

HISS-CAM

A DECISION-MAKING TOOL

World Vision has devised HISS-CAM as a tool to help staff think through difficult operational and policy decisions they may face when interacting with military and other armed actors.

More broadly, the tool seeks to answer the question that aid workers often face: How can we achieve the necessary balance between principles and pragmatism in our operations? Due to its applicability beyond civil–military (CIVMIL) engagement, World Vision has found that there is scope to use the tool for other decisions, mainly relating to local partnering and the acceptance of funds from non-traditional sources. Staff have reported that it facilitates not only a very useful analytical process, but also a helpful way of communicating on-the-ground decisions to other entities in the organisation.

It is especially useful in periods of peak activity and pressure or constraints, such as in an emergency relief operation, when entities outside the field may request information regarding a decision made by the office. Once the individual or group has a good understanding of the context, the tool is quick and easy to use. A further key benefit is that it builds the capacity of national staff in decision-making and reporting processes, while connecting them better in the response phase of a disaster with visiting international staff who convey operational realities to donors and others. It therefore carries with it a great return in investment; staff simply need to learn how to use it.

BACKGROUND

In both disaster relief settings and conflict-affected states, humanitarian organisations find themselves working in **close proximity to a range of military actors**, including private armed groups, host government forces and international peacekeepers. Traditionally in complex emergencies, clear boundaries defined the relationship between combatants and non-combatants, and by association the military and non-military domains. Regular forces were characterised by strong internal discipline and centralised command, control and communication, while humanitarian workers operated with the almost universally recognised protection provided by international humanitarian law (IHL). Today, an increasing number of conflicts are driven by irregular forces of an ethnic, political and/or criminal nature, and whose mandate is one of national liberation, insurgency, or secession, and/or the control and protection of precious resources. Command and control is often weaker than in regular armed forces, which is now widely acknowledged in contexts where child soldiers are used.

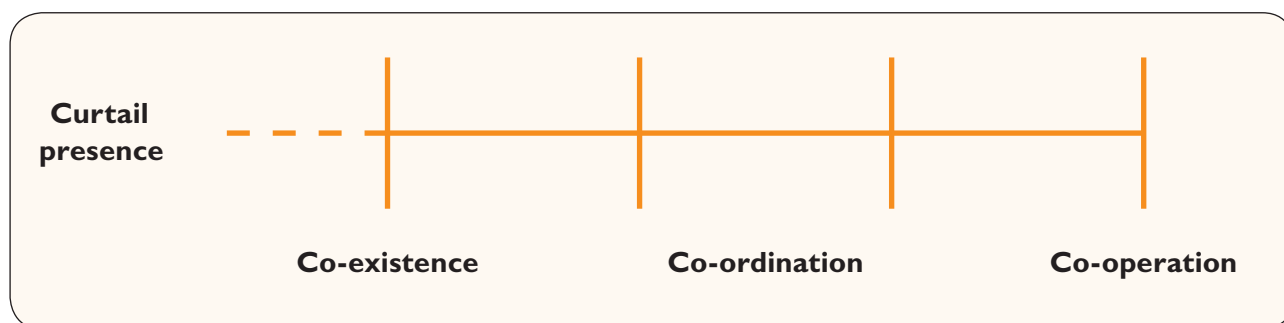
Another recent development is the evolution and growing prominence of ‘whole-of-government’ or ‘comprehensive’ approaches to ‘stabilisation and reconstruction’ missions that include military support to aid delivery and the rebuilding of infrastructure. Particularly in disaster relief settings, therefore, the practical realities on the ground necessitate various forms of CIVMIL co-ordination for humanitarian operations. The challenge is to manage aid agencies’ engagement with military forces in a balanced way that limits any threats to both the **perceived impartiality** of an organisation and the **safety and acceptance of aid workers** among local populations and the belligerents.

It is now well understood that CIVMIL engagement in the field presents one of the most challenging and complex aspects of the current humanitarian landscape, due to these issues. The purpose of the HISS-CAM tool is to provide teams on the ground with an effective day-to-day decision-making process to deal with complex CIVMIL engagement which potentially could compromise their key operating principles. The tool does not provide prescriptive guidance but rather is designed as an enabling mechanism that builds staff confidence in making difficult decisions.

The ultimate aim is to equip staff with the ability to determine **appropriate levels of interaction** with armed actors in areas that are considered to fall within the category of 'exceptions to the rules'. In other words, exceptional and often unpredictable circumstances in which either military engagement in a traditionally humanitarian activity seems necessary to save lives and alleviate suffering, or else the environment obliges interaction with armed groups, often at risk of jeopardous security implications for staff, or negative public perceptions of the organisation.

