

# Gaining Traction: Measuring the impact of IHL training

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# Acknowledgements

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# List of Acronyms

ICRC	International Committee of The Red Cross
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PRT	Provincial reconstruction team
RCRC	Red Cross Red Crescent
SAF	Safer Access Framework
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit



Chefe de suco (village chief) Reinado Amaral Soares and Januario Ximenes of Timor-Leste Red Cross inspect a toilet built by Red Cross in the village of Hohorai. © Australian Red Cross / Conor Ashleigh.

## Introduction

The evolving nature of warfare is presenting challenges for those seeking to improve humanitarian outcomes for conflict affected populations. The number of armed conflicts around the world has risen significantly over the last decade and a half, with the number of non-international armed conflicts more than doubling between 2001 and 2016. The number of parties fighting within these conflicts is also increasing – in 2016, sixty-six per cent of conflicts had three or more warring parties. Conflicts are increasingly waged in cities, leading to heavy civilian casualties and disruption of vital infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> This rapidly changing environment is compounded by shrinking humanitarian spaces and rising humanitarian needs.

Within this challenging environment, awareness of and ability to apply International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and humanitarian principles are increasingly important, including for stakeholders other than traditional humanitarian actors. Personnel traveling to the field can be equipped with practical IHL and humanitarian principles knowledge and skills through a variety of avenues, including through training and dissemination via the International Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement, academic institutions, through other generalist or technical trainings, in-house trainings, or online courses. Whilst many of these providers are evaluating their approaches (e.g. through course evaluations), there is a dearth of literature on the impact of IHL and humanitarian principles training on humanitarian outcomes.

This research paper starts to build the evidence base on how IHL and humanitarian principles training translates to humanitarian outcomes. Through five key findings and a series of targeted recommendations, this paper intends to support strengthened humanitarian outcomes through improved approaches to IHL and humanitarian principles capacity strengthening.

1 ICRC, 2003. 'The Roots of Restraint in War'

# About this research

## Research objectives

The overarching objectives of this research were to:

- **Analyse and identify the impact** of training humanitarian practitioners in IHL and humanitarian principles
- **Identify strategies** for enhancing the impact of IHL and humanitarian principles training for humanitarian practitioners.

## Methodology

This research used a mixed methods approach that captured both qualitative and quantitative data. The research process began with a **review of literature** on humanitarian education, adult learning, IHL and humanitarian principles dissemination and training approaches, as well as evaluation reports on Australian Red Cross IHL training courses. Fifteen key informant interviews were conducted with people who had experience as participants and trainers in a range of contexts, for a range of organisations. A **survey targeting humanitarian practitioners that had participated in IHL trainings** was used to gain quantitative insights into knowledge, attitudes and practices prior to and after undertaking training. **Story tracking** identified specific case studies in which participant experiences and examples of positive deviance. A summary of the methodology is presented below.

Figure 1: Methodology



## Limitations

- **Sample size:** The sample size – 15 interviewees and 26 survey respondents – means the data are illustrative rather than representative of humanitarian practitioners worldwide. Training experience differed widely, meaning the findings apply to approaches used in multiple courses.
- **Applicability:** Whilst connections were made with institutions offering specific courses on IHL, deeper engagement as part of the research process was not possible due to time and resource limitations. This research was intended as a first step in building the evidence base around the impact of IHL and humanitarian principles training on humanitarian outcomes in the field. It can inform institution-specific approaches or future research.

Figure 2: Overview of IHL and Humanitarian Principles



## International Humanitarian Law and Humanitarian Principles

**International Humanitarian Law** regulates all situations of armed conflict – both international armed conflict and non-international armed conflict.

**International armed conflict** occurs between two or more States; and

**Non-international armed conflict** occurs between a State and one or more non-State armed groups, or between on-State armed groups.

An extensive range of rules that govern international armed conflicts, including situations of military occupation. A more limited set of rules govern non-international armed conflicts. Importantly, irrespective of which specific rules apply, all States, entities, groups and individuals whose activities are associated with armed conflict are required to respect international humanitarian law.

