DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
CENTRE FOR FOREIGN POLICY STUDIES

Workshop Report

Surviving Violence: Comparative Perspectives

*Centre for Foreign Policy Studies**

with

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, and

The Resilience Research Centre

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the key findings and insights of a two day workshop entitled "Surviving Violence: Comparative Perspectives," held on September 28-29, 2012 at Dalhousie University. Hosted by the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, in conjunction with The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative and the Resilience Research Centre, this workshop explored modes of civilian protection in situations of armed violence. Premised on the assumption that civilian self-protection tactics and strategies are not sufficiently recognized and incorporated into international responses during and after armed conflict, the discussion focused on the ways and means that civilians themselves develop to survive violence. Our objectives were to: explore the survival experience and assess the extent to which global and local conceptions of protection are connected and mutually supportive; facilitate dialogue across disciplines and methodologies in order to identify the overlaps and gaps; and help equip scholars and practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to better engage with civilian self-protection mechanisms and inform future policy and practice. Bringing together a diverse range of disciplinary, thematic, and regional expertise, this workshop highlighted the everyday acts of survival inherent within the terrain of conflict and war, yet concluded that the knowledge and experiences of survivors remain largely invisible within the existing civilian protection framework.

Reflecting the principal themes emerging from the workshop discussions, this report is divided into five sections. The ***first section*** explores the ***meaning of survival*** for those living through mass violence, focusing primarily on civilian agency in navigating this uncertain environment. It suggests that, at its most basic, survival within contexts of war and armed

violence is highly tactical, as individuals and communities gather and disseminate information, pool their resources, accommodate dangerous actors, and flee or hide from violence, among other strategies. It further argues, however, that for those living in environments of chronic insecurity, survival is more than simply the act of surviving the moment. Instead, it is better represented as a *living process*, thus highlighting the agency, resilience, and resistance of civilians within the constraints of their environment.

The ***second section*** outlines the kinds of ***research and methods*** that are currently being used to study and understand the survival experience. The workshop discussions revealed a diverse range of methodologies used in working with war-affected populations, such as storytelling, various visual methodologies (photovoice, bodymapping, and arts-based techniques), and participatory action methods. The participants also highlighted a number of ethical concerns inherent in this work, including the inappropriate use of minority world methods, the prevailing concern with publishing over the needs and concerns of the individual or community, and the potential risk of harm to research participants.

The ***third section*** considers the ***various actors involved in civilian protection***, including individuals and communities, national governments, armed groups, and international actors. Although recognizing that individuals and communities are ultimately the first and last providers of their own protection, it contends that each of the above actors may play a role in supporting these endogenous protection strategies. National governments are essential players in coordinating civilian protection efforts with both internal and external actors. Rebel groups, as a result of their dependence on local actors for resources and information, may also be engaged by communities for protection from attack. International actors can build local capacities and prepare communities for their eventual withdrawal. Nonetheless, despite the prominent role of

the international community in the protection of civilians, the participants concluded that there is a need for greater evaluation of the efficacy of these efforts in enhancing civilian protection.

The ***fourth section*** examines the ***intersections among these actors*** and their effect on protection outcomes. Although observing that the survival of civilians is intimately linked to the action or inaction of international actors, it argues that the interplay between the two levels is still unclear. Researchers and practitioners thus continue to grapple with the challenge of how international protection efforts may (or may not) enhance equivalent activities at the local level. Despite some successes in this regard, it is clear that much work remains to bridge the divide between the two and expose or develop mutually beneficial protection strategies.

Finally, the ***last section*** discusses the ***implications of these insights in relation to the practice of protection*** and provides suggestions for rethinking the civilian protection framework. It suggests that the notion of survival, understood as a process of agency, resistance, and resilience, is central in this regard, as civilians are ultimately the final guarantors of their own protection. While international actors may support or reinforce local capacities, they will never be able to guarantee this protection themselves. The report concludes by summarizing the principal implications for policy practice.

