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To: Jody Olsen, Director
Anne Hughes, Chief Compliance Officer

From: Kathy A. Buller, Inspector General

Date: September 18, 2019

Subject: Final Report on the Review of New Country Entry Guidance for Conflict-Affected Environments (IG-19-05-SR)

Transmitted for your information is our final report on the Review of New Country Entry Guidance for Conflict-Affected Environments.

Management concurred with all 14 recommendations, which remain open. In its response, management described actions it is taking or intends to take to address the issues that prompted each of our recommendations. OIG will review and consider closing recommendations 1-10 and 14 when the documentation reflected in the agency's response to the preliminary report is received. For recommendations 11-13, additional documentation is required. Our comments, which are in the report as Appendix G, address these matters.

We wish to note that in closing recommendations, we are not certifying that the agency has taken these actions or that we have reviewed their effect. Certifying compliance and verifying effectiveness are management's responsibilities. However, when we feel it is warranted, we may conduct a follow-up review to confirm that action has been taken and to evaluate the impact.

You may address questions regarding follow-up or documentation to Assistant Inspector General for Evaluation Jeremy Black at 202.692.2912.

Please accept our thanks for your cooperation and assistance in our review.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Peace Corps currently operates in 62 countries which expressed a need for trained men and women to help achieve their development priorities. Fourteen of these countries have hosted United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions, and two have on-going UN peacekeeping missions. The Peace Corps has opened (or reopened) 14 new programs since 2004, 12 of which were in countries with a history of violent conflict affecting the present context. If this pattern continues, most new country entries in the future are likely to be in conflict-affected¹ environments.

WHAT WE FOUND

While conducting country program evaluations of recently opened programs in conflict-affected countries, the Peace Corps Office of Inspector General (OIG) identified some concerning trends. Some Volunteers working in conflict-affected environments struggled to feel successful, integrated, and resilient. This has increased Volunteers' stress, dissatisfaction with service, and potential for negative health and safety impacts. Volunteers found it very difficult to integrate into their communities, which is foundational to a safe and successful service.

Our review determined that the Peace Corps lacked specific criteria to distinguish conflict-affected countries from other countries, which impeded its ability to apply an appropriately focused lens during the assessment process. As a result, the agency had not developed adequate processes or procedures to prepare staff and Volunteers to work in conflict-affected countries.

Many former staff and external stakeholders we interviewed acknowledged that the Peace Corps needed to be 'conflict sensitive' to be a responsible partner in these complex environments.

We found that the agency had not implemented or institutionalized many recommendations made in prior internal studies concerning new country entries in conflict-affected environments. This review found several examples of solutions and resources developed by country program and headquarters staff which would benefit future Peace Corps Volunteers, staff, and programs if they could be shared and adapted.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

Our report makes 14 recommendations designed to improve guidance in both the "New Country Assessment Guide" and the "New Country Entry Guide."

¹ We determined that the term "post-conflict" did not usefully convey the range of challenging conditions in which the Peace Corps works. For these reasons this review uses the broader term "conflict-affected" rather than "post-conflict" when referring to countries and environments where people and institutions continue to be affected by prior conflict or other traumatic events.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, key U.S. Government (USG) agencies have clarified principles guiding development and humanitarian interventions in conflict-affected environments. In 2010, the U.S. Department of State initiated a strategy to harmonize the U.S. Government response to conflicts, and called for greater planning, coordination, and focusing of resources amongst USG agencies. They noted that:

“...the U.S. government has recognized that U.S. national security depends upon a more effective approach [to] fragile states. Yet we have struggled with how to understand these challenges and how to organize our civilian institutions to deal with them. The challenge keeps growing.”

More than half of all U.S. foreign assistance provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) goes to conflict-affected countries.²

U.S. Government agencies and donor organizations need to tailor assistance and training programs in conflict-affected environments, according to “A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas” produced in 2018. This framework emphasizes the importance of addressing trauma and psychosocial well-being in conflict-affected environments.

The Peace Corps works in countries with histories of civil wars, ethnic clashes, cross-border conflicts, rebel incursions, foreign occupations, genocide, violent protests, and repressive dictatorships. These conflicts often have on-going impacts, including internally displaced populations and refugees, the presence of landmines, and people who served as child soldiers. Populations in conflict-affected countries have elevated rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Additional shocks such as natural disasters and epidemics may complicate conditions and further elevate rates of PTSD. Nepal, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Ethiopia have been hit with devastating earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, tsunamis, and tropical cyclones. Ebola epidemics severely impacted Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone,³ while South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique have high HIV/AIDS incidence rates.⁴

Of the 62 countries in which the Peace Corps operated as of September 2018, 14 countries (7 in the Africa Region; 6 in the Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia Region; and 1 in the Inter-America and the Pacific Region) had hosted UN peacekeeping missions. In Kosovo and Liberia, there were UN peacekeeping missions concurrent with Peace Corps operations. Six countries (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda, South Africa, Myanmar, and Ukraine) had violent conflicts in the last 5 years. Since 2004, the Peace Corps has opened or re-opened 14 overseas programs, 12

² U.S. Department of State and U. S. Agency for International Development, *Leading Through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (Washington, DC: U.S. State Department, 2010), 122.

³ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/macroeconomics/publication/2014-2015-west-africa-ebola-crisis-impact-update>

⁴ According to UNAIDS country data presented on <http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/>

of which were in countries with a history of violent conflict or U.N. peacekeeping missions. Following this pattern, most new country entries in the future are likely to be in conflict-affected environments.

At the time of this review, some Peace Corps countries had areas with on-going conflicts, such as Ukraine and Myanmar, and the agency avoided placing Volunteers in those areas for security reasons. In general, conflict-affected environments are more likely to exhibit weak or impaired governmental institutions, widespread poverty, unstable political and economic systems, damaged infrastructure, detrimental environmental effects, and diminished ability to protect citizens' security and control corruption.⁵ Distrust and poor social cohesion are common in communities which are recovering from a history of violent conflict. These environments also take longer to recover from shocks unrelated to conflict, such as natural disasters, epidemics, and food insecurity.

One external partner we interviewed observed that for their organization, post-conflict is rarely an accurate label for the conflict-affected countries where they work. For example, Central African Republic and South Sudan were considered post-conflict in recent years, yet both have had fresh outbreaks of violent conflict. Likewise, many countries in which the Peace Corps works may be labeled post-conflict but may in fact have ongoing conflict in areas of the country where the Peace Corps is not working.

PURPOSE

While conducting country program evaluations of recently opened programs in conflict-affected countries, OIG identified some common challenges. Volunteers working in these environments struggled to integrate and persevere in their assignments. This led to stress, dissatisfaction with service, and negative health and safety impacts. Volunteers found it very difficult to integrate into their communities, which could increase exposure to safety risks. Staff we interviewed validated that working in conflict-affected environments was more difficult and stressful for Volunteers and staff. As one former country director (CD) put it: "We did not take into consideration the fallout for the community in a post-conflict situation. Nobody trusts anybody."

Taking a conflict sensitive approach required staff and Volunteers to understand the history of the conflict and inter-group relations. Staff also needed to examine how Peace Corps programs and activities fit into and impacted national and community level development priorities and social dynamics.

⁵ Analysis of the challenges and capacity gaps in the area of comprehensive development planning in post-conflict contexts, Development Account Project (ROA 105) Strengthening National Capacity for the Integration of Sustainable Development Principles into Development Strategies in Countries Emerging from Conflict, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Sustainable Development, pages 10-14

This review evaluated the adequacy of Peace Corps guidance on new country entries and re-entries in conflict-affected environments. Our researchable questions were:

- Is there sufficient guidance for headquarters and overseas staff tasked with opening or re-opening in a conflict-affected environment?
- What are some actions the Peace Corps should take to improve new-country entry or re-entry in conflict-affected environments?

PRIOR STUDIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our review found a range of useful recommendations in internally produced reports to help the agency address challenges associated with opening and operating in a post-conflict context. Generally, the results of our review confirmed the continuing relevance and importance of these recommendations, most of which had not been acted upon. Furthermore, we learned that the Peace Corps began implementing an Enterprise Risk Management Process⁶ as part of the Peace Corps Strategic Plan for FYs 2018-2022 (Performance Goal 6.1). This new system could provide a structured process for anticipating the implications of conflict-affected environments on Peace Corps operations.

The Peace Corps has made efforts to improve its understanding of how conflict-affected environments posed additional and unique challenges, such as safety and security issues, the need to remain politically neutral, finding partners, working in communities shattered by war, and living with traumatized populations. Figure 1 provides a timeline of key events and reports mentioned in the following sections.

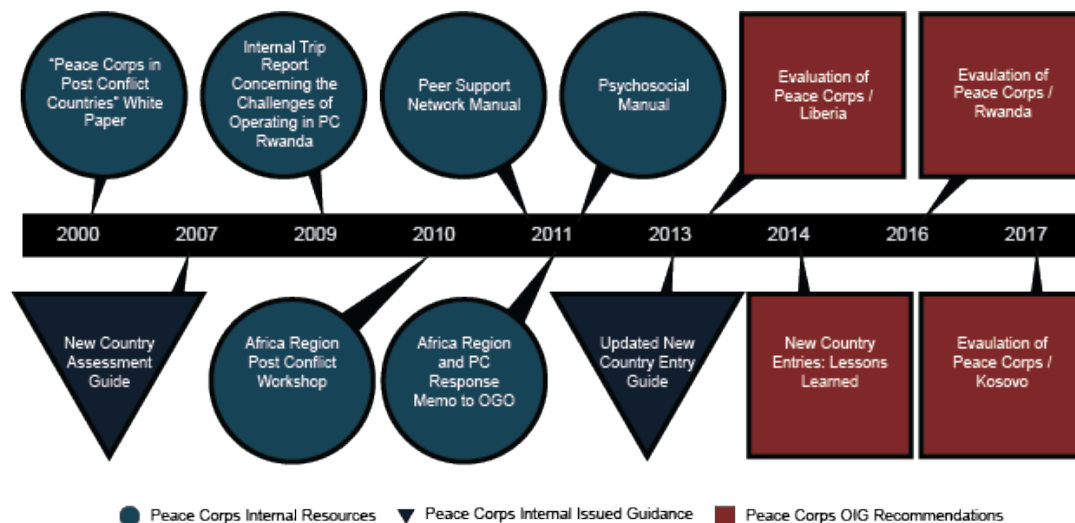


Figure 1: Timeline of recommendations and guidance concerning Peace Corps operations in conflict-affected environments.

⁶ “Enterprise Risk Management” entails a risk governance structure based on an evidence-based risk profile, and the regular creation and use of risk profile reports to make decisions about mitigating significant risks which they identify. Peace Corps issued Manual Section 780 Enterprise Risk Management in July 2019.

Following is a summary of the main recommendations from these internal reports.

Former Peace Corps Director Mark Schneider commissioned a study in 2000 titled “Peace Corps in Post Conflict Countries” which provided recommendations for opening programs in post-conflict countries based on case studies of several Peace Corps country programs in conflict-affected environments. These recommendations included:

- When staffing conflict-affected countries, look for skills in the local language and knowledge of the host country for U.S. direct hire staff, and ensure that the cultural diversity of the host-country is well represented in the host country national staff.
- Assign Crisis Corps [Peace Corps Response] to prepare the ground for two-year Volunteer assignments.
- Have a mix of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental partners in the country program and ensure that they are not politically biased towards particular groups of beneficiaries.
- Provide specialized staff training on post-conflict issues and additional training during [overseas staff training] on “issues related to security, site selection, programming and volunteer training that are more problematic in post-conflict/conflictive countries than in standard Peace Corps settings.”
- Modify Volunteer training to include: social/political history; sensitive language to use when talking about the conflict; site-specific information about the conflict, its impacts, and players; the effects of trauma on community members; continued training on the conflict during reconnect and in-service trainings; and country-specific training on conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts.

