

Locally-Led Advance Mobile Aid (LLAMA)

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[This is the condensed version of a monograph based on two years of research. The many legitimate questions that LLAMA raises are more fully addressed in the monograph which is available through The Cuny Center.]

This paper is about an archetypal organization for delivering a new form of emergency aid. Locally-Led Advance Mobile Aid (LLAMA) is to be deployed when civilians trapped in conflict are dying and the chance of reaching them in time with conventional relief and protection is unlikely.

The Crisis in Crisis Response

The problems discussed here will not go away. Civilians face increasingly dangerous trends in the nature of war and the notion of asylum. The face of conflict today is one of civilians trapped in their own homeland, targeted by their own countrymen. The failure of asylum is increasingly seen in efforts to compel refugees to go home, or to contain them there to begin with. At the same time, aid workers face evermore-drastring trends in diminishing access, security and resources. Thus it is increasingly hard for endangered civilians to get out—and for aid workers to get in. The convergence of these trends has left crisis response itself in crisis. It clearly points to the need for deeper innovations than we have considered before.

We in the aid community have taken many steps to persuade *reluctant governments*, *recalcitrant soldiers*, and *reticent donors* as to both our integrity and their obligations. Our introspection has led to many improvements. But in the end, we are still trying to influence powers and events that can easily remain beyond our control. We still find millions of endangered civilians “impossible to reach.” The plight of these trapped populations represents “one of the great humanitarian challenges of our time... Solutions to their problems remain elusive.”¹

Fundamentally, we do not behave like survivors do amid conflict. Our aid vehicle has a very vulnerable profile. LLAMA does not suggest overhauling conventional aid. Rather, it would create an *additional* vehicle to move aid at times when conventional aid is finding it impossible. As Kofi Annan has said, “New mechanisms are required to deal with changed circumstances... The forms of conflict most prevalent in the world today are [now] internal... The challenge of protecting civilian populations can only be met by reaching across traditional lines.”² LLAMA could be such a mechanism. It could work with traditional agencies in an extremely complementary way.

How LLAMA is Designed

LLAMA aid is conducted by the LLAMA organization—not conventional agencies. And yet, the possibilities for mutual benefit between the two are enormous. Essentially, the mission is to help teams of locals return home with an increased capacity to aid their own people. The teams are recruited, trained and equipped by the LLAMA organization, which is given discreet but vital support from patrons in the aid community and beyond. In turn, LLAMA helps the aid community during its most difficult transitions and gaps in emergency response.

LLAMA is not built upon the formal, fixed structure, large-scale delivery of aid we are familiar with. Instead it is informal, mobile and small scale. Research shows that all of LLAMA's pieces and moving parts have already been "piloted", and all of its key premises have precedent.

- (1) Civilians. Historical studies reveal how communities and movements facing abusive power have been able to organize for their own survival. Social science studies show how families cope with violence. In each instance, people suffer through a deadly learning curve. The "best practices" that can be found in these civilian accomplishments have not yet been put into the hands of an aid vehicle that can reach trapped populations.
- (2) Skilled teams. The small unit field craft discussed in this paper has been applied many times in many situations. Much of it resides in military manuals. Some of it also can be found in the quiet reports of unconventional small teams (some faith-based, others profit-based) getting aid to populations otherwise "impossible" to reach today. Their vital lessons tend to go unshared with the larger aid community.
- (3) The aid community. When aid agencies are locked out of a conflict zone, or are about to evacuate one, or are about to enter one, they will appreciate the support of a locally-led entity on the ground. Moreover, history shows that when the circumstances require it, highly respected aid agencies and donors will support *nonconsensual* aid (life-saving action without the permission of abusive powers). They also put an enormous amount of trust and prerogative into local hands when they cannot fulfill their own foreign-led missions.

Profile. LLAMA's physical profile (as well as its field craft) is designed to maximize access, security and resources. Its scale is small; its structure is mobile, dispersed and non-bureaucratic; its supervision is locally-led; and its status is without incorporation or authorization. The question of whether to engage controlling powers depends on the situation. History is replete with examples of how communities and movements adjust their profile depending upon the political space available. When opportunities exist, they engage. When the risks are too great, they disengage. When civilians are hiding in order to survive, then LLAMA must do the same. It will consider a record of flagrant human rights abuses as *prima facie* cause for initially avoiding a given group. This is termed "presumptive avoidance".

Nevertheless, LLAMA teams, in very close consultation with local leaders, will always remain open to the idea of a “discretionary approach” toward abusive powers or hostile populations. They are rarely monolithic or unchanging, thus an opening for reprieves and tests of goodwill should always be considered.

LLAMA aid has three equally important parts: the indigenous *LLAMA teams* that bear the risks and responsibilities on the ground, the *Ad-hoc Committees for Training* (ACTs) that recruit, train and equip those teams, and the *headquarters* (Board and secretariat) that assembles those ACTs, and guides LLAMA over the long term.