CONTINUUM OF ENGAGEMENT

'Civil–military engagement' is the term used by aid agencies to describe the spectrum of possible interactions between humanitarian and military operations. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) determines that these can range from co-existence to co-ordination and co-operation in some instances.



World Vision policy includes a fourth 'C' – curtail presence – to provide entities with the option to suspend engagement altogether.

Listed below are the three main types of interaction, along with scenarios which help illustrate these types of interaction. These should be considered when defining CIVMIL strategies within field offices.

- **Co-existence** determines a situation in which active engagement between humanitarian and military actors is either inappropriate or impossible, but interaction is unavoidable.

Scenario: Shared operational space with military actors (i.e. state forces, rebel groups, paramilitaries) where it is deemed inappropriate to co-ordinate, other than to stay aware of the other’s movements.
- **Co-ordination**, involving dialogue between humanitarian and military actors, is deemed appropriate in situations where it is possible to promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, and minimise inconsistency in a relief operation, often in conjunction with other agencies and via a neutral, third-party institution.

Scenario: Active sharing of information with armed actors regarding plans and procedures, to ensure mutual understanding. Most common examples include instances where there is a UN-mandated force.

- **Co-operation** tends to occur only in situations where military involvement in a traditionally humanitarian activity is required in order to save lives and alleviate suffering.

Scenario: Use of military assets for protection, delivery of relief in extreme circumstances. Examples include the 2004 Asian Tsunami response and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, where both national and international military assets were used.

It is important to note that one country programme can have interactions at numerous points along the spectrum. Context must therefore be continually re-assessed.

KEY PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

World Vision's point of departure for making decisions on whether or how we engage with the military are our **ethical foundations**, which can be translated for the purposes of the field to key **operating principles**. These begin with a commitment to fulfill our Mission and to abide by our Core Values, and are summarised below as they relate to the issue of CIVMIL engagement:

- The **humanitarian imperative** insists on seeking to promote the well-being and dignity of civilians in a way that also supports a sustainable, self-directed, and long-term future. Guiding this imperative is a commitment to the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the ICRC–NGO Code of Conduct.
- **Impartiality of action** places a high value on ensuring that programmes do not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, political affiliation or social status. Relief must be guided by an assessment of needs, while the priority is given to the most urgent cases of distress. Connected to this in the context of complex emergencies is the need to appear neutral in the provision of aid.
- **Independence** underscores a commitment to the humanitarian imperative and not to the agenda of governments, political groups or military forces. Because advocacy is a central part of humanitarian action, and the military is a potential target of advocacy, organisations must not act in a way that surrenders this responsibility. Core aspects of independence include freedom of movement for humanitarian staff, freedom to conduct independent assessments, freedom of selection of staff, freedom to identify beneficiaries on the basis of need, and the free flow of information between humanitarian agencies.
- The **'Do No Harm'** principle commits agencies to developing context-specific approaches that prevent, to the best of their ability, any unintended negative consequences of humanitarian assistance in a given context. Success in achieving this assists in the provision of **security** for staff, local partners, beneficiaries and other humanitarian agencies, and in the prevention of the furtherance of conflicts in-country as well as in the region.
- **Sustainability** ensures that agencies assist communities to overcome poverty and injustice over the long term; hence any engagement with the military must have a view beyond the immediate. The 'Do No Harm' principle certainly applies here, because it is only through clear context analysis that agencies will be able to prevent any unintended negative impacts in a context, particularly in complex situations. The sustainability aspect of humanitarian or development work must not be compromised.

We argue that these principles form the ethical foundations that should shape our approach to dealing with armed groups at the field level. Summarised under the banner of HISS, these are the humanitarian imperative (i.e. the obligation to respond to a crisis or need), the principles of impartiality and independence, the imperative of staff security and beneficiary protection, and importance of sustainability (in terms of assisting

communities in the long term to overcome poverty and injustice). Therefore, all interaction should be measured against these four touchstones.

H umanitarian imperative
I mpartiality and Independence
S ecurity and Protection
S ustainability

Of the principles, deliberate deviations from 'Do No Harm' – which incorporate the **safety** of all stakeholders and **sustainability** of a response – clearly require the highest level of justification so far as limitations are concerned, due to the long-term perspective that underpins all development work in assisting communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Therefore, we argue that it should be considered a non-negotiable principle that cannot be forfeited knowingly in any area.