### The Principles of IHL are:



**Humanity:** forbids the infliction of all suffering, injury or destruction not necessary for achieving the legitimate purpose of a conflict.



**Military necessity:** permits measures which are actually necessary to accomplish a legitimate military purpose and are not otherwise prohibited by international humanitarian law.



**Distinction:** provides that parties to an armed conflict must “at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives.”



**Proportionality:** prohibits attacks against military objectives which are “expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.”

**The Humanitarian Principles** guide the way that humanitarian response is carried out. Promoting and ensuring compliance with the principles are essential to effective humanitarian interventions.

#### Humanity

Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

#### Neutrality

Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

#### Impartiality

Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

#### Independence

Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

# Findings

The research findings presented in the report are summarised below.



## Finding 1:

**Application of IHL training can be linked to improved humanitarian outcomes**

“The outcomes of these discussions [on humanitarian principles] were that we were granted access to the civilian population [and] able to provide health.



## Finding 2:

**Training on IHL and humanitarian principles is only one step in a learning process**

“It's not something you can just train on and send delegates. You need reflection and recalibration. You learn, you go to the field, and you then need to reflect on what worked for you, what didn't and then recalibrate your way of thinking.<sup>2</sup>



## Finding 3:

**Application of IHL and humanitarian principles is supported if there is a critical mass of actors in context that understand and support the principles**

“There needs to be enough people in the field that understand the significance and importance and application or else it undermines it for the whole. There needs to be a critical mass.<sup>3</sup>



## Finding 4:

**Training for field practitioners needs to be practical and contextualised**

“With regards to training – keep it simple, narrow it down to the fundamentals, and keep it operationally relevant.<sup>4</sup>



## Finding 5:

**Awareness of IHL and humanitarian principles mitigates individual and operational risks in the field**

“If you're not very careful you can get people in a lot of trouble and very easily get your mission cancelled. There's a way of going about it, I don't think that way is educated widely enough.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Interview 3

3 Interview 3

4 Interview 11

5 Interview 9



## Finding 1:

### Application of IHL training can be linked to improved humanitarian outcomes

Interview and survey data provide clear examples of when learning from IHL training has been applied and led to better humanitarian outcomes.

Whilst there were challenges with attribution, the data indicate that knowledge was applied in numerous situations to achieve positive results. Specific examples demonstrate how training knowledge or behaviours were used in country contexts. The figure below shows high-level data on how interviewees applied their knowledge to achieve improved humanitarian outcomes.