The LLAMA teams . Fundamentally, LLAMA’s mission is to prepare and return nationals to their home areas so they can help their own people. Team members would not be “employees” of LLAMA. They will have no contracts outside their country. Nor will they be incorporated or affiliated with any particular institution inside, unless such status lends “cover” to their work. In other words, they will be much like any of their fellow countrymen and women who are, without authorization, trying to aid their own communities in the conflict zone.

There would be an average of seven members per team. The many possible sources of volunteer candidates include a diaspora, refugee camps, local staff of foreign aid agencies soon evacuating, civil society organizations, displaced persons, and still-resident populations at risk.

Screening and selection. LLAMA’s most critical step is the selection of its team members. Referrals from trusted local and foreign individuals on the ground help identify an initial pool. Candidates are screened for certain qualities. These include proper motivation, readiness for risk, moral accountability, technical skills, and physical fitness. The teams include women (who often play key roles in displaced communities and civilian undergrounds). The teams’ leaders should be respected back in the place to which they will be deployed. Every team member should be capable of critical thinking and individual leadership. Psychological profiling during rigorous training will help ascertain several of these qualities. Military and peacekeeping professions have procedures for such candidate assessment that LLAMA can adapt.

Team leadership. During a ten-week training, the teams develop internal cohesion. They also learn to follow a team leader selected from among them. It takes a special kind of volunteer to both follow—and if necessary assume—leadership without hesitation. Of course civilians have proved capable of this in times of crisis throughout history. They have done so even without the benefit of the intensive preparation that LLAMA would entail. By the end of their training, the teams are to have developed a feeling of considerable autonomy. This is deliberate. Although ACTs can exercise some control of teams’ post-deployment (when it has better information, or when multiple teams might need coordination), the bulk of decision-making lies with individual team leadership.

Ad-Hoc Committees for Training. ACTs are “ad-hoc” in the best sense of the word: adapted to circumstances. LLAMA is very ground-oriented. Once headquarters releases staff and trainers to establish an ACT, it allows them enough flexibility to be very responsive to ever-changing events. Nevertheless, to reduce the chance of

misguided “ad-hocism”, all ACTs do start with the same doctrinal understanding and the same general curriculum for trainers. Once an ACT has been in the field, it regularly debriefs headquarters. As teams are deployed, these debriefings then include specific team reporting (as noted later).

Cadre and country trainers. Two perspectives critical to any training are that of expertise and that of local context. (1) LLAMA attains expertise by developing an “in-house cadre” of trainers. This cadre would be drawn from humanitarian, security, and human rights sectors. (Even though cadre trainers will not often be indigenous to the affected country, it should not be assumed they are westerners. Some of the most effective cadre trainers will be found in non-western nations.) (2) LLAMA attains local perspective by recruiting “country trainers”. They help put an ACT’s specialized training into local culture and context. Just as importantly, these locally-recruited trainers act as a bridge between LLAMA’s foreign ACT personnel and local team members. Cadre and country trainers are drawn primarily from the following professions.

Humanitarian relief specialists. Some trainers will come from the emergency relief community. Recruiting them is one way that LLAMA draws from and shows respect for that larger community. The most useful trainers will be those field practitioners who have hard-earned experience with relief-on-the-move in conflict zones. They will need to have demonstrated unconventional problem-solving “under the gun”.

Former military or security experts. Many conventional aid agencies have already sought out training from private security companies, as well as military and police forces. Many other agencies remain uncomfortable about such contact. LLAMA is a type of aid that absolutely must learn from these professions. The use of asymmetrical tactics by the weak in the face of the powerful can be traced to antiquity. Soldiers have refined such tactics and civilians have copied them. Similarly, LLAMA must act like a survivor if it is to be effective.

Human rights monitors. Staff from human rights organizations would be best suited to train LLAMA teams in monitoring, witness handling, assessment, and reporting of abuses. LLAMA does not follow a “rights-based approach” per se. It is very unlikely ACTs will train team members to conduct human rights education or advocacy on the ground. It does not focus on building a “culture of human rights”. But the effect of LLAMA’s actions is to help civilians more effectively struggle for their basic right to life.

Location of the ACTs. The full LLAMA monograph details options for staging an ACT either in a third country, a border country, or in safer pockets of the affected country itself. Obviously the first two would require an understanding with the host government, which the LLAMA Board has the responsibility to negotiate. The third option of staging an ACT in the affected country itself can pose some advantages, but the complexities should not be underestimated. There are several different scenarios for entering the affected country and establishing cover for an ACT. In these scenarios, cover comes in the form of collaborative groups, critical events, and rural or urban sanctuary.

ACT format, duration and (re)supply. The ACT format would be rugged, outdoors and hands-on, attempting to simulate some of the protection and relief activities planned. The training also needs to reinforce team discipline and loyalty.

While the duration of an ACT training can vary, ten weeks might be the median, based on historical experiences in military and civilian underground training, as well as the learning curve on certain technologies. The lifespan of the ACT itself is determined by: (1) The number of different teams it trains, and (2) the nature of the relationship—if any—between the ACT and the LLAMA teams *after* they have been deployed. An ACT may provide “umbilical” functions (to facilitate re-supply, reporting and coordination) for the teams if these functions add more benefit than risk to the operation. It is one of the many case-by-case decisions made in LLAMA.