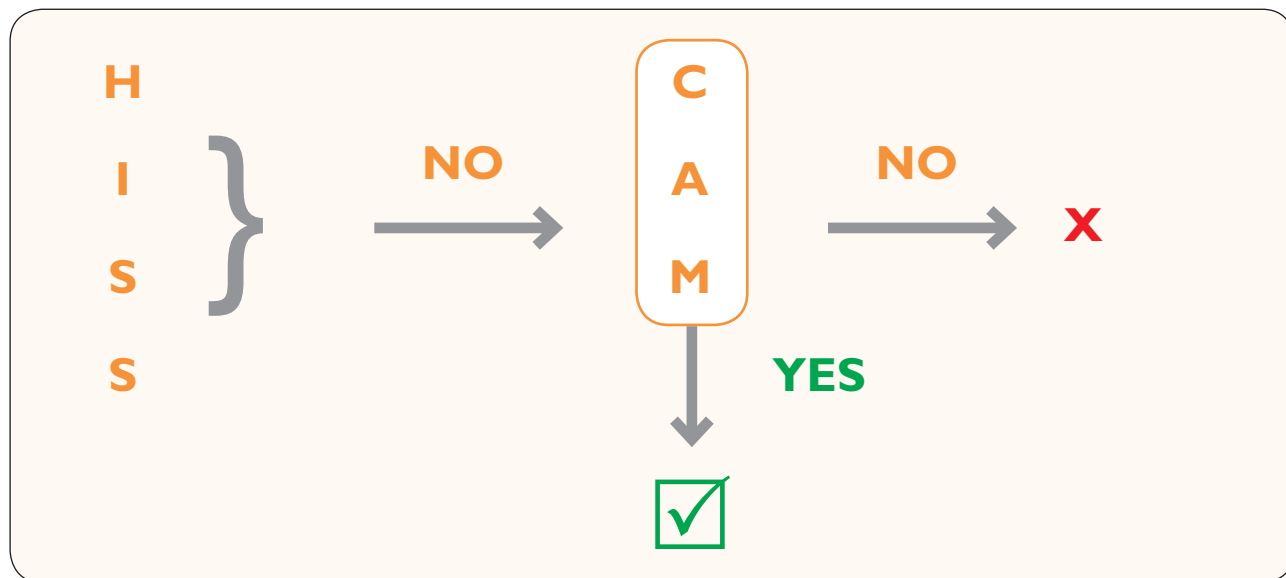
It is expected that tensions will emerge in the decision-making process between some of the other operating principles guiding action. When considering what level of engagement is required with a military or armed group, it is important first to identify **which of the principles is at risk** of being compromised.

Once the principle/s most at risk are identified, a compromise can only be justified if **three steps** are considered and answered positively in the decision-making process. Questions to be considered within each step incorporate the CAM process:

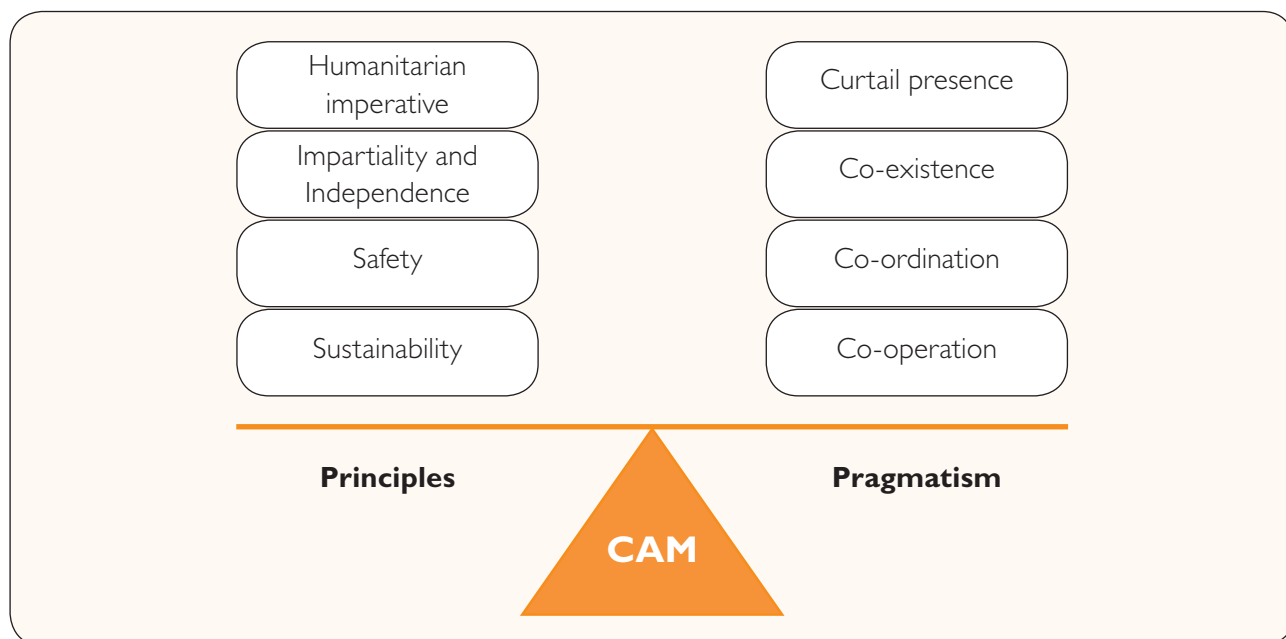
C ompelling aim
A ppropriate, Adapted, Adequately informed
M inimal negative impact