An internal agency report from 2009 concerning the challenges of operating in Peace Corps/Rwanda concluded that the agency needed to revise its expectations about operations in conflict-affected environments. The 2009 report called for a more realistic allocation of resources to avoid negatively impacting staff and Volunteers. After these issues were identified, Africa Region produced the “Psychosocial Manual,” to better prepare Volunteers working in post-conflict contexts and improve resiliency through positive self-care practices. Africa Region also organized a workshop held in Uganda in 2010 to discuss challenges and make recommendations related to working in conflict-affected environments in Africa. Recommendations from participating staff, Volunteers, and external resources addressed the following areas:

- Agency and post preparedness (staff, budget, and resources)
- Volunteer recruitment and selection
- Volunteer training
- Program design (projects, community and site development, and counterpart support)
- Volunteer support
- Staff development and recruitment
- Safety and security

In addition to these internal agency reports, OIG signaled that there were systemic problems arising in new country entries in conflict-affected environments. Our [“Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Liberia” \(IG-11-07-E\)](#) found that “[l]essons learned from the post’s opening have not been incorporated in agency processes and policies.” The finding identified “challenges associated with operating in a post-conflict environment” as part of the cause. OIG recommended that the agency incorporate lessons learned from Liberia into new country entry processes and policies. As a result, in 2013, the agency issued updated guidance in the “New Country Entry Guide” to highlight lessons learned from previous entries and produced resources guiding the creation of peer support networks. It also customized the pre-departure guide for Liberia. OIG summarized results from several audits and evaluations of new posts in the [“New Country Entries: Lessons Learned Report” \(September 2014\)](#), and made a set of recommendations, some of which reinforce prior recommendations related to post-conflict countries.

Table 1 provides an overview of the extent to which four selected reports and two guides we reviewed included recommendations and guidance for Peace Corps staff to address operational factors in conflict-affected countries or environments.⁷ Viewed together, these operational factors represent what could be described as an agency-specific “conflict-lens” for new country entries. Our interviews with past and current Peace Corps staff and Volunteers who served in conflict-affected environments confirmed the relevance of each of these factors.

⁷ For more detail about the specific recommendations made in these reports, readers of this report may contact Senior Evaluator Kris Hoffer at khoffer@peacecorpsig.gov.

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Table 1: Reports and Guidance that Failed to Address Operational Factors Relevant in Conflict-Affected Environments

		Reports				Guidance	
		Peace Corps in Post Conflict Countries	Rwanda Findings	Uganda Post-Conflict Workshop	OIG's New Country Entries: Lessons Learned	New Country Assessment Guide	New Country Entry Guide
		2000	2009	2010	2014	2007	2013
Operational Factors	Staffing					Not addressed	
	Budget/ Resources	Not addressed				Not addressed	
	Timeline	Not addressed	Not addressed			Not addressed	
	Partners		Not addressed	Not addressed		Not addressed	Not addressed
	New Country Assessment Process	Not addressed	Not addressed			Not addressed	Not addressed
	Staff Development				Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed
	Volunteer Training				Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed
	Mental Health Support	Not addressed			Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed
	Volunteer Recruitment				Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed
	Site Development/ Programming					Not addressed	Not addressed

RESULTS OF OUR REVIEW

Peace Corps policies for new country entries and re-entries are defined in Peace Corps Manual Section (MS) 340 “Opening a Post.” Two attachments included in this manual section provide the procedures for its implementation. The “New Country Assessment Guide” (2007) is used by small teams charged with visiting prospective posts to evaluate the feasibility of opening programs and to develop recommendations for staff assigned to open the program. The “New Country Entry Guide” (2013) is the main reference used by the country director and other members of senior staff to open a new office and begin operations in a new country.

This review found that the Peace Corps needed to more fully assess the conflict status of countries under consideration for opening, re-opening, or expanding a Peace Corps program. The agency should also address gaps in the current “New Country Assessment Guide” and the “New Country Entry Guide” to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency’s processes and procedures for opening posts in conflict-affected environments.

The report is divided into two sections. The first section regards the “New Country Assessment Guide.” We present three findings and six recommendations that should help Peace Corps assessment teams apply a “conflict lens” during the new country assessment process. The second section examines the “New Country Entry Guide.” We present eight findings and eight recommendations intended to enable start-up teams to adapt and operate more effectively in conflict-affected environments.

“NEW COUNTRY ASSESSMENT GUIDE”

The Peace Corps’ “New Country Assessment Guide” was issued in March 2007. The Peace Corps provided OIG with documentation on assessments completed in the following conflict-affected environments after the issuance of that guide: Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Indonesia (2007); Georgia (2008); Colombia and Nepal (2011); Kosovo (2012); Myanmar (2013); Timor Leste (2010 and 2014); Ukraine (2015 and 2016⁸); and Sri Lanka (2017). Figure 2 provides a timeline of new country assessments since 2007.

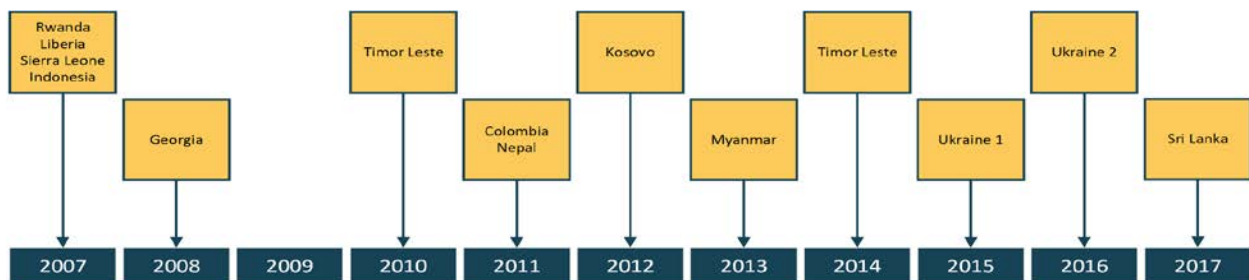


Figure 2: Timeline of new country assessments.

⁸ The two Ukraine reports counted as one for the review. Volunteers were evacuated in 2014 and returned in 2015.

We reviewed the assessment documentation provided for evidence that the assessment teams considered how conflict might impact Peace Corps operations, in areas identified as sensitive to conflict in previous agency and OIG reports. Some examples of the types of recommendations we looked for included:

- Hiring USDH and local staff with the requisite experience and capabilities, while creating a diverse representation on staff;
- Training staff in the weeks and months before Volunteers arrive to ensure that they are prepared;
- Providing adequate resources to hire qualified staff and to set up the post, recognizing the post-conflict contexts will likely be more expensive than typical environments, and infrastructural issues will present additional challenges;
- Putting extra preparation into Volunteer recruitment and training to provide trainees with accurate expectations, and Volunteers with an understanding of the history of the conflict;
- Equipping Volunteers with resiliency skills and an understanding of how traumatic experiences might affect their community.
- Undertaking a robust safety and security assessment with particular attention to identifying safe areas as well as the risks of the resumption of violent conflict;
- Focusing programming in the initial start-up phase; and
- Allowing the post to grow slowly in accordance with post capabilities.

The Peace Corps’ “New Country Assessment Guide” did not help assessment team members to develop the needed range of recommendations to the Director for opening and preparing programs in conflict-affected environments.

Assessments we reviewed often missed conflict and trauma-related areas of concern in conflict-affected environments. Table 2 shows the extent to which the assessment reports we reviewed addressed possible impacts of conflict on areas of post operations which were most affected by conflict and trauma.

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Table 2: Did new country assessment reports on conflict-affected countries mention the possible effects of conflict on post operations? Source: New Country Assessment Reports.

Country Assessed	Sri Lanka	Ukraine	Timor Leste	Myanmar	Kosovo	Nepal	Colombia	Georgia	Indonesia	Liberia	Rwanda	Sierra Leone	Number of Assessments Mentioning Issue Area
Date of Assessment	2017	2015 2016	2010 2014	2013	2012	2011	2011	2008	2007	2007	2007	2007	
Number of conflict-affected issue areas mentioned	6	6	8	10	6	5	3	0	2	1	7	3	
1. PCV resilience/PTSD awareness training			x								x		2
2. Mental health support				x							x		2
3. Effects of conflict on host communities											x		1
4. History of the conflict/parties involved	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	11
5. Implications of conflict for programming	x		x	x	x							x	5
6. PCV training modifications necessary				x	x	x	x				x		5
7. Safety and security training modifications	x	x		x									3
8. Site development implications	x	x		x	x	x							5
9. Partners/counterparts				x	x	x						x	4
10. Implications for recruitment and predeparture		x									x		2
11. Considerations for staff recruitment	x		x	x	x				x		x		6
12. Effect on staff:PCV ratio			x										1
13. Training needs for HCN staff													0
14. Needs for additional staff/headquarters support during start-up			x										1
15. Needs for additional resources		x	x	x									3
16. Implications for the timeline			x	x									2
17. Post policy implications-communications, whereabouts, transportation	x	x				x	x						4

There were several reasons why these gaps in the reports occurred. First, the “New Country Assessment Guide” did not distinguish conflict-affected environments from those which were not. Second, the “New Country Assessment Guide” did not include an examination of the effects of trauma on operations or Volunteer resiliency and support. Third, assessment team members were not recruited based on experience with conflict environments or trained on how to assess the impacts of conflict on areas of Peace Corps operations. Fourth, except for safety and security,

checklists in the “New Country Assessment Guide” did not contain prompts about additional areas to consider in conflict-affected environments. Finally, the agency did not have a standardized approach to preserving documentation related to new country assessments.

The “New Country Assessment Guide” did not distinguish conflict-affected environments from those which were not.

The “New Country Assessment Guide” did not provide guidelines for determining if the assessment process needed to be adapted to address the additional complexities inherent in conflict-affected environments. Ignoring these complexities created gaps in assessment report recommendations.

A former field staff member said that when he worked on opening a new program, they did not think about the ways the history of conflict might affect their Volunteers and post operations. They had problems with Volunteer integration, behavioral issues, and Volunteers feeling unsafe. A counselor from the Peace Corps’ Counseling and Outreach Unit visited the post and attributed the problems they were having to the country’s history of conflict. In the interview, the former field staff member concluded that “I should have been aware of the post-conflict issues from the beginning... I could have created a better environment and [the Volunteers] would not have felt so lost.”

The “New Country Assessment Guide” considered how conflict affects safety and security, but there were no questions specifically related to conflict in the other sections (such as programming and training, staffing, medical support, administrative issues) of the guide. The guide did not orient new country assessment teams on how to assess conflict-affected environments in a comprehensive manner. Our review found that a history of conflict could impact every section of the assessment, and the agency should take a more holistic approach to the assessment process. If the assessment started with the question “Is this a conflict-affected environment?” based on objective criteria selected by the agency, then the guidance could suggest additional lines of inquiry based on the response. There were some existing prompts which could provide useful insights when asked with a conflict-sensitive lens, such as:

- [What is] The effect[s] of cultural issues on safety and security, health, programming, and training?
- What are the potential constraints for Peace Corps staff and Volunteers working in the country?
- What other issues or information could impact the start-up of the Peace Corps program?