Equipment for telecommunications and aid sectoral work is selected carefully. It can range from low to high tech, depending upon suitability, portability, and concerns about discretion or dual-use diversion. Before the creation of an ACT, equipment and supply resides in pre-positioned regional hubs. Once an ACT is set up, it may become the equipment training ground and transshipment point. After the ACT has begun deploying teams, forward equipment and supply can be cached in areas of their deployment.

ACTs can be disbanded after conventional aid reaches the populations concerned. Teams are also dissolved—but would be tremendous assets to any in-coming agencies wanting to absorb them. Headquarters remains the one permanent feature of LLAMA. It is there where the guidance and continuity of LLAMA is assured.

The headquarters. The headquarters, consisting of a non-remunerated Board and salaried secretariat staff, is LLAMA aid’s permanent anchor, sail and compass over time. Its primary functions include information management, initiating consultations, assembling ACTs, and steadily improving the LLAMA approach. (The latter is achieved through debriefings, longitudinal studies, and curriculum revisions.)

Under no flag. LLAMA intends to avoid subordination to any national interest. Steps toward this end include diversifying its funding sources and capping the portion derived from states; never operating under a foreign military umbrella; and not sending foreigners into conflict zones. LLAMA must not appear to be dominated by nations or nationalities that are perceived as “interventionist”. Thus the location and composition of headquarters will be important decisions.

Information collection and analysis. One of the many ways LLAMA can help patrons in the larger aid community is to provide professional information management. The UN and NGOs have established precedents for managing information (or intelligence, as it is sometimes called). But the record also shows there are still major constraints on doing so. The constraints on good information gathering, analysis and dissemination are often due to a lack of consent, capacity and candor.

Collection. The full monograph describes comparative strengths that LLAMA would acquire in terms of “eyes” (photo information via commercial satellite), “ears” (signals information intercepted by private contractors), and “feet” (human information gained by very small LLAMA units on long-range forays). By triangulating the three, each method guides the other two toward their mark—and serves as a cross-check on their findings.

Intelligence agencies do this, but until the day they candidly share what they know about incipient crises, aid work needs such layered information. Standard open sources of information are not enough; they can leave aid agencies blind, deaf and lame. LLAMA must bring such “value added” to conventional efforts in order to claim it fills gaps in “getting the alarm out”. It must have real capacity in *advance* information gathering and analysis in order to claim it is *advance* mobile aid.

Analysis. One of LLAMA’s more important innovations will be Crisis and Response Forecasts, or CRFs. These will be independent, professional and proactive assessments that help LLAMA and its potential patrons determine their next steps. The analysis needed to produce CRFs will come not only from LLAMA’s in-house staff—but also from pooling expertise with other nongovernmental organizations that are already doing excellent work in this regard. For any given crisis, these analysts will build a three-part CRF that assesses:

- √ Risk to endangered civilians
- √ Prospects for conventional aid to reach them in time
- √ Prospects for LLAMA aid

The purpose of linking these assessments is to learn not only how imminent deadly threats are—but *also* how immediate conventional solutions will be. If the threat is near and the solution is far, then we know we must consider unconventional options—which is the third part of the CRF. By being both an analytical *and* an operational agency, LLAMA brings a lot to the table.

Consultation and action. The LLAMA Board, in the person of its president, initiates a structured process of consultation with other emergency response actors. Beyond promoting awareness of specific crises, the purpose of these talks is to gain patron support for LLAMA deployments. The CRFs help inform this consultation. If the process, described below, results in the belief that nonconsensual aid is needed in order to save lives, then LLAMA initiates action by forming ACTs.

How LLAMA Unfolds

Headquarters forecasts and consults. LLAMA analysts and pooled experts first assess the risk to endangered civilians (CRF #1). They develop best, middle and worst-case scenarios. The worst scenario projects the highest plausible mortality rate in a given timeframe. They then assess the prospects for any conventional aid that might be under consideration to reach those at risk within a lifesaving timeframe (CRF #2). CRF #2 looks not only at what those involved in a crisis *say* they will do, but also at “self-interest probability” and other determinants of their behavior. This puts a more critical eye on the words of belligerents—and on those leaders in aid response that we so often take our “cue” from.

The purpose of these first two assessments is to put the likely “die by” and “reach by” timeframes side by side. When CRF #1 finds the risk to the civilian population is “extremely high”, and CRF #2 finds the likelihood of a conventional response reaching

them within a lifesaving timeframe “very low”, then CRF #3 examines the prospects for LLAMA deployment.

LLAMA cannot name the threshold that warrants nonconsensual aid; that is a choice its patrons each make. But LLAMA does assert that we have an obligation to act in anticipation of how conditions will be—not in response to conditions as they already are. In taking this position, LLAMA faces the “paradox of early warning”. The earlier warning is offered, the more lives it might save, but the less urgent or believable it seems. Yet in this regard, LLAMA offers one enormous advantage: many times we fail to respond soon enough *not* because the problem is unworthy but because the solutions available all seem too daunting. But LLAMA is a less intrusive, less costly option—thus potential patrons can contemplate using it earlier.

