

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

Summary and User Guide

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Every day, civilians suffer in violent 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. 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 a longer report delves into the steps involved in each of the logic models, this summary and guide lays out the practical use cases for our findings.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

In armed conflict, civilians may be harmed in various ways: their rights may be violated by acts of violence, such as torture or sexual violence at the hands of armed groups. They may also suffer indirect consequences, including threats to their livelihood, the risk of famine or the breakdown of essential infrastructure. A multitude of actors, local organizations as well as international institutions have been working all over the world to prevent these instances of civilian harm. In our study *The Logic of Protection Approaches (2022)*¹, we identify four main approaches through which such protection actors influence armed forces' conduct toward civilians in practice: (1) **“naming and shaming” armed actors**; (2) **mobilizing influencers**; (3) **capacitating communities**; and (4) **training armed actors**. We then construct abstract models around each of the four approaches that break down their underlying logics, outlining how each approach intends to change armed actor behavior and how it can fall short of its goals or even backfire. These logic models have been developed based on interviews with protection organizations and researchers from around the world, as well as a literature review and two workshops. At times, we underscore our findings with examples from a case study from the post-ISIS areas in northern Iraq.

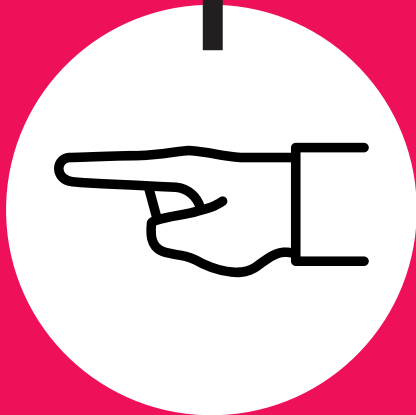
While the report dives into each step of the logic models and breaks down their meaning, this summary and user guide lays out the use cases for our findings. The logic models can help organizations understand what analysis they should conduct before deciding whether to engage in preventive protection and which approach they should choose. These models can also help practitioners identify the risks associated with each approach and pinpoint the indicators they can use to check if their intervention is on the right track.

In doing so, the logic models serve an additional purpose: facilitating the creation of synergies between different protection actors and complementary approaches. While we present each model individually, they are not mutually exclusive and their modes of action often feed into one another. For example, one key target of a “naming and shaming” approach are actors with leverage over the armed group, which plays directly into the hands of protection organizations seeking to mobilize such influencers. The models can also help protection actors to draw on their respective strengths to collaborate with likeminded organizations in order to promote the protection of civilians. While, for instance, an international NGO may excel at training armed groups in international humanitarian law, the effect of its intervention could be multiplied if it were to partner with a military ally of the armed group that can point out specific problems regarding the conduct toward civilians within the armed actor’s military operations. Protection actors should make sure to keep in mind the connections between the logic models when using them to design, monitor and evaluate a protection approach.

¹ This research project has been made possible by the generous support of UK Research and Innovation and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