**Figure 3: Application of knowledge for better humanitarian outcomes**

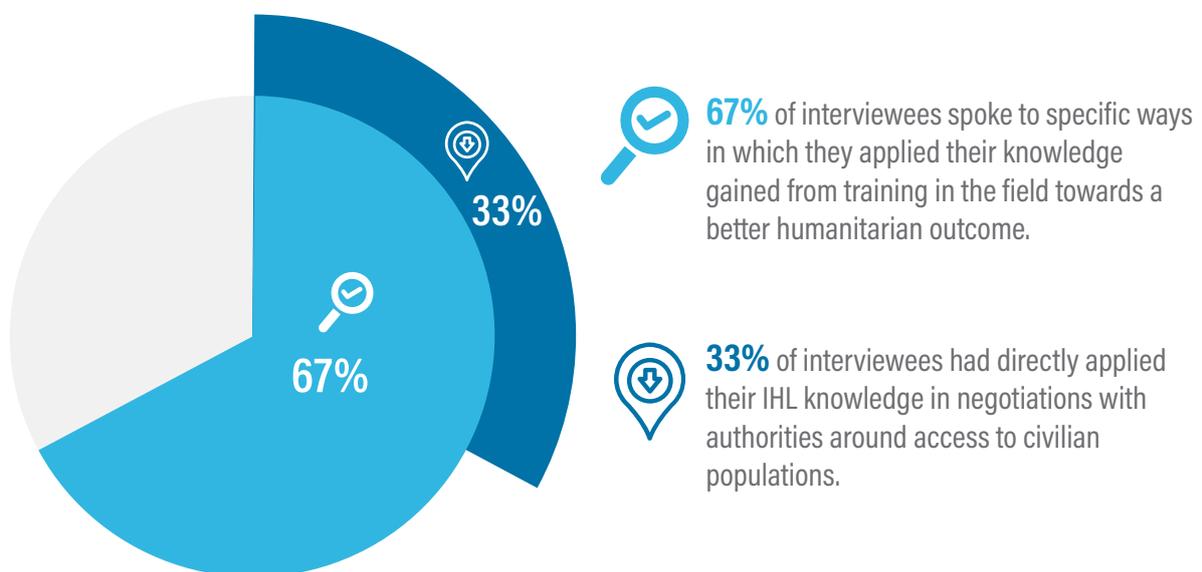
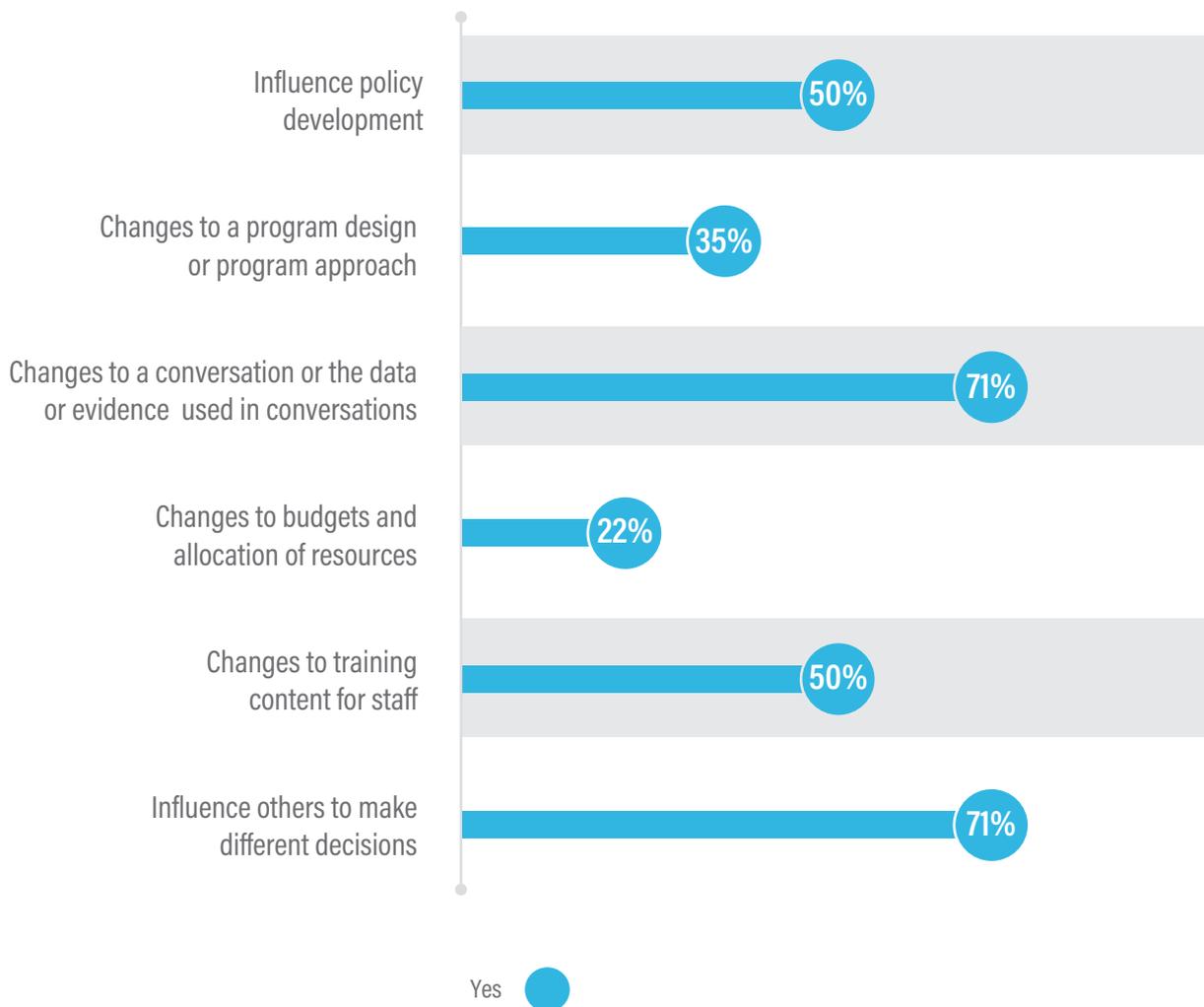