ACTs prepare teams. With enough patron support mobilized, ACTs can be established. During the ten week training, emphasis would be put on:

- √ Strengthening the command structure and unit cohesion within the teams
- √ Physical and mental conditioning
- √ Simulated live exercise with emphasis on problem-solving scenarios
- √ Critical field craft (information management and communications, as well as safer movement, encampment and threat response)
- √ Adaptation and refinement of aid skills
- √ Telecommunications equipment training
- √ Off-the-land survival

Fundamentally, ACTs offer a versatile mix of training, equipment and supplies. Teams can attempt many kinds of activities when provided an appropriate mix to match needs in their home areas. Generic examples are: sustained aid, or merely give-and-go aid; supply line finding-and-minding; telecom out-posting; information-gathering; escorting; civilian returnee training; and attached advisors. Thus LLAMA has no “standard deployment”. But in the end, it all comes from the same clay: a mix of training, equipment and supplies that enables locals to survive and serve in a conflict zone.

Teams deploy for three broad models of work. LLAMA’s three broad models of work are: “Self-reliance”, “Inside-out collaboration”, and “Preparing those under international care”.

Model I: Self-reliance. Any model of self-reliance work must face the question of ownership without equivocation. One frequently hears calls for a stronger local role in relief response. They are often based on considerations of safety (ours), cost savings, and dignity instead of dependence. But outsiders rushing in to an emergency often fail to “confer” much ownership. In contrast, most LLAMA team members will have been residents of the areas to which they are deployed. Still, the familiarity and respect that ties them to the affected populace is not enough. They will also be trained to learn how the trapped population has survived. History shows time and again how civilians rely on kin (affinity), secrecy (anonymity) and pragmatism (accommodation) to live another day.

Any effort to increase a group's self-reliance must start by learning what they themselves have been doing.

Building local capacity. LLAMA aid is about as locally-led as aid can be—and still be called aid. It will promote local capacity through leadership strengthening, institution building and community development. But because this is aid on the run, these familiar-sounding *goals* will be pursued in very different *forms*. They also will have less ambitious scope. LLAMA simply intends to share best practices with leaders, institutions and communities about how to survive so they can continue to serve. This is done by helping them transition to more dispersed, mobile and discreet forms of work. This differentiates LLAMA from its closest cousin, known as “remote control aid.” While remote control aid has demonstrated our increased willingness to trust locals with programs during the worst emergencies—it has still left these brave individuals exposed above ground tending to our immobile, vulnerable aid apparatus.

Self-reliance in protection and relief. Protection: LLAMA's focuses on civilian “protection” in the physical, not legal, sense of the word. Leadership and information is vital for avoiding physical threats. It is vital for teaching primordial elements of protection, such as the optimal group size and composition for survival, and time-tested means of hiding or fleeing. The latter can include improved information management and communications, as well as safer movement, encampment and threat response. They are also key to a myriad of other preparations and proactive steps that can enhance protection.

Relief sectors: There are professional standards in the key sectors of emergency relief. LLAMA will rely on its in-house cadre and country trainers to adapt those standards for the scaled down, mobile and discreet nature of LLAMA aid. Teams might work in the sectors noted below. The full monograph details some of the possible activities, skill sets, and material that teams might require.

- √ Preventative health
- √ Water and sanitation
- √ Shelter and site planning
- √ Nutrition and food security *
- √ Transitional livelihood *
- √ Education (to create a safe and “normalized” setting for vulnerable children)
- √ Livestock

* Food and economic *security* are given special attention. A variety of mechanisms can be used to move it from a survival mode to one of stabilization. In safer and more sophisticated circumstances, it can move from a stabilization mode to one that shifts away from LLAMA sourcing and becomes more self-reliant. But of course there is no guarantee that a stabilization phase will consolidate itself or even last. If the population needs to rapidly flee, they will do so with portable inputs (currency, tools and skills) and outputs (goods produced).

Model II: Inside-out collaboration. Under this model of work, LLAMA teams (1) help send an alarm about at-risk populations out to the world public, and (2) transmit important baseline information out to aid agencies hoping to come in, so they can better prepare their interventions. Finally, if aid agencies are indeed on the verge of entering, a team can (3) help guide their movement in so they can position their programs for the least hazard and greatest impact. The opportunities for supporting the goals of advocacy and aid organizations “from the inside-out” are many.

Model III: Preparing those under international care. In this model, LLAMA teams work with civilians who are under international care to help prepare them for danger they might soon face. This refers to those rare but disastrous times when international safe havens have collapsed, as well as those many instances when international asylum breaks down. Trends ranging from refolement, to the manipulation of IDP camps, to the poor durability of cease fires, all make it increasingly likely that people once under our care will walk back into danger. LLAMA would take better advantage of that period of care by sharing field craft for civilian survival.

The reach of LLAMA aid. Case examples show that hundreds of thousands can be reached by the aid of discreet small teams. LLAMA both learns from and innovates off of these experiences. There are many ways LLAMA can put “a convoy in a backpack”. In large part this is refers to working through a variety of currency and market innovations. But it also refers to stripping aid down to its essentials, subsisting on the land, and relying on the smartest, most portable aid of all: leadership and information. Moreover, LLAMA *grows* once in the field. This is achieved by reactivating caregivers, retooling organizational responders, recruiting, and replicating.

