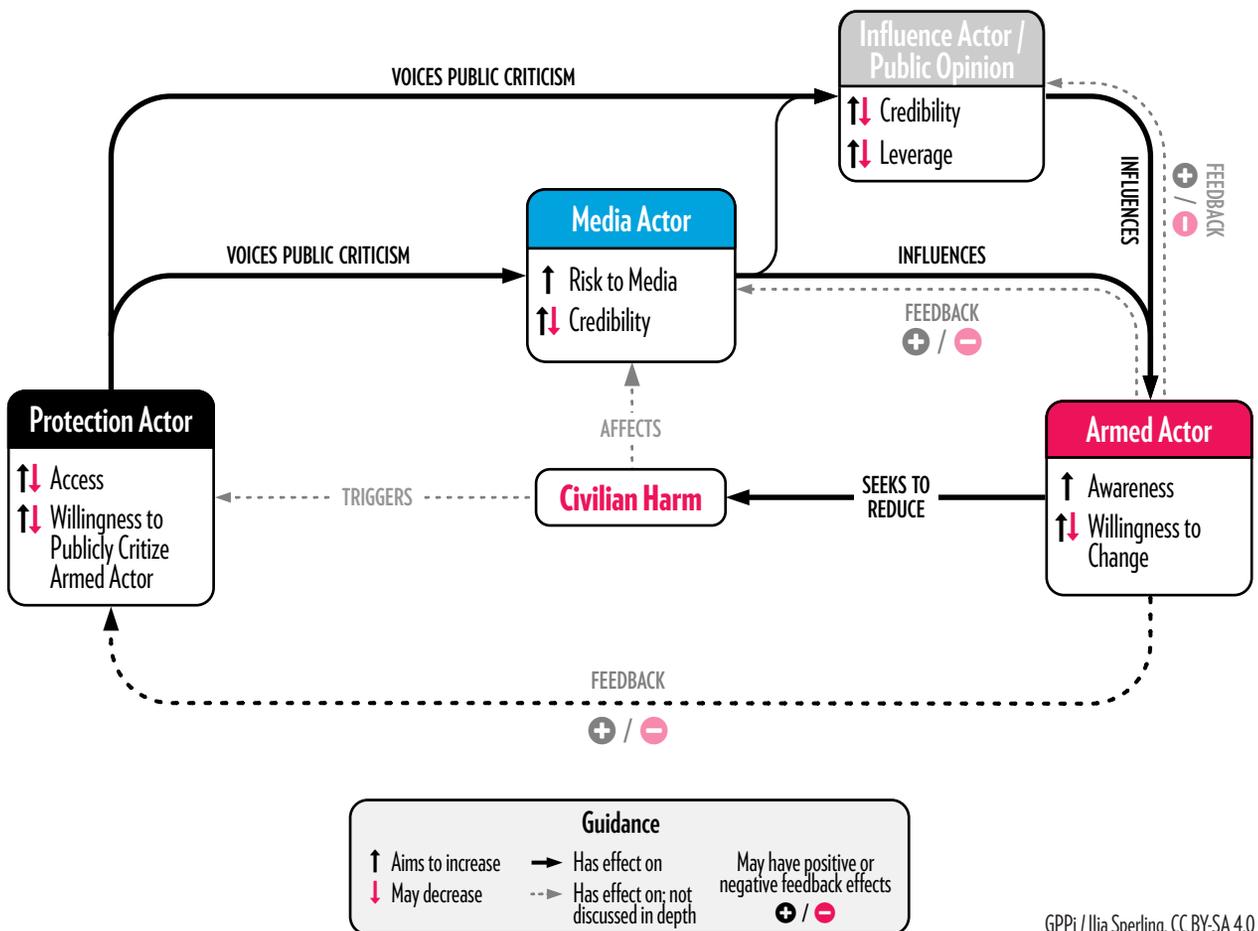
...the armed actor turns on the communities and individuals harmed by its behavior, accusing them of providing protection actors with the evidence used to publicly criticize them.

Armed actors who attach a great deal of importance to their public image and reputation are likely to be particularly sensitive to public criticism. To what extent an armed actor derives its legitimacy from its public reputation can depend on its ideology (e.g., a radical religious orientation or a focus on the defense and 'liberation' of a community or area), its political ambitions (e.g., a determination to govern the territory under its control or a political wing that is participating in elections), and its level of integration with and dependence on the local community (e.g., recruitment of fighters and obtainment of resources mainly from the local area). Further, if an armed actor has publicly promised to regulate its conduct to comply with legal obligations in the past, it is likely to be quite sensitive to public criticism of its conduct. Timing also matters – public criticism can

have a heightened impact at key junctures, such as during peace talks or negotiations on arms supplies.

The reaction of the armed actor also varies based on the nature of its harmful conduct toward civilians. Armed actors are often more likely to address issues that have little impact on military strength but where action will be welcomed by influencers and supporters – e.g., the recruitment of children. However, armed groups may be less willing to address instances of misconduct that are more complex, even if they cause severe civilian harm. There is also a risk that the armed actor’s actions do not match its public promises: it may announce changes in the right direction but fail to implement them in the hope that the public’s attention span remains short and that its promises will be enough to satisfy supporters and allies until the media storm has blown over.

Figure 2: “Naming and Shaming” Armed Actors, Armed Actor Level



GPPi / Ilja Sperl, CC BY-SA 4.0

As pressure on the armed actor increases, it may resolve to address its conduct toward civilians. In reacting to the public criticism, the armed actor creates feedback effects on all other actors involved. These may be positive, encouraging future similar approaches, but could also cause harm to protection actors, media or influencers – e.g., by damaging their credibility or limiting their access to affected populations.

4. Mobilizing Influencers

Example: Motivating Tribal Leaders to Engage With an Armed Group in Yemen

In Yemen, an international organization worked in close collaboration with its national staff to influence tribal leaders and community elders with close connections to a non-state armed group who had committed significant civilian harm. National staff attended traditional Qat¹⁶ chewing sessions and discussed humanitarian principles and protection concerns caused by the armed actor's conduct toward civilians. The organization found that tribal leaders had a strong political interest in helping their communities and could therefore be motivated to convince the armed group to improve its behavior.

The underlying logic of this approach is to convince influencers to exert pressure on or persuade armed groups to change their harmful behavior and improve their treatment of civilians. The entities and individuals we call 'influencers' exert different forms of leverage over armed actors: some may have personal connections to the armed actor in question, some affect the armed actor's economic and political objectives, and still others influence the perceived legitimacy of the armed actor and the cause for which it fights. Influencers are therefore a heterogeneous group of actors whose respective importance depends on the specific context and armed actor in question.

International influencers typically include foreign governments and associated armed forces, international organizations such as NATO or the UN and its entities, regional organizations like the African Union, foreign non-state armed actors, and foreign private companies. The most important domestic influencers include governments, political parties and individual politicians, traditional leaders such as chiefs and religious leaders, local business, and civil society actors. Diaspora communities also play an important role in many conflict situations.

Step one: Protection actors identify and convince the right influencers.

Protection actors generally start their interventions by seeking to identify those influencers who have significant leverage over an armed actor and who are likely to be

16 Qat is „indigenous to Yemen and certain parts of eastern Africa. Chewing the leaves, which have sympathomimetic and euphoric effects, has been documented in many countries and increased with worldwide migration.” Sonia El-Zaemey, Joachim Schüz, and Maria E. Leon, “Qat Chewing and Risk of Potentially Malignant and Malignant Oral Disorders: A Systematic Review,” *The international journal of occupational and environmental medicine* 6, no. 3 (2015): pp.129–143, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.15171/ijoem.2015.537>.

receptive to the protection actor's concerns. To increase their chances of success, they often attempt to mobilize several influencers in parallel.

Protection actors typically rely on existing networks to approach selected influencers. Such contacts were usually developed through previous positive experiences of working together. Where no such networks exist, protection actors have to build new connections with influencers, which can be difficult and time-consuming. In such cases, protection actors often rely on staff who have contact with and access to the influencers they want to reach or whose background allows them to make these connections more easily. On occasion, protection actors organize conferences or workshops in order to establish an initial contact with potential influencers. These events can serve as 'door-openers' which allow protection actors to use discussions around less controversial topics to develop a relationship and build trust with influencers before broaching the potentially more difficult issues related to armed actors.

To reach different types of influencers, national and international protection actors often join forces. National actors usually have more developed networks with domestic influencers thanks to their personal contacts, shared religious, ethnic and political backgrounds, and prior experiences of working together. Meanwhile, external protection actors typically have better access to international influencers like foreign governments or UN agencies. Many of these actors are accredited at international fora like the UN Human Rights Council, which allows them to lobby influencers and have offices in international hubs like Geneva or New York. International protection actors frequently have strong ties to Western governments, including the United States, who fund their work and who wield a measure of influence over authorities and armed actors in many violent conflicts.