Figure 4 highlights specific areas in which trainees made changes in their work practices as a result of the training they had received. It shows that the biggest changes were made in influencing others, use of evidence in conversations, policy development and training for staff.

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents that have made changes as a result of training



This finding about changes in work practices resulting from training aligns with the broader literature on IHL. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) research, described in *Roots of Restraint in War* (2018), examined the impact of IHL training and methods that soldiers found most effective. It found that external entities are able to influence the behaviour of armed forces. As such, humanitarian organisations drawing on IHL and humanitarian principles in dialogue with armed actors positively contributes to respect for humanitarian norms.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> ICRC 2018. 'The Roots of Restraint in War'. ICRC, Geneva.

The figure below highlights the journey of one trainee, showcasing when they engaged with training on IHL and humanitarian principles and how it was used to strengthen humanitarian outcomes in specific missions.

Figure 5: Sarah's story: applying IHL for field impact



There is little available literature about the impact of training on humanitarian outcomes. There are opportunities to strengthen this evidence base. For example, Australian Red Cross includes questions on application of IHL and humanitarian principles as part of delegate debriefing (see box below). A similar approach applied across other organisations and captured more systematically could contribute towards a stronger body of evidence across contexts and organisations.

### **Australian Red Cross debrief questions for delegates**

- Prior to your mission, did you complete online or face-to-face training in international humanitarian law? *Yes / No*
- During your mission, did you rely on your knowledge of international humanitarian law? *Yes/No*
- If yes, did you rely on your knowledge of IHL in relation to:
  - ▶ Negotiating access to beneficiaries
  - ▶ Reminding colleagues of the importance of impartial, independent and neutral humanitarian assistance
  - ▶ Access to or delivery of health care
  - ▶ Personal safety and security or safety/security of others
  - ▶ Protection of the wounded and sick
  - ▶ Protection of medical personnel, vehicles or facilities
  - ▶ Internally displaced persons or refugees
  - ▶ Other (if possible, we could ask for a “please specify” section)

### **Recommendations**

- ✓ Strengthen de-briefing processes for staff, including regularly asking questions on how IHL and humanitarian principles have been applied in the field
- ✓ Seek opportunities to utilise data to strengthen the evidence base on training impact, and feed back into case studies to tailor training content