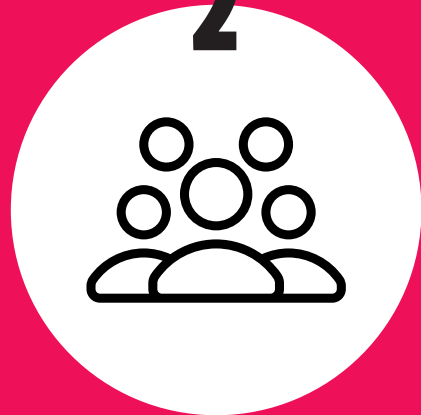
Four Approaches to Protecting Civilians

1



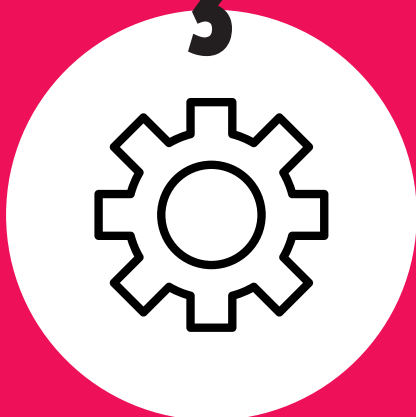
“Naming and Shaming”
Armed Actors

2



Mobilizing
Influencers

3



Capacitating
Communities

4



Training
Armed Actors

1

“Naming and Shaming” Armed Actors

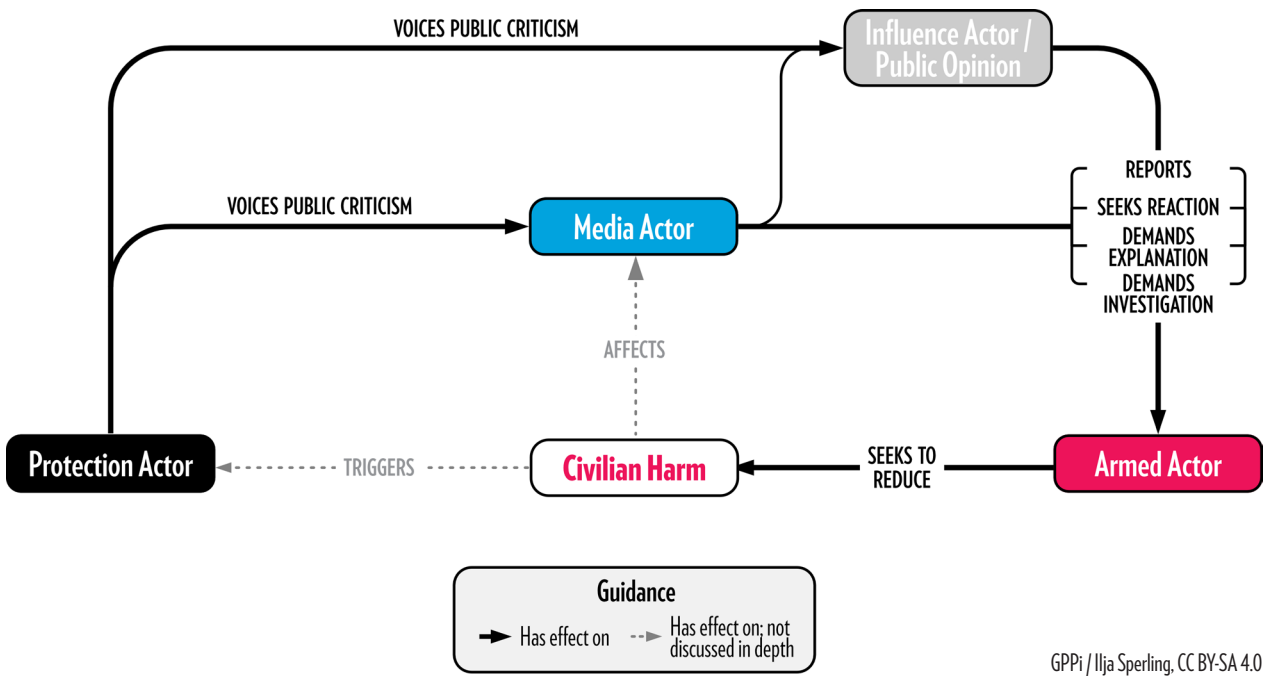
Key Logic

When media attention is brought to the harmful deeds of armed groups, pressure on them may increase enough to make them address the issue.

Publicly calling out armed groups or specific states for their forces’ behavior toward civilians is a long-established strategy used by protection actors to draw attention to incidents of civilian harm. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are among the institutions known for using this “naming and shaming” approach. Protection actors collect and widely spread information about armed groups’ misconduct either in their own publications, which are then picked up by the media, or by directly providing media outlets with evidence of violations. In doing so, they seek to sway public opinion and inform influencers who have leverage over the armed actor, thus increasing pressure on the armed group to address the factors leading to the reported violations.