Among international influencers, foreign governments often have a great deal of leverage, as they provide armed actors with financial support, training and/or weapons. In addition, they can use their political and diplomatic influence to damage or enhance the legitimacy of armed actors in the international sphere, and to affect their economic interests – for example, by imposing or lifting sanctions.¹⁷ Foreign governments also have the power to support or participate in direct military interventions against armed actors accused of harmful behavior toward civilians. In turn, allies or coalitions of non-state armed groups can exert influence over armed actors based on the military, financial and ideological support they provide to their members.¹⁸

International and regional organizations also exert considerable leverage in countries affected by armed conflict. Organizations such as the World Bank control the financial resources on which many countries depend, while UN organizations can bestow legitimacy on conflict parties – or politically intervene in a conflict setting. In addition, regional organizations and the UN can also exert pressure on armed actors by recommending or even ordering punitive measures such as sanctions or travel bans, while the International Criminal Court can – under certain circumstances – instigate prosecutions against officers or commanders accused of harming civilians.

Among international influencers, foreign governments often have a great deal of leverage, as they provide armed actors with financial support, training and/or weapons.

17 "Allies, Partners and Proxies: Managing Support Relationships in Armed Conflict to Reduce the Human Cost of War," ICRC, April 14, 2021, p. 47, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4498-allies-partners-and-proxies-managing-support-relationships-armed-conflict-reduce>.

18 See, for example, ICRC research on the influence of Al-Qaida on the MUJAO and Ansar Dine armed groups in the Sahel region. Fiona Terry and Brian McQuinn, "The Roots of Restraint in War," ICRC, June 30, 2018, p. 47, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4352-roots-restraint-war>.

One oft-underestimated type of influencer are diaspora communities, who frequently provide important financial and political support to armed actors in their countries of origin. Especially in conflict-affected countries where freedom of expression is severely limited, diaspora voices can wield an important influence over how the public views armed actors and their behavior.

In many conflicts, foreign private companies have sway over armed actors because of their role in the commercial exploitation of raw materials such as minerals. Foreign economic actors also exercise some degree of influence, as they provide key resources such as weapons or, in the case of private military companies, manpower.

When targeting domestic influencers, protection actors will usually approach government entities or officials in charge of the army or police if their concerns are linked to the conduct of state security forces. A government's formal authority over state security forces allows them to issue orders, make appointments and set budgets. These government actors can also pass relevant legislation or initiate legal procedures through the courts in response to incidents of harmful behavior by armed actors. In some instances, governments also provide financial resources and exert political influence over non-state armed actors such as militias. Further, specific government ministries or even individual officials can be influential in their own right. Meanwhile, some political parties in conflict countries exert a great deal of influence because of their role as the 'political wing' of a particular armed group.

Another important group of domestic influencers are traditional or religious leaders, who wield significant authority in many countries – especially over non-state armed actors that claim to fight on behalf of specific ethnic or religious groups. More than with other types of influencers, traditional or religious leaders may be able to directly influence the behavior of individual fighters without having to rely on an armed group's leadership to reign in its forces. However, these leaders can be difficult to reach, especially for 'outsiders' such as international protection actors.

Approaching influencers can be particularly challenging if the armed actor in question has been designated as a terrorist organization and if contact with its forces is therefore a criminal offence. In this case, influencers may be reluctant to openly acknowledge their ties to the armed actor. One way protection actors may work around this problem is to focus on easier-to-reach influencers, in the hope that they will relay their concerns to stakeholders closer to the armed actor.

In countries affected by violent conflict, local businesses often control key resources that are of interest to various armed actors. They function both as suppliers of vital goods and services to armed actors as well as their clients – for example, in cases where an armed actor ensures the safety of trade routes or controls the sale of certain raw materials.¹⁹ As such, businessmen from affected communities can be crucial influencers with in-depth contacts to armed groups – which can translate into good chances that they may affect the behavior of an armed group.

Finally, even in countries where fundamental rights such as the freedoms of movement or expression are limited, civil society actors like NGOs and the media can still influence the public image of armed actors and, in doing so, the level of support and legitimacy they enjoy.

Traditional or religious leaders may be able to directly influence the behavior of individual fighters without having to rely on an armed group's leadership.

¹⁹ See e.g., Terry and McQuinn, "The Roots of Restraint."

To convince such influencers to use their leverage over armed actors, protection actors employ similar tactics as those used for approaching the media: collecting data and documenting the harmful behavior of armed actors and its impact on civilians, as well as collecting information and expertise regarding applicable laws and norms. Which approach works best depends on the type of influencer a protection actor wants to target. Protection actors therefore often adapt their approaches by highlighting, for example, parallels between international humanitarian law and Sharia law when approaching Muslim religious leaders in a context like Iraq, or by attempting to convince foreign governments to act by stressing the importance of their first-hand information from conflict-affected areas that diplomats cannot access.

This first phase of an approach targeting influencers is closely tied to the mechanisms of “naming and shaming”. Not only are the media and protection actors who publish data on civilian harm acting as influencers themselves, but protection actors also hope that their public criticism of an armed group’s conduct reaches other influential stakeholders (see Chapter 3 “Naming and Shaming’ Armed Actors”). In some instances, protection actors will publicly call on influencers to act, demanding, for example, that foreign governments stop supplying weapons to armed actors whose conduct causes harm to civilians.²⁰ This is particularly effective in countries with laws or rules stipulating that governments can only assist armed actors whose conduct complies with applicable laws.²¹

Step two: One or more influencers become more aware of the harmful behavior and resolve to raise the issue with the armed actor concerned.

To raise influencers’ awareness of the problem and convince them to intervene, protection actors attempt to highlight how the armed actor’s conduct contradicts the influencers’ interests and norms. If the protection actor’s intervention is successful, influencers will address the problem of civilian harm with the armed actor and use their leverage to convince or pressure it to act.

20 “Allies, Partners and Proxies,” p. 49.

21 For example, the Leahy law in the United States prohibits assistance to armed actors responsible for gross violations of human rights. See Erica Gaston, “Regulating irregular actors: Can due diligence checks mitigate the risks of working with non-state and substate forces?,” ODI, June 2, 2021, p. 8, accessed May 25, 2022, https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/CSAG_Regulating_irregular_actors_WEB.pdf. The UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy stipulates that “United Nations support cannot be provided where there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of the receiving entities committing grave violations of international humanitarian, human rights or refugee law (...).” Quoted in “Enabling Support by Mitigating Risk: MONUSCO’s Implementation of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” Center for Civilians in Conflict, June 2020, p. 6, accessed May 25, 2022, https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CIVIC_HRDDP_Report_Final-Web-1.pdf.



Success factors: Cost-benefit calculations affect influencers' reactions to protection actors' mobilization efforts.

A number of different signs can indicate that the “mobilizing influencers” approach is on the right track to motivating an influencer to exert pressure on the armed group.

If intervention is working...

...the influencer's reaction indicates that it considers the protection actor as independent, credible and trustworthy. They consider the protection actor's data as credible evidence of armed actor misconduct.

...the influencer agrees with the protection actor's interpretation of what constitutes harmful behavior toward civilians and which rules and norms should apply.

...there are indications that the influencer objects to the armed actor's harmful behavior toward civilians because it violates their norms and values and/or because of concerns about a potential negative impact on their own interests and reputation.

...the influencer takes steps to facilitate the protection actor's ability to operate in the context and its access to people in need of protection.

...the influencer publicly endorses the concerns raised by the protection actor and/or is known to support these concerns during conversations with other stakeholders.

...the influencer uses its leverage over the armed actor to reduce civilian harm (e.g., by instructing or ordering the armed actor to address its misconduct or by threatening to withdraw support).

...the armed actor engages in dialogue with the influencer over the issue in question.

However, if the influencer reacts in the following ways, the approach may fail at this stage.

The intervention may not work if...

...the influencer ignores the protection actor or breaks off contact entirely.

...the influencer promises to intervene with the armed actor but does not follow through.

...the influencer disputes the protection actor's credibility and independence, and may even express these doubts publicly or during contact with third parties.

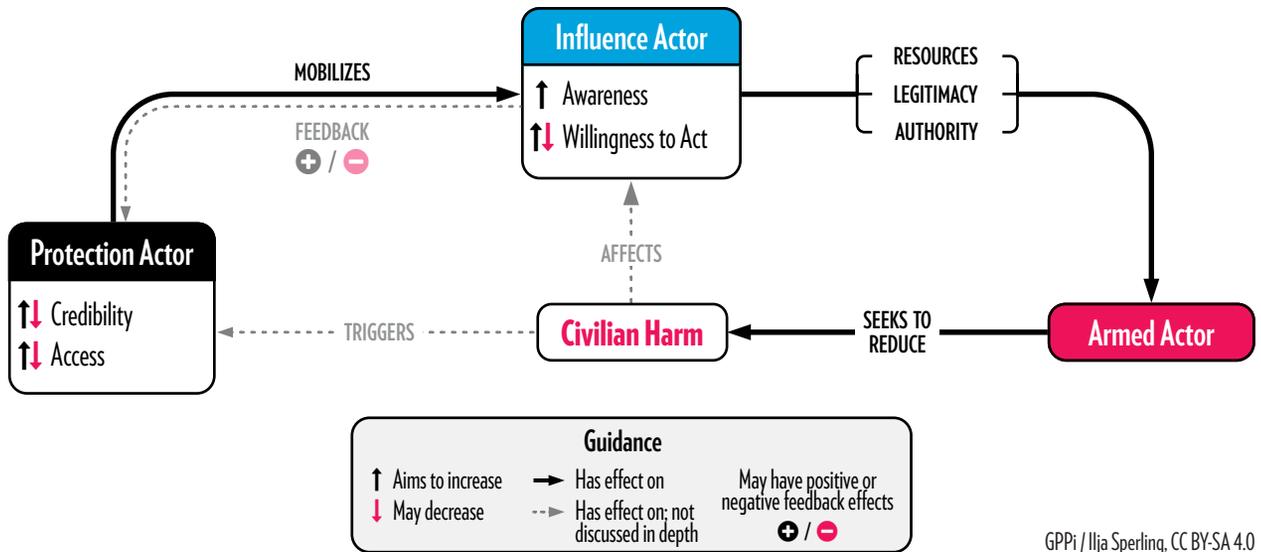
...the influencer may impose or support restrictions on the protection actor's ability to work in the context.

