

## Risk and aid work today

**On Sunday 6 August 2006 15 national staff of Action Against Hunger were found shot dead in a town in north-eastern Sri Lanka. The bodies of 11 men and four women wearing Action Against Hunger (ACF) T-shirts were found face down at their office in Muttur. The gruesome discovery followed heavy fighting between Tamil rebels and government forces. Two more ACF staff members were subsequently discovered in their agency vehicle apparently killed whilst trying to flee the attack. It is not clear who was responsible for the killings.**



Friendly encounter with the security forces  
Credit: RedR-IHE Sri Lanka

The incident highlights the risks to which aid workers can be exposed, especially national staff, and the worrying aspect of apparently targeted attacks. Even if the most rigorous risk management mechanisms are in place this cannot guarantee that incidents will not occur. It is essential, however, that agencies do what they can to mitigate or minimise threats due to conflict and criminality.

Much has been achieved in developing an approach to risk management appropriate to the needs of the aid sector. Tools are available and there is invaluable experience to learn from as demonstrated in previous issues of the *Security Quarterly Review*. In recent years many agencies have reviewed their approaches to risk management, recruited dedicated security officers and implemented systematic procedures at HQ and field levels. This is most dramatically seen within the UN with the establishment of the Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) but also within major international NGOs. There is still a need, however, to ensure that all agencies working in insecure locations have an effective approach to managing risk and have the means to implement procedures.

In Sri Lanka there has been an understandable continuing demand for security training through the RedR-IHE Learning Support and Capacity Building Programme. In Darfur, RedR-IHE continues with the Safety Training and Support for Humanitarian Agencies programme. Having teams on the ground who understand the context enables them to adapt to the constantly changing circumstances and provide appropriate training and support.

It is also important to understand how we perceive threats and the impact of insecurity on humanitarian action. Larissa Fast is carrying out research on these themes and invites you to take part in her study. Alexandre Carle is studying European NGO security and crisis management skills, tools and needs. Both research studies are outlined on page 2.

Many agencies are unclear on the availability of insurance for "special risks". Leslie Edwards and Martin Morgan have many years experience responding to kidnap and abduction incidents. On page 3 they provide a helpful overview of what to consider when purchasing "special risks insurance".

Most of the time we focus on external threats. Corinna Kreidler, however, feels the aid sector is not good at acknowledging and dealing with the internal threat of corruption within agencies. In her article starting on page 6, Corinna describes the threats and considers some of the key issues we need to face.

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## Special Risks Insurance - a buyer's guide

**Leslie Edwards** and **Martin Morgan** give an overview of insurance cover available for “special risks” which, for most agencies and staff, concerns the threat of kidnap, abduction and the possible payment of a ransom.

### Purpose of this guide

Many of the organisations we have met are aware of the risks of kidnapping in the areas where they are operational. They implement measures in the form of training and briefing for field staff to reduce and avoid the risk of kidnap. They also carry out Crisis Management Team training for Country Directors and HQ Staff to mitigate the effects of a kidnap should it occur.

However, many directors, risk managers and others have also asked for guidance on ‘Special Risks Insurance’, which is the rather coy description traditionally given to insurance against kidnap and extortion. They want to buy this insurance but simply do not know where to start.

The aim of this article is to fill this knowledge gap so that informed decisions and choices can be made prior to purchase of a policy.

### Definitions

The insurance world may be new to many readers. It is important to understand who does what, particularly the difference between an insurance company, a broker and a response consultancy.

#### Insurance Company

It provides the policy and takes the financial risk that goes with it. It pays up if you have a valid claim (covered loss). Some main providers of special risks policies are ACE, AIG, Chubb, Hiscox plc, and St. Paul Travelers. There are others.

#### Insurance Broker

The broker is the interface, or middleman, between the client (policy holder) and the insurance company. The broker earns money in one of two ways: a commission paid by the insurance company that comes out of the premium paid by the client, or by the payment of a flat fee from the client.

