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Challenging choices: protection and livelihoods in conflict

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Key messages

- There are strong linkages in situations of violent conflict between threats to people's protection and threats to their livelihoods.
- People in crisis often adopt strategies that promote safety and dignity at the expense of livelihoods, or vice-versa.
- With better analysis, more joint approaches and flexible and long-term funding, organisations can do more to build linkages between livelihoods and protection to achieve positive outcomes for conflict-affected populations.

Conflict devastates lives and livelihoods. People not only face threats to their safety and dignity through violence and displacement, but the destruction of livelihoods is frequently a direct or indirect consequence of war. In responding to these threats, people are often faced with horrific choices. Livelihoods strategies may still be pursued, but under extreme risk to personal safety. Efforts to minimise security risks may cost people their livelihoods. Protection and livelihoods – both in terms of the threats people face and how they respond – are thus inextricably linked. But despite these connections, and despite the increased commitment of many aid actors to protection and livelihoods programming in conflict situations, efforts to link these programmes remain limited.

This HPG Policy Brief summarises the findings of research examining the links between protection and livelihoods in conflict. Based on case studies in Chechnya, Darfur, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and Sri Lanka, the study explores the inter-connections between protection and livelihoods in terms of the threats people face and their actions in response. It highlights the similarities between the analysis that underpins protection and livelihoods programming, and illustrates examples of where protection and livelihoods interventions have been linked in practice. It argues for greater connections between these two areas of work in order to achieve better outcomes for those affected by conflict.

Protection and livelihoods threats, vulnerability and community responses

The model below is used by protection actors to analyse the risks faced by conflict-affected communities. Adapted from earlier models developed for natural disasters, it shows that risks are a function of the threats people face, their vulnerability to those threats and their capacity to withstand or respond to them.

$$\text{RISK} = \frac{\text{THREAT x VULNERABILITY}}{\text{CAPACITY OF AFFECTED POPULATIONS TO RESPOND}}$$

Humanitarian actors can reduce the level of risk that populations face by helping to minimise the threats they confront, reducing their vulnerability or increasing their capacities to respond.

The research confirmed the close connection between threats to protection and threats to livelihoods. Conflict directly impacts on people's livelihoods through death, injury and displacement. Critical livelihoods assets, such as houses, land and livestock, may be destroyed or looted. Indirect impacts on livelihoods include

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Box 1: Examples of linkages between protection and livelihoods threats

- Physical violence, torture, abduction, arrest and sexual violence (affects livelihoods options, productive capacities and access to livelihoods assets).
- Restrictions on freedom of movement (affects access to land, markets, migration opportunities, employment, networks and social services).
- Forced displacement (affects access to livelihoods, services and networks).
- Attacks on or theft of assets such as houses, land, hospitals and food, or extortion or exploitative practices (affects livelihoods assets, income and services).
- Disruption to property and land rights (affects livelihoods options, including farming).
- Discrimination on the basis of social status (affects livelihoods options such as access to employment).
- Loss or theft of personal documentation (affects proof of ownership of livelihoods assets, freedom of movement, access to employment and services).
- Landmines (death and injury, affects access to land and other livelihoods assets).
- Forced recruitment into fighting forces (death and injury, reduces productive capacities).

the decimation of basic services and governance structures, and loss of access to employment, markets, farms or traditional pastures through limitations on movement. In Darfur, for instance, displacement has affected the food security of the entire population, as agricultural production has dwindled and markets have collapsed.

Different people experience violence differently. The level of impact that a violation has on a community or individual relates to their vulnerability. This in turn depends on what people own, who they are and where they live. In refugee camps in the West Bank, young men between the ages of 14 and 35 are most affected by Israeli military activity: they are often targeted in raids, and form the core of the resistance that camp residents mount in the face of incursions. Whilst in many emergencies assets are a source of resilience, in situations of conflict they can become life-threatening liabilities. Living in resource-rich areas, such as fertile land in the OPT or Sri Lanka, has opened people up to attack, exploitation and coercion. The wider governance environment and the reach and accountability of civil, economic, judicial and political institutions also determine the vulnerability of certain groups. In Chechnya, corruption of the judicial system affected people's ability to defend their property, employment and social rights; the poor lacked access to justice because they were unable to pay legal fees or bribes. The functioning of markets, institutions which determine access to land and natural resources and local conflict resolution mechanisms are all critical determinants of people's vulnerability.

How people respond to threats depends on the options available to them. People generally face the lowest risk when they have some degree of choice. Some options – fleeing temporarily, calling on social networks, making political alliances or changing expenditure patterns or food intake, for instance – reduce exposure to physical danger and allow people to retain some livelihoods assets. As the degree of choice decreases, however, risks to safety or livelihoods become severe. Strategies that minimise risks to safety often have negative consequences for livelihoods, and vice-versa. Strategies that may minimise risks in the short term can involve longer-term risks to livelihoods.