Introduction

There is growing acceptance that if states are unable or unwilling to prevent and react to mass atrocities within their borders, this "responsibility to protect" must fall to the international community. Although reflected in a significant body of international norms, laws, and policies,[1] major challenges remain in converting this principle into practice. Academics and practitioners working on this issue typically focus on the dilemmas involved in the provision of civilian protection, highlighting the failures, and, less often, the successes of international approaches. Less recognized are the strategies and mechanisms that civilians themselves develop to survive violence. However, through single case studies in settings of on-going conflict, anthropologists and other area specialists have begun to provide an appreciation of the 'localized' dynamics of violence and the agency of civilians within the structural constraints of war. Drawing on research from Liberia, Mozambique, Northern Uganda, and Sierra Leone, among other cases, their work traces the processes through which individuals and communities navigate, challenge, and ultimately survive the threats arising from armed violence.[2] Nonetheless, these self-protection strategies are seldom well understood and / or connected with external responses. Worse, humanitarian interventions may inadvertently contradict or impede endogenous sources of protection, and compromise the efforts of local actors to break cycles of conflict and foster sustainable development in their communities.

[1] See, for example, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001); United Nations, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility: Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change* (United Nations, 2004); United Nations General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome* (New York: United Nations, 2005); United Nations Security Council, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: S/RES/1674* (2006); United Nations Security Council, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: S/RES/1894* (2009).

[2] See Erin Baines and Emily Paddon, "This is How We Survived: Civilian Agency and Humanitarian Protection," *Security Dialogue*, 43, no. 3 (2012): 231-247; Chris Coulter, "Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?" *Feminist Review* 88, no. 1 (2008): 54-73; Stephen C. Lubkemann, *Culture in Chaos: An Anthropology of the Social Condition in War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Mats Utas, "Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's Social Navigation of the Liberian War Zone," *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2005): 403-430.

To explore these everyday acts of survival and bridge the divide between external and internal strategies of protection, the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, in conjunction with The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative and the Resilience Research Centre, hosted a two day workshop to analyze civilian protection strategies, synthesize existing knowledge, and foster dialogue and collaboration among scholars and practitioners working on this subject. Bringing together a diverse range of disciplinary, thematic, and regional expertise (see Appendices), the objectives of this workshop were to: explore the survival experience and assess the extent to which global and local conceptions of protection are connected and mutually supportive; facilitate dialogue across disciplines and methodologies in order to identify the overlaps and gaps; and equip scholars and practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to better engage with civilian self-protection mechanisms and inform future policy and practice. In the process, our intention was to move beyond the conventional focus on the failures and limitations of civilian protection, in order to give voice to multiple perspectives and build an expanded understanding of survival in the context of violence.

This report will summarize and analyze the principal themes and insights emerging from the workshop discussions. It will proceed in five sections. First, it will explore the meaning of survival for those living through mass violence, focusing primarily on civilian agency in navigating this uncertain environment. Second, it will outline the kinds of research and methods that are currently being used to study survival and understand these experiences. Third, it will consider the various actors that are responsible for helping civilians survive, including local actors and communities, national governments, armed groups, and international actors. Fourth, it will examine the intersection of internal and external understandings of survival, and its effect on

protection outcomes. Finally, it will discuss how these insights can help to inform the practice of protection, and will provide suggestions for rethinking the civilian protection framework.

What does it mean to survive?

At its most basic, survival within contexts of war and armed violence is highly tactical, as civilians react to and navigate the threats arising from their environment. In these times of acute need, civilians are primarily concerned with surviving the moment, by ensuring their physical safety and the protection of their families, homes, livelihoods, and values. Various self-protection strategies may be used in this regard, a number of which emerged during the workshop. Although these strategies differ according to the rural or urban setting of violence and the unique context in which they are located, they could be broadly divided according to the individual or collective nature of these acts. At the individual level, these include: running, hiding, taking refuge with families or in safe places, accommodating dangerous actors, or flight, among others. At the collective level, these include: gathering and disseminating information, developing early warning systems, pooling resources, planning escape routes, or community flight. These tactical choices are rarely easy, however, as individuals within the context of war often face terrible dilemmas and trade-offs in navigating these terrains. Although it was observed that individuals and communities are never fully prepared for the extremes of war and armed violence, knowledge of the land and local context are crucial to the success of many of these strategies. It was noted that individuals and communities may also draw on their experience of past conflicts and disseminate this information between villages.