## Finding 2:

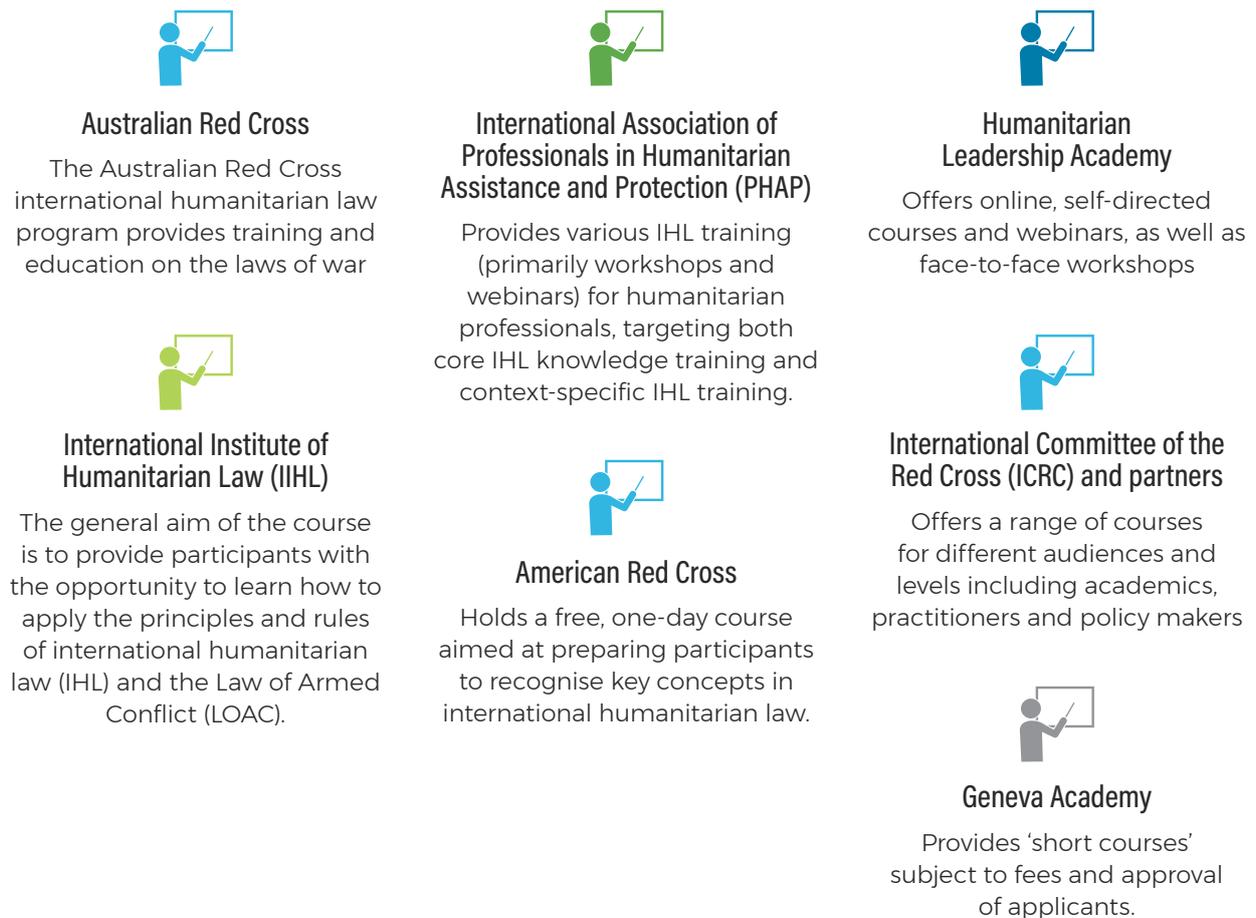
### Training on IHL and humanitarian principles is one step in a learning process that contributes towards better humanitarian outcomes

Knowledge and confidence in applying IHL and humanitarian principles in field contexts for better humanitarian outcomes relies on ongoing engagement, recalibration, refreshment and practice. Humanitarian practitioners who received training that was supported by in-country conversations, opportunities to engage with IHL issues in context, or refresher training on return from deployments were much more likely to report confidence and increased application of IHL principles.<sup>7</sup>

*"I think it's important for people to have refresher trainings – the situations change and things are used in different ways."<sup>8</sup>*

The figure below provides a snapshot of providers that offer training in IHL.