In situations where people know that an attack is imminent, they will frequently seek to avoid the threat. This can include changing travel patterns or moving away. In Hebron in the West Bank, Arab residents spoke of remaining indoors on Jewish festivals when the risk of settler violence was higher. Reducing exposure to threats can be achieved by spreading the risk, for instance by travelling in groups to farms or markets or splitting families across different locations. Risk can also be reduced by managing expenditure and investment, for instance by cultivating crops which require less maintenance or which are less likely to be destroyed by opposing groups, a strategy used in all three study locations. People can also reduce their exposure by making alliances with power holders. In Darfur, agreements with Arab population groups for 'protection' were often one of the key determinants of people's physical safety. Although villagers were often forced to pay for protection, these arrangements enabled farmers to retain access to their land. In other instances, people may choose to confront the threat. Young men in West Bank camps resist Israeli incursions with stone-throwing and Molotov cocktails, and self-defence groups have been established in Darfur. In some instances, people have little choice but to expose themselves to the threat, risking physical violence, exploitation or ill-treatment in order to pursue livelihoods. This was the case in Gaza and Sri Lanka. Often, the highest risks are associated with situations where people leave their homes or land through force or as a last resort because bare economic survival is no longer possible.

Links between protection and livelihoods analysis and programming

There are strong similarities between protection and livelihoods analysis. Both emphasise understanding

of the conflict environment, and ensuring that responses are based on an in-depth analysis of the nature of the threats, who is most vulnerable and the capacities or responses of communities themselves. Both carry out analysis at different levels, international, national and local. Despite these similarities, livelihoods and protection assessments tend to be undertaken separately, as agencies find it difficult to create multi-functional teams, time is often limited and it can be difficult to achieve the level of depth required.

Targeting populations on the basis of both protection and livelihoods objectives is most common in populations facing the same protection threats and with the same livelihoods, for example rural populations at risk of displacement. It is more problematic when there are acute protection concerns, but the impact on livelihoods is less severe or people have different livelihoods. While there may be advantages in providing livelihoods support to those suffering protection threats, for instance to ensure access and gain information, this may run counter to the principle of impartiality. Providing targeted livelihoods support to those with similar protection threats but different livelihoods has implications for the complexity, scale and cost of a programme.

In many instances where joint programming has been possible, the starting point is usually protection. ICRC's operational framework in Darfur is an example of how an integrated strategy can be approached:

1. Identify the protection concerns (for ICRC this involves an analysis of violations of IHL).
2. Analyse which communities are affected and prioritise those most affected by protection issues.
3. Identify the humanitarian consequences of violations.
4. Identify who is responsible for the violations.
5. Identify a potential protection vector – i.e. a humanitarian response which could mitigate the humanitarian consequences of violations, while at the same time creating the foundations for protection dialogue.
6. Identify which perpetrators or actors can be approached in order to create a dialogue on protection issues.

The ICRC distinguishes between 'authority-centric' and 'victim-centric' activities. Authority-centric activities aim to make the authorities aware of, or help them fulfil, their responsibilities; victim-centric activities help lessen the vulnerability of people at risk.[1] Joint protection and livelihoods programmes can have the following objectives:

- Preventing the occurrence or recurrence of violations or abuses that impact on people's livelihoods (authority-centric).
- Reducing people's exposure to violations (victim-centric).
- Reducing the need to engage in strategies that entail risks (victim-centric).
- Limiting the humanitarian consequences of exposure (victim-centric).

Joint protection and livelihoods programming is most evident in efforts to prevent forced displacement and land confiscation. The most sophisticated examples are in the OPT, in response to long-running conflict and the systematic undermining of Palestinian livelihoods, including as a result of the Barrier wall erected by Israel, which has cut access to 10% of West Bank land. A number of different agencies are working on the problem of land access and confiscation. ICRC selects beneficiaries on the basis that they have lost regular access to their land, are in economic need and are willing to engage with the agency. Livelihoods interventions include cash for work to support farmers at planting and harvesting times, the provision of basic inputs such as seeds and tools, water projects, support to cooperatives and training in improved production practices. ICRC also supports farmers' applications to the Palestinian authorities, which then coordinate with Israeli counterparts to allow access to land. When there are problems farmers contact the ICRC, which in turn asks the Israeli authorities to open Barrier gates. The ICRC uses information from these projects to demonstrate the humanitarian implications of violations of international humanitarian law. Other agencies also seek to address land problems. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) negotiate increased access to land for farmers and monitor Barrier gates. Other agencies undertake livelihoods support to increase productivity and assist in marketing. Farmers reported that the most important support was assistance in ensuring that Barrier gates remained open.

