

Guidelines for Field Staff for Promoting Reintegration in Transition Situations

Introduction

No amount of reports, assessments, project documents, or even guidelines, for that matter, can fully prepare field personnel to handle every situation that arises in transition situations. Transition situations, by definition, are a sort of twilight zone, where there is no war, yet there is no peace. There is tension and there is a very real possibility that matters could get worse before they get better.

The goal of reintegration depends on creating a stable situation where people, whether they have been displaced, traumatized, or are demobilized combatants, feel comfortable enough to go home again and to rejoin society. But making an unstable situation more stable requires many things to happen, and there is no manual that can answer every situation. In fact, field staff is very much on their own as they deal with day-to-day problems and emergencies of varying proportions while attempting to achieve the over-all goals of a mission.

Differing circumstances, people, and issues make every post-conflict reintegration project unique, and the success of any operation is due, in large part, to the discretion of the people on the ground. Yet to provide basic strategic assistance to guide field personnel, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Post-Conflict Reintegration has developed ten fundamental principles—they have come to be known as the “Golden Rules”—to help navigate through what is almost certainly difficult terrain.

1. Stability is the overriding priority

A time of transition is inherently unstable. There may be no war going on, but often there is also no peace. Whatever the causes that led to instability in the first place have probably not been resolved. It may be that there is no peace agreement. It may be that there is still a considerable level of violence. Or, there may not be a government to work with as a reliable partner.

In this time of transition, where life-saving humanitarian operations are winding down but assistance aimed at building long-term sustainable development has not yet materialized, or has just begun, stability is the overriding priority.

The key question is, "what can we do to help make this unstable situation more stable?" Hardly a rhetorical proposition, the answer to this question must translate into practical, achievable actions.

- **The starting point**—The country team should agree on a "starting point"—the point where everyone agrees to use as the starting point, or base line, for developing programmes and strategies for moving toward stability.
- **Laying a foundation for full participation**—The participation of all sectors of society, from people at the community level, as well as in local and national institutions, is the key to success. This means that the intended beneficiaries of our programmes must be involved with assessments, information analysis, planning, programme delivery, as well as in monitoring and evaluation of programmes. At the outset, this requires a two-way communication strategy to explain and inform the public about the UN and its program, while also listening and understanding the needs of the people and their communities.
- **Working with the international community**—In any country, it is necessary for Country Teams to work with other representatives of the international community, such as NGOs, bi-lateral donors, the World Bank and IMF, and regional and sub-regional organizations. The idea is to seek convergence with these actors to avoid working at cross-purposes, which can be extremely harmful to the reintegration and rehabilitation process.
- **Understanding the obstacles**—Moving forward requires keen political insight and the ability to identify problems that can obstruct the peace-building process. A common understanding of these unresolved problems during the transition phase is necessary, as it is these problems that will ultimately determine the success of the reintegration process. Among the types of issues that bear watching include human rights concerns, impunity, the absence of rule of law, or political obstacles to the reintegration of minorities and other groups. Failure to maintain law and order, for example, could result in a critical loss of confidence, and consequently, credibility.
- **Consider the factors involved in the conflict to prevent relapse**—Too often, post-conflict situations relapse into conflict. The Country Team must consider these factors, including the people and the places, in all of their analysis and assessments.

2. Move forward only when you're confident that everyone is on board.

The reintegration process requires a certain level of confidence. People need confidence that they will be safe, that their human rights will be protected, and that they can support themselves before they will return to their homes. Similarly, the international community needs the confidence and the reassurance that the national or local authorities are committed to a sustainable rights-based approach.

Building confidence is a gradual process. In transition situations it is often thought that the “gap” between relief and development means that “more” needs to be done. Very often, however, it is not that more needs to be done, it is that more needs to be done differently. For example, in transition situations, it is no longer sufficient to view all issues through the same political or military prism that existed during the emergency period. Instead, the approach must be changed to accommodate actions that promote and protect human rights, and to meet humanitarian and development needs. This is part of the confidence building process.