It is worth bearing in mind that commissions can vary greatly and that some brokers receive up to 50% commission for some special risks policies. That is, half the money the client pays for the policy will go to the middleman. Brokers are required to reveal the commissions involved, but *only if the client asks them to do so*. Make sure you do!

Some of the better-known special risks brokers are AON (ASM-Asset Security Managers is AON's special risks arm); HSBC Insurance Brokers Limited; Marsh & Company and Willis (SCR - Special Contingency Risks Ltd is Willis's special risks operation).

#### Kidnap Response Consultants

These are the men and sometimes women who deploy to advise the client organisation in the event of a kidnap. They ‘steer’ the client in the management of the kidnap event and remain with the client until safe resolution. Sometimes called ‘negotiation advisers’, they have usually had experience of handling dozens of kidnaps.

Insurance companies who provide kidnap cover usually ‘retain’ a kidnap consultancy. That is, they pay the consultancy an amount of money each year to maintain a team of experienced responders who are ready to deploy worldwide at short notice. Response consultancies retained by insurers include: Ackerman Group, Clayton Consultants, Control Risks Group (CRG), Corporate Risk International (CRI), Kroll Associates, and Neil Young Associates (NYA). It is, however, an unregulated market. Anyone can, and some do, claim to be kidnap response experts without any justification for doing so. Make sure you meet the consultants attached to your policy!

### The kidnapping problem

There are said to be about 15,000 reported kidnaps each year worldwide, and there are without doubt a great deal more that are not reported.

The vast majority are criminal kidnaps for ransom, not political kidnaps, and are settled by the payment of a ransom. This is usually the safest and lowest-risk option. Rescue attempts by security forces are usually high risk, even where these forces are highly trained and competent.

## What do you want, need or get from a kidnap policy?

Cases can go on for weeks, months and sometimes years, and are expensive to manage. Most policies reimburse the insured for costs and losses but they do not normally pay up front. Some of the costs and losses involved that should be covered under the policy are:

- Ransom monies up to the limit insured (but note the other expenses involved can sometimes be two or three times the ransom)
- Travel costs (families, flying out the victim, flying in HQ staff)
- Lost salary
- Medical
- Rest and rehabilitation (family and victim)
- Retraining victim after release
- Interpreters
- Rewards for information
- Forensic analysis (to ascertain if a body found is that of the victim)
- Increased security (e.g. for family of victim for the duration of the kidnap)
- Legal claims against the insured (e.g. if the victim or the family sues the employer following release or death)
- Death or dismemberment of the victim, or the person handling the negotiation
- Loss of ransom in transit
- Finally, the response consultants' fees and expenses. This is one of the most important elements. Their costs should be unlimited under the policy. This means they will remain on station, just about anywhere in the world, for however long it takes until the victim is released.

## Options

Some organisations are ethically opposed to paying ransoms. This is fine too. You can buy a policy that covers all the other expenses, including consultants, but that does not cover ransoms.

Many organisations may feel uncomfortable paying a ransom in cash. Cases where victims are held hostage by an identifiable community entity or faction are sometimes settled by an agreement that a well be dug or school built (or some other material concession) in return for the release of the victims. Standard policies should still pay up for the costs involved in implementing these non-cash ransoms.

Be clear as to who the policy covers because some policies only cover expatriates, whilst others also include national staff.

## Other incidents

Policies should also cover hijacking, siege situations and wrongful detention. Wrongful detention is typically being detained and arrested on false charges, or in cases of misunderstanding or mistaken identity, commonly at an airport or border checkpoint.

## Conflicts of interest

### Kidnap response consultants and insurance companies

The kidnap consultant works to free the victim unharmed. A consultant does not work for the insurance company to save them money. The consultant should therefore report not to the insurance company during the case, unless the client wishes or permits this, but to the client's headquarters. Furthermore, the role is purely advisory, and it is up to the client whether to follow the advice or not. Even if the client does not follow the advice this should not affect any claim made under the policy, unless it is fraudulent. In a case of fraud the insurer might employ a loss adjuster (not the response consultancy).

### Brokers and insurance companies

In theory the broker should be offering the client the policies that best suit the client. Some brokers use the same high commission paying providers again and again. Brokers should offer a selection of policies from different insurance companies.