As a first step, protection actors must collect information about these violations. Strong evidence and good presentation are crucial for this: the more founded, tangible and relevant the claims appear, the more likely it is that the media will pick them up and the more credible the allegations will appear to the wider public. To establish wrongdoing, protection actors can juxtapose an armed actor’s behavior with its previous commitments as well as with international and national laws and other relevant norms. In addition to informing the public of occurrences of misconduct, media coverage can also lead journalists to ask the armed actor or its allies to comment on the accusations. Here again, documenting violence against civilians is key for countering potential denial from the accused armed group. Media coverage may also encourage third parties with influence over the armed group to pressure it into offering a public reaction and committing to changing its behavior (thus complementing Approach 2, “Mobilizing Influencers”). In this context, protection actors may gain an entry point to train armed groups in civilian protection (complementing Approach 4, “Training Armed Actors”). The “naming and shaming” approach aims to raise armed groups’ awareness of their violations of civilians’ rights and to increase pressure from influencers and the public so that the armed actor will avoid future misconduct.

Figure 1: “Naming and Shaming” Armed Actors



This graphic shows the processes underlying a “naming and shaming” approach to affect armed actor behavior toward civilians. If you want to know more, read Chapter 3 “Naming and Shaming’ Armed Actors” in the long report: gppi.net/poc-iraq.

2

Mobilizing Influencers

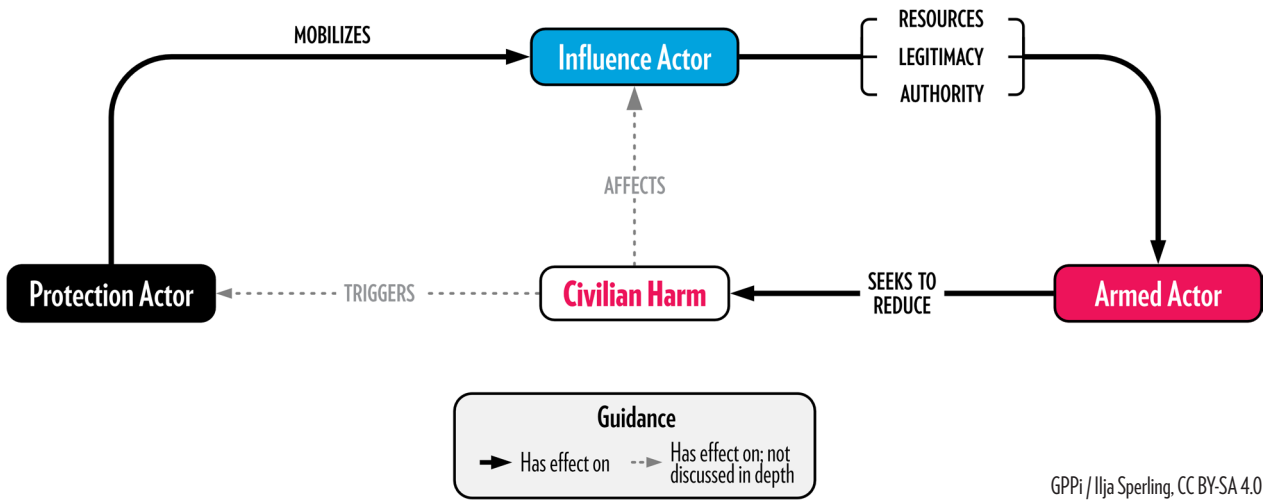
Key Logic

Convincing influencers to exert pressure on or persuade armed groups to change their harmful behavior can lead armed actors to improve their treatment of civilians.

Influencers are actors that have some degree of leverage over an armed group, e.g., through personal ties, control over the economic or political gains of the group, or potential influence over its legitimacy. They can include international entities (such as the United Nations or the African Union) as well as national governments, religious or traditional leaders, local businesses, or diasporas. A protection approach that mobilizes influencers takes advantage of the fact that armed groups rarely operate in isolation from their environment. For example, armed groups may use ideology or religion to establish their legitimacy (thus giving religious scholars or ideological leaders strong influence over them); they may also depend on local businesspeople for their supply of basic goods or may be funded by a government, which is, in turn, sensitive to public scrutiny. If third parties hold sufficient power over the armed group, they are better positioned to effect change within said group than protection actors themselves.