For those living in environments of chronic insecurity, however, survival is more than simply the act of surviving the moment. For the most marginal populations, it represents the

daily reality of their lives, as they plot and negotiate the volatile terrain of insecurity, resource scarcity, and uncertainty. Survival is thus a *living process* that structures their life choices and possibilities. The interplay of such factors as age, gender, class, and ethnicity will further condition these opportunities and limits. For this reason, an agent-centric approach was considered essential for understanding the multiple roles that civilians may assume in navigating the structural constraints of their environment. A panel on children and youth, for instance, noted that in situations of prolonged crisis, the marginalization and disenfranchisement confronting young people can severely limit their ability to affect the surrounding environment. Despite these constraints, one participant revealed the considerable political awareness and individual agency exhibited within the everyday lives of Congolese refugee youth residing in Uganda. The other two panelists suggested that among young people in Colombia and Sierra Leone, mobilization into armed groups was another means of reasserting their agency and gaining respect and power in the community. Another panel on gendered violence observed that in working with women who had suffered through sexual violence, the women would often reject their status as victims. Drawing on research from Peru and Northern Uganda, the panelists observed that these women instead preferred to discuss their moments of courage and their experiences of survival, thus emphasizing their strength within these times of adversity. These examples highlight the fluid nature of agency and survival in the contexts of war, transcending the typical victim-perpetrator binary and challenging widely accepted notions of right and wrong.

The concepts of resistance and resilience were also commonly used to describe the process of survival. Forms of everyday *resistance*, through which individuals and communities engage with and challenge repressive actors and the realities of war, were described by one participant as a way of "carving space" from the control exerted over their lives and "remaking

their world" within these constraints. More passive forms of resistance used by civilians included storytelling, adaptation, and avoidance, all of which were used to reduce the effects of war, evade certain dangers, and reassert some sense of control in their daily lives. More overt forms included the recovery and maintenance of such social places as schools or community centres, which served as "recuperative spaces" that could foster trust, dignity, and social repair. Another participant described a model of collective protest, through which civilians transmit norms of protection in attempting to 'nudge' armed actors towards using less violence. The notion of *resilience,* closely related to that of resistance, was also commonly used to describe the capacity of individuals to cope with and bounce back from adverse experiences. The workshop discussions generally favoured a broader, ecological perspective on resilience that incorporates contextual and culturally embedded understandings of positive adaptation, thus highlighting the social transformation of the individual in navigating to and negotiating for the resources that sustain their well-being in meaningful ways. It should be noted, however, that different conceptions of these terms emerged throughout the discussions, particularly across different disciplines. The participants highlighted that there is considerable potential for interdisciplinary dialogue to engage with and accentuate the richness and contextual nature of these concepts, while clarifying the limits of comparison across different cases.

Finally, it was observed that the survival experience often persists well into the "post-conflict" environment, where stagnation, marginalization, and ongoing violence continue to confront the survivors of violence. Drawing on her fieldwork among former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, one participant noted that life in the post-conflict setting was often more difficult for these youth than during the war. In particular, there was a strong sense of nostalgia for the power, respect, and income once earned as combatants, in contrast to the marginalization,

stigma, and poverty marking their current circumstances. More generally, the survivors of war and armed violence often struggle to understand their experiences, as they attempt to make sense of what happened and the choices they made during this period. In their work with women in Northern Uganda who had been previously abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), two participants described storytelling as a method used to open up space for dialogue on these issues. In sharing their experiences, these women gradually realized that despite their different backgrounds, they were united by the common story of their survival. This process further helped to contest the stigma and fear which they encountered in their daily lives, while enabling the possibility of imagining a new future of living together.

In sum, survival in the face of extreme violence is a multi-layered concept. Although civilian protection is frequently portrayed as a commodity provided through short-term humanitarian relief, it is evident that survival extends beyond the physical safety of individuals, families, and communities. Instead, it must be understood as a process, through which agents navigate volatile terrains, resist structures of domination and control, and negotiate their pathways to resilience. The act of survival further persists long after the violence has ended, as civilians struggle to understand their experiences and the impossible choices they were forced to confront. Rethinking civilians as knowing subjects can help to reveal these processes of agency, resistance, and resilience, and distinguish their strength and resolve from the brutal violence to which they have been exposed.