The success or failure of raising awareness with influencers and convincing them to approach the armed actor hinges to a large extent on the protection actor's ability to gain and maintain access to the influencer. Actors like the ICRC or UN organizations benefit from the fact that their specific role and mandate regarding the protection of civilians are widely known and respected. However, even these organizations often depend on having the right staff in place to reach key influencers. Key staff can also help protection actors adapt their message to influencers' specific norms and values, especially when they are unaware of or unreceptive to legal frameworks like international humanitarian or human rights law. In these situations, protection actors may have more leverage if they possess local knowledge that allows them to base their appeal to reduce civilian harm on traditional or religious norms to which influencers can more easily relate.

An influencer will be more inclined to use its leverage over an armed actor if its conduct violates the moral values and standards of the influencer. Many influencers will also be acutely aware of the potential damage to their reputation caused by

a relationship with an armed actor accused of harmful conduct toward civilians. However, influencers may be willing to accept a negative impact on their image due to the significant military or economic benefits of their connection to the armed actor in question. Much like in the case of protection actors using public criticism, timing matters. Influencers may be more receptive to a protection actor’s intervention when the strength of their reputation is of great importance. For example, a political party facing elections will want to avoid any damage to its prospects caused by the conduct of an armed actor it supports.

Figure 3: Mobilizing Influencers, Intermediary Level



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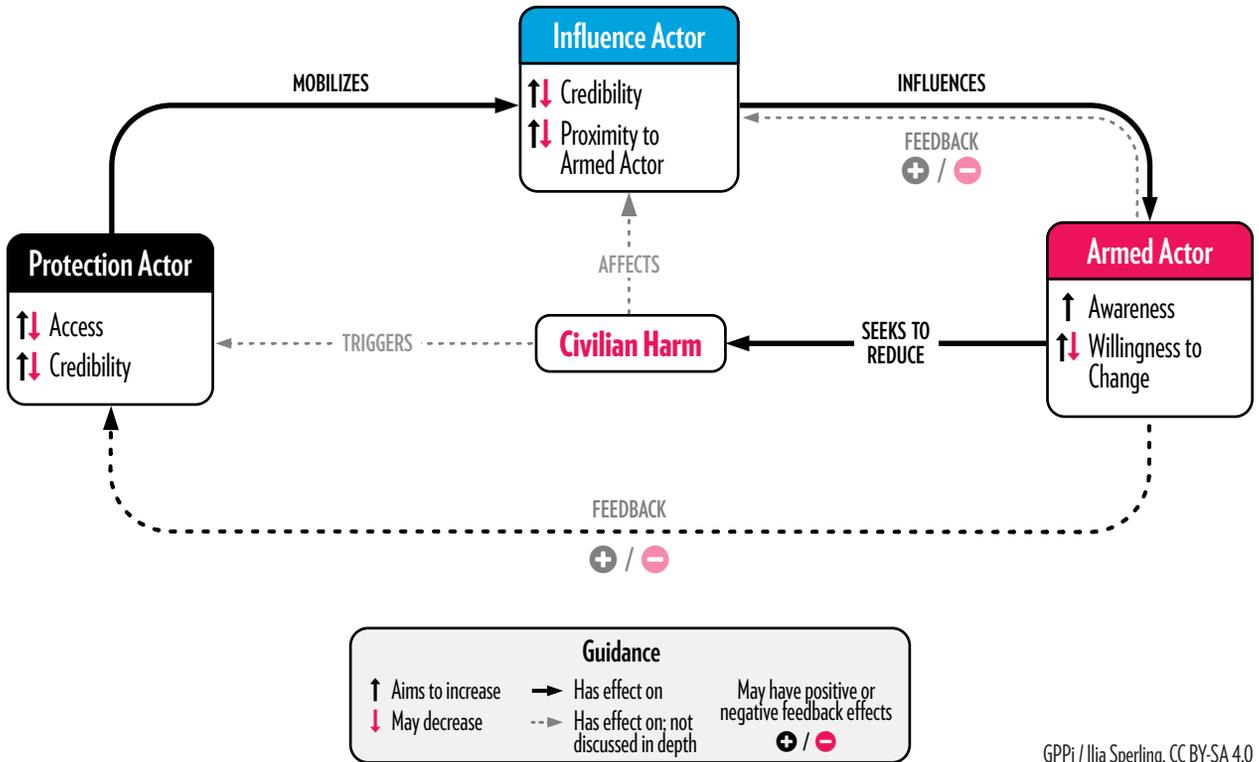
After having convinced a relevant influencer or several influencers to make use of their leverage over an armed group, protection actors continue to work with them as they resolve to exert pressure on the armed actor in question. However, in doing so, influencers could react negatively to certain advances by the protection actor, which may for instance damage the latter’s credibility.

Step three: The armed actor takes note of the influencers’ concerns regarding its harmful behavior and resolves to address the issue.

When mobilizing influencers, protection actors pursue the same goals as when they voice public criticism (see Chapter 3, “Naming and Shaming” Armed Actors”): they seek to make the armed actor more aware of the problem and more inclined to address it. For this reason, the same indicators can be used to assess whether the approach is on track to lead to success. A particular addition for mobilizing influencers: if the influencer is capable of instructing or ordering the armed actor to address its misconduct (for instance, because it is the government under whose authority state security forces operate), then doing so may be crucial to initiate a change in behavior. Efforts to mobilize influencers can also fail and backfire in a similar way as with “naming and shaming” –

for example, if the armed actor cuts ties with the influencer, seeks to undermine the credibility of the influencer and/or the protection actor, or limits the protection actor's access to affected communities.

Figure 4: Mobilizing Influencers, Armed Actor Level



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As influencers exert pressure on the armed actor in question, the armed actor reacts to the different parties that are involved. In the best case, it seeks to reduce instances of civilian harm and thereby positively reflects on the work of influence and protection actors. However, armed actors could also negatively affect those daring to influence them, for instance, by denying influencers access to their operations or by damaging protection actors' credibility.

5. Capacitating Communities

Example: Enabling Communities to Cooperate With Armed Forces on Addressing Crime in South Sudan

In 2019, communities in Mundri East County in South Sudan complained about harassment, physical abuse and even torture at the hands of armed forces, who were trying to deal with a spate of armed robberies in the area. Both sides blamed each other for the criminal incidents. Too afraid to engage the armed forces directly, community leaders sought support from a non-partisan peacebuilding organization operating in the area. The local team facilitated an open dialogue between the civilians and the armed forces and conducted unarmed patrols in areas particularly affected by criminal incidents. The protection actor regularly met with community leaders and armed forces, encouraging them to work together to maintain peace and stop violence against civilians. It reported that six months after it first got involved, communities said that their relationship with the soldiers had improved and that there had been no recent incidents of harassment. The overall number of criminal incidents had also decreased, and the protection actor was told that communities and soldiers had agreed to deal with the crime problem through dialogue.²²

Communities are rarely ever passive when armed actors harm civilians. They usually act to minimize the impact of such conduct. As such, many protection actors argue that empowering communities to take the lead in protection efforts should be a priority. Community-based protection approaches intend to support communities so that they may make better use of their capacities to influence a local armed actor's behavior toward them.²³

22 A summary of a case study published in Nonviolent Peaceforce, "Case Studies & Success Stories | April-June 2020: NP South Sudan," Nonviolent Peaceforce, accessed May 30, 2022, https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NPSS_Case_Studies_April_-_June_2020_2nd_quarter_2020_-_new_photos.pdf.

23 Oliver Kaplan, *Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. For examples of how protection actors have been assessing community needs and expectations see "MindShift: A Collection of Examples that Promote Protection Outcomes," InterAction, June 29, 2021, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.interaction.org/blog/mindshift-a-collection-of-examples-that-promote-protection-outcomes/>.

Step one: Protection actors provide data, training and resources to communities.

Protection actors usually start their engagement with communities by trying to understand their experience of harm inflicted by armed actors, and to gauge their expectations as to what should be done to address the problem. They will also assess existing efforts to influence the conduct of armed actors by communities and community-based groups and structures. Based on this analysis, protection actors usually aim to offer communities a combination of expertise and resources that is adapted to their priorities and supports – rather than replaces – their own strategies to protect themselves against armed actor misconduct.