To implement this approach, protection actors must identify which influencers are best suited for enacting change. Ideally, protection practitioners can draw on existing networks in their region of operation to find out who could best influence a given armed actor. Once identified, approaching influencers can be difficult – particularly if national governments or key international actors consider the armed group to be a terrorist organization or if the group is under prosecution for criminal offences. In such cases, influencers may not want to be known to associate with the armed group in question. Thus, protection actors may consider using intermediaries to relay their concerns to stakeholders close to the armed actor. When a connection is established, influencers need to be persuaded to use their leverage over the armed group. The most effective way to achieve this depends on the type of influencer. Democratic governments, for example, may be sensitive to arguments based on international law, while Muslim leaders in a context like Iraq may be more easily convinced by evidence of a Sharia law violation. By mobilizing influencers to address the issue with the armed group, protection actors pursue the same goals as when voicing public criticism: to make the armed actor aware of its misconduct and more inclined to address it.

Figure 2: Mobilizing Influencers



This graphic shows how a protection actor may affect armed actor behavior toward civilians when mobilizing influencers with leverage over the armed actor in question. If you want to know more, read Chapter 4 “Mobilizing Influencers” in the long report: gppi.net/poc-iraq.

3

Capacitating Communities

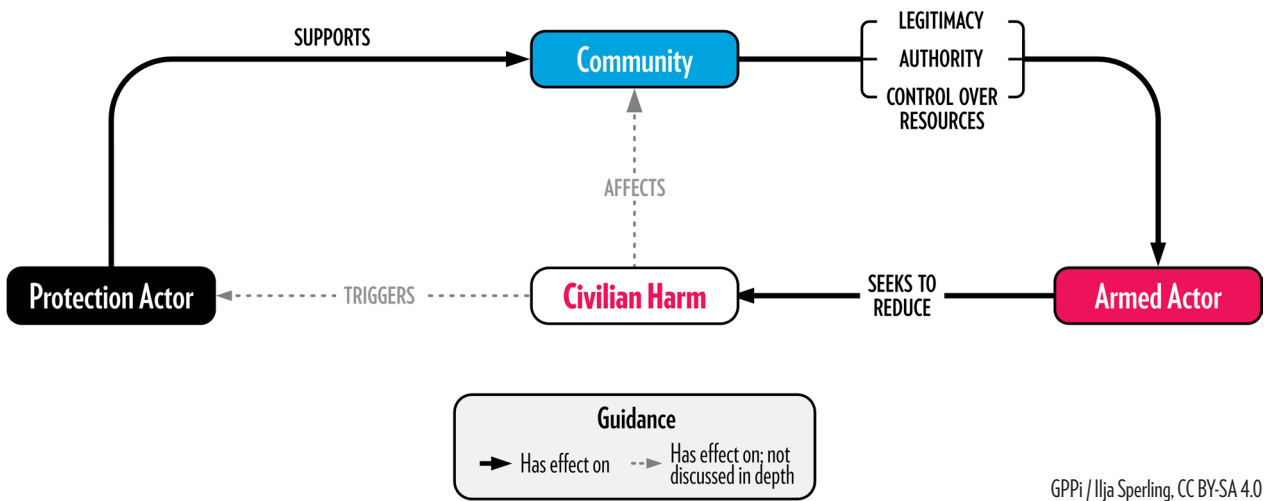
Key Logic

The protection actor supports communities so that they may make better use of their capacities to influence the armed actor's behavior toward them.

In addition to advocating on their behalf, protection actors can also help communities protect themselves against harm at the hands of armed groups. Conflict-affected communities almost always interact with the armed actors operating near them and rarely remain passive when their members' rights are violated. However, directly dealing with armed groups is dangerous for citizens, as situations can easily escalate to cause more harm. This is where protection actors can step in and help communities build the capacities needed to constructively engage with armed groups.