How many people can one LLAMA team reach? Thousands? How many people can a *network* of LLAMA teams reach? Tens of thousands? How many lives can be saved by replicating “second-generation” LLAMA teams in the field? Or by even creating a second, third or fourth LLAMA organization? Hundreds of thousands? Perhaps the only number that really matters is *zero*. If today, in a given place, conventional aid is unable to reach an endangered population, then zero is the real baseline. All the lives more than zero saved are reasons try another method such as LLAMA.

What LLAMA asks of Patrons

Patrons can include governments, UN/multilaterals, NGOs, the public, foundations, and corporations, as well as circles of advocacy, human rights, faith-based, solidarity and diaspora groups. History shows that all these sources have been tapped to provide nonconsensual aid when the cause was compelling enough. LLAMA will pursue a variety of patrons not only to build independence, but also to develop braided support that helps at different times in different ways. For example, some of these types of patrons tend to offer support much earlier than others. And some can offer funding, while others are well-positioned to offer equally-vital non-monetary types of support.

LLAMA seeks (1) funding, (2) equipment and supply, and (3) information sharing, as well as the identification of (4) contacts and partners, and (5) recruits. Perhaps two things stand out about this list. One is that LLAMA does not ask patrons to do its work.

They are not being asked to assume an operational role. Another is that non-monetary support can sometimes be of greater help to locally-based efforts than big funding. Local resources, local information, local contacts, local partners and local recruits all represent assets on the ground—which is the key to locally-led aid.

Traditional and nontraditional support. In some ways, LLAMA’s approach to mobilizing support will be traditional. It will, for example, solicit support from several “activist countries” that are already experimenting with ways to circumvent today’s erratic aid pipeline. These particular governments are quite interested in early warning, contingency planning, and standby capacity that can deploy before conventional aid does. Moreover, they have a record of not letting their foreign interests and policies get in the way of humanitarianism. Another tier of support LLAMA will pursue are larger foundations and NGOs. Ideally, one among their ranks would provide LLAMA a significant endowment to assure its long-term viability.

In other ways, LLAMA’s approach to mobilizing support will be nontraditional. With the post-Cold War decline of superpower patronage, warring parties have begun to place more emphasis on other sources of support, such as remittances from diaspora, solidarity, or faith-based groups. LLAMA will have opportunities to tap the same types of sources on behalf of the *victims* of those warring parties. And with post-modern technology able to move information, images and monies in ways hardly imaginable a decade ago, there are new opportunities for advance mobile aid. This globalization of instant information and financial flows is a natural ally of such aid.

Discretion and probation. There will often be larger humanitarian or diplomatic efforts underway in the general region where LLAMA deploys. These efforts are the result of hard work by others to build relationships and understandings with belligerent parties. Although those efforts will not yet have reached the civilians that LLAMA targets, it is still important that LLAMA’s work not jeopardize them. In this regard, history is on LLAMA’s side. Research shows nonconsensual aid has been undertaken by respectable institutions and individuals many times—and did not result in “blowback” onto the larger aid community. A patron can support conventional and unconventional approaches at the same time. For its part, LLAMA offers prudent and confidence-building steps.

In terms of *discretion*, the design of teams and the field craft they use are all tested means of avoiding abusive powers. Thus one aim is for teams go the duration of their deployment without ever being detected by these powers. But when teams are detected, the ACTs serve as buffers that disassociate patrons from events on the ground. Respected institutions and governments have already used similar buffers to quietly help the victims of Apartheid and other abusive regimes.

Clearly, some patrons would prefer credit rather than anonymity. Having their support channeled (via LLAMA) to trapped populations that no other agencies have reached might be an appealing moral—and marketing—incentive for them. LLAMA can negotiate “partial publicity” with such patrons in ways that do not compromise ongoing operations.

In terms of *probation*, patrons should have a chance, when appropriate, to evaluate an initial light foray by the team(s) before committing to more robust deployments. Such

“probationary deployments” would be scaled down and more monitored than usual. Such confidence-building deployments would lend reassurance to potential LLAMA sponsors.

What LLAMA can give Patrons

A cost effective option. A “lack of resources” appears, along with a lack consent and security, to be among the top reasons claimed for not reaching endangered populations. The aggregate pie for aid has shrunk since the Cold War. Prioritization of the remaining slices is, as always, skewed by geo-political goals. It is the reality we are faced with. LLAMA does not try to influence powers and events that can easily remain beyond its control. It does not try to persuade reluctant governments and reticent donors to separate their funding from real-politik. But LLAMA will try to show them it can very cost-effectively use money they do make available to it.