How do researchers and practitioners understand survival?

Drawing on research and practice from numerous countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, the workshop discussions enabled a comparative exploration of the commonalities

and differences of the survival experience. Its interdisciplinary focus further highlighted the wide range of methods used in working with the most marginal populations, as well as the ethical implications and conceptual limits of this work. However, although this topic is well-suited to incorporating these diverse perspectives, the workshop further revealed that there is still much to be done in breaking down disciplinary silos and enhancing collaboration in future research.

The methods discussed over the course of the workshop highlighted a number of trends in studying and understanding the survival experience. Most notably, much of this work privileged local forms of knowing, and was guided by the distinct histories and traditions of the context in which the researcher was embedded. Storytelling, as discussed above, was used to help survivors understand their experiences, while enabling the researcher to move beyond categorical assumptions of victim and perpetrator. Various visual methodologies, such as photovoice, bodymapping, and arts-based techniques, were similarly used in this regard, as the use of these media helped participants to explore the complex processes and social dynamics of conflict, as well as their own roles within these forces. Participatory action research (PAR) was also discussed as a means of prioritizing empowerment and action, by establishing a partnership between researcher and community. In this way, individuals and communities could come to "advocate for themselves," thereby privileging the importance of local knowledge in building and sustaining solutions. Finally, strengths-based and participatory approaches were recognized for their potential in overcoming the colonizing influences of conventional research. These approaches prioritize the resilience of survivors by exploring and mobilizing their unique talents and resources, in contrast to Western trauma response models that too often focus on perceived deficits.

The discussion also highlighted several concerns regarding the current state of research among war-affected populations. Most notably, it was observed that many of the tools and definitions used to measure resilience and other concepts derive from the minority world.[3] As a result of this influence, the methods used to explore the notion of survival may not always be relevant to the context in which they are based, or may produce biased results. While posing the additional challenge of training and capacity, it was suggested that holding consultations with community advisory committees and hiring local community members as research assistants, translators, or cultural brokers may help to overcome these limitations. One participant noted, however, that gaining access to communities can present a further challenge to researchers. Drawing on her own experiences in Rwanda, she suggested that government officials can often act as gatekeepers to local communities, as they influence who researchers speak to and how they work with these populations. She concluded that ethnicity, social status, patronage networks, and corruption are all important elements that can intersect in opening certain doors in these contexts and gaining access to information, or *vice versa*.

Various ethical concerns were also raised regarding research and practice with the survivors of war and armed violence. One participant noted that the humanitarian world is often highly reactionary, such that "common sense isn't always as common as it should be … especially in conflict and crisis." Research and practice among at-risk populations may inadvertently increase the risk of harm, by evoking painful memories, reinforcing negative stereotypes, or stigmatizing the individual within the community. It is thus imperative that this

[3] In the scholarship on risk and resilience, it has been noted that research in this field has been largely limited to individuals residing in the industrialized, 'minority' world. Consequently, there has been little investigation into the applicability of such constructs as resilience in non-western, 'majority' world cultures. See Jo Boyden and Gillian Mann, "Children's Risk, Resilience and Coping in Extreme Situations," in *Handbook for Working with Children and Youth: Pathways to Resilience Across Cultures and Contexts*, ed. Michael Ungar (London: Sage Publications, 2005): 3–26; Michael Ungar, "Resilience Across Cultures," *British Journal of Social Work* 38, no. 2 (2008): 218-235.

work reduce the risk of further traumatization and harm. It was further observed that with academic or journalistic work, the concern with publishing can often take precedence over the needs and concerns of the individual or community. One discussant noted that while researchers or journalists may often target the most vulnerable populations, they typically offer little in return to informants for their time and rarely disseminate the final results of the study among the community. While researchers and journalists are frequently viewed with suspicion as a result, it was agreed that more participatory approaches have much to offer to local communities, including contacts, networks, and resources, and can be a positive force for change and activism.

Who is responsible for the survival of civilians?