To provide effective support, protection actors usually start by analyzing what kinds of violations communities experience at the hands of armed groups, what affected populations think should be done, and which responses are already in place. Based on this information, protection actors can offer needs-based training and resources to help strengthen community-driven approaches. This can include providing evidence and data concerning the harm that civilians experience, enabling them to address armed actor's misconduct in a more systematic and quantifiable way, teaching communities peacebuilding and negotiation strategies, and providing material aid to reduce vulnerabilities. An important step in this process is identifying or creating structures – such as peace committees or community representatives – which are perceived as legitimate in speaking for the community and can thereby formalize interactions with the armed group. Once a community feels sufficiently equipped to risk engaging with the armed actor, they can use their leverage to influence its behavior. Communities can also increase – or reduce – their political support for armed actors and thus bestow or withdraw legitimacy from forces that claim to fight on their behalf and their interests. Since community leaders such as mayors, chiefs, imams, and priests command a great deal of respect among armed actors in cases like Iraq, they can exercise a measure of authority over them. Communities can also use their control over important resources such as food, money or new recruits to incentivize positive behavior changes or sanction misconduct.

Figure 3: Capacitating Communities



This graphic shows the underlying logic of supporting communities in building their capacities to influence an armed actor's behavior toward them. If you want to know more, read Chapter 5 "Capacitating Communities" in the long report: gppi.net/poc-iraq.

4

Training Armed Actors

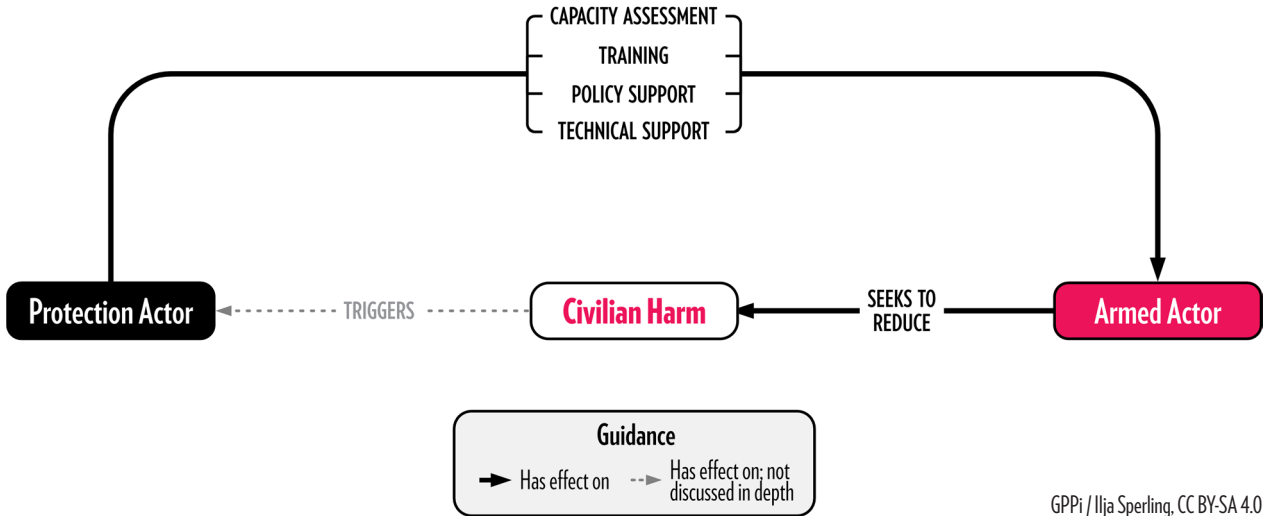
Key Logic

The protection actor helps an armed group who has expressed willingness to change its behavior understand which of its structural factors lead to civilian harm and addresses them through training and technical support.

An armed group that has acknowledged the problems caused by its forces and has decided to address them – perhaps as a result of one or more of the above-mentioned approaches – may need assistance doing so. One important note: the armed actor’s willingness to change and improve its conduct is a precondition for this approach. By working directly with those responsible for civilian harm, protection actors can help the armed group to move in a more desirable direction. However, this approach generates risks for protection actors: cooperation with an armed group, especially one accused of misconduct, may lead them to lose their reputation as independent. The armed group may also use this cooperation to improve its standing without actually intending to change its behavior. Therefore, protection actors providing training to armed actors should carefully monitor the group’s willingness to change.