Many other simple interventions can have an impact on both protection and livelihoods. Fuel-efficient stoves are used widely in conflict settings. Fashioned from clay and water, they cut down on firewood usage by up to 40%, reducing the frequency with which women have to travel outside the relative safety of camps in search of fuel. They also decrease the income that needs to be spent on purchasing firewood, or increase the income that can be generated from firewood collection by reducing consumption. Advocacy on access to land and markets and on return policies has implications for both protection and livelihoods. Similarly, access to information programmes, for instance on registration, conditions in areas of return, or even on relief entitlements can result in important benefits for both protection and livelihoods.

1 ICRC, *Enhancing Protection for Civilians in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence* (Geneva: ICRC, 2008).

A number of protection interventions have positive implications for livelihoods. Advocacy to prevent violations and defend people's rights (e.g. access to employment in OPT, fishing rights in Sri Lanka and Gaza and the rights of refugees in Thailand or Lebanon) can be fundamental to ensuring livelihoods. But livelihoods specialists often view advocacy as too politically sensitive, and advocacy is often only prioritised when an agency has protection capacity. Many protection actors provide training to authorities and communities on rights and responsibilities, including the ICRC in its capacity as guardian of IHL. Although there is little evaluative material available to judge impact, anecdotal evidence suggests that this has an impact not only on authorities' adherence to their responsibilities, but also on communities' ability to demand their rights. There is also a large range of community-oriented protection interventions which can reduce people's exposure to risks or help mitigate the consequences. These include legal assistance for land and property rights, assistance with accessing personal documentation, psychosocial care and more material interventions, such as the provision of whistles to raise the alarm or assistance to extremely vulnerable individuals.

Similarly, a number of livelihoods interventions can positively improve people's protection. The main way of reducing exposure to threats or engagement in risky strategies is through targeting those population groups facing protection and livelihoods threats, such as forced displacement or loss of land. Food aid in Darfur reduced the need for people to carry out livelihood strategies which involved risks to personal security, such as firewood collection outside of camps, and also gave people greater bargaining power in negotiating wage rates or making arrangements to farm as share-croppers or renters of land. Livelihood support in OPT is important in helping people retain access to land. Advocacy or other initiatives to reduce trade barriers and widen access to markets can help improve freedom of movement more generally and increase links between opposing groups. At a more general level, many of these initiatives to increase the protection outcomes of livelihoods interventions can be achieved by ensuring a genuine commitment to protection mainstreaming, which aims to minimise any risks associated with the provision of livelihoods support, such as reinforcing or exacerbating unequal power relations. It is also important to ensure that assistance is targeted at the most vulnerable and minimises any problems they may face in obtaining assistance.

Conclusion

Our research shows that, for people affected by conflict, livelihoods and protection are intimately connected. The threats to people's livelihoods and protection are linked, as is people's vulnerability to these threats and their capacity to respond. This means that the humanitarian community must make greater efforts to link its protection and livelihoods analysis and action.

Despite the linkages, occasions where a comprehensive protection and livelihoods strategy is adopted are rare. The failure to link the two can be attributed to agency mandates, which usually focus more on one than the other, as well as issues of scale, capacity and funding. Management support for integration between sectors is crucial, as is collaborative work between programme managers, along with flexible and longer-term funding. In some contexts, collaborative approaches between agencies may be the way forward.

Livelihoods and protection can be linked in practice, both at the level of analysis and action. There are already similarities between protection and livelihoods analysis, and combining the two more systematically could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the threats people face, their vulnerability and the options available to them to minimise risks. Combining livelihoods and protection approaches addresses both the causes and consequences of vulnerability and risk more effectively than either approach is able to do alone. It also expands the range and scope of available interventions. Advocacy and dialogue on protection threats can help prevent the occurrence or recurrence of abuse, whilst livelihoods assistance and other interventions can help address exposure to some threats by increasing choice and reducing people's need to engage in risky livelihood strategies. Assistance also addresses the consequences of exposure by directly addressing food insecurity, malnutrition or medical needs. Protection assistance in turn can have a positive impact on livelihoods by improving freedom of movement or access to land, markets and employment. Both protection and livelihoods interventions can help reduce barriers or obstacles at a policy and institutional level, for example through advocacy on land rights or by strengthening institutions responsible for security, rule of law and the provision of essential services. Finally, combining protection and livelihoods approaches can help reduce the risk that interventions will exacerbate unequal power relations or further endanger communities. This form of programming may be challenging in terms of agencies' skills, time and resources, but today's complex emergencies demand more integrated and sophisticated responses if the needs of conflict-affected populations are to be addressed.