The “New Country Assessment Guide” did not provide guidance about accessing external sources of data on conflict-affected environments such as conflict assessments from USAID’s Office of Conflict Mitigation and Management (CMM). Their “Conflict Assessment Framework” (CAF) tool had been used in more than 70 countries, and the results could help inform Peace Corps new country assessments and staff responsible for opening new posts.⁹ To

⁹ See Appendix A for a list of resources for assessments.

evaluate the conflict status of a potential new Peace Corps country, headquarters staff members we interviewed emphasized the importance of gathering information from external experts (many of whom would be available in Washington, DC) with knowledge of the current conditions in a conflict-affected country, such as survivor organizations, peace building organizations, and USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI).

We recommend:

- 1. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations establish a procedure to determine whether a new country entry, re-entry, or expansion should be assessed as a conflict-affected environment.**
- 2. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations adapt the country assessment process to more fully assess the implications of conflict on Peace Corps operations in conflict-affected environments.**
- 3. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations provide guidance regarding the use of internally and externally available data sources to understand the conflict context during assessments.**

The "New Country Assessment Guide" did not include an examination of the effects of trauma on operations including Volunteer resiliency and support.

Only three assessment reports addressed issues related to trauma, including the assessments for Rwanda, Myanmar, and Timor Leste. Rwanda and Timor Leste mentioned the need for Volunteers to be trained on resiliency and PTSD. Myanmar and Rwanda's assessment reports emphasized the need for strategies for providing additional mental health support and enhanced self-care. The Rwanda assessment also mentioned concerns about the effects of the violent conflict on host communities.

Regarding training, the Timor-Leste assessment recommended that: "training should include sessions on post-conflict populations, personal and societal trauma," The Myanmar new country assessment recommended against inviting individuals with a risk of mental health support needs, based on lack of services available. The Rwanda assessment drew attention to the reality of trauma-impacted communities and the need for Volunteers to understand the history of the conflict and to be appropriately sensitive. It advised that Volunteers need training on the effects of PTSD due to the emotional issues related to the genocide and also indicated that additional support should be provided to help Volunteers with coping issues due to exposure to underlying trauma.

The issue of trauma was not addressed in the other nine assessment reports we reviewed. Eight of the assessments had clearly followed the outline provided in the “New Country Assessment Guide,” but the outline did not include prompts for the assessment teams to consider issues of mental health, or additional training needs for staff or Volunteers due to trauma or exposure to PTSD. There was no guidance provided in the health section of the Guide about describing mental health conditions in host communities or assessing mental health facilities or resources for Volunteers.

When asked whether assessments should be “trauma-informed” in conflict-affected environments, a former field staff and current headquarters staff member who led an assessment stated that:

We need to be more trauma informed when we are in the assessment process. I know very little about being trauma informed in a post-conflict civil war environment. ...Having greater sensitivity and awareness of the history of trauma would help with the assessment and in setting up the office.

New country assessment teams could refer to external data sources to become more familiar with the mental health context. Three potential references are described in Appendix A. They include:

- “Who is Where, When, doing What (4WS) in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support,” by the WHO/ IASC, which is a tool commonly used in humanitarian settings to map out mental health activities and supports available in a country.
- “The Humanitarian Emergency Settings Perceived Needs Scale (HESPER): Manual with Scale.” By WHO and King’s College London. This is a tool used to assess perceived needs of communities in humanitarian crises, and they contain information on mental health support issues.
- “World Health Organization Assessment Instrument for Mental Health Systems (WHO-AIMS) Country Reports” by WHO. These reports provide an in-depth summary of the mental health system of a country or region.

We recommend:

4. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations create additional new country assessment guidance that furthers a trauma-informed approach in conflict-affected environments that addresses:

- **Local capacity for supporting Volunteer resiliency/post-traumatic stress disorder awareness training;**
- **Strategies for providing additional mental health support and enhanced self-care; and**
- **Effects of the conflict and trauma on host communities and implications for site management.**

New country assessment team members did not have specialized qualifications or training for conflict-affected environments.

Staff who worked in or participated in assessment teams in countries with a history of conflict noted the need for team members to have some background or experience in conflict-affected environments in order to understand the implications of their observations from that perspective. One former field staff person who worked in a conflict-affected country stated: “Any kind of review team from headquarters (project, new country, etc.) going into a post-conflict society needs to have some technical expertise in post-conflict contexts and country specific experience. A post-conflict lens as primary lens; there is so much about post-conflict environments you wouldn’t notice without that lens.” A former assessment team member observed: “People should have been selected for the assessment who understood post-conflict environments.” A headquarters staff person and former field staff member who worked in a conflict-affected country said “We should force any evaluation/assessment process to look through a conflict/crisis lens and make sure to talk to certain kinds of people. ... They should also compose the assessment teams with people who have the necessary expertise to look at things this way.”

The qualifications required to participate in an assessment team were not stated in the “New Country Assessment Guide.” One staff member explained that, generally, they looked for experience in the region, Peace Corps experience, and relevant technical expertise in the area being assessed, but not necessarily post-conflict experience.

We recommend:

- 5. That the Associate Director of the Office of Global Operations establish specific criteria for selecting and training new country assessment team members to ensure that they have the appropriate experience and skills to identify issues and concerns which are unique to post-conflict/traumatized environments.**

The agency did not consistently manage its new country assessment records and reports.

Our review found that the agency did not have a set of consolidated files for assessment reports, meeting notes, and follow-up documents. A former headquarters staff person said the files were fragmented and it would be useful to maintain a more systematic repository of past reports and related documents. The reference resources useful for informing assessments were not centrally located. The folder for assessments located within the Office of Global Operations (OGO) folder on the agency shared drive was not used by all Regions consistently. Having a clear system for managing and storing information and resources about assessments would facilitate the preservation of institutional memory. One former headquarters and field staff person attributed

this to the Peace Corps' '5-year rule.'¹⁰ "We have a body of experienced people; all this knowledge is lost. In 5 years, we have lost this body of experience and knowledge. The 5-year rule is a real impediment."

Inconsistent maintenance and use of its own historic records could create inefficiencies and leave gaps in understanding of the types of risks or challenges staff and Volunteers faced in the country in the past. Such knowledge gaps and process inefficiencies during the re-entry process could make it harder for post leadership to make fully informed decisions. In 2018, OIG identified a gap in documentation of the security assessment conducted in Kenya in 2016, following 19 months of suspended operations, in the "Management Advisory Report: Managing the Suspension of Peace Corps/Kenya: A Case Study." The lack of documentation combined with the transition of high-level managers in and out of the agency created a situation in which people making important decisions about post staffing levels during the suspension were not fully informed. This led OIG to recommend: "That the Director maintain adequate documentation of key decisions and recommendations related to opening, closing, and suspending any overseas office or country program." The agency concurred with this recommendation and planned to supplement MS 340 *Opening a Post* and MS 341 *Non-Emergency Post Closing* with additional guidance concerning the types of documents to be maintained and corresponding updates in the agency's records schedule. In addition to implementing this recommendation, the agency should consolidate and organize this documentation to ensure that managers engaged in all phases of opening or re-opening a program have access to records of assessments.

We recommend:

- 6. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations centralize and consolidate reports, notes, and information collected during new country assessments.**

"NEW COUNTRY ENTRY GUIDE"

The Peace Corps' "New Country Entry Guide" lacked policies and procedures that staff and Volunteers needed to operate in a conflict-sensitive manner.

The "New Country Entry Guide," attached to Peace Corps Manual Section (MS) 340, is the main reference used by members of the senior leadership team to open a new program and begin operations in a new country. The "New Country Entry Guide" includes links to resources, a timeline of key activities, a scheduling tool for staffing up, and instructions for establishing operational aspects of a post, such as financial and information technology systems. There are

¹⁰ According to the Peace Corps Act, most U.S direct hire appointments are limited to 5 consecutive years, with a few exceptions. The Peace Corps Act, Title 22 Chapter 34 Section 2506. (a)(2)(A)

also several checklists of tasks to complete in the areas of administration, programming and training, safety and security, and medical. The current version was last updated in March 2014.

The 2013 revision to the “New Country Entry Guide” added a statement that staff should “Recognize and provide resources to support the unique needs related to new country entries in post-conflict countries.” This change was based on a memo from Africa Region and Peace Corps Response to the Office of Global Operations (AF/PCR Memo) suggesting necessary revisions of the “New Country Entry Guide.”¹¹ The agency added three other bullets to the guidance based on this memo which were generally applicable to any new country entry but did not include additional guidance more specific to conflict-affected environments.

This review found that the “New Country Entry Guide” contained insufficient guidance on conflict sensitive policies and procedures for staff and Volunteer recruitment and training, timeline, and budgetary adjustments.

The agency lacked additional criteria and tools for recruiting staff to start up operations in conflict-affected environments.

The AF/PCR Memo contained the following recommendation regarding staff recruitment in conflict-affected environments:

Hire a full complement of strong, experienced staff at full performance level. The staff configuration is not as important as the necessary combinations of management experience, skills in programming, training and administration. The CD or DPT needs to create a strategic plan, identify key program areas, establish contacts with relevant partners and ensure quality site development. The DMO must be capable of initiating post operations and recruitment and training of a full administrative team. Avoid sharing staff between posts; the demands of developing programming and training from the ground up are too great to be met by part-time staff whose attention may be divided among posts.

A headquarters and former field staff person provided an insightful description of the challenges of staffing a post in a conflict-affected environment:

You’re sending (Senior) staff into an environment that they are not going to totally understand. Working in another culture is one thing, but working in a culture that has been damaged socially and culturally is a whole other bag ...expecting [senior staff] to hire [local staff] who are not going to be biased, who will be able to respond in an empathetic manner to Volunteers. It’s going to be hard to find those people.

Another headquarters staff and former field staff member recalled that staffing challenges were significant when working in a conflict-affected environment: “[You] need a leadership team of [senior] staff with experience who can hit the ground running. When recruiting host country staff, [you] had to be sensitive to ethnic divisions and dynamics. It was important to have a balanced, representative staff.”

¹¹ See Appendix B for an excerpt listing the full recommendations given.

This review found that the “New Country Entry Guide,” the Peace Corps Office of Human Resources, and Peace Corps Region offices did not specify unique requirements when recruiting staff to work in conflict-affected countries. Several staff interviewed for this review suggested additional criteria should be required or preferred for new posts in conflict-affected environments, such as prior experience working for the Peace Corps and experience working in a post-conflict environment. In addition, several sources mentioned that senior staff should possess strong skills in training, counseling, and coaching. When hiring local staff, several people emphasized the need to balance representation and preserve neutrality with sensitivity to ethnic divisions and dynamics. They also found that hiring local staff required more extensive outreach, planning, and vetting procedures.

Peace Corps headquarters staff we interviewed pointed out that they could create a database capturing the conflict experience of Peace Corps staff, which would make it easier to recruit personnel with the appropriate experience to start up programs. They said that selective placement factors could be used to identify applicants with post-conflict experience, which would facilitate better matches with staffing needs. Another possibility they considered feasible was the use of short term or retired staff with post-conflict experience to provide additional support during the process of establishing a post.

We recommend:

- 7. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations develop and issue guidance to address the need to recruit and hire staff with the appropriate experience to work in a conflict-affected environment.**

Staff at recently opened conflict-affected posts required more training.