### Kidnap response consultancies' other activities

What other activities does the consultant's parent company engage in? Do they have armed bodyguards in the same operational area? Do they carry out military training? Do they sell weapons and ammunition? Are they closely linked to any government? Are you comfortable with their other activities? Do any of these represent a (potential) conflict of interests?

## Questions you need to ask before purchasing a special risks policy

### Of your own organisation

- What do you want from the policy?
- Ransom and expenses or just expenses?
- Or just consultants?
- To cover expatriates, national staff, agency consultants?
- How many people? Where?

### Of your broker

- What is the link between the broker and the insurance company?
- How much commission will the broker receive from one insurance company as opposed to another and can these be outlined in writing?
- What is the relative value of the commissions on the policies being offered? (More than one option should be offered. If not then you should ask for options or look for another broker.)
- Are there any other rewards the broker will receive from the insurance company for a successful sale?

### Of the kidnap consultancy

- You should ask to meet a consultant – what is their kidnap experience and track record?
- What is the collective experience of the retained consultancy's *servicing* personnel?
- Will your organisation be comfortable working with the consultancy over a period of weeks or months in the event of a kidnap?
- How do they manage their cases?
- Do the consultants have experience of working with your type of organisation?
- Where are they experienced?
- What cases have they dealt with in the last two years?
- What back up do they have in terms of analyst support?
- How many consultants are there?

## Confidentiality

This article is written for managers and directors who might wish to purchase special risks cover for their organisation. They should note that it is a condition of just about every such policy that general disclosure of the existence of such cover within or outside the organisation can invalidate the policy. The reasons for this are obvious.

*Leslie Edwards has had experience in kidnap resolution in Iraq, Afghanistan and Latin America. He is also a full member of RedR-IHE.*

*Martin Morgan has been a kidnap response consultant for over twenty years. He has also participated in RedR-IHE seminars and workshops.*

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## Consultancy Services

RedR-IHE provides a wide range of tailor-made training and learning services to the humanitarian community. In 2006 RedR-IHE has done consultancy work and provided security training to the following organisations:

International Alert - Security Consultancy, Security Management Workshop and Personal Security Training  
 SDC, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation - Security Management Training  
 Mercy Corps - Personal Security Training (in conjunction with AKE)  
 Peace Direct - Personal Security Training  
 American Jewish World Service - Personal Security Training  
 British Red Cross - Personal Security Training  
 Terre des Hommes Lausanne - Security Consultancy  
 DFID Asia Dept - Personal Security Training  
 Presentations to the UK Ministry of Defence Joint Operations Planning Course  
 Relief International in Amman - Personal Security Training  
 Merlin, Ethiopia - Management and Personal Security Training  
 EC Delegation in Sri Lanka – Security Training  
 VSO, Voluntary Service Overseas – Security Consultancy

The RedR-IHE programmes in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Sudan have also offered a range of inter-agency training in Security Management, Personal Security, Operational Security, Fleet Management and Security Training for Drivers. The programmes in Sri Lanka and Sudan continue to offer safety and security training on an inter-agency basis.

For further information on consultancy work and tailor-made training contact [mark@redr.org](mailto:mark@redr.org)

# Corruption as an internal problem in humanitarian relief operations

Even though there is awareness of widespread corruption and its detrimental effects on development, the aid community is still reluctant to acknowledge that corruption is widespread in numerous aid projects.

**Corinna Kreidler** believes it is time to openly debate the issue, to share experiences and to train managers to deal with corruption.

Corruption affects long-term development as much as emergency relief projects. This article focuses on corruption in emergency aid operations where a number of specific factors make fighting corruption especially difficult.

In aid projects, the misuse of authority to obtain a personal benefit – corruption – is manifested in four different ways:

- Nepotism: the use of friends, family members or “cronies” for a specific task or recruitment to a certain post in return for favours
- Bribery: the provision of money or favours to unduly influence a decision
- Kick-backs or cuts: payments or favours in connection with a certain (trans)action
- Theft and diversion: the use of project funds or assets for personal benefit

## Nepotism

Nepotism is a concern when aid agencies are recruiting staff, selecting local implementing partners, contractors, suppliers and beneficiaries. Damage is caused by non-transparent systems which often involve collusion of staff with third parties and staff who are no longer independent because they owe favours to other people. The public image of an agency suffers as these practices are usually well known by the local population.