Once both sides have decided to cooperate, the protection actor usually starts by assessing the armed actor’s capacities: To what extent are fighters aware of their international and national legal obligations toward civilians? Do any gaps in the armed group’s knowledge and practice appear when analyzing data about past violations? The least controversial and therefore most common way of addressing these questions is to train the armed actor. Training can cover a wide range of topics, from basic awareness of international humanitarian law to military tactics designed to minimize the risk of civilian harm during combat. In addition, protection actors can help armed groups to develop policies that translate abstract, general international legal obligations into instructions that fighters can easily grasp and operationalize. They may also choose to provide material support or technical guidance in order to increase an armed group’s capacities to follow such rules. Finally, to monitor compliance with protection policies, protection actors can support armed groups in implementing tools to investigate incidents where their conduct may have harmed civilians.

Figure 4: Training Armed Actors



This graphic shows the process behind training armed actors to enhance the protection of civilians. If you want to know more, read Chapter 6 “Training Armed Actors” in the long report: gppi.net/poc-iraq.

What Factors to Consider When Deciding on an Approach?

While these models are abstract, concrete protection interventions must fit their context. The logic models outlined above are intended to help organizations plan, design and implement these interventions. Organizations can use them to identify what aspects of the context they need to understand in order to decide whether they should engage in preventive protection and which approach (or approaches) best fit their individual situation. The following is a non-exhaustive list of factors that we believe can affect the success of these various approaches. When designing an intervention to protect civilians from harm, organizations can use this list as a starting point to understand what to consider.

In the Protection Environment

| Factors to Consider | Protection Approach |
|---|--|
| <i>Freedom of expression:</i> If the media cannot report on an issue freely, then media coverage will have a hard time influencing public opinion. | “Naming and Shaming” |
| <i>Credibility of media outlets:</i> An effective campaign must use media outlets that are perceived as credible by the target audience. | |
| <i>Media reach:</i> Awareness of the protection actor’s concerns will remain low if the media covering the story has a limited scope or does not reach the target audiences. | |
| <i>Influencer reliability:</i> The influencer may not act as desired. Such actions could include ignoring the protection actor, breaking off contact or not following through on a promise to engage with the armed group. | Mobilizing influencers |
| <i>Community polarization:</i> The more that a community is polarized, the more difficult it will be to establish structures that are perceived as legitimately representing the interests and concerns of all community members. | Capacitating communities |
| <i>Proximity of the community or influencer to the armed group:</i> The more closely the community or influencer is linked with the armed group, the easier it will be for them to assert influence over it. | Mobilizing influencers / Capacitating communities |
| <i>Third party involvement:</i> Third parties with significant influence over the community, such as local government officials, can block the involvement of the protection actor or the community’s chosen representatives. | Capacitating communities |

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Overload of community-based interventions: If several protection actors simultaneously create community representation committees, this may result in a lack of clarity on who actually represents the community vis-à-vis the armed actor and could diffuse protection efforts.

Capacitating communities

With Regard to Armed Actors

| Factors to Consider | Protection Approach |
|---|-----------------------|
| <i>Dependence of the armed actor on a positive public image:</i> Armed actors that do not heavily depend on community or political support may have little concern for their reputation. Thus, they may ignore or even enjoy external criticism. | “Naming and Shaming” |
| <i>Difficulty of addressing civilian harm:</i> The armed actor is more likely to concede to demands if they can derive “easy wins” that require only limited internal change and offer reputational benefits. However, these changes may have little impact on the armed actor’s more serious misconduct. | All |
| <i>Sincerity:</i> If the armed actor agrees to protection training only because it feels pressured to do so and not because it is actually willing to change, then real improvements will be hard to achieve. <i>Armed actors’ organizational structure:</i> Protection training will not be effective if the armed group lacks structure and if its leadership has limited control over the behavior of individual fighters. | Training armed actors |
| <i>Cost-benefit analysis:</i> Misconduct toward civilians, such as raids or extortion, may have economic or other benefits for the armed group that need to be considered and weighed against potential disadvantages (such as a bad public reputation) when advocating for a change in behavior. | All |