The AF/PCR Memo contained the following recommendations regarding staff training in conflict-affected environments:

- Plan for developing the capacity of the programming and training team, which will take longer in conflict-affected environments than the 1- to 2-year start-up period usually projected for new posts, because professional skills may be weaker because of the conflict.
- The Peace Corps safety and security officer (PCSSO) should set aside additional time to conduct more frequent safety and security assessments and to build the capacity of the safety and security manager at post.

Some Peace Corps staff in conflict-affected environments lacked key skills and required significant capacity building to function effectively. Volunteers and staff experienced heightened stress due to exposure to victim’s stories. A former headquarters staff member said, “It’s devastating for [Volunteers] to see people around them who had been through trauma, and you have to be staffed up for that to provide the needed support.” An internal report regarding the

post-conflict context in Rwanda¹² found that there needed to be a “culture of health” because people who work in high stress, post-conflict environments tended to “downplay personal needs and stressors.” As an example of the type of stress encountered in a country where UN peacekeepers were still present when the post opened, a staff member reported that: “...safety and security was really tenuous because one text message could blow this country up. ... We were understanding that at any moment hell could break loose and we’d be evacuated.”

The internal report mentioned above concluded:

In post-war systems, trust has been broken and civil strife has interrupted the education and professional development processes for many, the result being that [local staff] are often not able or comfortable playing an intermediary role on behalf of [the Peace Corps] and our [Volunteers]. Given this, we need to factor in considerable time and resources for staff development, team- and trust-building, communicating core expectations for staff and creating a commitment to Peace Corps’ mission and presence in the country.

Insufficient time for hiring and training local staff was a challenge identified in OIG’s [“Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Kosovo” \(IG-17-02-E\)](#). The on-boarding timeline for training staff recommended in the “New Country Entry Guide” was too short for the senior staff to both prepare the Volunteer training and provide on-the-job training to the staff responsible for delivering it. As a result, the local staff were not included in decisions and were not well-trained by the time the initial pre-service training event took place.

The Peace Corps did not provide any additional training or preparation specific to the unique challenges of conflict-affected environments for staff hired to start-up programs. Many staff members interviewed indicated that training for USDH staff before arrival and robust staff development programs for local staff were critical in conflict-affected environments. Former staff we interviewed said that USDH staff should receive training on empathy, building consensus, and the specific history of the conflict, including personal level impacts (survivors, mental health, and how to spot and respond to PTSD and trauma) and societal implications (dependency, fragility, and security challenges).

One former staff member advised that senior USDH staff should be guided to look for other sources and organizations in-country to learn about the conflict. USDH staff also needed training on how to remain neutral in politically charged environments. Local staff needed skills training on coaching, mediation, team building, general capacity building, working with Americans, providing emotional support to Volunteers, and training on PTSD. The “New Country Entry Guide” did not specifically address the particular skill areas and competencies staff needed for conflict-affected environments. To fulfill this need, Peace Corps/Timor Leste created a new staff position titled “staff development specialist” who created individual development plans and tracked staff members’ progress to ensure they had the skills to succeed in their work.

¹² “Findings: Programming and Training in Post-Conflict Contexts Learnings from Rwanda” Peace Corps Africa Region Internal Report, October 24-25, 2009

We recommend:

- 8. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include additional provisions for the training and support needs of staff working in conflict-affected environments.**

Starting operations in conflict-affected environments was more difficult, time-consuming, and expensive, but the Peace Corps had not adjusted its resource allocations and timelines.

The AF/PCR Memo leveraged lessons learned from opening the program in Liberia to propose the following recommendations regarding post budgets, resource allocation, and the need for longer timelines in conflict-affected environments:

- Ensure that the post is provided with sufficient support and funding for initial start-up costs related to establishing the office, training center and staff housing.
- Invest fully in the staff and resources required to get the program off to a successful start
- Plan for additional support for the mental health needs of staff and Volunteers and provide training on the conflict environment and coping strategies.

The “New Country Entry Guide” did not prompt assessment teams to collect information which would enable staff establishing new offices in conflict-affected environments to anticipate higher costs and administrative complications. The Africa Region Post-Conflict Workshop Report strongly emphasized the need for the agency to plan for sufficient funding for conflict affected new country entries because start-up costs were often higher. Higher costs were related to the greater needs identified, such as more training days during staging and PST, higher costs for local staff, additional training for counterparts, a longer timeline and more intensive process for site development, more site visits for Volunteers at their sites, and inflated prices for materials and leases related to the effects of the conflict and presence of humanitarian aid organizations.

The September 2014 “[New Country Entries: Lessons Learned Report](#)” also recommended: “The agency should ensure that new posts have in place sufficient financial and material resources to support start-up operations and safeguard the agency’s independence and interests.” In conflict-affected environments there was often a problem due to competition between international aid organizations for qualified personnel in a limited pool of candidates. As explained in an internal agency report: “Lingering war economies make these countries excessively expensive.” The agency needed to offer more competitive wages and incentives to attract and retain local staff. Procurement could also be complicated by cash-based or corrupt environments. As one former field staff member described operational challenges, “Need[ed] a high cash reserve and had infrastructure that’s not great – there were problems finding housing, transportation, energy, and communications.” According to an internal agency report: “Given the elevated cost of doing

business in such a context, as an agency we need to refrain from simple V-Year¹³ cost comparisons, especially between post-conflict posts and those without a history of civil unrest.”

Staff struggled with unreasonably short timelines. A former field staff person who opened a conflict-affected post said: “We were starting in a short time frame with not a lot of knowledge of what we would face.” Some staff didn’t have enough time to set up the post, for example: arrange housing, prepare Volunteer training, hire local staff, receive medical supplies, or recruit trainees. As one headquarters staff person relayed: “...the time between when they enter [a new country] and when they want the input [of Volunteers] can be too short. We like to have a year [to prepare a class for a new country entry.] But Peace Corps and the host country leadership want to have the Volunteers as soon as possible.” “It can have a negative impact...Our big challenge is the timeline.” They also found that site development was not done carefully enough. In a conflict-affected environment, these aspects of setting up a new post required more time to complete. Some staff struggled with burn-out and said their post was understaffed in the beginning. One staff member recalled “My timelines were very difficult. Working 15-20 hours a day, Imagine your most stressful day at work, but imagine it every day for 2 years... the timelines were very, very short, what they expected in that amount of time was unreasonable.” The “New Country Entries: Lessons Learned Report” (September 2014) found that: “Staff should be provided sufficient time to complete the crucial start-up steps required for post to be prepared to receive its first group of trainees. ...New posts benefit from the temporary support of experienced headquarters and regional staff to successfully carry out start-up activities.”

We recommend:

- 9. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to provide for longer timelines, where appropriate, and additional resource requirements to support staff involved in completing start-up activities in conflict-affected countries.**

Piggy-backing¹⁴ or unconventional staffing models used to open a post in a conflict-affected environment did not work well.

An internal agency memo advised: “Avoid sharing staff between posts; the demands of developing programming and training from the ground up are too great to be met by part-time

¹³ “V-Year” (Volunteer-Year) is a calculation of the average number of Volunteers and Trainees expected to be present in a country program for a given fiscal year period. The calculation is based on a monthly tally of the likely number of Volunteers and trainees on-board, departing, or arriving in the V-Year Chart, which is a tool used in the operations planning process. V-Years are the basis for calculating cost factors when developing budgets.

¹⁴ Piggy-backing is a Peace Corps practice described in OIG’s *September 2014 “New Country Entries: Lessons Learned Report”* where the human resources of one country are used to open or substantially support another. (pg. 16)

staff whose attention may be divided among posts.” We found that the “New Country Entry Guide” did not sufficiently consider the complexities and heavier work load associated with starting operations in a conflict-affected environment or prompt start-up teams to build-in additional positions as appropriate.

In some instances, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Kosovo, the Peace Corps opened offices in conflict-affected environments using resources shared between multiple countries. Liberia and Sierra Leone split the director for programming and training (DPT) position, and Kosovo depended on Macedonia for medical services. These arrangements proved problematic for the staff involved. According to OIG’s “Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Kosovo” (IG-17-02-E), “The medical action plan for Kosovo, although complete, did not address the unique challenges of managing a medical emergency in Kosovo from another country.” OIG also identified deficiencies in site visits and facility assessments. As a result, some Volunteers did not feel confident that they would receive adequate medical care. The Peace Corps re-opened a program in Liberia in 2008, and OIG conducted an evaluation in 2011. In OIG’s “Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Liberia” (IG-11-07-E), evaluators described several programming and training related deficiencies, including difficulty achieving project objectives, working with counterparts, doing secondary projects, and finalizing an education project plan. Volunteers also felt inadequately prepared for the challenges of working in a conflict-affected environment. OIG attributed these problems to the absence of a full-time American staff member supervising the programming and training unit. These past findings indicated that starting a new program in a conflict-affected environment should warrant the provision of additional resources, even if it costs more and takes more time.

The “New Country Entry Guide” did not direct staff to plan for the extra effort and tasks required to set up a new program in a conflict-affected environment. One field staff person said it would have been helpful to have a schedule of visits from regional advisors, rovers, Peace Corps safety and security officers (PCSSOs), additional USDH administrative support, Peace Corps medical officer (PCMO) mentors, and other temporary duty (TDY) staff to assist with staff training, programming and training design, and site development while opening a new post.

We recommend:

- 10. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include more guidance related to the appropriate use of regional staff or other temporary duty staff to assist with start-up operations in conflict-affected countries.**

Standard Volunteer recruitment procedures were not sufficient for preparing and vetting candidates for conflict-affected environments.

The Africa Region Post-Conflict Workshop Report provided eight recommendations regarding recruitment of Volunteers for assignments in conflict-affected contexts. These recommendations included:

- “Systematic approach for preparing invitees (accurate materials with invitation, extended decision time, talking points for invitee to discuss with family, longer staging, direct conversation with country desk unit/country staff)
- Advertise and recruit specifically for work in post-conflict environment
- Interview process for nomination needs to be improved. Recruitment staff need extra training
- Need more time for recruitment of Volunteers
- Emphasis to be placed on ensuring invitees read the assignment description
- Make clear that this is a post-conflict country and special qualities are required in the assignment description
- Needs of host country be highly considered during Volunteer selection”

The “Peace Corps Strategic Plan for FY 2018-2022” includes “Strategic Objective 3: Volunteer Resilience.” This objective was built on the agency’s recognition of the need to increase Volunteer’s ability to navigate the challenges of service, starting with setting Volunteer expectations about service during recruitment and the pre-departure period. In FY 2018, the agency planned to analyze its messaging about the rigors of service. During interviews, one headquarters staff member expressed concern that there was not enough transparency during recruitment about how difficult it was to serve in conflict-affected environments.

During the 2010 Africa Region Post-Conflict Workshop, staff and Volunteers who worked in conflict-affected countries advanced several specific recommendations about how to improve the accuracy of invitees’ pre-departure expectations about serving in conflict-affected environments. The group proposed a more systematic approach to preparing invitees which included:

- Allow more time for invitees to decide whether to accept an invitation to a conflict affected environment.
- Develop an invitation packet which provides specific information about serving in conflict affected environments.
- Country desk officers should be proactive in preparing invitees for the unique challenges through phone conversations and group teleconferences.
- Increase the length of staging to 2-3 days and introduce the history of the conflict, discuss psychosocial aspects and introduce conflict sensitive approaches to development.
- Staging staff should have first-hand experience of the post and be able to accurately describe the current conditions of service.