In situations where communities struggle to document instances of harm directed against them, protection actors can provide them with data that proves armed actor misconduct and its impact in a more systematic and quantifiable way – and therefore underpins the community’s efforts to draw attention to its concerns. Protection actors can also offer communities resources and training in relevant skills, such as peacebuilding and negotiation techniques, and they can provide relevant legal know-how regarding the norms and rules that bind armed actors in their behavior.

Several protection actors also work to strengthen the capacity of communities to engage armed actors by either offering support to existing community representatives and other community structures, such as protection or peace committees, or by helping communities set up similar bodies. Typically, such representatives should identify the community’s most important protection concerns and represent it during any interactions with the respective armed actors or other stakeholders wielding an influence over the armed actors. Protection actors generally consult community leaders and other influential stakeholders like government officials to identify participants in these groups or committees. They often emphasize the importance of ensuring that groups which tend to be marginalized, such as women and minorities, are also represented. In some cases, protection actors also publicly call for interested members of the public to participate in community protection committees and groups. In many contexts, protection actors will have to work with communities to ensure that the relevant government entities endorse the structures or representatives a community has chosen to engage with armed actors on its behalf.

As part of their overall activities, many protection actors equip victims of armed actor violence with material assistance, such as relief aid. This not only reduces their overall vulnerability but can also serve to build trust between the protection actor and the community. However, some protection actors have consciously decided not to provide aid out of concern that the community’s readiness to work with them will be primarily motivated by expectations of material gain.

Step two: Communities have accepted structures and more competence to engage with armed actors, and they systematically use their legitimacy, authority and/or control over resources to influence the conduct of armed actors.

Ideally, the support of the protection actor has enabled the community to acquire the necessary competencies to meaningfully engage the armed actor about its conduct. Moreover, the community structures in charge of these interactions are accepted by the entire community. The community then proceeds to use these structures and competencies to approach the armed actor in an attempt to change its conduct.

To do so, the community first need to establish a communication channel with the respective armed actor. Conflict-affected communities almost always have some type of regularized interaction with the armed actors operating near them. Troops and fighters control civilians at checkpoints or procure supplies from local business. Local militia fighters often have family members living in the communities with which they interact. Where relationships are more scarce, engagement between communities and armed actors can involve community peace committees or structures similar to the ones discussed above. Community leaders also often play a role, as do politicians who represent the community concerned. Even in contexts where no external protection actors are present, communities will usually try to establish channels of communication with the armed actors whose behavior affects them as well as with the stakeholders that are considered to have an influence over them.

However, the mere fact of having contact with an armed actor does not automatically imply that communities will feel that they can take the risk of bringing up potentially sensitive concerns related to harm caused by an armed group's fighters or troops. At times, external protection actors can act as facilitators or neutral go-betweens who help to create a safe channel for communities to engage armed actors about their conduct.

Once such contacts have been established, communities can use different types of leverage to encourage armed actors to take steps to reduce civilian harm. They can increase – or reduce – their political support for armed actors and thereby bestow or withdraw legitimacy from forces that claim to be fighting to defend them and their interests. Since community leaders like mayors, chiefs, imams, or priests usually command a lot of respect among armed actors in contexts such as Iraq, they can exercise a measure of authority over these groups and their members. Several protection actors also highlight that women's groups may, in certain situations, have strong influence over armed actors. Apart from these kinds of intangible links, communities can use their control over important resources like food, money or access to potential recruits to either incentivize positive behavior changes or to sanction misconduct.

Ideally, protection actors' involvement will eventually enable communities to reach a stage where they can maintain their engagement with armed actors without further external support, thus allowing the protection actor to withdraw from the situation.

The underlying logic of a community-based protection approach is to empower communities to act as influencers in the ways described above (see also Chapter 4 "Mobilizing influencers"). In contrast to individuals like traditional leaders or

Ideally, protection actors' involvement will eventually enable communities to reach a stage where they can maintain their engagement with armed actors without further external support.

more formalized entities like foreign governments, communities are seldom clearly identifiable or monolithic groups. They consist of a variety of fractions with unique interests and characteristics – and any protection intervention working with communities as influencers needs to reflect this.



Success factors: A community's trust in the protection actor and the degree of communal unity affect its ability to effectively engage armed actors.

Several signs can indicate that communities are on the right track when it comes to building and using their capacities to meaningfully engage with armed actors who are causing harm.

If the intervention is working...

...community members, especially those most at risk of harm stemming from armed actor conduct, accept and feel represented by community protection structures that were set up with the support of the protection actor.

...the community has a shared understanding of its rights and an agreed-upon sense of priorities regarding its interactions with the armed actor.

...community representatives' work with the protection actor has strengthened their relevant skills for engaging with armed actors.

...the channels set up to facilitate communities' engagement with armed actors are used regularly and consistently.

...communities continue to use similar processes for identifying their priorities and engaging with armed actors when the protection actor is no longer involved.

However, certain obstacles on the community level may hinder this capacity-building process.

The intervention may not work if...

...certain community members reject the protection actor because they doubt the organization's independence and suspect it of pursuing its own agenda rather than that of the community.

...intra-communal tensions increase as different community members compete over who has access to the protection actor and the resources it is expected to offer.

...there is a lack of clarity over who represents the community vis-à-vis the armed actor, in particular if several organizations implement community-based protection interventions simultaneously.

...certain community members object to the people chosen to represent them during contacts with armed actors and this contributes to tension in the community.

...marginalized groups in the community are excluded from capacity-building efforts by the protection actor, e.g., because they are under-represented in community protection committees or groups.

...the community does not feel prepared to confront the challenges and risks linked to engaging armed actors about their conduct.

...third parties with significant influence over the community, such as local government officials, reject the structures and individuals chosen to represent the community and/or oppose the involvement of the protection actor.

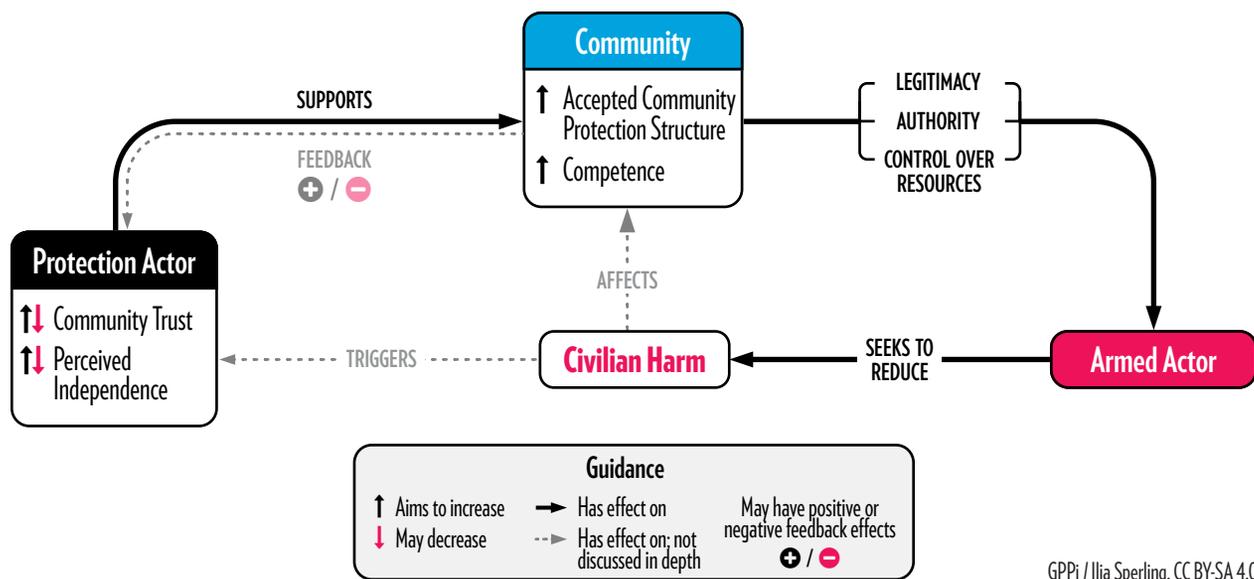
Success in building a community's capacity and competence in influencing armed actors will, to a large extent, depend on whether the community and its different subsections trust the protection actor enough to accept its involvement. It can be a big step for people to tell an external actor, such as an NGO, about the harm they have suffered at the hands of an armed group, especially if said group continues to present a threat to the community. The victims of such abuse need to trust the protection actor to handle their information responsibly, and they need to be convinced that it can actually do something about the harm they have experienced. It often takes time for protection actors to gain sufficient trust among violence-affected communities. For this reason, meaningful dialogue about civilian harm may only become possible after the protection actor has established its usefulness to the community through other activities, such as a relief assistance.