Affordable by any measure. LLAMA has no standard package cost because it has no standard deployment. Yet some assumptions about its affordability can be made:

- (1) It is not intensive in terms of commodities, infrastructure, or expatriates, so these normally expensive line items are much cheaper.
- (2) To an unprecedented extent, commodities will be purchased or improvised locally, eliminating global transshipment costs and waste.
- (3) Its teams are very cost-effective, living light on the land. Having “no address” means not paying rent or utilities.
- (4) The teams’ self-reliance model of programming leverages local resources and volunteer manpower.
- (5) To the extent the teams’ work can help mitigate forced displacement, it contains costs. Nothing is a better cost-saver than early preventative action.
- (6) It avoids enormously wasteful “costs of doing business” with unethical groups that very often are passed on to donors. LLAMA teams will avoid formalized extortion by not dealing (or “engaging”) with those who extort aid. Moreover, teams physically draw little attention, thus will not suffer the chronic skimming, looting, and rate-gouging that large-scale aid often does.

These points suggest why the design or modus operandi of LLAMA is cost effective. The means by which this would be *monitored* are addressed in later discussion of accountability.

A complementary option. Another matter of huge importance to donors is better coordination between aid bodies. This will be one of LLAMA’s profound strengths. Can there be a better measure of cooperation than providing each other vital help at critical moments? Consider how LLAMA can help aid agencies at the most dangerous transitions and gaps in their emergency work.

Transition: Pull out strategically. Deciding whether or not to pull out of a conflict is perhaps the most difficult moment that operational agencies ever face. If they stay too long in the face of danger they risk expatriate deaths. If they stay too long in the face of manipulative powers, they risk “collusion” with them. But leave—and they feel they

have abandoned their local staff and beneficiaries with no preparation for the coming conflict. Foresight is needed. By coordinating with LLAMA, preparations can be made to (1) help staff adapt and continue their service, and (2) help beneficiaries build self-reliance.

Transition: Prepare for the end of asylum or safe haven. Periods of international care can be used as an opportunity to prepare civilians for coping with future conflict. This is particularly needed when such periods might be short-lived. Border asylum countries might use various methods to oblige refugees to go home, even when home is dangerous. Safe havens inside the affected country might collapse. These periods of international care are a time when LLAMA can work side by side with aid agencies on a goal we can all agree is desirable: that civilians be better prepared for dangers once they are on their own again.

Gap: Help even while being denied access. We tend to think emergency response begins *when we get there*. But oftentimes, by the time we gain access, the death toll is already in decline. This refers to the deadly period during which outside relief is absent. It can last months or years. If aid agencies are locked out of a crisis zone, then LLAMA provides a channel for them to indirectly help civilians trapped there. As but one of many examples, LLAMA teams can move some of their life-saving but idle supply to where it is needed—*when* it is needed. Another example is helping patrons (re)establish funding support for a local service provider that LLAMA has helped put back on a survival footing. Or, for example, if patrons are trying to draw attention to a forgotten crisis, then LLAMA teams can get facts with which they can sound the alarm. If they want independent forecasts of both a crisis *and* the international response to it, the LLAMA can provide it.

Transition: Enter a crisis very well prepared If aid agencies are preparing to enter a crisis zone and need baseline information on the people's location and condition, LLAMA teams can provide them such facts. The mapping and assessment it provides can help their programs come in with the greatest impact and least hazard. Upon arrival, LLAMA teams can give them introductions to local leaders and strong hires.

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No one will (indeed no one should) support LLAMA aid unless persuaded it offers acceptable levels of security, legal principle, and accountability. The full monograph responds to all these legitimate questions in detail. It will show how LLAMA could meet and surpass prevailing practices in many ways. The following is merely an overview of critiques.

Security of Teams?

The question of “acceptable risk” is an abstract until put into context. Acceptable compared to what? Acceptable to whom? We must refer back to the situation we are already in. Conventional aid today is inherently dangerous. And those in greatest danger are the *local* drivers, warehouse guards, contractors, and interpreters who work within an exposed, vulnerable infrastructure that we imagine is the only way to move aid. Research

shows that our local staff are first-tier targets whom we give only second-class protection. To be clear, there will be times when LLAMA teams are interdicted and detained; and on some of those occasions, killed. The possibility is undeniable. Who wants to be responsible for them walking into such danger? They will.

LLAMA volunteers undertake their work with full knowledge of its life-threatening nature. They undertake the risk when there is no other operation reaching their trapped families and compatriots with aid. It is easier for abusive powers to kill locals—and locals know it. Yet history shows in every conflict there are those who chose risk over safety in order to help their own people. If they want to do this, can we decline helping them?

Acceptance, protection and deterrence. Standard aid security doctrine is built on the premise that work is done above ground: openly handling very coveted commodities, limited in maneuverability, led by outsiders, and making most moves transparent. To defend this vulnerable profile, conventional security has employed three broad strategies: (1) gain acceptance, (2) protect humanitarian infrastructure, and/or (3) deploy deterrent force. The record shows that these strategies, though continually improving, have their limits.