Our review identified a need to communicate the additional challenges Volunteers have faced in conflict-affected environments which the agency should analyze and address. During interviews, returned Volunteers who served in conflict-affected environments reported that they needed more information to anticipate the challenges they encountered. They also felt underprepared for coping with the reality of service in these environments. This indicated that the Peace Corps did not sufficiently inform prospective applicants about the implications of serving in a conflict-affected environment.

We learned that the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS) did not have any unique processes or procedures for post-conflict countries. According to one staff member, the agency didn't consider a country's conflict-status when placing medically accommodated volunteers in new posts which were conflict-affected.

Some posts, such as Myanmar, Rwanda, and South Africa provided placement officers with additional questions to help set the applicant's expectations and provide more information about the post. They did not use these questions to eliminate people from consideration. The Peace Corps' placement procedures did not prioritize applicants with prior experience or education relevant to post-conflict/trauma contexts, even though staff who supported Volunteers in these environments asserted that they should. The internal report regarding the post-conflict context in Rwanda noted that Volunteers who had experience with crisis intervention prior to service felt better prepared to deal with members of the community who struggled with PTSD. The report concluded that: "Given this, it seems logical that we should require people accepting an invitation to a post-conflict environment to get some practical experience with crisis management prior to staging. This preference should be noted in all [job-specific requests (JSRs)]."

During interviews, staff members emphasized that the Peace Corps should provide an extended staging for conflict-affected countries for the Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU) to provide training on PTSD, active listening, and generally prepare trainees for the reality of serving in a conflict-affected environment.

We recommend:

- 11. That the associate directors for the Offices of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, Global Operations, and Peace Corps Response develop focused Volunteer recruitment protocols and pre-departure communications for conflict-affected environments which inform invitees about challenges of service.**

Volunteers needed training on additional competencies for serving in conflict-affected communities.

Participants in the Africa Region Post-Conflict Workshop advocated the creation of a “psychosocial core competency” which would include training on the following topics and incorporate knowledge and techniques from organizations already engaged in post-conflict stabilization and development:

- Country-specific social/political history, specifically about the conflict
- The effects of trauma and PTSD in communities where Volunteers serve
- Self-care and resiliency/advanced stress management
- Trust-building strategies
- Understanding the transition from humanitarian aid interventions to sustainable development and capacity building

In addition to the content areas listed above, the white paper on “Peace Corps in Post-Conflict Countries” recommended several ways Volunteer training should be modified in conflict-affected countries.¹⁵ These topics include:

- Conflict and trauma sensitive language
- Site-specific historical information about power relations and local history of conflict
- Continued in-service training regarding the conflict and trauma
- Specifically tailored training on conflict resolution

Despite these long-standing recommendations, the Peace Corps has not provided new country entries in conflict-affected environments with guidance or resources to support Volunteer training modifications.

Annual performance goal 3.2 of the Peace Corps’ 2018-2022 Strategic Plan is: “Increase the capacity of Volunteers to manage adjustment challenges outside the clinical environment.” Additional support with adjustment challenges is particularly important for Volunteers assigned to work in conflict-affected environments.

Volunteers interviewed in past OIG evaluations were insufficiently prepared to live and work in conflict-affected environments. They also found it difficult to succeed in their assignments because of dysfunctional governmental institutions. Volunteers said they felt afraid, had difficulty integrating into their communities, and were overly stressed. Some Volunteers were disgruntled and distrustful of the Peace Corps administration. One field staff member

¹⁵ “Peace Corps in Post-Conflict Countries”, by Patricia Weiss Fagen and Carl Swartz, pgs. 30-31

interviewed said that this contributed to elevated early termination rates of Volunteers. We also found evidence for this in the agency's own assessments and in relevant OIG evaluations.

A former field staff member said “[Volunteer] training [should have a] much bigger emphasis on what is going on psychologically in a post-conflict situation and how that can be a challenge for safety and security.” As one headquarters staff person said, “In [one conflict-affected country] we got a great group of Volunteers, and we set them up to fail because they didn't get the support they needed. All of them either [early terminated (ET), medevac'd, or were in extensive counseling.”

A former field staff member who established a new post said that:

When I was doing site development at a school- everyone in the school had one family member kidnapped. A girl was deformed due to the chemicals sprayed. I was incredibly overwhelmed by the information they gave me. I was wondering ‘What am I doing here, how am I going to help with this?’

For a 22-year-old who is not emotionally mature- kids who are victims of violence, with murdered parents, are people [who] don't open up as easy. The volunteers (and I) were not emotionally prepared to deal with this.

Another former staff person recalled how Volunteers often found themselves having difficult conversations which they did not know how to handle. Even basic communications could be awkward due to the unspoken history of a family or event. This staff member said:

[Volunteers]...would come to us crying. The response from the training team was ‘what did you expect?’ That sort of experience was not atypical for Volunteers. The Volunteers who really became part of the community and got to know people, there was oftentimes the instances where a conversation would start, and Volunteers didn't know what to do.

As a result, staff informed us, Volunteers sometimes employed unhealthy coping mechanisms or took unnecessary risks associated with leaving site more frequently. In 2016, OIG produced an evaluation of Peace Corps/Rwanda and found that there were serious issues with Volunteers being out of their sites, excessively consuming alcohol, and failing to integrate into their communities.

See Appendix A for descriptions of resources for staff and Volunteer training. These include resources that the agency's staff development team could use for preparing training for staff who will be starting operations in a conflict-affected environment. There are also resources that headquarters or post-level trainers could reference when designing training for Volunteers.

We recommend:

- 12. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to provide guidance on Volunteer training competencies for conflict-affected environments.**

The Peace Corps developed internal training resources, but they were not widely shared.

To meet the needs of Volunteers in Kosovo, a counselor from the COU delivered a training to Volunteers on working with populations impacted by PTSD. One RPCV from Kosovo said: “That training for me was a turning point in my Peace Corps service. We talked a lot about PTSD, and it was something that I knew little about.” She described symptoms of PTSD, and we talked about how that can translate when you are working with people. This led to the creation of a training session used in Kosovo titled “Working in a Post-Conflict Setting,” which included resources from the Peace Corps Intercultural Competence, Diversity and Inclusion (ICD&I) Training and incorporated fictionalized accounts from different perspectives on the conflict. Another example of a headquarters-originated resource was created by an RPCV who worked in a conflict-affected area. She designed and delivered a session to headquarters staff about trust building in conflict-affected environments.

Africa Region staff with specialized expertise in conflict-affected environments developed a training manual titled “Approaching the Psychosocial through Development” for training Volunteers working in conflict-affected environments. Most Peace Corps staff interviewed were not aware of this resource, although two staff members (in Sierra Leone and Kosovo) did recall using it to design Volunteer training. One staff member said they needed more training to feel confident delivering the sessions. The agency had records of training resources for conflict-affected environments accumulated from 2009 to 2011 related to this training manual, but they were not easily accessible to other staff who could use them.

We recommend:

- 13. That the associate director of the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support create, collect, and make available appropriate references and trauma-informed training materials for conflict-affected posts.**

The “New Country Entry Guide” did not provide guidance about the use of external training resources to train Volunteers on sensitive topics such as a country’s history of conflict.

One staff member explained how the Peace Corps’ use of local staff to provide training for Volunteers about conflict and trauma created problems: “You’re asking people who had been through a conflict or a genocide to explain to Volunteers what happened or to be a resource.” A comment in the internal report regarding the post-conflict context in Rwanda reinforces this point:

...we need to have a realistic understanding of the ability of our HCNs to discuss in a non-partisan manner the conflict/atrocity events. Often, they are unable, due to their own degree of trauma, to serve as cultural interpreters for our [Volunteers] and [USDH senior staff].

This was also a problem identified in the “Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Kosovo” (IG-17-02-E). Volunteer training was more difficult because some staff were unable to participate in training regarding issues related to the history of conflict.

After encountering initial problems, several posts turned to external resources with specialized experience in conflict history and trauma to help deliver Volunteer training.

- Peace Corps/Timor Leste contracted external resources with deep knowledge of the Timorese conflict to create a series of eight training sessions for Volunteers to better prepare them to work in the conflict-affected environment. These sessions covered the history of the conflict, ways the conflict continues to determine different aspects of the country, and the effects of trauma on the communities in which Volunteers work.
- In Peace Corps/Cambodia, a local organization facilitated pre-service training for Volunteers on the effects of genocide and support which is available to Cambodians for mental health issues. The USAID Democracy and Governance Officer provided training on post-conflict realities in Cambodia. Trainees also met with members of the host families at local wats (Buddhist temples) and they shared stories from the time of the Khmer Rouge and explained how it impacted their lives.
- Peace Corps/Uganda asked a local counselor and a psychotherapist to facilitate a one-day workshop on psychosocial support for Volunteers working in Northern Uganda.
- Peace Corps/Sierra Leone arranged for American and Sierra Leonean experts to provide training on PTSD, secondary victimization, effects of the conflict on students and community members, ways to be supportive, and self-care.

In order to avoid placing local staff in situations where they risk being triggered by past trauma, many new posts in conflict-affected countries have tapped local resources with deep expertise to provide necessary training for Volunteers. The “New Country Entry Guide” should highlight these examples and provide guidance about the use of external resources to train Volunteers on the history of conflict and prepare them to work with people who may be coping with past trauma.

We recommend:

- 14. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include guidance related to the use of external local resources to assist with training Volunteers about the conflict.**

CONCLUSION

This review identified challenges common to many programs in conflict-affected environments. We found that the Peace Corps had internally studied these challenges and made useful recommendations on multiple occasions which were not systematically implemented. The most often cited areas needing improvement were staff and Volunteer recruitment and training. Many posts have developed and implemented workable solutions to these challenges which staff who open new programs in conflict-affected environments could build upon. The agency should apply a “conflict lens” during the new country assessment and post start-up process, through prompts, checklists, and resources in the “New Country Assessment Guide” and the “New Country Entry Guide.” OIG recommends that the “New Country Entry Guide” be revised to provide staff responsible for starting a program in a conflict-affected environment with enough details and resources to adapt post operations.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

WE RECOMMEND:

1. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations establish a procedure to determine whether a new country entry, re-entry, or expansion should be assessed as a conflict-affected environment.
2. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations adapt the country assessment process to more fully assess the implications of conflict on Peace Corps operations in conflict-affected environments.
3. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations provide guidance regarding the use of internally and externally available data sources to understand the conflict context during assessments.
4. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations create additional new country assessment guidance that furthers a trauma-informed approach in conflict-affected environments that addresses:
 - Local capacity for supporting Volunteer resiliency/post-traumatic stress disorder awareness training;
 - Strategies for providing additional mental health support and enhanced self-care; and
 - Effects of the conflict and trauma on host communities and implications for site management.
5. That the Associate Director of the Office of Global Operations establish specific criteria for selecting and training new country assessment team members to ensure that they have the appropriate experience and skills to identify issues and concerns which are unique to post-conflict/traumatized environments.
6. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations centralize and consolidate reports, notes, and information collected during new country assessments.
7. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations develop and issue guidance to address the need to recruit and hire staff with the appropriate experience to work in a conflict-affected environment.

PEACE CORPS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

8. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include additional provisions for the training and support needs of staff working in conflict-affected environments.
9. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to provide for longer timelines, where appropriate, and additional resource requirements to support staff involved in completing start-up activities in conflict-affected countries.
10. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include more guidance related to the appropriate use of regional staff or other temporary duty staff to assist with start-up operations in conflict-affected countries.
11. That the associate directors for the Offices of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, Global Operations, and Peace Corps Response develop focused Volunteer recruitment protocols and pre-departure communications for conflict-affected environments which inform invitees about challenges of service.
12. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to provide guidance on Volunteer training competencies for conflict-affected environments.
13. That the associate director of the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support create, collect, and make available appropriate references and trauma-informed training materials for conflict-affected posts.
14. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include guidance related to the use of external local resources to assist with training Volunteers about the conflict.