- Country teams should view the confidence-building process as a staircase: before moving on to the next phase of the transition or development process, each element in the process must be addressed. For example, impunity for human rights violations could be addressed before the physical infrastructure is rebuilt.
- Choose modest and uncontroversial programmes in the immediate aftermath of conflict or during instability. Immunization programmes, for example, are often seen as apolitical and humanitarian, may be a good confidence-building starting point.
- Programmes should be realistic. Consider the security environment. Make sure there is sufficient funding. And make sure that programmes can effectively be carried out. By using a narrowly tailored-to-fit approach, programmes can be structured so they look forward to the next step—larger reintegration programmes—yet can be reduced if the security situation on the ground deteriorates.
- Strategic monitoring can help build confidence. Through monitoring, programmes can be continually adjusted in real time based on successes, and failures. Headquarters should assist in this effort.

3. Local and international actors need a shared vision

Keeping the international community engaged in a transition situation is a major challenge. A situation that “falls off the global map” is soon forgotten within both UN circles and externally, and is generally not a candidate for high levels of assistance.

To move forward on reintegration, and to prevent a situation from becoming a forgotten backwater, there must be a shared vision by local and international actors on reintegration goals. Where national authorities—perhaps due to nationalistic or ethnic sentiments and policies, are not genuinely willing to allow or enable reintegration, international efforts to promote such reintegration will be severely obstructed.

To prevent this fundamental problem from dooming the reintegration efforts, several issues should be addressed:

- Country team members need a common understanding and analysis of the nature of the conflict. There must be agreement on the collective goals that should be reached in the rebuilding process.

- Shared information and a shared political analysis are essential, and will affect programmatic decisions leading to successful reintegration policies.
- This shared vision among local actors involves more than just government officials. It involves civil society, human rights organizations, displaced persons, and local communities. It should be noted, however, that there could be sharp differences within civil society.
- Identify and include actors that can help promote stability and confidence, and also identify and exclude those who do not want peace.
- The Resident Co-ordinator/Humanitarian Co-ordinator should identify the areas not controlled or served by national authorities so the internationals can determine what steps to take there—to identify what should and should not be included in the national “solutions.”
- Country Teams must achieve a common understanding with non-state actors that control territory that is consistent with a rights-based approach. This requires training and UNHQ must liaise and advocate, with Member States, the need for allowing access to these areas.

4. Protection and Assistance are flip sides of the same coin.

Protection is part of any sound assistance activity:

- The first step in addressing protection and human rights issues is to hire the right people, and to analyze what the role of the individual agencies will be.
- Country teams should establish a human rights and protection thematic group to follow the issue among the civilian population.
- Non-discrimination is a fundamental human rights principle. All populations in need must be served, even if it requires addressing sensitive issues.
- The protection and human rights component must address the underlying causes of the conflict. This could mean working with a new set of actors, and it might mean raising sensitive issues, such as redress for human rights violations. This will not make you popular, but in the end, these are the questions that must be confronted before there is a sustainable peace.

5. Building capacity to promote reintegration

The extent that national actors have the capacity to participate and facilitate the reintegration process has major implications on bridging the relief-development gap in the context of reintegration.

The lack of national capacity is a potential obstacle to progress if it is not addressed, starting at the earliest stages. Furthermore, capacity building is a prerequisite to local ownership of programmes, a necessity to ensure that the reintegration process is sustained.

- Regarding local and national institutions and actors, capacity building must take place through a rights-base approach, with human rights as a core element in the

reintegration process, which requires a sustainable and safe environment. Building capacity that does not follow this course could lead to tremendous damage later on, should local or national institutions operate in a manner contrary to the rights-based approach.

- Capacity building is a gradual process with many dimensions. It involves government and civil society, including NGOs, grassroots organizations, and the media.
- Gender mainstreaming is an important part of capacity building. During transition situation, an attempt may be made to move forward and improve the situation of women, rather than return to the pre-war situation.
- Wherever possible, reintegration programmes should try to include qualified returning nationals and national experts in the development and implementation of the reintegration programmes. Although it should be recognized that not all returnees may be welcome, or may be thought of as “deserters” by the local population, when it is possible to include these people, they are often a great asset to the process.
- Special attempts should be made to locate returning nationals with particular skills, and Country Teams could conduct surveys of refugee camps to determine what skills exist.
- In addition to capacity building in humanitarian assistance and reintegration programmes, systems of justice should also be strengthened.
- Specific capacity building efforts during the reintegration process may encourage donor support.