The question of who is responsible for the protection of civilians dominated the workshop. Although often portrayed as a commodity to be delivered by the international community, the protection offered by humanitarian actors or UN agencies is inconsistent in times of acute need. The former may be denied access to at-risk populations, or may withdraw or choose not to intervene due to the risk to their own personnel. The latter is equally unreliable, as the UN Security Council and other bodies are frequently hampered by political considerations or indecision. For these reasons, it is evident that civilians are ultimately the final guarantors of their own protection. Nonetheless, the workshop participants agreed that all of the above actors have a role to play in ensuring the survival of civilians. This section will consider the local, national, and international actors engaged in civilian protection, while the following section will consider the intersections among these levels.

Although local communities caught up in the extremes of war are often portrayed as victimized populations in need of international protection, this discourse fails to recognize the

fluid nature of civilian agency and self-protection on the ground. As discussed above, civilians know how to protect themselves, based on their own understandings of the local context and the threats they face. One participant, for instance, presented the work of the Cuny Center, which has produced an inventory of more than 500 different types of self-protection, divided according to three principal strategies: avoidance, accommodation, and affinity. These self-defence measures further vary by community, such that each has its own brand of protection. While most presentations focused on rural settings, one participant focusing on Ciudad Juarez in Mexico discussed the self-protection measures enacted by the residents of this city in response to rising crime and armed violence, thus drawing attention to the increasingly urban nature of violence across Latin America and other regions. Regardless of the setting, however, it was agreed that local initiatives could be better supported by outside actors, as the self-protection strategies of civilians are necessary yet rarely sufficient to ensure the safety they need.

The role of national governments in civilian protection was less discussed, despite the obvious state-centric focus of many UN peacekeeping missions. One participant examined a joint UN-government civilian protection strategy in place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Despite attempting to build a more holistic approach, he argued that the protection teams and other tools established through this strategy were largely implemented at the national level, thus excluding any collaboration with community-based initiatives. He further suggested that significant divides existed between the government in the capital of Kinshasa and the UN, as the two rarely exhibited a shared vision in working towards sustainable solutions. This type of study, exploring the collaboration of the state with either internal or external actors for the purposes of civilian protection, warrants further investigation. Although frequently criticized for their lack of capacity and their inability to protect civilians in the midst of war, it is

evident that national governments are essential players in coordinating civilian protection efforts in these environments.

Interestingly, rebel groups were also identified as a source of protection for local communities. Although often viewed as a threat to security and thus rarely engaged by humanitarian actors, several of the participants suggested that armed groups are often dependent upon their relationships with communities for resources and information, and may be engaged by the latter in return for protection from attack. In some cases, communities may attempt to accommodate armed actors by cooperating with them or persuading them against the use of violence. As discussed above, one participant also described the ways through which communities may attempt to "nudge" combatants through collective protest, in order to alter their beliefs and behaviour. However, another participant suggested that rebel groups may be reluctant to take responsibility for civilian protection, even when fighting an abusive regime. In Syria, for instance, he observed that the revolutionary council has largely deferred this responsibility to the international community, as its primary goal is to protect the revolution rather than the population itself. Nonetheless, these observations suggest the more general point that there is a need to consider the role and dynamics of armed groups in civilian protection, and the means through which their preferences may change in their interactions with communities.

Finally, much of the discussion focused on the role of the international community in the protection of civilians. Although humanitarian efforts are increasingly being framed through a protection lens, many of the participants remained quite critical of the capacity of international actors to effect change at the local level. One participant, for instance, noted that despite the oft-exaggerated assumptions about the importance and impact of mainstream humanitarian actors, there has been minimal improvement in the delivery of protection. Most international efforts

remain hindered by a lack of resolve, resulting in their limited and inconsistent presence in times of acute need. Another participant observed that most international aid arrives after violence has already occurred, and is largely geared towards treating and handling its impacts as opposed to preventing its outbreak in the first place. These familiar tendencies continue to prevail despite the considerable dialogue among humanitarian organizations to coordinate their efforts on the ground. Instead, the discourse of protection remains rooted in particular practices and policies, with little recognition of the localized dynamics of violence and insecurity.