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES FOR TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

Assessment References for New Country Entry or Re-Entry

Conflict Assessment Framework: Version 2.0

USAID

Found at this web address: <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/working-crises-and-conflict/technical-publications>

A conflict assessment is an analytical process undertaken to identify and understand the dynamics of violence and instability. The CAF 2.0 represents USAID's unique methodological approach for implementing a conflict assessment to help its USAID Missions and operating units better evaluate the risks for armed conflict, the peace and security goals that are most important in a given country context, how existing development programs interact with these factors, how the programs may (inadvertently) be doing harm, and where and how development and humanitarian assistance can most effectively support local efforts to manage conflict and to build peace. ... To avoid unwanted negative outcomes from assistance, such as inadvertently supporting one side against the other, it is essential for international actors to develop an independent, objective view of the conflict. A conflict assessment is a tool to facilitate this process.

USAID's Office of Conflict Mitigation and Management (CMM) developed the CAF 2.0 to enable development practitioners to understand the underlying factors of a conflict and be able to work with different identity groups and institutions to implement programs which solidify peace-building efforts. USAID missions work with CMM and trained personnel to conduct the assessments when creating Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) in conflict affected countries. The Peace Corps can contact the director of CMM to request copies of CAFs which have been completed for countries which are being considered for new country assessments.

Who is Where, When, doing What (4Ws) in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support WHO/ IASC

Found at this web address: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/documents-public/iasc-who-where-when-doing>

Humanitarian actors in emergencies often encounter challenges in knowing Who is Where, When, doing What (4Ws) with regard to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Such knowledge is essential to inform coordination. 4Ws tools are used in many areas of aid to map activities conducted across large geographical areas. 4Ws tools generally aim to map supports by government and non-governmental agencies, including pre-emergency services and supports. The IASC Reference group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support has developed a 4Ws tool to map MHPSS activities in humanitarian settings across sectors. It is envisioned that this tool will be used by groups with MHPSS coordination responsibilities in emergencies with numerous MHPSS actors.

There does not appear to be an easily accessible global repository for 4Ws assessments. During fieldwork, assessment teams could ask WHO representatives in country for contact with the MHPSS cross-cluster working group to find out if they have conducted this assessment and request to see the results.

The Humanitarian Emergency Settings Perceived Needs Scale (HESPER): Manual with Scale. WHO and King’s College London

Found at this web address: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-emergency-settings-perceived-needs-scale-hesper-manual-scale>

In the humanitarian field, most needs assessments tend to use either population-based “objective” indicators (for example malnutrition or mortality indicators), or qualitative data based on convenience samples (for example through focus groups or key informant interviews). Whilst the latter method is not able to paint a full population-picture, the former is not able to gather information on people’s subjective perception of needs.

The HESPER Scale was developed to fill this gap. It aims to provide a method for assessing perceived needs in representative samples of populations affected by large-scale humanitarian emergencies in a valid and reliable manner.

During meetings with partner organizations working on mental health support issues, assessment teams could ask if this type of assessment has been completed. If the results can be accessed, they would provide useful information about potential Volunteer host communities, providing a better understanding of the impacts of conflict and subsequent mental health and psychosocial support needs.

World Health Organization Assessment Instrument for Mental Health Systems (WHO-AIMS) Country Reports

WHO

Found at this web address: https://www.who.int/mental_health/who_aims_country_reports/en/

The World Health Organization Assessment Instrument for Mental Health Systems (WHO-AIMS) is a new WHO tool for collecting essential information on the mental health system of a country or region. The goal of collecting this information is to improve mental health systems and to provide a baseline for monitoring the change.

For the purpose of WHO-AIMS, a mental health system is defined as all the activities whose primary purpose is to promote, restore or maintain mental health. WHO-AIMS is primarily intended for assessing mental health systems in low and middle-income countries, but is also a valuable assessment tool for high resource countries. ...Over 100 countries are currently participating in the WHO-AIMS project.

Medical and PTE staff can use information from the WHO-AIMs report to become familiar with the status of mental health services, priority issues, and public education efforts as part of the new country assessment process. Information may not be completely up to date, but it provides a baseline for developing questions to be asked during fieldwork.

External Resources for Volunteer and Staff Training

The Idealist’s Survival Kit: 75 Simple Ways to Avoid Burnout, by Alessandra Pigni
Berkeley CA: Paralax Press, 2016.

Found at this web address: <http://www.parallax.org/product/idealists-survival-kit-75-simple-ways-to-prevent-burnout/>

The Idealist’s Survival Kit is a series of 75 short reflections on mindfulness in action designed to support humanitarian professionals and volunteers in addressing the specific themes and issues that they are likely to encounter in their work. The Idealist’s Survival Kit is built on the premises that changing the world starts from within and that personal development and global development are interlinked.

This reference could be used by country directors to provide ideas for activities with staff and Volunteers to promote self-care and reduce stress. Likewise, training designers will find this a useful resource for activities on these topics.

Problem Management Plus (PM+) Individual psychological help for adults impaired by distress in communities exposed to adversity. World Health Organization, mhGAP

Found at this web address:

https://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/problem_management_plus/en/

With this manual, the World Health Organization (WHO) is responding to requests from colleagues around the world who seek guidance on psychological interventions for people exposed to adversity. Our mental health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) recommends a range of psychological and pharmacological interventions by non-specialized care providers. It recommends, for example, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) for adult depression.

While the intensive training required to fully utilize this method is beyond what the Peace Corps can provide, training designers may find useful information on topics such as communicating concern, sensitivity to sexual assault survivors, managing stress, and managing problems.

Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers

Found at this web address:

https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/

*When terrible things happen in our communities, countries and the world, we want to reach out a helping hand to those who are affected. This guide covers **psychological first aid** which involves humane, supportive and practical help to fellow human beings suffering serious crisis events. It is written for people*

in a position to help others who have experienced an extremely distressing event. It gives a framework for supporting people in ways that respect their dignity, culture and abilities. Despite its name, psychological first aid covers both social and psychological support.

Perhaps you are called upon as a staff member or volunteer to help in a major disaster, or you find yourself at the scene of an accident where people are hurt. Perhaps you are a teacher or health worker talking with someone from your community who has just witnessed the violent death of a loved one. This guide will help you to know the most supportive things to say and do for people who are very distressed. It will also give you information on how to approach a new situation safely for yourself and others, and not to cause harm by your actions.

This guide provides a set of guidelines for how individuals can provide immediate psychological support in a crisis which has been endorsed by many international agencies. This guide provides tangible do's and don'ts for anyone involved in providing humanitarian support to victims in a crisis. As a training resource, it contains 3 well developed case studies to help trainees think through how they would respond in a crisis.

Sphere Handbook 2018 – Sphere

Found at this web address: <https://spherestandards.org/handbook/editions/>

The principal users of The Sphere Handbook are practitioners involved in planning, managing or implementing a humanitarian response. This includes staff and volunteers of local, national and international humanitarian organisations responding to a crisis, as well as affected people themselves. The Handbook is also used for humanitarian advocacy to improve the quality and accountability of assistance and protection in line with humanitarian principles. It is increasingly used by governments, donors, military or the private sector to guide their own actions and allow them to work constructively with the humanitarian organisations that apply the standards.

The Sphere handbook contains foundational documents such as the Humanitarian Charter, Protection Principles and the Core Humanitarian Standards. Country directors and new country assessment team leaders working in conflict-affected environments should be familiar with the content of these key documents. This is a resource that the staff of the Office of Staff Learning and Development (OSLD) may want to review and consider inclusion of some materials in training for USDH staff working in these environments.

IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

Found at this web address:

https://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf

The primary purpose of these guidelines is to enable humanitarian actors and communities to plan, establish and coordinate a set of minimum multi-sectoral responses to protect and improve people's mental health and psychosocial well-being in the midst of an emergency. The focus of the guidelines is on

implementing minimum responses, which are essential, high-priority responses that should be implemented as soon as possible in an emergency. Minimum responses are the first things that ought to be done; they are the essential first steps that lay the foundation for the more comprehensive efforts that may be needed (including during the stabilised phase and early reconstruction). To complement the focus on minimum response, the guidelines also list concrete strategies for mental health and psychosocial support to be considered mainly before and after the acute emergency phase.

This set of guidelines is useful for an organization working in a conflict affected environment. This document contains a list of dos and don'ts, and a matrix of interventions, outlining the kinds of activities that should be occurring after a humanitarian emergency. Action sheets on various topics provide more specific guidance on actions to be taken. They are applicable for humanitarian workers. Figure 6, originally from the IASC guidelines¹⁶, shows the different layers that need to be addressed in an emergency. Peace Corps staff and Volunteers could play a role at the two lowest levels of the diagram in terms of community and family supports and addressing basic services and security, which impact the majority of people.

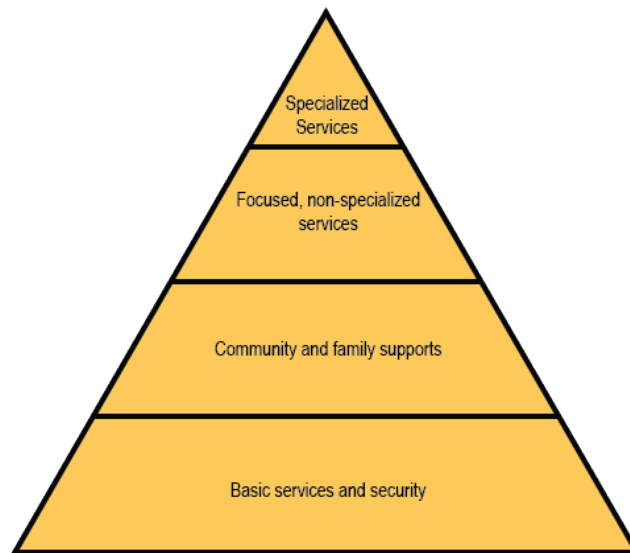


Figure 6: Layers in a humanitarian emergency

2017 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report

James G. McGann, university of Pennsylvania

Found at this web address: https://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/13/

This document provides a ranking of think tanks world-wide. A listing by region provides a useful tool for identifying think tanks which could provide information about a conflict in a particular region of the world. Many of these think tanks could be contacted by Peace Corps training staff or staff in regional offices to obtain high level research on current political developments in a specific area where the Peace Corps is considering opening a program. They

¹⁶ IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, pg. 12, Figure 1

may also have experts willing to meet with assessment teams or senior leadership staff to provide insights and answer questions about the effects of conflict in an area of interest.

USAID Interagency Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Response Course (HA/DR)

This is a two-day classroom-based course that provides an overview of what happens when disasters strike overseas and how the U.S. Government responds and engages within the international humanitarian system. Course content will include the critical triggers and components of a U.S. Government's international disaster response and the structure of the international humanitarian system. This course is for interagency colleagues GS-11 to GS-13 or equivalent.

Some Peace Corps staff have found this training useful for understanding how the Peace Corps interfaces with other USG agencies who intervene in conflict-affected environments. More information on the availability of this course can be obtained by sending an email to GlobalCLD@usaid.gov.