6. Coordination is not just an activity—it’s a way of life

Coordination—that is, sharing of information, highlighting inconsistencies and duplications, the search for synergies, and striving to reach common objectives—is a time consuming, energy draining, yet essential activity if joint programming is to succeed.

Everything needs to be coordinated. Humanitarian, political, development, and human rights considerations all have to blend together into a common approach. There must be coordination between Headquarters and the Country Teams.

Coordination requires a sense of realism as well. Agencies will not always work in exactly the same direction at the same time. Yet a common vision will decrease tensions between agencies.

- Agencies must see the value in coordination and the agency leader in a given country should have a stake in coordination efforts.
- Programme diversification and joint programming can increase the scope of coverage and reduce the pressure on certain actors. This means that Country Team members should devise and implement programmes that ensure a holistic approach that addresses all aspects of the transitional period.

7. Follow the flow of people: A regional approach can make a lot of sense

Too often, internal conflicts have serious spillover effects on other countries. Displaced persons cross borders to escape danger. Arms smuggling is common, and smuggling in natural resources and goods is prevalent. In some cases, neighboring governments, militia and non-state entities may be involved.

The key indicator for Country Teams in determining whether a regional approach is needed is the flow of people. This will have an impact on coordination, strategic planning, and programme harmonization of reintegration efforts.

- Country Teams should seek opportunities to discuss and to take action on issues of a regional nature. This include engaging in a dialogue with regional and sub-regional organizations, which in turn, helps to boost confidence among displaced persons, and, can facilitate their return home.
- The Country Teams should prepare for the return of refugees in a regional context.

8. Ensuring staff security helps the staff ensure civilian security

Security for international and national staff, including UN agencies and NGOs, is linked to the issue of confidence. When security conditions permit staff to freely and safely travel, the odds are greatly improved that reintegration programmes can be sustained. If the staff is not safe as they provide assistance to beneficiaries, there is wider sense of instability and consequently, a loss of confidence in the reintegration process.

- Protecting humanitarian staff can ensure that the staff can safely work in the field where they can work to protect the rights of the civilian population and effectively deliver humanitarian assistance.
- It is imperative that Country Teams hold the Government or non-state actors responsible for those who attack or kill humanitarian staff. Action must be taken to address the issue of impunity when it comes to staff security. This issue should addressed in a preventative way as well.
- Area security and a community-based approach to security should be pursued.

9. Headquarters must help you serve the people in need

Turning policies into practice depends on whether the policies are relevant to the needs of the circumstances and whether they provide some added value. Even then, successful implementation depends on the conscious efforts of the Country Team.

- The Reference Group on Post-Conflict Reintegration has established a follow-up plan to its work to ensure effective Headquarters support to Country Teams in Transition. This plan also includes a compilation of “field practices” to advise

Country Teams going through transition processes, based on the lessons learned by other Country Teams facing similar situations.

Headquarters support requires solid two-way communications, and means that the field letting Headquarters know the needs and issues at the country level. Frequent use of video conferencing and other information tools can help forge stronger links during the conduct of operations and could assist in daily decision-making. Rotating staff between Headquarters and the field is also crucial, as are more frequent missions to the field.

10. Working with donors is part of your job

Donor governments can help in two main areas. They can help ensure that an action by the Country Team is effective and on target, and they can assist in addressing critical issues, such as human rights violations, through advocacy or funding.

Donors are unlikely to provide much funding for programmes where they do not have confidence in the reintegration process, due to the political or security climate. Corruption and political obstruction to reintegration-oriented principles can also hurt donor confidence.

For IASC agencies to raise the necessary resources to assist the reintegration process, they need to create the confidence that the programme will work. Donors need to be confident that the local and national entities want to make it work, and they need confidence that the UN can manage the process effectively based on a coherent strategy. Security is a significant donor concern and it is a question that the Country Team must constantly address.

- A good analysis on the impact of under-funding from a human rights perspective can engage donors.
- It is important to emphasize the regional aspects in fund-raising efforts, as this is consistent with dealing with the problem in a holistic manner.
- UN Headquarters must ensure that activities contributing toward stability are included in the consolidated appeals process.