LLAMA is premised on working below ground (at least initially), and that changes the whole security architecture. In order to gain *acceptance*, conventional aid tries to engage abusive powers to win their consent. And it seeks approval of the general population by projecting a principled image. But LLAMA presumptively avoids abusive power. And it gains approval of the population by tapping local ties of affinity and loyalty. In order to build *protection*, conventional aid tries to “harden” itself against attacks. Its field craft comes from the security industry. But LLAMA’s workplace is below ground. It hides and moves itself away from attack. Its field craft comes from the security industry and special military doctrine, as well as historical study of underground movements, and social science study of civilian survival tactics. Finally, in order to achieve *deterrence*, conventional aid appeals for countervailing power to control belligerents. If available, that power uses sanctions and the threat of defensive and offensive force. But LLAMA does not attempt to control belligerents. It does not use sanctions or offensive force. While defensive force is not advocated here, headquarters and patrons should at least have the option to discuss personal side arms for the teams (perhaps not unlike those allowed to medical personnel under international law).

Security and Survival of Civilians?

The strongest argument in favor of LLAMA in a given situation is that “nothing but LLAMA aid will reach these endangered people in time.” And the strongest argument against is “LLAMA will further endanger these people.”

Do no harm. Can LLAMA make things worse? Might it invite retaliation against the people it intended to help? Anecdotal historical evidence suggests that undergrounds which attract no attention are at less risk than ones that do. Partisan undergrounds engaged in resistance invariably drew attention, triggered reprisals, and suffered higher

casualties—while nonviolent undergrounds focused only on quiet survival suffered much less.

Might LLAMA lure civilians into a false sense of security? This has happened with conventional aid and peacekeeping. But LLAMA does not come in with the emblems and arms of the international community. It does not convey the message “The world has arrived.” LLAMA’s message is “You lead, this is risky, but we have ways we can help.” Helping inform civilians about dangers and options also mitigates against a false sense of security. Civilians’ reasonably informed consent can be bolstered by two innovations. (1) LLAMA can arrange “survivor testimonials” so doubtful civilians can *hear* from trusted countrymen about dangers they have experienced, and see video footage of the same. (The degree to which at-risk civilians downplay threats and fail to prepare is astonishing.) (2) LLAMA can also have civilians visit “demonstration sites”. These would be locations where LLAMA is already established, that undecided civilians *see* activity ranging from early warning systems to transitional livelihoods. Civilians might conclude that they face grave danger and that LLAMA tactics are viable. Again, if they want the aid even with its inherent risks—can we decline helping them?

Flight can be safer and more sustainable. History has shown time and again that by adjusting their “profile” and by acquiring certain skills, civilian populations can survive longer. Unfortunately this requires a learning curve during which many may die. One of LLAMA’s most basic purposes is to share proven “best practices in safer and more sustainable flight” with civilians. In this role LLAMA is both a teacher and a student.

Historical research reveals how civilians often find, through trial and error, an “optimal grouping” (or best group size and composition) for survival. The conditions that tend to shape their choices are security, economic prospects, environmental capacity, compatible relations, and aid management. LLAMA offers skills and organizational methods to address each of these conditions. Security is always the first consideration. But as vital as security is, armed assault is often not the biggest killer of civilians in conflict zones.

LLAMA focuses on key areas of security field craft that militaries have used—and civilians have copied—over time. They are:

- (1) *Information management.* Its primary purpose is to feed *local* early warning networks with physically actionable information. There are many sources and methods to draw on.
- (2) *Communications.* While the benefits of communication are many, security is its foremost application. Key choices are: suitable technology (from primitive to modern) and reliable protocols and chains of communication.
- (3) *Safer movement.* Movement often poses danger for at-risk populations, yet they can master tactics of travel formation, route planning and counter-detection.
- (4) *Safer encampment.* There is ample doctrine and experience for safer sanctuary in both rural and urban settings.
- (5) *Safer threat response.* History shows that civilians can learn immediate action drills in anticipation of or response to threats such as shelling and bombing, crossfire and sniper fire, ambush, pursuit and landmines.

Sovereignty and Consent?

LLAMA is consistent with laws *and precedents* regarding sovereignty. Local citizens who run LLAMA teams are well justified in helping their own people without the consent of abusive powers. So too, foreigners who help initiate those teams are well justified—after giving due respect to controlling powers—to proceed with nonconsensual aid.

When is transparency no longer required in aid work? The norm is already being challenged by respected aid agencies worldwide when they engage in human rights monitoring that inherently requires discretion and confidentiality. There has never been a human rights field report that was first taken over to the local Colonel's office for editorial review. It is also challenged by the defensive deceptions that aid agencies often practice (and security manuals advise) in order to evade “warring factions and thugs”.

So too, sovereignty has already been challenged by low-profile nonconsensual aid. History provides case examples from Ethiopia, South Africa, Bosnia, Burma, Sudan, North Korea and Cambodia.

Sovereignty has also been challenged high-profile coercive intervention. This escalation to forceful “humanitarian intervention” has not always achieved what it intended: in addition to intruding very heavily upon sovereign powers, it has not always left its “beneficiaries” safer. While not offering LLAMA aid as a substitute for such escalation (which sometimes is indeed necessary), it is noteworthy that LLAMA is a much less intrusive option than those other efforts. This all leads to justification for nonconsensual and nonviolent work under ground. Rather than waiting to see if conventional escalation bears fruit, LLAMA would be undertaken concurrently with it.

