

REFERRED TO IN CHAPTER 12

The Security of National Staff: Essential Steps (InterAction)

The Security of National Staff: Essential Steps 2002

The Security of National Staff: Essential Steps

In spring 2001, InterAction commissioned research on the practices and policies of its membership regarding the security of its national staff. Based on the resulting report, InterAction's Security Working Group asked the researchers to draft essential steps that aid agencies can take to improve the security of their national staff.

Essential Step #1: Increase the involvement of national staff in the formulation, review and implementation of security policies and plans.

Essential Step #2: Identify threats to national staff, then reduce their vulnerability to these threats.

Essential Step #3: Establish clarity on security procedures and benefits, especially with regard to evacuation and relocation options.

Essential Step #4: Integrate national staff security into preparedness, training, and human resource management procedures.

The following pages review each of the essential steps, explaining their importance, listing possible actions and citing examples.

Essential Step #1: Increase the involvement of national staff in the formulation, review and implementation of security policies and plans.

Why this is important:

National staff has an understanding of the local society that expatriates rarely achieve. Not using them as an integral part of security planning means that agencies ignore one of the best - if not the best - resource they have. Expatriates are often harried, stressed and overworked. They may not be the best at designing security structures for national staff.

Possible Actions:

- Competent national staff members are allowed to advance to the highest levels of responsibility within the agency.
- National staff nominates or elects representative(s) to the security plan design and review team.
- The agency implements systematic procedures to elicit security feedback and analysis from national staff.
- In situations where expatriate staff are absent on a regular basis (because of evacuations or program structure), capacity building of local staff is promoted over "remote control" management.

Examples:

- In one organization's Somalia program, national staff is responsible for designing and implementing security plans, including for expatriates.
- Another agency insists on a two-person security focal point: one expatriate staff, one national staff.

Essential Step #2: Identify threats to national staff, and then reduce their vulnerability to these threats.

Why this is important:

Along with the risks that they share with expatriate staff, national staff also comes under additional threats. These stem from being members of the local society and hence vulnerable to pressures that expatriates are largely immune to and of which they often have only a vague notion. To counter these vulnerabilities, agencies must make the identification of threats to national staff a systematic part of their overall threat assessment.

Possible Actions

- The agency recognizes that some groups of national staff are more at risk than others, depending on gender, ethnic or national origin, age, position, level of responsibility, that this determination varies from program to program, and that the conclusion may at times be unexpected or counterintuitive.
- The agency includes national staff threat assessment into program decisions such as where, how, and what type of assistance is provided.
- The agency includes national staff threat assessment in procurement decisions (e.g., do expensive, visible assets such as vehicles enhance or degrade the security of national staff in a particular situation).
- The agency includes national staff threat assessment in staffing decisions, such as filling open positions with national or expatriate staff.
- The agency includes national staff threat assessment in determining local procurement and contracting practices.
- The agency takes steps to increase acceptance of presence and its programs to the local community.

Examples

- In Kosovo an NGO would ask its national staff to review and change if necessary the daily distribution plan based on the overnight violent activities of the police.
- In Chechnya, one agency determined that Chechen male staff between 15 and 40 are the most at risk.

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The Security of National Staff: Essential Steps (InterAction) (continued)

Essential Step #3: Establish clarity on evacuation and relocation options.**Why this is important:**

Most agencies do not plan on making general national staff evacuations. And most national staff do not expect it. However, the issue of national staff evacuation is so emotionally charged that it has taken over the debate on national staff security. This impedes discussion of how to deal with more common threats to national staff. In-country relocation and individual evacuation are issues for which agencies should define their commitments. Clear policies, explained to all, will clear the way for more important discussion of day-to-day threats and concerns.

Possible Actions

- Within a country security plan, the commitments to the evacuation or relocation of national staff are spelled out with clarity.
- The agency examines procedures to protect, and if need be, evacuate a member of national staff who has come under life threat due to his or her activities as a humanitarian worker, and reviews potential obstacles to doing so.
- The agency defines safe areas in the geographical neighborhood of its operations, and reviews procedures and potential difficulties in the event of relocation of national staff.
- The agency reviews and lays out how it will cater for the security and well being of national staff should international staff be evacuated. Examples:
- During the war in Bosnia, a national staff member who had run afoul of local authorities was sent out of the country for three weeks of training. This provided a cooling off period.
- In Sudan, one agency has on occasion evacuated Sudanese staff due to threats and has left Ugandan and other expatriate staff behind.

Essential Step #4: Integrate national staff security into preparedness, training, and human resource management procedures.**Why this is important:**

Current thinking emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to security and the fact that it is not a topic or sector that can be dealt with in isolation. This is also true for national staff security. The security of national staff depends on the innumerable decisions made at all levels and in all departments of agencies, their donors, other agencies, and beyond. It will take time for security concerns to be incorporated into the decision making process.

Possible Actions

- The security orientation of newly hired national staff goes beyond the risks associated with their level of responsibility and includes the history, role, mandate and message of the agency. A good orientation should allow the newly hired staff to go home and explain to family and friends what the agency is all about.

- Orientation includes making them aware of the existence of a security plan, and filling them in on who the focal point for that plan is and what structures exist to include their voice in the formulation or review of the plan.
- Ask security trainers to incorporate national staff trainers and national staff security issues into their curriculum.
- Prioritize national staff over international staff for security training.
- Provide equipment training to the primary user and a potential stand-in.
- Staff are hired or promoted based on their qualifications for a position regardless of whether they are national staff or foreign.
- Hiring, promotion, and dismissal procedures are transparent and able to be understood by national staff and applicants.
- Where local health insurance is non-existent, ineffective or corrupt, agencies craft a solution that provides their national staff employees protection better than the in-country standard.
- Local partners such as NGOs, institutional partners, contractors, local professionals share in the information and in-house security training. This has the added benefit of extending an agency's informal risk assessment network.
- All staff are repeatedly told, before and during a crisis, that agency assets and equipment are never worth risking one's life for.

Examples:

- In Georgia, the national staff of an NGO has opted to receive a \$15 dollar monthly allowance instead of local health insurance, which is not satisfactory.
- In Somalia, in one agency national staff determines who is to receive the limited amount of security training available.