Figure 6: High-level snapshot of training providers



7 Interviews 1,3,7,10,13

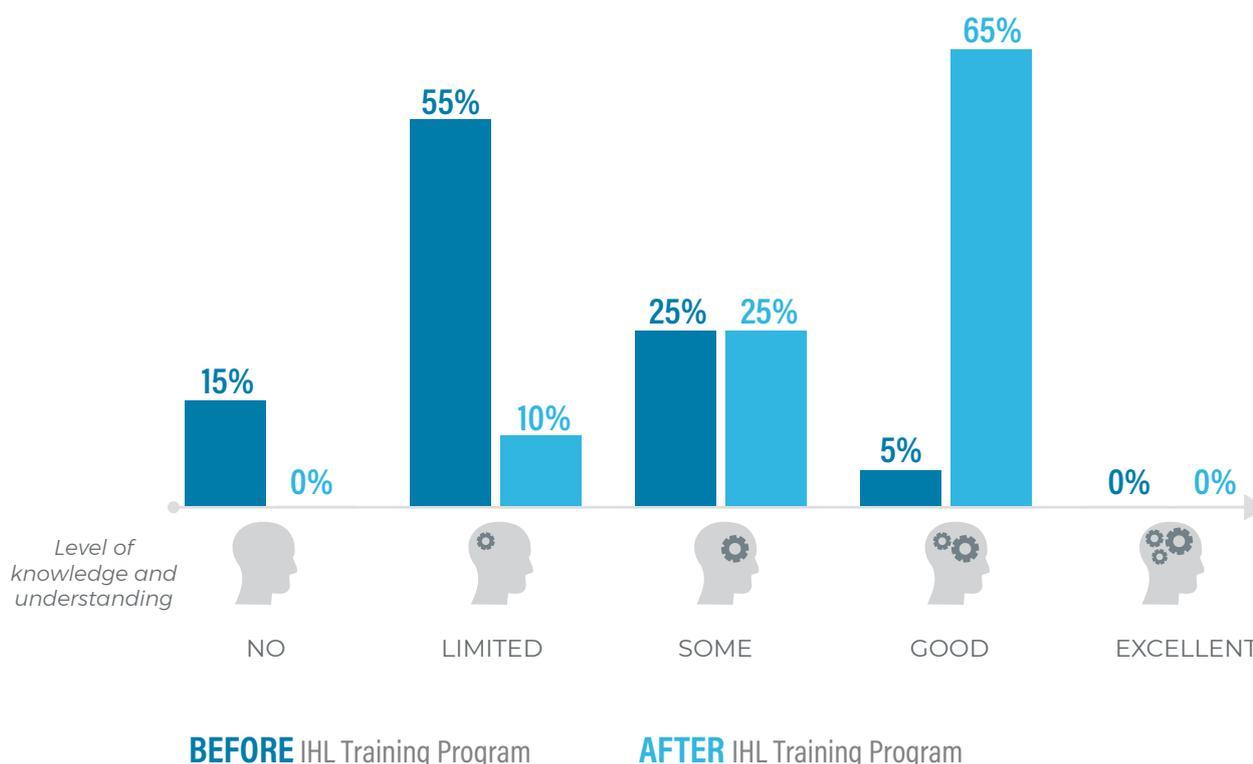
8 Interview 9

The primary training approach for IHL in humanitarian organisations is through a one-off module, resulting in certification.<sup>9</sup> Most courses participants had attended were ad hoc one-off trainings. No humanitarian staff reported a structured learning pathway that supported ongoing learning and reinforcement.

Learning in the humanitarian sector has been widely researched. One of the key avenues to strengthen capacity across the sector is a structured approach to learning and development.<sup>10</sup> However, in the absence of continual learning and reinforcement, humanitarian workers may receive specific training then go several missions, or many years, without having to apply it.<sup>11</sup> In such cases, knowledge and the ability to apply it dissipates. One interviewee spoke specifically about their experience in missions that did not require them to engage in IHL issues, and how they would have benefited from refresher trainings to keep their knowledge up to date.<sup>12</sup> Some interviewees reported that sometimes further learning was undertaken opportunistically rather than as part of an intentional strategy to build on prior knowledge.

The figure below shows people’s confidence in engaging with IHL issues before and after training. It clearly shows the positive impact of training on participants’ ability to engage with IHL issues. It also shows that there is room for more learning and capacity development that could be enhanced through refresher training and other planned learning opportunities.