Kumekucha - Its A New Dawn: New Beginnings through Trauma-Informed Resilience and Reconciliation

Green String Network

More information is available at this web address: <https://www.green-string.org/>

This workbook is used by community facilitators in Kenya to lead participants through a process to heal individual and community trauma resulting from violence. The process depends on establishing a safe environment for dialogue between community members. It provides participants with an understanding of the psychosocial effects of trauma, victimization, and the cycle of aggression. It introduces healing practices which participants can use to move past trauma and rebuild their community. It is based on storytelling and locally generated visual aids, reproduced in the manual, which are used by the facilitators to introduce ideas and spark discussion. While this curriculum is very specific to a particular context, it is an example of an approach being used to facilitate community healing, and it is the type of tool the Peace Corps could find useful to equip Volunteers in some settings to respond to community needs. The video at <https://www.f6s.com/greenstringnetwork> fully describes the process, including how it incorporates deaf participants.

The Economic Crisis, Violent Conflict, and Human Development

UNDP Working Paper- Namsuk Kim and Pedro Conceição

Drawing on a review of both theoretical and empirical literature, this paper frames the connection between economic factors and conflict within a conceptual framework in which levels of human development and the risk of conflict are linked.

This paper provides a concise summary of the “conflict trap” which shows the connection between conflict and low human development. This could be a useful reference for training designers as background on how a history of violence connects to the work of the Peace Corps.

A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict Affected Areas (2018)

US Department of State, USAID and the US Department of Defense

Found at this web address: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/283589.pdf>

Over the past year, the Department of State (State), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Defense (DoD) have reviewed the significant lessons learned from past stabilization efforts. The principles for effective stabilization have been widely studied, but they have not been systematically applied and institutionalized. The review has shown that the performance of U.S. stabilization efforts has consistently been limited by the lack of strategic clarity, organizational discipline, and unity of effort in how we approach these missions.

In response, this report outlines how the United States can improve the outcomes of our stabilization efforts through more efficient and disciplined bureaucratic structures, processes and engagement with international partners.

This report summarizes the USG priorities for work in conflict-affected areas. It looks at the whole of government approach and recommends changes which are necessary to make it more effective. While the Peace Corps is not specifically mentioned, it is important for the agency to consider how it fits into this framework when entering a conflict-affected country.

Existing Internally Developed Post-Conflict References

Internal Report: Peace Corps’ Response to Humanitarian Crises

(approximately 1996, by PPA ?)

This report reviews the Peace Corps’ role in humanitarian crises by studying activities by Volunteers in the Burigi Refugee Camp in Tanzania from June 1994 to February 1995. This report concludes with four recommendations to the Peace Corps to improve the effectiveness of Volunteers engaged in emergency relief activities.

Approaching the Psychosocial through Development: A Training Manual

Peace Corps Africa Region

The purpose of this training is not to build skills in order for Volunteers to become mental health workers in their communities, but rather to enable Volunteers to identify and empower existing local actors and culturally appropriate resources that could be mobilized for the healing of individuals and the community, as this healing is a critical precondition for development and progress.

This is a general training developed by staff in the Peace Corps Africa Region, which is intended to be tailored according to local needs. It contains five modules:

The first three modules move from exploring the generalities of war and circumstances in which people become increasingly vulnerable (Modules One and Two) to contemplating the potential psychosocial effects of exposure to traumatic events (Module Three). Module Four intentionally stresses the need for self-care while working in such high-stress contexts. The final module, Module Five, involves identifying strategies and approaches whereby PCVs' development efforts can contribute to individual and community psychosocial wellbeing.

Training Report for Psychosocial Support for PCVs in Northern Uganda

Sister Margaret Aceng and Mr. Benjamin Porter, 2010

Due to an identified need to support Peace Corps Volunteers with psychosocial support skills for their day to day interaction with beneficiaries, as well as their own personal wellbeing, Peace Corps Uganda invited Sr. Margaret Aceng and Mr. Benjamin Porter to facilitate a one-day training in Gulu on the 20th of March, 2010.

This report provides a summary of activities and outcomes from a one-time training workshop provided by external resources at the request of Peace Corps/Uganda. It is a good example of a locally developed solution to provide context-specific information needed by Volunteers.

Trust in Post Conflict Countries

RPCV Sandi Giver, Peace Corps Headquarters, 2010

This training session designed for Peace Corps Headquarters staff, explained the complexity of building trust in post-conflict environments. It was intended to show how Volunteers can integrate in distrustful communities and use participatory methods to build trust between groups.

Africa Region Post-Conflict Workshop Report

Entebbe, Uganda, 2010

This workshop, organized by the Africa Region, invited staff and Volunteers working in post-conflict countries in Africa to consolidate lessons learned and reflect on ways the Peace Corps could improve operations.

White Paper: The Peace Corps in Post-Conflict Countries

Carl Schwartz and Patricia Weiss Fagen, 2000

The report is intended to address two general concerns: First, how the Peace Corps should prepare for new country entries and re-entries in countries that have suffered long periods of major civil strife and violence. And second, how the Peace Corps and its volunteers may contribute to strengthening peace and reconciliation in the course of the work undertaken in these countries.

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After looking at case studies of Peace Corps operations in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, South Africa, and Mozambique, the authors identified four overarching common challenges: preserving Volunteer safety, maintaining neutrality, identifying partners, and working with traumatized populations. The authors provide detailed recommendations for addressing each of these challenges.

APPENDIX B: EXCERPT FROM A MEMO TO THE OFFICE OF GLOBAL OPERATIONS FROM AFRICA REGION AND PEACE CORPS RESPONSE

Africa Region/Peace Corps Response Memo

August 11, 2010, Subject: Lessons learned from the Liberia [New Country Entry] Process and Recommendations for Revisions to the [New Country Entry] Guide

1. Develop a plan for [new country entry] posts to support Volunteer training, program development, and staff development needs, integrating traditional and Response Volunteers as appropriate. Building strong systems and training a strong programming and training team require sustained support and resources from headquarters beyond the one-to-two-year startup period allotted to new posts.
2. Invest fully in the staff and resources required to get the program off to a successful start. Avoid the Peace Corps Response pilot model that adds staff later, as the program grows in Volunteer numbers. Building a strong initial base is essential to development of a quality program.
3. Ensure that in [new country entry] posts established using PCRVs, the responsibility for oversight, resources, and general post management rests solely with the Region. Peace Corps Response serves as a recruiting and placement function and cannot provide the sustained field support to new posts that is customarily handled by the regions.
4. Hire a full complement of strong, experienced staff at full performance level. The staff configuration is not as important as the necessary combinations of management experience, skills in programming, training and administration. The CD or DPT needs to create a strategic plan, identify key program areas, establish contacts with relevant partners and ensure quality site development. The DMO must be capable of initiating post operations and recruitment and training of a full administrative team. Avoid sharing staff between posts; the demands of developing programming and training from the ground up are too great to be met by part-time staff whose attention may be divided among posts.
5. Ensure the admin team has sufficient support and budget needed for the initial start-up tasks related to setting up the office space, PST site and staff housing.
6. Utilize existing agency resources (such as the P&T Guidance and Characteristics of a High Performing Post) and best practices to ensure that agency standards for sound programming and training are met and that the fundamentals of Volunteer support are

implemented. The practices followed for [new country entry] posts should be the same as that followed for other posts, including but not limited to:

- a. Since program staff will be new, it is best to hire them with enough lead time to ensure they are fully trained. Provide additional staff training to train up staff whose professional skills may have atrophied due to a long absence from the workforce.
 - b. Focus on initial site development and ensure staff has the appropriate time to implement best practices.
 - c. Incorporate plans for an extended orientation if PCRVs are being used and an In-Service Training to ensure adequate preparation and ongoing technical and Volunteer support.
 - d. Rely on the PCSSO to provide an ongoing assessment of key safety and security concerns and to be fully involved to select, train and mentor the Safety and Security Coordinator.
 - e. Ensuring that a project framework is in place prior to the arrival of traditional Volunteers.
7. Recognize and provide resources to support the unique needs related to [new country entry] openings in post-conflict countries, including mental health needs of staff and Volunteers, and allowing additional training time for post-conflict and resiliency training.

APPENDIX C: OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In 1989, OIG was established under the Inspector General Act of 1978 and is an independent entity within the Peace Corps. The purpose of OIG is to prevent and detect fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement and to promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency in government. The Inspector General is under the general supervision of the Peace Corps Director and reports both to the Director and Congress.

The Evaluation Unit provides senior management with independent evaluations of all management and operations of the Peace Corps, including overseas posts and domestic offices. OIG evaluators identify best practices and recommend program improvements to comply with Peace Corps policies.

The Evaluation Unit announced its intent to conduct a review of the Peace Corps' post-conflict country re-entry or new entry protocol on January 23, 2018. For this review, we used the following researchable questions to guide our work:

- Is there sufficient guidance for headquarters and overseas staff tasked with opening or re-opening in a post-conflict environment?
- What are some actions the Peace Corps should take to improve new-country entry or re-entry in post-conflict environments?

Scoping interviews with key stakeholders were intended to verify that the scope was relevant to current operational challenges. The agency staff interviewed suggested resources to explore and generally concurred with the proposed topics to be examined.

This research included a review of agency documents provided by headquarters and post staff; interviews with management staff representing: the Director's Office; the Africa Region; the IAP Region; the EMA Region; the Office of Safety and Security; the Office of Human Resources; the Office of Global Operations; the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support; the Office of Staff Learning and Development; the Counseling and Outreach Unit; the Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning; the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection; and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer. We also interviewed returned Peace Corps Volunteers who served in conflict-affected countries, many of whom served in the initial cohorts. In addition, we reached out to many former and current field staff who either helped to open new posts or participated in new country assessment teams. Finally, we interviewed several external sources to learn more about resources available at other agencies and to compare Peace Corps practices and procedures with those of other organizations doing similar work in conflict-affected countries.

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This review was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. The evidence, findings, and recommendations provided in this report have been reviewed by agency stakeholders affected by this review.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

As part of this review, interviews were conducted with 32 current and former Peace Corps headquarters staff and field staff. Many interviewed staff members served on assessment teams, helped open conflict-affected posts, or served as Volunteers in the first cohorts of conflict-affected countries.

Table 3: Positions Interviewed

Title
Safety and Security Officer
Chief of Operations (2)
Chief of Programming and Training
Senior Advisors (2)
Associate Director for Safety and Security
Country Directors (current and former) (5)
Director of Management and Operations (former) (3)
Director for Programming and Training (former) (5)
Peace Corps Medical Officer (former)
Assistant Director for Human Resources, VRS Director of Recruitment
Staff Recruitment and Selection, Human Resources
Human Resources Expert
Counselors, Counseling and Outreach Unit (2)
Program Analyst, Office of Strategic Information, Research and Planning
Program Specialist, Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support
Placement Supervisor, Volunteer Recruitment Services
Regional Recruiter, Volunteer Recruitment Services (RPCV)
Administrative Specialist (RPCV)
Financial Management Specialist (RPCV)

Data as of February 2019

Eight additional interviews were conducted with external resources.