## Bribery

Aid workers are sometimes drawn into situations involving bribes when being asked to present official documents or when staff are “encouraged” to buy their way out of a difficult situation, such as an alleged traffic offence. Payments made at road blocks are a frequent phenomenon in many conflict-prone areas. The obligation to hire specific people (members of one armed group or staff of a local warlord) as security guards can also be included in this category.

In most countries bribery is an offence. Those offering bribes fear persecution and might commit other offences to camouflage the initial bribe. The credibility of an aid organisation and its staff is severely damaged when such payments become public. Last, but not least, the funds used for the bribe are lost for the legal objectives of the operation.

## Cuts and kick-backs

Cuts or kick-backs are payments or favours received by staff when completing a (trans)action such as procuring project materials, signing a service contract or renting premises or vehicles. On the recipient’s side the motive is greed. On the payer’s side the motive is to avoid or out-rid competition or to achieve a higher price by sharing the profits with the staff members. Kick-backs can come in the form of gifts, a monthly percentage of all purchases or fixed amounts per transaction. Suppliers can also issue two original receipts which permit the billing of one item to two different donors or the amounts shown on the receipts do not correspond with the amounts actually paid.

Kick-backs lead to inflated prices or the procurement of lower quality goods. Staff members become indebted to the payer and become a potential blackmail victim. The staff member then owes the payer favours in return. Extensive procurement fraud can lead to lower quality aid as funds are lost in the transactions.

The agency has to put costly control measures in place. Many agencies employ expatriate staff to improve oversight functions on the assumption that they will not be tempted to accept kick-backs even though the tasks could just as well be accomplished by local staff.

## Diversion or theft

When agency staff use project assets or funds for their personal use then these assets are diverted, regardless of whether they are permanently stolen or only “borrowed”. Motives are to enrich oneself by selling the goods (e.g. fuel, vehicle spare parts, food aid etc.) or to save money by borrowing goods for private use (e.g. generators, computers, etc.). Without downplaying the seriousness of these offences, agencies must pay their staff decent salaries to provide for basic necessities. If salaries are kept low to maximise the use of donor funds then staff are more likely to be tempted to divert funds or assets when an opportunity arises. The fear of losing a job is less if the job does not pay well anyway. Widespread corruption in many developing countries means that staff may see their own fraudulent activities as a copy of larger-scale corruption in national politics which often go unpunished.

These actions can happen anywhere at any time: in procurement, in the warehouse, during or after distributions, when using office equipment or vehicles. Distribution of relief goods to people who are not entitled to receive them is another form of diversion. In this case, aid agencies can face the specific problem of staff sexually exploiting beneficiaries by promising

them extra goods in return for sexual services. Direct diversion of funds can happen at any step in the financial cycle through the forging of receipts, taking advantage of parallel exchange markets or simply stealing money from the cash box.

Diversion leads directly to a loss of funds, assets and resources. Additional costs are incurred when expensive control mechanisms have to be put in place.

### Who is involved?

Agencies that face corruption tend to hire additional expatriate staff as they are assumed to be less inclined to get involved in malpractices. Experience of aid workers shows that they are, indeed, less often involved but this is most likely due to their considerably higher wages rather than higher moral standards. However, once an expatriate is caught for diversion of assets or reception of kick-backs, the amounts of money involved are usually higher than in cases involving exclusively local staff. Men seem to be more often involved than women which reflects a general pattern of crime. It could also be caused by the fact that more men are holding higher, more influential positions in agencies than women. They are also under greater social pressure as they are more often the breadwinner or even the overall head of the extended family. On the other hand, women – especially working in administration – are more vulnerable to direct pressure exerted by others to cooperate in malpractices and often feel unable to report such acts.