The extent to which a community is divided will have an important impact on efforts to establish credible and trusted community protection structures – especially when the divide pertains to different perceptions of and experiences with a specific armed actor and its conduct. The more polarized a community is, the more difficult it will be to establish structures that are accepted as representing the interests and concerns of all community members. Whether this is possible depends in part on the relationship particular groups and individuals have with the armed actor. While some community members may support the respective armed group, others may have been singled out by it as targets of harmful behavior. Some people in the community may profit from doing business with armed actors while others lose out as their property is destroyed. Marginalized groups, such as women, people with disabilities, ethnic, religious or other minorities, the elderly, or internally displaced persons, are generally most vulnerable to armed actor misconduct. However, their needs are often overlooked or treated as unimportant by more powerful community members. Armed actors may well try to exploit internal divisions within communities for their own benefit. The extent to which communities agree on which protection concerns should be prioritized during contacts with armed actors and who will do this on their behalf will likely have a significant effect on efforts to influence the conduct of armed actors. Many protection actors therefore prioritize strengthening community cohesion as part of their approach.

When it comes to community-based approaches, the protection actor's involvement becomes particularly relevant. Often, protection actors fail to prioritize the community's needs and existing structures over implementing their own intervention approach. In the balancing act that is supporting vulnerable groups by setting up new representation structures versus making use of established power dynamics and processes, protection actors need to be careful not to pursue their own agenda. If (some of) a community's genuine interests are not constructive for a peaceful resolution of relations with an armed actor, a community-based approach might not be best suited to influence armed actor conduct. It will also be difficult to achieve through a protection intervention.

Often, protection actors fail to prioritize the community's needs and existing structures over implementing their own intervention approach.

Figure 5: Capacitating Communities, Community Level



After establishing a cooperation with an affected community to build its capacity for engaging with armed groups, protection actors continue to work with the community as the latter resolves to exert pressure on the armed actor in question. However, in doing so, the protection actor must be careful not to endanger or misuse the community's trust and adapt to the community's specific context, needs and structure.

Step three: Influenced by the affected community, the armed actor is taking steps to improve its conduct toward civilians.

In the best-case scenario, the community has now increased the armed actor's awareness of both misbehavior by its own forces and the harm this is causing. Thanks to the community's involvement, the armed actor's willingness to address the problem has grown.



Success factors: The strength of the links between communities and armed actors is decisive for what protection interventions can achieve.

The factors that can undermine or advance progress toward this result largely mirror those identified in previous chapters, where we discuss the reaction of an armed actor to public criticism and interventions by influencers, respectively (see Chapter 3 "Naming and Shaming' Armed Actors" and Chapter 4 "Mobilizing Influencers"). However, there are several developments specific to the protection approach discussed in this chapter that can impact its success.

If the intervention is working...

...the discussions between community representatives and armed actors – and any progress made – are documented and shared with the community as a whole.

...the armed actor replaces or redeploys individual fighters or units that were the main focus of the community's complaints about misconduct.

...the armed actor adopts many community recommendations regarding its conduct.

The intervention may not work if...

...the armed actor further radicalizes following the intervention of the community.

...the armed actor reacts aggressively to communities raising their concerns about its conduct and to the protection actors that support them.

...the armed actor bypasses representatives chosen by the community to instead deal with community members it considers allies. As a result, support for community protection structures may decrease and intra-communal divisions may increase.

...the armed actor redeploys fighters and units responsible for most civilian harm elsewhere, thereby increasing the risk that other communities experience harm.

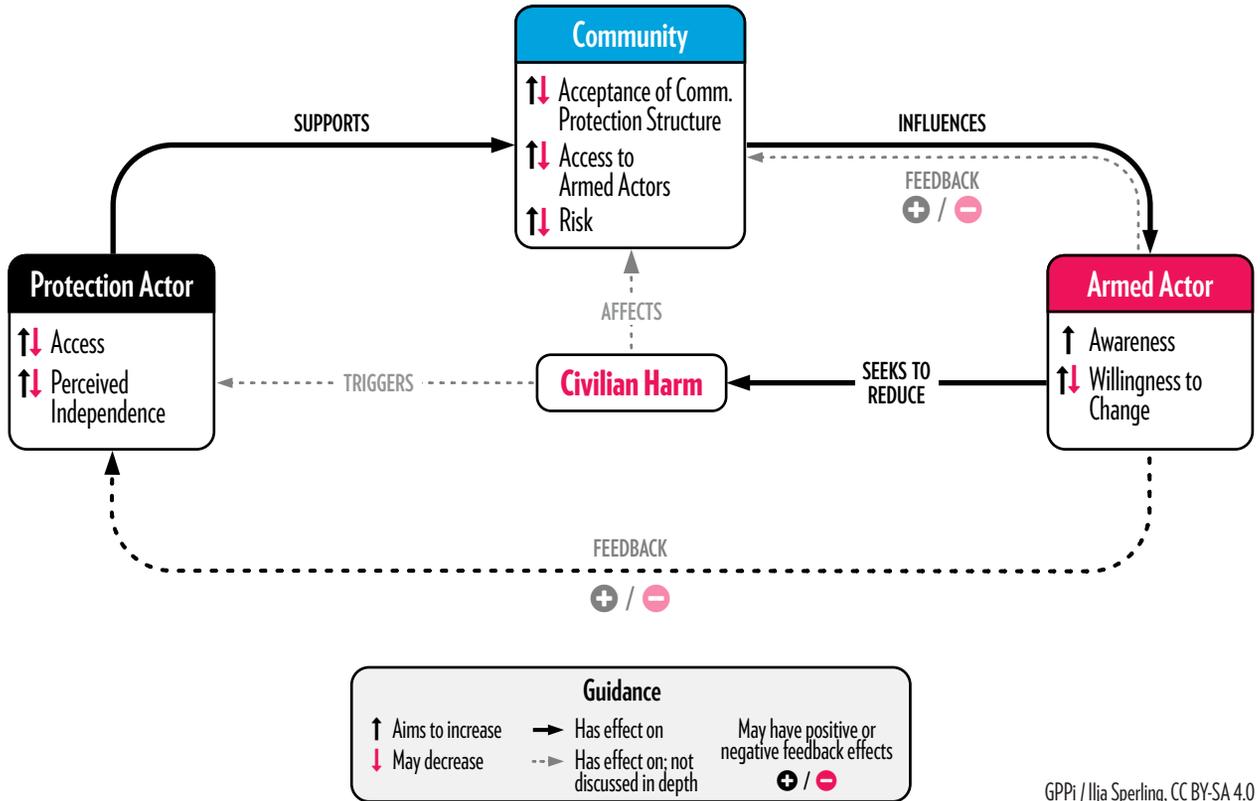
Proximity to armed actors typically enhances a community's leverage over them, most notably when armed groups are embedded in a community. In such cases, fighters are typically recruited from among the civilians for whom they claim to fight. Any armed group that claims to fight to defend the interests of a particular community can be expected to be more receptive to complaints by that same community when it comes to its own conduct. On the flip side, communities have fewer options to influence armed actors they are not in some way connected to. In such cases, armed groups usually feel less accountable to the civilians with whom they interact most directly.²⁴ In situations where there are few links between the two sides, or where armed actors are only connected to a particular sub-group of a community, it may be difficult to establish productive contacts. Here, the intervention of an external actor can be helpful to mediate between the two sides. However, even in such cases the protection actor should be careful when implementing a community-based approach – in many such instances, communities have so few links with and so little leverage over armed groups that the protection actor may produce more harm than good by encouraging communities to take the risks that are involved in engaging armed actors.

As is the case for the other protection approaches discussed above, an armed actor will likely weigh the costs of its behavior toward civilians against the related benefits in each situation. For instance, communities may struggle to convince an armed actor to stop the violent extortion of civilians at a checkpoint if that is an armed actor's main source of revenue. However, they may be able to convince it that allowing more trade and freer movement of people may produce more benefits for the armed group in the long term. The armed actor is more likely to make concessions to community demands if there are "easy wins," that is, measures to address particular kinds of civilian harm which require only limited internal change but are likely to be welcomed by the communities with which the armed group interacts. For example, while armed actors may refuse to give up anti-personnel landmines arguing that these weapons are

24 Terry and McQuinn, "The Roots of Restraint," p. 53.

an essential part of the group’s military strategy, they may agree not to place them in locations where they present a particularly grave danger to nearby communities.

Figure 6: Capacitating Communities, Armed Actor Level



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As the community exerts pressure on the armed actor in question, the armed actor reacts to approaches by the different involved parties. In the best case, it will seek to reduce instances of civilian harm and thereby positively reflect on the work of communities and protection actors. However, the armed group might also act negatively vis-à-vis those daring to influence them, e.g., by causing further harm to civilians or denying protection actors access to affected communities in the future.

6. Training Armed Actors

Example: Training Officers at Checkpoints in Yemen

A protection actor regularly trained front line soldiers in Yemen on the protection of civilians during military operations. One of the trainees later passed on to other soldiers what he had learned, including to an officer who had regularly shot at civilian cars that sped through checkpoints without stopping. During a follow-up visit by the training instructor, a car sped through the checkpoint, but the officer did not shoot. Instead, he called the next checkpoint and asked them to stop the vehicle to find out why it didn't stop before. Typically, drivers said they had not seen signs indicating a checkpoint or understood that they needed to stop the car. In this instance, when the instructor asked why the officer didn't shoot, he replied that the protection actor had taught him not to shoot.²⁵

The main condition for this type of intervention is that the armed actor has acknowledged the problems caused by the conduct of its forces, and has indicated that it is prepared to work with protection actors to address them. This willingness to act may well be the result of progress achieved by employing the three protection approaches previously discussed as well as through direct contacts between the protection actor and the armed actor. If this condition is met, the protection actor may help an armed group understand the structural factors that lead to civilian harm and may support it in addressing them through training and technical support.