In Protection Organizations

| Factors to Consider | Protection Approach |
|---|--|
| <i>Trust in the protection actor:</i> The protection actor will only be able to gather evidence concerning violations if affected communities trust that it will use this information responsibly and to their benefit. | “Naming and Shaming” / Capacitating communities |
| <i>Ability to gain and maintain access to influencers:</i> Even large, respected organizations must have the right people in the right place at the right time. A sufficiently deep insight into local dynamics and modes of communication as well as established relationships are key to gaining the ear of relevant influencers. | Mobilizing influencers |
| <i>Military expertise:</i> Armed group trainings are more effective when they speak to military realities and use military concepts and language. To have the greatest success, civilian protection actors must have this expertise on hand within their staff. | Training armed actors |
| <i>Resources:</i> Successful protection approaches require long-term commitment from a sufficient number of staff members with targeted expertise. | All |

How Could the Different Approaches Backfire?

Several complex dynamics can affect the practical outcome of a protection approach. Like any intervention conducted in a fragile context, protection approaches run the risk of not only being ineffective, but also causing active harm. For organizations that want to engage with civilians, authorities and/or armed groups in conflict or post-conflict situations, developing risk management strategies early in the planning process is therefore paramount. During our research, we came across several scenarios in which the four protection approaches could backfire. At a minimum, the following risks should be considered when designing and implementing a protection approach.

Potential Risks for Protection Actors

| Risks | Protection Approach |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Undermined credibility:</i> When presented with evidence of their violations and requests for a change in their behavior, influencers or armed actors may try to push back by publicly discrediting the protection actor and portraying it as biased.</p> | <p>“Naming and Shaming” / Mobilizing influencers</p> |
| <p><i>Restricted future action:</i> Influencers or armed groups may restrict the protection actor’s access to victims of misconduct, thus limiting its ability to deliver assistance and collect evidence. The risk of losing access to people in need may deter other protection actors from criticizing the armed actor.</p> | |
| <p><i>Decreasing critical lens:</i> The protection actor may be less willing to document and criticize harmful conduct if it fears that it could lose privileged access to the armed group.</p> | <p>Training armed actors</p> |
| <p><i>Impaired perception:</i> Close cooperation with a specific armed group can negatively affect perceptions of the protection actor’s independence, hindering its work on the ground or alongside other armed actors.</p> | |

Potential Risks for Civilians

| Risks | Protection Approach |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Further harm:</i> Criticism of armed actors by communities or the media may cause that actor to turn on the groups and individuals harmed by its behavior, accusing them of providing protection actors with the information and evidence used to reprimand them and reacting aggressively when confronted with this data.</p> | <p>“Naming and shaming” / Capacitating communities</p> |

Competition for access: Community members may compete over access to the protection actor and the resources it offers, creating intra-communal tensions.

Inadequate choice of representatives: Community members, third parties like local governments or the armed actor may object to the people chosen to represent the community. In this case, the armed group may instead opt to interact with those community members that it considers to be allies. Such a rejection can create tensions and weaken support for community protection structures.

Capacitating communities

Potential Risks Concerning the Behavior of Armed Actors

| Risks | Protection Approach |
|---|---|
| <i>Redeployment:</i> When pressured, the armed actor may redeploy fighters and units responsible for causing civilian harm, putting other communities at risk. | All (except training) |
| <i>Internal tensions:</i> Investigations on and sanctions for misconduct may lead to internal tension within the armed group, making it difficult for leadership to implement restructuring programs and improve the conduct of their forces. | “Naming and Shaming” / Training armed actors |
| <i>Misuse of aid:</i> The armed actor may misuse material aid (such as weapons) or intelligence provided by protection actors in order to harm civilians. | Training armed actors |
| <i>Red herring:</i> The armed actor may use its cooperation with a protection actor as a means of deflecting pressure exerted by other stakeholders. | |

How to Determine Whether an Intervention Is Going Well?