**Figure 7. Measuring the impact of training on knowledge and understanding.**



9 Bollentino and Claude, 2008, p. 276

10 Russ and Davis, 2014. ‘The push for change in humanitarian learning and development’. See <https://odihpn.org/blog/the-push-for-change-in-humanitarian-learning-and-development/>

11 ICRC 2003; Interviews 1, 3, 9

12 Interview 9

Effective ways of embedding knowledge and strengthening confidence in the application of IHL and humanitarian principles included:

- **Teaching IHL or humanitarian principles to others.** A third of interviewees reported that teaching or training others was an effective way to consolidate and refresh their knowledge and clarify their understanding. This strategy to embed knowledge is supported by the broader research on learning. The impetus to pass on knowledge promotes increased literacy and self-study – a “protégé effect”,<sup>13</sup> in which students studying to teach others score higher in tests than those studying for their own knowledge.

*“[my knowledge on IHL was consolidated by] the need to provide training to peers in the project, having to draw on colleagues and reading materials.”<sup>14</sup>*

- **Opportunities for reflection.** Interviewees described the importance of reflection for embedding learning and making sense of challenging situations in the field. Four interviewees described the importance of this process and provided examples of how it strengthened their knowledge or the knowledge of their students. The importance of reflection as part of the Adult Learning Cycle is supported by broader research and literature. Reflection enhances the ability of practitioners to interrogate what they may do differently in future scenarios. A reflective practitioner is capable “of thinking on his or her feet, essentially developing a new understanding in response to every professional situation.”<sup>15</sup> This is particularly important in the context of IHL and humanitarian principles application, because it is unlikely any two scenarios in the field will be the same.

*“it’s not something you can just train on and send delegates. You need reflection and recalibration. You learn, you go to the field, and you then need to reflect on what worked for you, what didn’t, and then recalibrate your way of thinking.”<sup>16</sup>*

- **Refresher trainings.** A third of interviewees spoke to the importance of refresher trainings to consolidate knowledge, particularly after field postings that didn’t require regular engagement with or application of what they had learned.

*“I think it’s important for people to have refresher trainings – the situations change and things are used in different ways – you can do two or three missions and there may not be any issues you come across so you can be blasé.”<sup>17</sup>*

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13 Chase, C.C., Chin, D.B., Oppezzo, M.A. et al. (2009)