Table 4: Interviews with External Resources

Title	Organization
Senior Advisor	Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
Chief Executive Officer	The Green String Network
Director, Gender and Social Inclusion	Millennium Challenge Corporation
Acting Field Support Division Chief	USAID, Office of Conflict Mitigation and Management
Deputy Chief, Field Programs Division	USAID, Office of Transition Initiatives
Senior Technical Advisor	Catholic Relief Services
Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (2)	Various

Data as of February 2019

APPENDIX E: LIST OF ACRONYMS

Table 5: Acronyms found in this report

Acronyms	
AF	Africa Region
CAF	Conflict Assessment Framework
CD	Country director
CMM	USAID Office of Conflict Mitigation and Management
COU	Counseling and Outreach Unit
DMO	Director of Management and Operations
DPT	Director of Programming and Training
ET	early termination
HCN	host country national
ICD&I	Intercultural Diversity and Inclusion Training
MS	manual section
OGO	Office of Global Operations
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OPATS	Overseas Programming and Training Support
OSIRP	Office of Strategic Information, Research and Planning
OSLD	Office of Staff Learning and Development
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID)
PCMO	Peace Corps Medical Officer
PCR	Peace Corps Response
PCSSO	Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer
PSC	personal service contractors
PST	pre-service training
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
RPCV	Returned Peace Corps Volunteer
TDY	Temporary duty
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDH	United States Direct Hire
VRS	Volunteer Recruitment Services

APPENDIX F: AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT



MEMORANDUM

To: Kathy Buller, Inspector General

Through: Anne Hughes, Chief Compliance Officer *AH*

From: Michelle K. Brooks, Chief of Staff *MB*
Patrick Young, Associate Director, Office of Global Operations *PKY*

Date: September 9, 2019

CC: Jody K. Olsen, Director
Maura Fulton, Senior Advisor to the Director
Matt McKinney, Deputy Chief of Staff/White House Liaison
Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General
Jeremy Black, AIG/Evaluations
Robert Shanks, Associate General Counsel
Shawn Bardwell, Associate Director for Safety and Security
Karen Becker, Associate Director, Office of Health Services
David Walker, Associate Director, Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection
Kweku Boafo, Director, Peace Corps Response
Jeffrey Kwiecinski, Deputy Director, Office of Strategic Information, Research and Planning

Subject: Agency Response to the Report: New Country Entry Guidance for Conflict-Affected Environments (Project No. 18-EVAL-04)

Enclosed please find the agency's response to the recommendations made by the Inspector General for the New Country Entry Guidance for Conflict-Affected Environments Evaluation as outlined in the Preliminary Report on New Country Entry Guidance for Conflict-Affected Environments Evaluation (Project No. 18-EVAL-04) given to the agency on June 24, 2019.

The agency has concurred with all 14 recommendations provided by the OIG in its Preliminary Report: New Country Entry Guidance for Conflict-Affected Environments, and the target offices will work to address the recommendation by the set target date.

Recommendation 1

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations establish a procedure to determine whether a new country entry, re-entry, or expansion should be assessed as a conflict-affected environment.

Concur

Response: The Office of Global Operations (OGO) will establish a procedure to determine whether a new country entry, re-entry, or expansion should be assessed as a conflict-affected environment. This procedure will then be added to the New Country Assessment Guide (Attachment A, MS 340 *Opening a Post*).

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Assessment Guide
- Updated MS 340 *Opening a Post*

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 2

That the associate director of OGO adapt the country assessment process to more fully assess the implications of conflict on Peace Corps operations in conflict-affected environments.

Concur

Response: Once the agency has established a procedure to determine whether a new country entry, re-entry, or expansion should be assessed as a conflict-affected environment, it will then adapt the New Country Assessment Guide to more fully assess the implications of conflict on Peace Corps operations in conflict-affected environments.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Assessment Guide

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 3

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations provide guidance regarding the use of internally and externally available data sources to understand the conflict context during assessments.

Concur

Response: The Associate Director of OGO will provide guidance regarding the use of internally and externally available data sources to understand the conflict context during assessments.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Assessment Guide

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 4

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations create additional new country assessment guidance that furthers a trauma-informed approach in conflict-affected environments that addresses:

- Local capacity for supporting Volunteer resiliency/post-traumatic stress disorder awareness training;
- Strategies for providing additional mental health support and enhanced self-care; and
- Effects of the conflict and trauma on host communities and implications for site management.

Concur

Response: The Associate Director of OGO will work with relevant offices to create additional new country assessment guidance to further a trauma-informed approach in conflict-affected environments to address the items listed in this recommendation.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Assessment Guide

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 5

That the Associate Director of the Office of Global Operations establish specific criteria for selecting and training new country assessment team members to ensure that they have the appropriate experience and skills to identify issues and concerns which are unique to post-conflict/traumatized environments.

Concur

Response: The Associate Director of OGO will establish specific criteria for selecting and training members of the new country assessment team to ensure that a majority of the team have the appropriate experience and skills to identify issues and concerns which are unique to post-conflict environments.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Assessment Guide

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 6

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations centralize and consolidate reports, notes, and information collected during new country assessments.

Concur

Response: The agency recognizes the need to centralize and consolidate reports, notes and information collected during new country assessments. While it updates MS 340 to include guidance for the maintenance of this information, the agency will also add applicable guidance to the New Country Assessment and New Country Entry Guides. The guidance will be in line with the agency’s record schedule.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated MS 340 *Opening a Post*
- Updated New Country Assessment Guide
- Updated New Country Entry Guide

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 7

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations develop and issue guidance to address the need to recruit and hire staff with the appropriate experience to work in a conflict-affected environment.

Concur

Response: The Office of Global Operations will develop guidance for the Office of Human Resources and Regional staff relating to the recruitment of staff with the appropriate skills and experience for those posts identified as a conflict-affected environment.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Guidance on recruitment of staff in conflict-affected environments

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 8

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include additional provisions for the training and support needs of staff working in conflict-affected environments.

Concur

Response: When updating the “New Country Entry Guide”, the Associate Director of OGO will include provisions for the training and support needs of staff working in conflict-affected environments.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Entry Guide

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 9

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to provide for longer timelines, where appropriate, and additional resource requirements to support staff involved in completing start-up activities in conflict-affected countries.

Concur

Response: The Associate Director of Global Operations will include additional provisions in the updated “New Country Entry Guide” to cover the extension of timelines, where appropriate, and additional resource requirements to support staff involved in completing start-up activities in conflict-affected countries.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Entry Guide

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 10

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include more guidance related to the appropriate use of regional staff or other temporary duty staff to assist with start-up operations in conflict-affected countries.

Concur

Response: The Office of Global Operations will develop guidance that clarifies under what conditions it is appropriate to use regional and/or TDY staff to assist with start-up operations in conflict-affected countries.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Entry Guide

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 11

That the associate directors for the Offices of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, Global Operations, and Peace Corps Response develop focused Volunteer recruitment protocols and pre-departure communications for conflict-affected environments which inform invitees about challenges of service.

Concur

Response: The Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection will continue to provide pre-departure information to invitees about their country of service. In addition, the Offices of Global Operations and Peace Corps Response will develop focused Volunteer onboarding protocols and pre-departure communications for conflict-affected environments which inform invitees about challenges of service.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Examples of pre-departure communications
- Onboarding protocols for conflict-affected environments

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 12

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to provide guidance on Volunteer training competencies for conflict-affected environments.

Concur

Response: With input from the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support (OPATS), the Associate Director of OGO will provide guidance on Volunteer training competencies for conflict-affected environments. The Volunteer Competency Model is currently in development and guidance on Volunteer competencies for conflict-affected environments will be included in this model.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Updated New Country Entry Guide
- The Volunteer Competency Model

Status and Timeline for Completion: September 2020

Recommendation 13

That the associate director of the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support create, collect, and make available appropriate references and trauma-informed training materials for conflict-affected posts.

Concur

Response: OPATS will make available appropriate references and trauma-informed training materials for conflict-affected posts.

Documents to be Submitted:

- References and trauma-informed training materials

Status and Timeline for Completion: September 2020

Recommendation 14

That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to include guidance related to the use of external local resources to assist with training Volunteers about the conflict.

Concur

Response: The Associate Director of OGO will work with OPATS to develop guidance on when and how to use external local resources to assist with training Volunteers about the conflict.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Guidance on how to use external local resources to assist with training Volunteers about the conflict

Status and Timeline for Completion: April 2020

APPENDIX G: OIG COMMENTS

Management concurred with all 14 recommendations, which remain open. In its response, management described actions it is taking or intends to take to address the issues that prompted each of our recommendations. We wish to note that in closing recommendations, we are not certifying that the agency has taken these actions or that we have reviewed their effect. Certifying compliance and verifying effectiveness are management's responsibilities. However, when we feel it is warranted, we may conduct a follow-up review to confirm that action has been taken and to evaluate the impact.

OIG will review and consider closing recommendations 1-10 and 14 when the documentation reflected in the agency's response to the preliminary report is received. For recommendations 11-13, additional documentation is required. These recommendations remain open pending confirmation from the chief compliance officer that the documentation reflected in our analysis below is received.

11. That the associate directors for the Offices of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, Global Operations, and Peace Corps Response develop focused Volunteer recruitment protocols and pre-departure communications for conflict-affected environments which inform invitees about challenges of service.

Concur

Response: The Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection will continue to provide pre-departure information to invitees about their country of service. In addition, the Offices of Global Operations and Peace Corps Response will develop focused Volunteer onboarding protocols and pre-departure communications for conflict-affected environments which inform invitees about challenges of service.

Documents to be Submitted:

- *Examples of pre-departure communications*
- *Onboarding protocols for conflict-affected environments*

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

OIG Analysis: OIG suggests a more precise description of the documentation to be provided. The agency should provide specific examples of appropriately informative pre-departure communications for invitees to at least 2 conflict-affected new country entries.

12. That the associate director of the Office of Global Operations revise the “New Country Entry Guide” to provide guidance on Volunteer training competencies for conflict-affected environments.

Concur

Response: With input from the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support (OPATS), the Associate Director of OGO will provide guidance on Volunteer training competencies for conflict-affected environments. The Volunteer Competency Model is currently in development and guidance on Volunteer competencies for conflict-affected environments will be included in this model.

Documents to be Submitted:

- *Updated New Country Entry Guide*
- *The Volunteer Competency Model*

Status and Timeline for Completion: September 2020

OIG Analysis: In the report, OIG identified key topics such as the history of conflict and impacts on the local context, understanding and responding appropriately to community members who suffer from the effects of trauma, and challenges of capacity building in the wake of humanitarian aid. OIG requests that documentation provided shows how training for Volunteers in conflict-affected environments will be designed to include training topics addressed in the finding.

13. That the associate director of the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support create, collect, and make available appropriate references and trauma-informed training materials for conflict-affected posts.

Concur

Response: OPATS will make available appropriate references and trauma-informed training materials for conflict-affected posts.

Documents to be Submitted:

- *References and trauma-informed training materials*


Status and Timeline for Completion: September 2020

OIG Analysis: OIG found that the agency had created useful references, but they were not being systematically shared with post staff who open new programs in conflict-affected environments. OIG requests that the agency also provide documentation showing that the references and training materials are available to field staff in conflict-affected new country entries via an effective and sustainable mechanism such as the current “PT&E Resource Center” within the agency’s intranet or other logical and accessible location.

APPENDIX H: PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT

PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION

This program evaluation was conducted under the direction of Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jerry Black by Senior Evaluator Kris Hoffer. Additional contributions were made by Senior Evaluator Kaitlyn Large and Evaluations Apprentice Sara Jackson.



OIG CONTACT

Following issuance of the final report, a stakeholder satisfaction survey will be distributed to agency stakeholders. If you wish to comment on the quality or usefulness of this report to help us improve our products, please contact Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jerry Black and at jblack@peacecorpsig.gov or 202.569.5648.

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