However, even when armed actors claim that they are ready to take steps to improve their conduct, protection actors may not always have all the information they would need to assess whether these claims are sincere. It is considerably easier to evaluate how willing an armed actor really is to engage effectively with the protection actor and to change how its members behave toward civilians if the protection actor has deep insight into the force's internal organization. For example, protection actors that have a pre-existing relationship with particular armed actors – such as foreign military forces or international institutions – usually have a better understanding of the internal dynamics that govern an armed actor's behavior as well as of the factors that may limit its openness to working with external actors on what is likely to be a sensitive issue. Based on this inside knowledge, protection actors can design their support activities and adapt them to the armed actor's particular situation.

25 Examples based on “Reversing the Trend: Putting Civilians First. CIVIC’s 2021-25 Strategic Plan,” Center for Civilians in Conflict, last accessed September 8, 2021, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/reversing-the-trend/>.

Step one: Protection actors support an armed actor’s training and policy development and help build its technical capabilities.

In many instances, the protection actor and the armed actor start their cooperation by assessing how aware fighters are of the rules that apply to their conduct – and how capable the armed actor is to enforce these rules. They may also analyze documented evidence of civilian harm caused by the armed actor to identify its biggest shortcomings and to agree which gaps in knowledge and practice should be addressed with the support of the protection actor. Some armed actors are not even aware of the international and national legal frameworks that bind them, or they lack the policies, know-how and structures that are needed to comply with their legal obligations.²⁶ However, the results of such assessments alone are unlikely to determine what areas capacity-building efforts should focus on. Especially at the start of their cooperation with protection actors, armed actors may only be willing to accept measures that require limited changes to their way of operating.

Training by protection actors is often the least controversial and therefore a common approach to influencing armed actors’ conduct toward civilians. Such trainings can cover a wide range of topics – from basic awareness of international humanitarian law to military tactics specifically designed to minimize the risk that civilians are harmed during combat.²⁷ Protection actors may have to be flexible when it comes to deciding which rules to refer to: international legal regimes such as IHL are not always known or accepted as binding, especially by non-state armed groups. This means that protection actors may also choose to refer to other relevant norms rooted in local or religious traditions, which are often more familiar and thus acceptable to members of an armed actor.²⁸

Trainings also need to be adapted to the different hierarchical levels of an armed group as well as to the corresponding levels of responsibility. Protection actors often prioritize training officers, commanders or other decision-makers because they are assumed to have the biggest influence over the conduct of troops on the ground. Protection actors may also simply not have the resources and personnel to also train the rank-and-file. However, training may at times also include other capacity-building methods, such as military exercises that can support the operationalization of legal

26 Sandesh Sivakumaran, “Lessons for the law of armed conflict from commitments of armed groups: identification of legitimate targets and prisoners of war,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 882 (2011): p. 470, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S181638311100035X>.

27 Several authors have argued that for certain armed actors training has had a positive influence on attitudes and behavior. See Fiona Terry, Helen M. Kinsella, Scott Straus, “Fiona Terry of the International Committee of the Red Cross talks about *The Roots of Restraint in War* and the intersection of research and humanitarianism,” *Violence: An international journal* 1, no. 1 (2020): pp. 190–191, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2633002419899796>; Andrew Bell and Fiona Terry, “Combatant rank and socialization to norms of restraint: examining the Australian and Philippine armies,” *Empirical and Theoretical Research in International Relations* 47, no. 5 (2021): pp. 825–854, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2021.1881085>; Andrew Bell, “Military Culture and Restraint toward Civilians in War: Examining the Ugandan Civil Wars,” *Security Studies* 25, no. 3 (2016): pp. 488–518, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2016.1195626>.

28 For example, in Somalia the ICRC refers to “biri-ma-geydo” in its contacts with local armed actors. This is described as a “collection of practices that governs conflicts. It’s a mix of traditional elements and Sharia law.” “Somalia: Using traditional law in dialogues with armed groups,” ICRC, November 10, 2014, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/somalia-using-traditional-law-dialogues-armed-groups>.

While trainings can increase awareness of the rules governing armed actor conduct, short-term or one-off activities are unlikely to bring about a lasting improvement of fighters' behavior.

norms. Ideally, the content of such trainings should be closely related to the reality of conflict experienced by the participants. While trainings can increase awareness of the rules governing armed actor conduct, short-term or one-off activities are unlikely to bring about a lasting improvement of fighters' behavior. To have a longer-term impact, some protection actors therefore prioritize strengthening the capacity of the armed actor's own internal training system.

In addition to training efforts, some protection actors have helped armed actors to develop policies which translate abstract and general international legal rules into operational instructions. Several protection actors have tried to influence policymaking at the very highest level, e.g., by advising governments or military alliances such as NATO on protection-of-civilians policies that can regulate the conduct of local forces under their control. Protection actors have also participated in armed actor-led processes to operationalize high-level policies by including such guidelines into armed groups' own doctrines, codes of conduct, standard operating procedures, rules of engagement, military manuals, penal codes, and other related documents and guidance.

Since non-state armed actors cannot sign international treaties that still govern their conduct toward civilians in times of war, some protection actors have offered them alternative ways of showing their willingness to reduce civilian harm. Geneva Call's Deeds of Commitment are an example of a formalized pledge signed by non-state armed actors to comply with certain rules regulating their conduct toward civilians.²⁹ Albeit not binding in a strictly legal sense, such pledges can still be considered equivalent to a formal government policy on the protection of civilians. The Deeds of Commitment are generally complemented by a detailed implementation plan that defines the steps a signatory will take to meet its obligations. Moreover, the plan outlines the support needed from protection actors and often also includes steps aimed at allowing Geneva Call to monitor whether and how the armed actor has actually implemented measures to fulfill its stated commitment.

This is important because even when an armed actor has adopted policies related to minimizing civilian harm, there is no guarantee that it is willing and able to implement them. Protection actors engaged in protection policy advice thus need to pay particular attention to two questions: (1) Are the objectives of the policy and the means to achieve them clearly and unambiguously formulated? And (2) is there sufficient political, cultural and societal agreement around the policy? Ideally, policies governing the protection of civilians need to include guidance that lays out which entity has the authority to implement them – and determines the resources that can be used to do so. The language of the policy may have to be broad enough to capture many different strands of opinion, but the implementation plan should be specific enough to ensure the policy can be operationalized.³⁰

To monitor compliance with protection of civilian policies, protection actors have in some cases helped armed actors put in place guidance and tools to investigate any incidents where their conduct allegedly caused civilian harm. Some protection

29 Geneva Call, "How we work."

30 "Closing the gap: Implementation of Protection of Civilian Policies," Center for Civilians in Conflict, October 6, 2020, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/publications/policy/closing-the-gap/> - :text=This%20policy%20brief%2C%20%E2%80%9C%20Closing%20the%20Gap%3A%20Implementation,best%20route%20to%20ensure%20operationalization%20of%20policy%20commitments.

Contrary to what most protection actors can or are willing to do, military allies of an armed actor have the option of enhancing the protection of civilians by providing combat support like weapons, tactical advice and intelligence.

actors have also been advising armed actors on how to make amends for harm caused by its members, for example, by apologizing to civilian victims or making financial compensation payments.

Beyond support for training and policy development, some protection actors have focused on strengthening the technical capabilities of armed actors. Even if there is a will to protect civilians from harm, implementation can be a real challenge for many armed actors. The battle for Mosul in 2016/17 is but one example of a highly complex and dangerous situation of urban warfare in which armed actors needed significant know-how, tactical ability and the right equipment to be able to conduct operations in a way that allowed them to reach their military objectives while also respecting their protection obligations toward civilians.³¹

Contrary to what most protection actors can or are willing to do, military allies of an armed actor have the option of enhancing the protection of civilians by providing combat support like weapons, tactical advice and intelligence. Such support can improve an armed group's ability to more precisely target military objectives, thereby reducing (the risk of) harm to civilians.³² In some cases, such allies may also deploy military advisors who can counsel the armed actor on how to avoid harm to civilians during its operations. In principle, a military ally's support 'on the battlefield' should also give it significant inside knowledge about as well as influence over an armed actor. If successful, this kind of cooperation can result in less immediate harm to civilians and simultaneously improve the military ally's ability to influence armed actor conduct in the long term.