The top-down approach advanced by international actors is therefore largely divorced from the survival experience of local individuals and communities. It was further suggested that humanitarian efforts may undermine or even contradict local self-protection mechanisms, thus inadvertently increasing the chances that individuals and communities may be exposed to violence. In an internally displaced persons camp in Haiti, for instance, one participant reported that the distribution of tents to individuals inadvertently separated recipients from their family members, leaving them more vulnerable to violent crime and sexual assault. Another participant suggested that humanitarian action increases the dependence of individuals and communities on the services and protection provided, thus leaving local counterparts ill-equipped to cope with future violence when this support is withdrawn. Given the potentially negative side effects of international protection mechanisms, the participants concluded that there is a need for greater evaluation of the efficacy of these efforts in enhancing civilian protection.

While civilians are ultimately the first and last providers of their own protection, there are a multitude of actors that may be able to contribute in this regard. Nonetheless, there is still much to be done to bridge the divide between local efforts and those undertaken at the national and international levels. As a result, there is a need to recognize and identify the self-protection

strategies already undertaken by individuals and communities, and consider how these intersect with national and international responses.

How do local and international conceptions of survival intersect?

As is evident from the above discussion, a notable disconnect exists within the discourse of civilian protection, particularly between the "saviours" who rescue and protect and the "victims" who experience the devastation of armed conflict. However, this dichotomy risks obscuring the extent to which the survival of civilians is intimately linked to the action or inaction of international actors, as the protection efforts of both frequently overlap in practice. As the interplay between the two levels is still unclear, it is necessary to explore the intersection of these processes and the resulting implications for civilian protection.

Above all, researchers and practitioners, including the participants in this workshop, continue to grapple with the challenge of how international protection efforts may (or may not) enhance equivalent activities at the local level. How can international actors modify the existing civilian protection framework to incorporate the fluid nature of civilian agency and self-protection? How can this framework apply across contexts, and be adapted to the unique needs of individuals and communities? Finally, how do we evaluate the extent to which these efforts are actually protecting civilians from violence? At the same time, it is important to not idealize self-protection efforts, given the complex choices and dilemmas that civilians face in navigating the terrain of war and armed violence. Research methods that privilege local forms of knowing

can help to break down the victim-perpetrator binary, and recognize that the process of survival is embedded in the structural constraints inherent in the persistence of crisis and chronicity.[4]

The workshop highlighted a number of examples of the intersection of local and international responses to violence. One participant, for instance, discussed the work of the LRA Crisis Tracker, a real-time mapping platform and data collection system designed to track the movements of the Lord's Resistance Army across the DRC and Central African Republic. First developed as an early warning response system using 11 high frequency radio installations among several communities, this peer-to-peer network has since expanded with international support to include more than 60 radio sites today. Using this network, communities are able to communicate with each other regarding the activities of the LRA and adapt their self-protection strategies accordingly. At the same time, this information is further used by international peacekeepers, field workers, and local and international NGOs to respond to attacks and monitor trends over time, thus informing national and international policy. The LRA Crisis Tracker therefore represents an innovative example of the possibilities of internal and external collaboration, through which international actors have been able to enhance the protection efforts of a community-led initiative.

More often, however, the workshop discussions revealed the continuing inconsistencies and limitations of international responses. Reporting on the findings of the Local to Global Protection studies in Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe, one participant observed that there has been little change relative to the protection needs of civilians and the allocation of money and resources by humanitarian agencies. Another participant observed that the

[4] Chronicity, according to Henrik Vigh, refers to the "experience of crisis as a constant," and has been used to describe the lives of individuals trapped within the enduring constraints of war and violence. See Henrik E. Vigh, "Crisis and Chronicity: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuous Conflict and Decline," *Ethnos* 73, no. 1 (2008): 5–24.

international outcry regarding the crisis in Syria has largely focused on the indecision of the UN Security Council, thus ignoring local protection efforts. While the workshop participants agreed that international and humanitarian responses are essential to complementing civilian self-protection strategies, it is clear that much work remains to bridge the divide between the two and expose or develop mutually beneficial protection strategies.