Staff engage in different forms of corruption depending on their role in taking or influencing decisions. Managers and human resource personnel can exert direct influence on recruitment decisions. Field supervisors can manipulate distribution lists. For bribery to occur a manager must authorise the use of cash for payments. Kick-backs and cuts are most common where logisticians and warehouse managers influence purchasing and contracting decisions.

### External factors fostering corruption

External factors can create a climate for corruption. In emergency operations time pressures mean quick decisions on staff recruitment; local partners selected within days or a few weeks; media pressure requires quick results. The immediate need to save lives takes priority over detailed procedures.

Implementing effective controls to mitigate against corrupt practices costs money and tends to increase the percentage of funds used for administration - the so called “overheads”. A donor’s insistence that “every penny has to reach the poor” can result in agencies emphasising direct implementation of operations at the expense of oversight and accountability procedures.

Many emergency operations take place in conflict-affected countries. Corruption is often one of the root causes of conflict and aid agencies commonly have to deal with widespread corruption. Where insecurity restricts access to beneficiaries aid agencies might have to hire private contractors to deliver relief goods for distribution by local authorities. Both contractors and authorities can embezzle the goods by selling them before they reach the destination or by distributing them according to their own priorities. In such cases agencies have to weigh the risk of losing goods or not delivering them to the beneficiaries at all.

In a relaxed approach to security, staff who raise the issue of malpractice might be perceived – or feel to be perceived – as trouble-makers. This concern can inhibit someone’s readiness to monitor project procedures and practices. Someone on assignment for a short period of time might not be bothered with such a problem. The turnover of staff also reduces institutional memory. Those caught once for corrupt practices might easily get away with the same thing another time.

There is the worry that detection of corrupt practices could lead to donor requests to repay funds or to the withdrawal of donor support. It is also sometimes difficult for senior staff to accept that colleagues with whom they work on a daily basis may be involved in corruption. To recognise the signals and investigate is usually a painful process. Not all personnel are prepared for such a challenge which is why some may prefer to ignore the signals. If those inclined to malpractice realise there is no risk of punishment and very little effort is made to stop them then corruption will continue or grow.

### Fighting corruption

There are a number of fundamental principles in addressing corruption:

- transparency in decision making
- publicity and openness in handling information
- a “four-eye principle” throughout all procedures
- enforcement mechanisms for rules and regulations

All legal means should be used to enforce procedures. Individual staff members who become aware of possible corruption must be supported and should not be seen as trouble makers. These are the basics which can be reinforced by more specific actions.

Transparent recruitment procedures to avoid or reduce nepotism:

- staff vacancy announcements in newspapers, on the radio, and in public places
- receipt of applications carefully managed so that all reach the appointed decision-makers
- written tests
- careful background checks on potential candidates

The public tends to be very well informed about recruitment practices as large numbers of people are looking for well-paid jobs with international agencies. An agency can easily spoil its public image by poor recruitment or, conversely, can earn a lot of credit through transparent and merit-based staff recruitment. Deploying staff away from their home region can be a measure to reduce pressure from family members.

As bribery is illegal in many countries senior staff can forbid all such payments but they need to set an example themselves. Even if tempted to take short-cuts senior staff should never instruct subordinates to effect such payments. If it is done once there is no point in forbidding it the second time. As a consequence, "receipts" for such payments should not be given thus obliging the person who wishes to bribe to do it from his or her own pocket.

There are legions of procurement procedures which reflect the fact that kick-backs and cuts are widespread in aid operations. Providing several quotations and public tenders for more valuable contracts are standard procedures. However, suppliers and vendors find ways to cheat the system and so agencies must make sure sensitive information is well controlled. Tenders should be opened in public or at least by a tender committee. The committee can include representatives of third parties such as civil society groups, faith groups, etc.

Exchanging information with other agencies on suppliers to be avoided helps to eliminate some of the worst cases. If possible in the local context, legal action must be taken and suppliers who are found guilty should be publicly exposed.