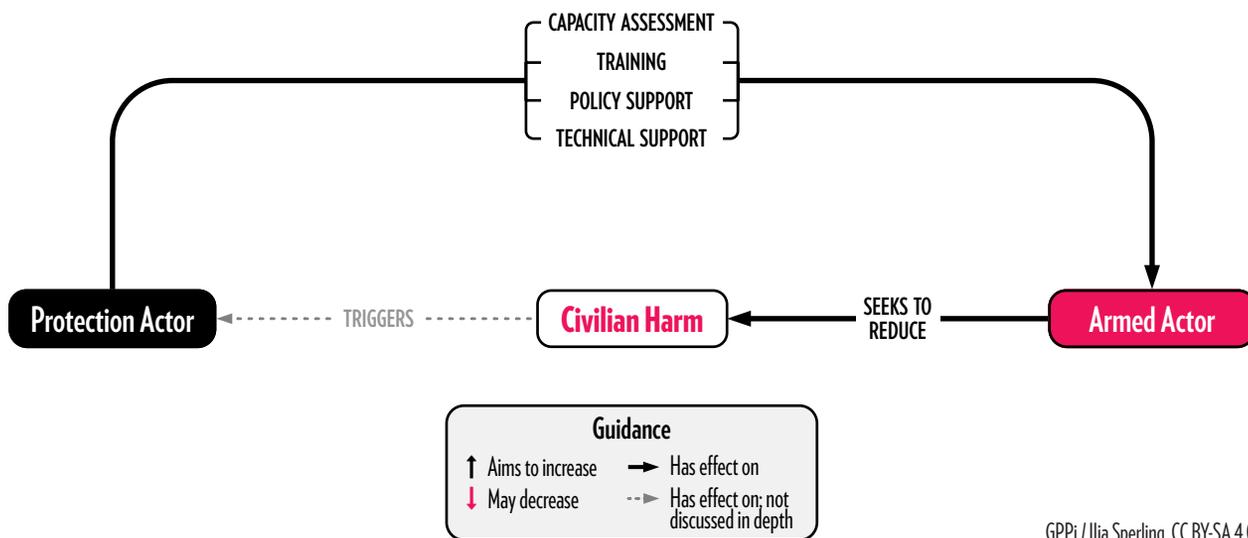
In situations where armed actors directly interact with civilians during acute hostilities – such as when they manage detainees or screen civilians fleeing enemy-controlled territory – the risk of civilian harm is particularly high. In these situations, non-military protection actors can provide armed actors with essential information regarding the presence and needs of civilians, which in turn permits armed groups to adapt the conduct of their forces accordingly. Some protection actors use so-called deconfliction systems to inform armed actors about the location of civilian targets that must not be attacked. Some have also helped armed actors put in place systems that aim to improve the tracking of civilian casualties caused by its forces as well as communication channels that allow conflict-affected communities to report alleged instances of harm.³³

31 Ruben Stewart, "Lessons Encountered During the Battle for Mosul," *NZ Army Journal* 4, (2018), accessed May 30, 2022; "Protection of Civilians in Mosul: Identifying Lessons for Contingency Planning," Center for Civilians in Conflict and InterAction, October 17, 2017, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.interaction.org/documents/protection-of-civilians-in-mosul-identifying-lessons-for-contingency-planning/>.

32 "Allies, Partners and Proxies," p. 53.

33 Marla B. Keenan, "Operationalizing Civilian Protection in Mali: The Case for a Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis, and Response Cell," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 2 (2013): Art. 21, accessed May 30, 2022, <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.ba>.

Figure 7: Training Armed Actor, Protection Actor Level



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After the protection actor has established sufficient trust in the armed actor’s willingness to change, the protection actor and armed actor analyze where the biggest issues lie and how to best address them. The protection actor then supports the armed actor in making the necessary changes that are required to improve the latter’s conduct toward civilians.

Step two: The armed actor’s capacity to ensure compliance with relevant rules and norms, and to thereby reduce civilian harm caused by its forces, has improved.

If capacity-building efforts are successful, the number and severity of instances of civilian harm caused by the armed actor decrease as a result of its improved ability to control the conduct of its forces and to comply with IHL and other relevant rules and norms.



Success factors: The success of capacity-building efforts hinges on the extent to which the armed actor is committed to improving its behavior.

A number of different signs can indicate that the training is on the right track in terms of helping the armed actor change its behavior to the better.

If the intervention is working...

...the armed actor communicates with third parties about its efforts to strengthen its capacities and thereby signals that it is ready to be held accountable for its conduct.

...the armed actor references international humanitarian law and other relevant rules and norms in its own training curricula, codes of conduct, and policies.

...both commanders and rank-and-file troops or fighters are more aware of their legal obligations regarding the treatment of civilians and have a clearer understanding of how they can comply with these obligations.

...there are examples of the armed actor investigating and – if allegations are confirmed – sanctioning infractions by individual units or fighters.

...affected communities and other protection actors monitoring the conduct of the armed actor confirm that behavior toward civilians has been improving.

The following developments could, on the other hand, indicate that the approach is falling short of its goal to improve armed actor conduct toward civilians to reduce civilian harm even though the armed actor has engaged in training.

The intervention may not work if...

...measures taken to investigate and sanction misconduct by individual units or fighters increase tensions within the armed group and therefore challenge the ability of its leadership to pursue the stated objective to reduce civilian harm.

...the armed actor misappropriates material aid provided with the purpose of reducing civilian harm, such as weapons or intelligence, to in fact cause more civilian harm.

...the armed actor uses its limited cooperation with a protection actor as a fig leaf to deflect pressure from other stakeholders.

...support efforts by the protection actor focus on ‘low-hanging fruit’ and therefore have little impact on the armed actor’s most serious patterns of misconduct toward civilians.

...the protection actor’s willingness to document and criticize harmful conduct decreases because it is afraid of losing its privileged access to the armed actor.

...close cooperation with a particular armed actor has a negative impact on the perceived independence of the protection actor, which could result in rival armed actors and their allies limiting the protection actor’s capacity to provide impartial assistance and to be present on the ground.

This protection approach is based on the premise that an armed actor is willing to change its conduct toward civilians. How genuine that commitment to improve is determines the chances of success. If an armed actor primarily undertakes capacity development because it feels it has little choice but to comply with external demands, its readiness to improve its conduct may remain limited or even dwindle completely once the protection actor’s support diminishes.

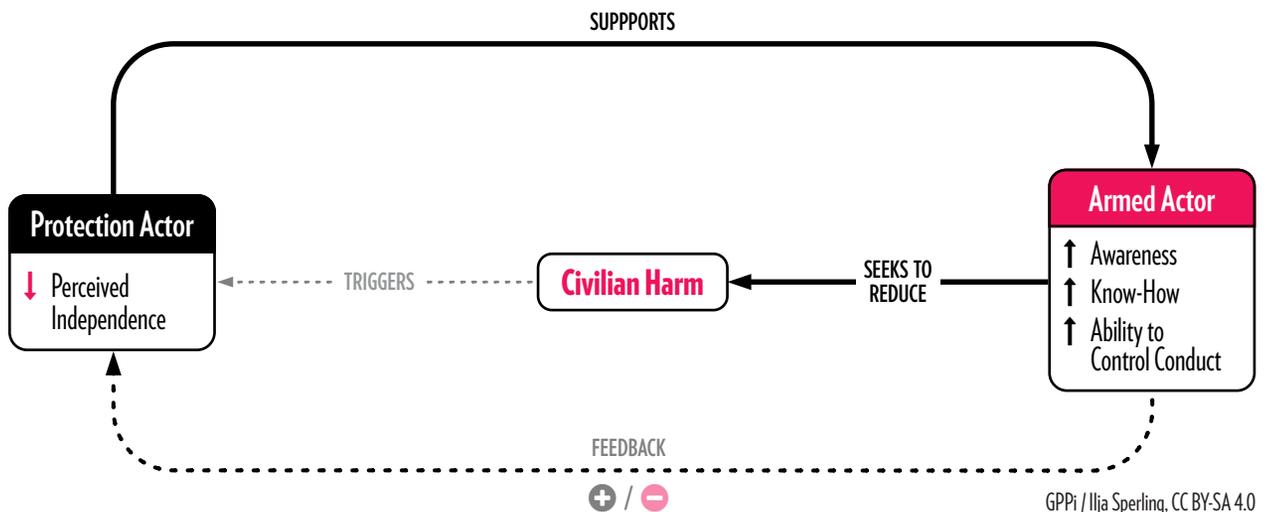
The internal organizational structure of an armed group is also likely to have a significant impact on any attempt to improve its capacity to reduce and prevent harmful behavior. The types of activities protection actors conduct as part of this approach often rely on an armed actor having put in place established structures and rules, such as training systems or policies, that apply across the board. They are also based on the assumption that the armed actor’s leadership has sufficient command and control over its forces to be able to institute important changes. However, in more decentralized armed forces with few codified rules, change can happen in fairly unstructured ways that are as much bottom-up as they are top-down. In such cases of loose command-and-control structures, it will likely be very challenging, perhaps even impossible, to develop and deploy the type of capacity-building approach discussed here.³⁴

34 Terry and McQuinn, “The Roots of Restraint,” p. 21 following. Page 24 features a useful typology of armed actors according to their internal structure, ranging from very centralized top-down organizations to community-embedded highly decentralized organizations.

The timing of any initiative to build armed actor capacity can also be important: since the aim is to prevent civilian harm, the ideal moment to develop this capacity would be at peacetime – to ensure all necessary policies, guidelines and structures are in place in case armed conflict breaks out. However, armed actors and the authorities who control them may not be particularly interested in engaging in such activities when conflict is not imminent, as the problem of armed actor misconduct toward civilians seems far away and theoretical or insignificant. At the same time, engaging an armed group that is actively fighting in an ongoing conflict is also difficult since its leadership or forces likely will not have the time or choose to prioritize their military success and the protection of their own fighters above any efforts to protect civilians.

