

[Note: This was submitted to CCHS Human Security Bulletin for November 2003 and appears on the following website:

http://www.humansecuritybulletin.info/November_2003/Human_Security_Initiatives/en/NGO_Insecurity.php]

"Context Matters: Identifying Micro- and Macro-Level Factors Contributing to NGO Insecurity"
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Just over a year ago, on 19 August, 2003, a suicide bomb decimated the Canal Hotel, the UN headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq. The bomb killed 22 individuals including the UN Head of Mission Sergio Vieira de Mello and wounded more than 150 others. On 27 October, 2003, another suicide bomb killed 12 people in front of the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Baghdad. In recent years, the numbers of non-governmental organization (NGO) personnel who have been threatened, harmed, or killed around the world has gained increasing attention from the media and those agencies and organizations working in contexts of war or violence. Theories attempting to explain this phenomenon concentrate on changes in the global context that have resulted in the targeting of NGOs. The authors that do specifically address the issue of insecurity for aid personnel generally focus on the contextual reasons for violence against aid workers.

These explanations do not, however, explain the anecdotal evidence suggesting only some NGOs are targeted, or, in other words, why some are more secure than others operating in the same country or area. If global trends are to blame, what accounts for the differing levels of insecurity particular NGOs face in the same country? In an attempt to gain insight into the issue of humanitarian security, a 2002 study examined micro- and macro-level factors contributing to NGO insecurity. Specifically, it explored the influence of NGO characteristics (micro-level) on its level of insecurity in similar and different contexts (macro-level) to determine if and how the profiles of more and less insecure NGOs differ across contexts. The study compared two different contexts in which a variety of NGOs operate: on-going war situations with high levels of violence (Angola from January 1998 to December 1999, and Sierra Leone from May 1997 through July 1999) and a relatively stable situation (Ecuador in 1999 and 2000) and collected information from NGOs working in one or more of the three country case studies Angola, Ecuador, and/or Sierra Leone about the incidents of violence these NGOs experienced during the time periods of the study. These incidents of violence became the basis for determining and measuring the organizations' level of insecurity.

By using reported incidents of violence against NGOs and comparing these to indicators of NGO characteristics, the research assessed the impact of these characteristics on their levels of insecurity in Angola, Sierra Leone, and Ecuador using both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques. The findings indicated that on a macro-level, the overall levels of insecurity were indeed higher in countries experiencing on-going war than in the relatively stable country. Additionally, the micro-level profiles of more and less insecure NGOs differed across countries, suggesting a variety of inter-related factors lead to insecurity for particular NGOs. Thus, context does matter in determining levels of insecurity.

Several findings were of particular interest. Specifically, the organizations in the research

sample that worked with both sides of the conflict (defined as impartial), or were more integrated into the local community (defined as more engaged) were more insecure. In addition, the findings suggested two additional categories of NGOs experienced heightened levels of insecurity: organizations that carried out two or more types of activities (e.g., agriculture and education) and provided material aid; and operational organizations (i.e., those that carried out their own programming).

Although the findings from the study are not generalizable beyond those NGOs studied, the study did point to several implications.

1. More preparation and guidance regarding an organization's mission and principles would help to prepare NGO staff, possibly reducing security incidents.
2. Issues of partiality and impartiality (meaning working with one or both sides of a conflict) in situations of on-going violence deserve special analysis and attention.
3. More integration into local communities and social networks should be undertaken with caution in contexts with high levels of on-going violence.
4. More research on this topic and information-sharing among agencies would assist in identifying patterns and trends for security incidents.

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