Rethinking the civilian protection framework

The past decade has witnessed considerable questioning of the conventional notions of sovereignty and intervention, as the debate has increasingly shifted from the rights of sovereign states to their "responsibility to protect" civilians from mass atrocity. The protection of civilians has featured prominently in several UN Security Council resolutions, and has largely assumed a "taken-for-granted" place in these deliberations. However, as one participant asked, has this discourse had any influence over the capacity of individuals and communities to cope with and survive mass violence? Has it brought increased attention to the importance of local self-protection strategies? Through a scan of relevant UN documents and reports, the participant concluded that the "responsibility to protect" doctrine has focused almost exclusively on the role of the state in this regard, with little acknowledgement of the potential role of "victims" in their own protection against war and armed violence. Civilian agency and the localized dynamics of insecurity have equally received little consideration, despite the efforts of researchers and practitioners to better our understanding of how, when, and why individuals and communities ultimately survive these experiences.

There is therefore a clear need to rethink the civilian protection framework. Although overlooked or dismissed by many, if not most, humanitarian actors, the notion of survival is

central in this regard. This concept prioritizes the agency of civilians, drawing attention to the ways through which they challenge and navigate the threats arising from their environment. In recognizing the strategies that individuals and communities already take, this concept further reverses the onus of responsibility, from the external actors offering protection to the local actors negotiating these volatile terrains. From this perspective, survival is understood as a process of agency, resistance, and resilience, which humanitarian actors may support or reinforce yet never guarantee.

Over the two days of this workshop, the participants identified a number of insights, challenges, and reforms that may help to enhance this understanding of the survival experience. These insights are summarized below, and will hopefully help to bridge the prevailing divides in this field and expose collaborative protection strategies to inform future policy:

1. **Although national, regional, and international actors may all contribute to the safety of civilians, individuals and communities are ultimately the final guarantors of their own protection.** National and international efforts need to recognize civilian agency, and explore the ways in which they may enhance the strategies that individuals and communities already take. Engaging unconventional actors, such as armed groups, should also be considered.
2. **Survival is a "living process."** Although it is important to observe and document the different types of survival strategies employed by civilians, these choices can only be understood in relation to the context and constraints in which they are made. These will further vary according to their rural or urban setting, or the intensity of violence in the conflict or post-conflict environment. There is therefore a need to broaden the range of cases we are considering, in order to fully understand the survival experience across different contexts.

3. **While the concepts of agency, resilience, and resistance are central to this notion of survival, their meaning is also highly variable.** Further dialogue across the disciplines and between researchers, practitioners, and communities is needed to fully understand the survival experience and develop a full understanding of the richness of these concepts.
4. **Despite good intentions, the protection offered by UN agencies and humanitarian actors is inconsistent at best.** Although international actors often lack the resources to fully protect civilians and may pull out when the risk is greatest, they can still help to shorten the lethal learning curve of self-protection. By engaging in genuine communication with local counterparts, international actors can build local capacity and prepare communities for their eventual withdrawal.
5. **Inflexibility presents a further challenge to humanitarian work, as compliance with donor procedures has often undermined creativity, risk-taking, and innovation.** Although supporting self-protection mechanisms may appear to threaten established practice, these efforts may also give renewed emphasis to the people humanitarian actors are there to protect.
6. **Finally, there is minimal evidence of "what works".** As we strive to bridge the divides between the global and the local, greater evaluation should be built into this work. Breaking down disciplinary silos and exploring the combination of different research methods may help in this regard. Participatory approaches can also help to leverage the insights of individuals and communities, and ensure that research and practice is responding to local needs. At the same time, however, researchers and humanitarian actors should consider the ethical implications of this work, and avoid scenarios that may inadvertently expose civilians to further harm.

Appendix A: Agenda

Surviving Violence: Comparative Perspectives

Workshop Program

Session 1: Re-thinking the Civilian Protection Framework

- **Chair**: David Black
- Frédéric Mégret, *Helping the Syrians Help Themselves: The Normative Implications of International Assistance to a Rebellion*
- Nils Carstensen, *Local Action in the Face of International In-decisiveness: Case Studies of Self-Protection in Sudan, South Sudan, Burma/Myanmar, and Zimbabwe*
- Casey Barrs, *Building on Local Knowledge and Practice of Self-Protection Amid Violence*

Session 2: Conceptualizing Civilian Survival in the Everyday

- **Chair**: Laura Eramian
- Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, *Quitar Espacio a la Guerra: Mapping Everyday Responses to Violence in the Context of Armed Violence*
- Erin Baines, *Survivor Stories as Political Text: Rethinking Protection in the Case of Northern Uganda*