- Is it in pursuit of a **compelling** or legitimate **aim**? The desired outcome should not be general, but 'specific', and have a 'compelling' or important purpose. Is it, for example, aligned with the organisation's strategic aims (including global, regional, and national aims)? Financial considerations in and of themselves should never constitute a compelling aim or justify a deviation from one of the key operating principles.
- Is it **appropriate, adapted, and adequately informed** to that aim? The compromise should be appropriate to its purpose; in other words, it should reasonably and by evidence be connected to the aim. Evidence must include existing context analysis and assessments as well as any new information available.
- Is there **minimal negative impact** on the fundamental principles guiding CIVMIL interaction, and have all other means been exhausted in attempting to achieve the aim? This can be broken down into three areas for consideration – 'when, who and how': **when** refers to time (immediate and longer-term implications), **who** refers to impact of the decision on other stakeholders (communities, industry peers and entities within the organisation), and **how** refers to the method or approach for achieving the compelling aim.

As illustrated below, if all of the first three **HISS** principles are measured positively against each of the **CAM** considerations, the proposed CIVMIL engagement can be justified.



This approach to how we can achieve the necessary **balance** between principles and pragmatism explicitly connects the HISS-CAM tool with OCHA's continuum of CIVMIL engagement. As the diagram below demonstrates, these form two ends of an equilibrium, with integrity obtained through the CAM process as the pivot.



The key, therefore, is to balance the HISS principles with the tactical choices to curtail presence, co-exist, co-ordinate or co-operate.

It is highly recommended that each office install an **accountability** and **reporting mechanism** so that decisions are appropriately recorded, particularly where the action may affect operations in an organisation more broadly. Attached to this document is the template that World Vision uses in its decision-making process, and a flowchart diagram for an alternative depiction of where proposed actions do not align to HISS.



LOOKING AHEAD

Most agencies will face their own **internal challenges** in fostering a shift from the mindset of 'My Way' to an explicit philosophy and strategy of 'Our Way'. The practical aspects of CIVMIL interaction have been widely neglected, and staff either tend to have deeply-entrenched attitudes and approaches towards the military, or feel it is counter-intuitive to interact proactively with armed actors who are at times the very perpetrators of injustices suffered by those they serve. An organisation such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) does not have to face the same type of complexity when managing relationships with the military because formal and transparent engagement with armed groups is part of its legal mandate, alongside the absolute necessity to remain neutral, impartial and independent.

The organisation-wide mapping process that World Vision conducted in 2007–2008 into its relationships with military and other armed groups showed that, in an environment which many see as over-regulated, there appears to be a groundswell calling for guidance in the CIVMIL arena.

Beyond the internal challenge remains the **external challenge** of building consensus between agencies. In December 2007, agencies convened a session in Brussels dedicated to the issue of CIVMIL engagement. While it was clear that there are numerous differences of opinion within the NGO community, it was recognised that there is a need for, and importantly the drive to find, **common ground** on these issues.

Any progress toward defining an agreed humanitarian perspective on CIVMIL will lead to better advocacy vis-à-vis military and government actors and to smoother operations in the field. This will, however, require agency leaders to look beyond their own organisations, and to take responsibility to translate agreed guidelines to workable behaviour in their operations. Advances in some notable peace support missions, such as those in DRC and Sudan, and even now in Afghanistan, demonstrate the possibility of achieving clear guidelines that delineate the respective roles of military and civilian/humanitarian actors. Even while such guidelines are slow in the making, they challenge us to put them into practice. The aim of this tool is to provide one small step in making this happen.

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