For a protection actor to be involved in supporting the capacity development of armed actors in this way requires a particular skill set and expertise. Civilian protection actors involved in capacity building often draw on the expertise of staff who previously occupied senior roles in the military and are therefore familiar with the discourse and way of thinking of armed organizations. Military allies working to enhance the protection of civilians by trying to improve the conduct of the armed actors they support can be expected to have the required expertise. In some cases, they also have added leverage over an armed actor – if they can link their capacity-building support with other benefits, such as weapons deliveries that are essential to the latter.

Figure 8: Training Armed Actors, Armed Actor Level



In the best case, the armed actor reacts to training by and cooperation with the protection actor by reducing harm to civilians due to greater awareness of the issue, more know-how regarding how to implement harm reduction efforts in different scenarios, and because it can control individual fighters, who oblige with norms and rules. However, the protection actor could suffer some damage to its reputation by being perceived as affiliated with the armed actor.

8. Conclusion

Ways Forward for Protecting Civilians from Harm

In this paper, we presented four models outlining different logics of cause and effect that underpin the main approaches to protecting civilians from harm in contexts of armed conflict (see Figure 9).

These models are intended to help protection actors conduct the necessary analysis to decide whether to engage in efforts to change armed actor conduct, and to design their approaches if they do. They are also meant to help them better use the synergies between different approaches and to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of their interventions.

The Key to Protection: Extensive Context Analysis Pre-Intervention

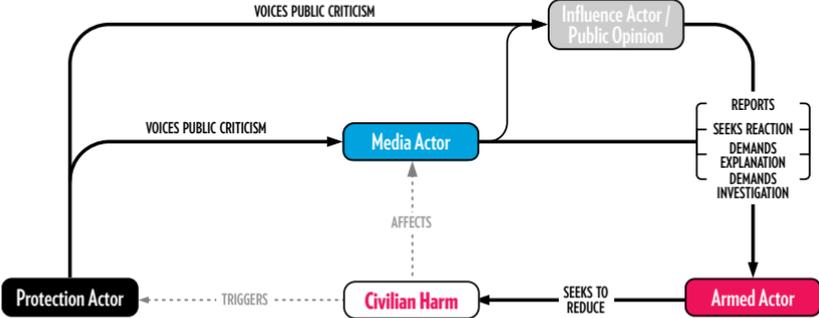
It is important to emphasize that we do not propose a step-by-step manual for how something as complex as human behavior can be influenced in all circumstances. Protection actors have stressed time and again that the chances of success of any effort to influence the behavior of fighters or soldiers largely depends on the specificities of each situation. However, by systematizing the underlying logic of key protection approaches, we were able to identify the main factors that influence the likelihood of success for each approach. While the models proposed here do not offer ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches to preventive protection for every situation, they can help guide protection organizations as to what aspects of a given context they need to understand to decide whether to engage in this space – and if so, how to go about it.

First, protection actors need to gather sufficient evidence and data showing misconduct before they attempt to hold an armed actor accountable for its behavior and demand improvements. Such data is generally obtained by interviewing victims of misconduct by armed actors and/or by drawing on secondary sources, such as reporting by other organizations or the media. If the protection actor believes that the observed harm to civilians merits a response in the form of targeting armed actor conduct, a multitude of factors regarding the protection environment, the protection actor’s own internal organization, as well as the armed actor need to be considered to decide on the approach that is best suited. For instance, in a very fragmented media environment where outlets mostly report into echo chambers or act as propaganda channels for different conflict parties, a “naming and shaming” approach could be difficult to implement. If the armed actor signals that it would like to cooperate on building its capacity to improve its conduct, an intervention that trains fighters could be suitable – but only if protection staff have the required expertise on military contexts. At the same time, if an affected community is highly polarized, an approach that focuses on building community representation structures tasked to engage armed actors might easily fail.

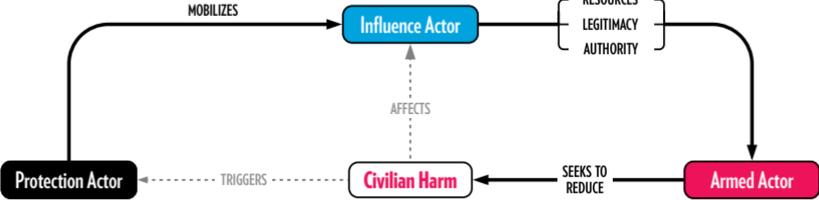
Protection actors have stressed time and again that the chances of success of any effort to influence the behavior of fighters or soldiers largely depends on the specifics of each situation.

Figure 9: Logic Models on the Approaches to Protecting Civilians From Harm in Contexts of Armed Conflict

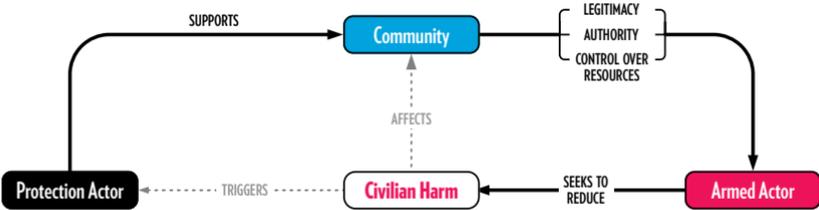
“Naming and Shaming” Armed Actors



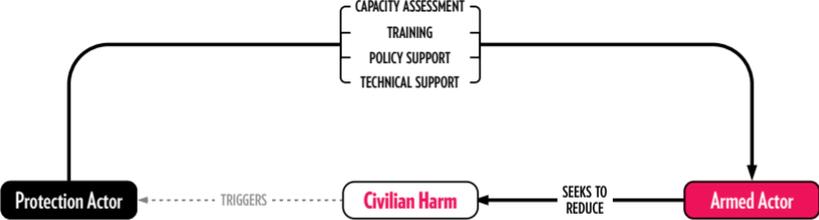
Mobilizing Influencers



Capacitating Communities



Training Armed Actors



A complete overview of the key factors we identified as part of this research can be found in a complementary summary and user guide, which can help protection organizations navigate this decision-making and planning process.

Also Key: Cooperation Between Protection Actors to Implement Complementing Approaches

Apart from supporting a thorough assessment of the specific context in which protection actors operate, the protection approaches modelled here could also help organizations working on preventive protection design their interventions in a way that complements related efforts by other actors and allows individual protection organizations to draw on their respective strengths in the pursuit of their common objective – promoting the protection of civilians. Some fictional examples illustrate how this could work:

- A local human rights organization regularly collects data that shows the civilian harm caused by the conduct of an armed actor. Because of concerns about the security of its staff, the protection organization does not use this data to publicly criticize the armed actor. Instead, it passes the evidence on to an international organization that can publicly condemn the armed actor without incurring undue risk. This also helps other protection actors that have been trying behind the scenes to mobilize influential stakeholders to put pressure on the armed actor to change its conduct.
- An international NGO has been providing regular training sessions on IHL and other relevant legal norms to the members of an armed group. In parallel, an external military ally is supporting the armed actor with tactical military advice and weapons. To enhance complementarity, the military ally informs the NGO about specific problems regarding the conduct of the armed actor toward civilians. The NGO adapts the content of its training to address these issues.
- An international humanitarian organization wants to support efforts by conflict-affected communities to influence the conduct of armed actors operating near them. As the organization has limited contacts with these communities, it partners with a local NGO that has been setting up community-based structures for resolving conflicts and promoting reconciliation. The local NGO's network allows the international organization to assess the community's protection needs and expectations. Based on this assessment, the international organization decides to fund and train the local NGO so that it can include protection-related knowledge and skills in its work to support communities.

The logic models can provide a starting point to monitor and evaluate the progress of protection approaches, thus enabling protection actors to adapt their efforts accordingly.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Testing Clear Assumptions of Cause and Effect to Diminish the Attribution Gap

Finally, the most important aspect about protection approaches is whether they actually work – meaning whether they eventually change the situation of civilians who live among armed groups for the better. The logic models can provide a starting point to

monitor and evaluate the progress of protection approaches, thus enabling protection actors to adapt their efforts accordingly. Many of the preventive protection actors we interviewed for this research emphasized the challenges of tracking their progress and assessing the outcomes of their efforts to influence the conduct of armed actors. It can be particularly difficult to establish whether it was indeed the protection intervention that caused a change in the behavior of an armed group. The models presented in this paper may be helpful in this respect as they lay out and describe, in a step-by-step manner, the interactions between causes and effects. In this way, they also provide indicators for each level of cause-and-effect dynamics, which can be used to assess results. The assumptions and success factors can also be tested. As such, the logic models help to counteract the attribution problem. In the corresponding summary and user guide, protection actors can find a list of questions that can be used to assess these factors.

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Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi)

Reinhardtstr. 7, 10117 Berlin, Germany

Phone +49 30 275 959 75-0

Fax +49 30 275 959 75-99

gppi@gppi.net

gppi.net