Session 3: Community Understandings and Responses to Violence

- **Chair**: Susan Thompson
- Oliver Kaplan, *Nudging Armed Groups: How Civilians Transmit Norms of Protection*
- Carlos J. Vilalta Perdomo, *Towards an Understanding of Community Organization Against Crime: The Case of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico*

Session 4: International Norms, Laws and Practices for Civilian Protection

- **Chair**: Carla Suarez
- Lawrence Woocher, *The Responsibility to Protect: Assessing its Contribution to Local Strategies to Prevent Mass Violence*
- Michael Poffenberger, *Leveraging Old and New Technologies to Enhance Civilian Early Warning: A Case Study of the LRA Crisis Tracker*

- Arthur Boutellis, *Peacekeeping and the Protection of Civilians in Practice in the Congo*

Evening Reception: Resilience through the Arts

- Art exhibit: Linda Dale
- Spoken word: Ian Keteku
- Poetry reading: Grace Acan
- Lindsay McClain Opiyo, *Creative Transitions: The Arts and Community Expressions of Peacebuilding in Uganda*
- Tracy September, *The Rhythm of Resistance in South Africa: The Role of Music and the Arts in Conflict Situations*

Session 5: Considerations for Methods and Ethics

- **Chair**: John Measor
- Susan Thomson, *Gatekeeping or Image-Making? Working with Local Officials to Gain Access in Urban Kenya and Rural Rwanda*
- Linda Liebenberg and Janice Ikeda, *Understanding Resilience and Youth in Violent and Conflict Affected Contexts: The Use of Mixed Methods*
- Jocelyn Kelly, *Body-Mapping: A Methodological Experience with Congolese Women*

Session 6: Children and Youth Navigating through Armed Violence

- **Chair**: Dominic Silvio
- Myriam Denov, *Navigating Crisis and Chronicity in the Everyday: War-Affected Youth in Urban Sierra Leone*
- Christina Clark-Kazak, *Political Survival in Forced Displacement Contexts: Strategies of Congolese Young People in Uganda*
- Linda Dale, *Young People's Relationships with Armed Groups in Colombia*

Session 7: Gendered Violence and Resilience

- **Chair**: Erin Baines
- Eliana Barrios Suarez, *The Combative Side of Resilience: Lessons from the Courage of Indigenous Quechua Women in Peru*
- Grace Acan, *The Impact of Story-telling Among Formerly Abducted Women in Northern Uganda*
- Carmen Logie, *Exploring Contexts of Violence Among Internally Displaced Youth in Leogane, Haiti*

Session 8: Outreach and Wrap-up Discussion

- Workshop Outreach and Publications: Steven Zyck
- Wrap-up Discussion: Carla Suarez and David Black
- Closing Poem: Ian Keteku

Appendix B: Participants

Name	Institution
Dalal Abdul-Razzaq	Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University
Grace Acan	Women's Advocacy Network
Erin Baines	Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia
Casey Barrs	Cuny Centre
David Black	Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University
Arthur Boutellis	International Peace Institute
Nils Carstensen	DanChurch Aid / ACT Alliance
Christina Clark-Kazak	York University
Linda Dale	Children / Youth as Peacebuilders
Myriam Denov	McGill University
Laura Eramian	Dalhousie University
Janice Ikeda	Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University
Oliver Kaplan	University of Denver
Jocelyn Kelly	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
Ian Keteku	
Linda Liebenberg	Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University
Carmen Logie	Women's College, University of Toronto
Lindsay McClain Opiyo	Music for Peace Foundation
John Measor	Saint Mary's University
Frédéric Mégret	McGill University

David Morgan	Dalhousie University
Michael Poffenberger	Resolve
Pilar Riaño-Alcalá	Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia
Tracy September	University of KwaZulu Natal
Dominic Silvio	Dalhousie University
Carla Suarez	Dalhousie University
Susan Thomson	Colgate University
Carlos J. Vilalta Perdomo	Center for Economic Research and Education
Shelly Whitman	The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative
Lawrence Woocher	Science Applications International Corporation
Steven Zyck	NATO Civil-Military Fusion Centre / *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*