Measuring the impact of preventive protection is a challenge – as is demonstrating whether it improves the long-term situation of civilians living among armed groups. Protection actors can use a set of guiding questions to determine whether their interventions are on the right track.

Approach 1: “Naming and Shaming” Armed Actors

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the protection actor able to collect and collate relevant and credible evidence? • Is the evidence presented in an accessible format? |
| Media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the targeted media representatives recognize the issues raised by the protection actor as relevant and thus welcome the evidence, expertise and content provided? • How frequently do media outlets run the story and how much visibility do they give to public criticism? • Is public criticism reported on by media outlets that have significant impact on public opinion, the armed actors in question and/or on national or international stakeholders with influence over armed groups? • How strong and sustained is the social media reaction to the protection actor’s concerns? |
| Response to reports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the concerns picked up within the political fora, such as parliament, or reflected in other events like protest rallies? • Are there demands for formal investigations into the armed actor’s misconduct? • Do the institutions formally in charge of the armed actor criticize its conduct? • Do other stakeholders with influence over the armed actor display concern about the issues raised by the protection actor? • Do other protection actors report that public criticism helped their efforts to raise awareness concerning the civilian harm caused by the armed actor? |
| Armed actors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the armed actor reacting to public criticism and thus acknowledging awareness concerning their misconduct? • Does the public discussion around its conduct increase the armed actor’s willingness to reduce civilian harm, either because its leadership was not previously aware of the problem or because said criticism strengthened the position of leaders and influential allies who favor more restraint toward civilians? • Is the armed actor prepared to discuss the allegations with protection actors or cooperate with them to address the harmful conduct? • Is the armed actor taking any concrete actions to reduce civilian harm? |

Approach 2: Mobilizing Influencers

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Protection actor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the protection actor gained access to relevant influencers? |
| Armed actors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the armed actor engage in dialogue with the influencer over the issue in question? • Is the armed actor taking any concrete actions to reduce civilian harm? |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Influencers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any indications that the influencers object to the armed actor's harmful behavior because it violates their norms and values and/or because of concerns about its potential negative impact on their own interests and reputation? • Are influencers taking steps to facilitate the protection actor's ability to operate in the context and its access to people in need of protection? • Does the influencer publicly endorse the concerns raised by the protection actor and/or is it known to support these concerns in its contact with other stakeholders? • Is the influencer using 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)? |
|-------------|---|

Approach 3: Capacitating Communities

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do community members, especially those most threatened by the armed actor's conduct, accept and feel represented by the community protection structures established with support from the protection actor? • Does the community have a shared understanding of its rights and sense of priorities regarding its interactions with the armed actor? • Has interacting with the protection actor helped community representatives strengthen the skills needed to engage with armed actors? |
| Interactions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the channels set up to allow communities to engage with armed actors used regularly and consistently? • Are the discussions between community representatives and armed actors as well as any progress made documented and shared with the community as a whole? • Do communities continue to use similar processes to identify priorities and engage with armed actors even after the protection actor is no longer present? |
| Armed actors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the armed actor replaced or redeployed those individual fighters or units responsible for the misconduct at hand? • How many community recommendations regarding its conduct has the armed actor adopted? • Is the armed actor taking any concrete actions to reduce civilian harm? |

Approach 4: Training Armed Actors

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the armed actor formally agree to cooperate with the protection actor on training or other forms of capacity building? • Does the armed actor communicate with third parties about its efforts to strengthen capacity, thereby signaling its readiness to be held accountable for its conduct? |
| Training effects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have references to international humanitarian law and other relevant rules and norms been included in the armed actor's training curricula, codes of conduct and policies? • Do commanders as well as rank-and-file troops or fighters know their legal obligations regarding the treatment of civilians and do they have a clearer understanding of how to comply with these obligations after working with a protection actor? • Are there examples of the armed actor investigating and – if confirmed – sanctioning individual units or fighters for infractions? • Can affected communities and other protection actors monitoring the conduct of the armed actor confirm that its behavior is improving? |

A full report further explores these four logic models and outlines how contextual, risk and success factors are situated within this framework.

You can download it at gppi.net/poc-iraq.

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