Payment by cheque, with two signatories, reduces the likelihood of direct cash cuts. Quality controls reduce cheating through the provision of lower quality goods. Pre-numbered forms for procurement orders limits the abuse of an organisation's letterhead and agency price arrangements for personal / private purchases. The latter can also be achieved by confirming all orders through phone calls from senior management staff. Finally, the rotation of staff occupying key or sensitive posts can reduce the development of a system which may become difficult to detect by senior management where turnover is often quite high.

The involvement of communities in general, and the intended beneficiaries in particular, is the best way to tackle the diversion of aid resources during distributions. Transparency in setting up selection criteria, consistency in applying them and publicising distributions contributes enormously to reducing aid diversions. Victims may not dare to denounce culprits in public during the distribution itself but post-distribution monitoring can help uncover corrupt practices. Victims of malpractice might be willing to expose them when an efficient complaint mechanism is available.

Control of stock and equipment is the basis of all storage systems used in professional aid agencies. However, a tight control of who has access to these resources and unannounced counting is necessary to achieve a high level of vigilance. If a person is found guilty, exposure of the act and consequent punishment is necessary to make sure that procedures are taken seriously.

## **Tackling the side effects of fighting corruption**

Apart from the factors fostering the existence of corruption, there are also a number of factors that deter agencies from fighting corruption more vigorously. Those unintended side-effects are threats to staff, the threat of legal action taken against them, damage to public image - through media reporting - and the danger of being confronted with false allegations.

### **Threats to aid personnel**

Unfortunately, there are cases where staff committed to fighting corruption are personally targeted. The agency has an obligation to ensure investigations are carried out in a way that demonstrates it is an issue concerning the whole organisation and not a personal issue between staff. The investigating staff must also be able to withdraw from the location if it is no longer felt safe. Backing from head office and additional protection, if necessary and possible, is indispensable as encouragement for staff.

### **Threat of legal action**

Legal action could be taken against the agency by the donor or by the government of the country in which the fraud took place if the agency is accused of having failed to put appropriate control mechanisms in place.

Legal action by donors is usually preceded by audits to establish evidence of corruption. Full cooperation by agency personnel and transparency throughout the process can help to minimise loss of trust. The audit should also be used as a learning exercise to make sure that similar malpractices cannot be repeated elsewhere and are prevented in the future.

If the host government takes legal action it is again important to show the readiness of the organisation to investigate the case, to take appropriate measures to punish the culprits and to put mechanisms in place to make sure it will not happen again. However, there is also a need to show that it is individuals who are involved in corruption, not the organisation itself.

### **Deterioration of an agency's image**

A corruption case reported in the agency's home country media is most likely to result in the withdrawal of public support. Few people will congratulate the agency for having the courage to acknowledge the issue. Local media might simply be interested in the sensational aspect of the case and information must thus be handled with care. Public debate of the issues should be used to show the agency's efforts to fight corruption rather than its failure to stop a specific practice.

Agencies might also fear damage to their reputation with institutional or private donors. Again, the agency should make it clear that it is individual staff members who are involved and should openly and transparently inform donors about the detected fraud, the ongoing investigation, and measures taken against the culprits to avoid the same happening again. A growing number of donors encourage partners to actively take measures against corruption and an agency reporting a case in their operations might find more support and understanding than previously assumed.

### Danger of false accusations

A pro-active fight against corruption may risk over-enthusiastic reporting based on rumour. Investigations must be carried out with care. Jealousy and envy can motivate people to report malpractices which do not exist. Allegations can be used to remove a staff member from their post.

### Conclusions

Corruption in emergency operations is not a necessary evil that should be accepted without question. This article suggests ways of addressing corruption and how to establish mechanisms to mitigate against such practices. Aid agencies need to acknowledge the phenomenon more openly and talk frankly about the occurrence of corruption as well as their efforts to fight against it. Information exchange and collective learning can lead to better results in fighting a joint enemy.

### References for further reading:

Georg Cremer, *On the problem of misuse in emergency aid*, in The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, June 1998. <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a042.htm>

[http://www.transparency.org/global\\_priorities/aid\\_corruption](http://www.transparency.org/global_priorities/aid_corruption)

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