Humanitarian Principles?

LLAMA teams have the proper humanitarian character to engage in aid. They even have distinct advantages in trying to remain neutral, independent and impartial. (Note: Locally-led aid taps a powerful force by having teams aid their own people. They are highly motivated, and their people are highly receptive. In this sense, a team serving its home populace is “partial”. But LLAMA earns its impartiality by sending different teams to different populations in need. Thus, in the aggregate, LLAMA does not discriminate.) Given their design and field craft, LLAMA teams will also be able to physically avoid many of the unprincipled situations that conventional aid agencies often face.

Neutrality. LLAMA cannot be purely neutral in that aid fixes what combatants destroy. Neither LLAMA nor any other agency needs to apologize for that. But it can be neutral in the sense that it will very rarely fuel the fighting capacity of one side or another. Toward this end, LLAMA employs (1) built-in checks to reduce chances that a team will deliberately violate its neutrality, and (2) field craft that reduce chances its aid will accidentally benefit belligerents—which has the same effect as violating neutrality.

History shows that belligerents will sometimes respect and facilitate the neutral distribution of aid. LLAMA and local leaders will use their discretion in approaching such groups. Conventional agencies often make concessions to armed groups, feeling that *they need* a protective partner to provide armed deterrence on the ground. But as

noted, LLAMA has its own security regimen and will not be forced into relations that undermine neutrality. LLAMA can test partnerships with small trial runs. If no reliable armed powers can be found, then it will work separately from all of them.

Independence. It was noted earlier that LLAMA’s headquarters will operate “under no flag”. But it is not enough to be independent in political and financial terms. An agency also needs *operational* freedom on the ground. If it cannot move a step without being given permission or assured of safety, then what does the word “independence” really mean? In this regard, a strong case can be made that LLAMA will be able to operate more independently on (or under) the ground than its conventional counterparts.

Impartiality. Impartiality, nondiscrimination and proportionality all require us to prioritize our aid according to human need. Yet again, the availability of access, security, and resources continually determine where we go. We are wed to those we *must* influence: the reluctant governments, recalcitrant soldiers, and reticent donors. They skew our targeting. But an organization like LLAMA which is not as permission-bound, risk-averse, or donor-driven will be better able to get aid where it is most needed.

Accountability?

LLAMA offers many strengths—indeed comparative advantages—in performing accountably that LLAMA offers. Briefly, they are:

Probationary deployment. As noted earlier, patrons should have a chance, when appropriate, to evaluate an initial light foray by the team(s) before committing to more robust deployments.

Finances. LLAMA has strong financial controls because it: (1) selects reliable personnel under conditions that are much less rushed than conventionally happens with belated emergency response, (2) avoids the large concentration of population and resources that so often corrupts camps, (3) has a much more manageable volume to monitor, since it is not commodity-intensive, (4) puts cash disbursements on a short leash, through pay per unit, pay per day, and/or short cycle micro-finance, all intended to show “quick proof of sincerity”.

Reporting. LLAMA teams will be equipped to provide video inventory audits. That is, the ACT will be able to see live video feeds of all the supplies the team was issued and/or how it is distributed, as well as all the currency the team was issued and/or what it has purchased.

Ethics. LLAMA adopts its ethics (and tactics) from the people it serves. This is in accord with the importance we attach today both to “ground-truthing” our work, and understanding the “coping mechanisms” by which civilians survive. The ground truth is that civilians often cope with violence by using “guile” and a range of unconventional tactics. LLAMA also adopts its ethics from admired individuals and institutions that have carried out unorthodox rescue—all of whom ended up on “the right side of history”.

Professionalism. Too often we are adept with the technical requirements, but amateurish with the political-security ones. LLAMA teams will be skilled with each. Research shows that local civilians and foreign agencies alike are already conducting nonconsensual aid, but the resulting lessons and best practices from it are little shared. The logical outcome of *not learning* from this work “outside the box” is that each new try will be improvised, unrehearsed and amateurish. It remains needlessly unprofessional—and thus unnecessarily dangerous.

Fidelity to those in need. There are many principles to which we must be accountable. But as the Sphere Project’s Humanitarian Charter states, our *fundamental* accountability must be to those we seek to assist. It is sometimes said that conventional aid is accountable to many parties, but that there is no mechanism by which foreign agencies are held accountable to the “beneficiaries”. This paper argues that locally-led aid is such a mechanism. LLAMA teams are aiding their own people. They will serve them even when conventional efforts have failed or not even been attempted. *This is the ultimate expression of accountability.* What is needed *on our part* is a genuine expression of trust. Dire conditions call for innovative operations—and commensurately flexible funding arrangements to support them. They also call for us to live up to our oft-professed goal of empowering those we work with. We must step outside our conventional comfort zone of *control*. If we do not trust locally-led efforts enough to place more control in their hands, then we should fully expect to see more news accounts saying: “It’s impossible to reach them.”

About the Author

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¹ *IDP: Global Survey 2002*, by the Global IDP Project of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

² *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, UN Security Council, S/2001/331, 30 March 2001; pp. 15 & 21 pp. 15 & 21.