14 Interview 10

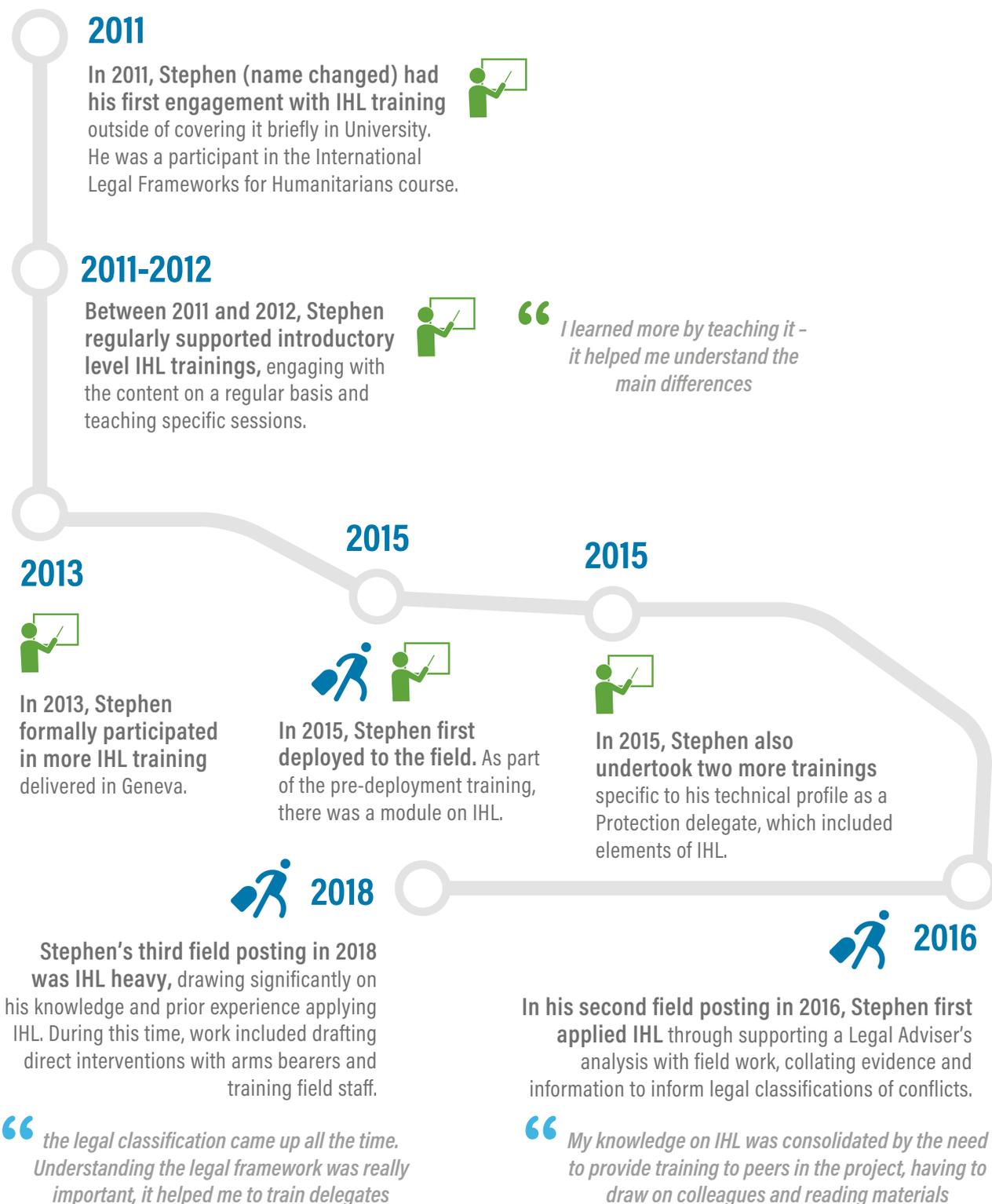
15 Schon, DA. (1983) in Walker, Hein, Russ, Bertleff and Casperz (2010) A Blueprint for Professionalizing Humanitarian Assistance. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2010.1023>

16 Interview 3

17 Interview 9

The figure below outlines the journey of a practitioner, demonstrating the various points of engagement with IHL content. This interviewee reflected on the benefit of consolidating knowledge by training others.

**Figure 8: Stephen's story: IHL Learning as a process**

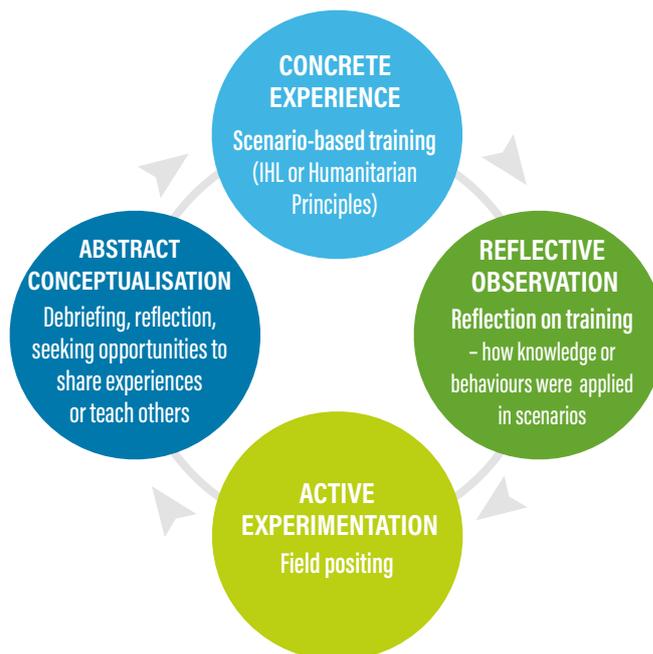


## Recommendations

- ✓ Consider IHL and humanitarian principles as a learning journey rather than a one-off training. Opportunities to foster this learning journey include:
  - ▶ Developing a structured learning pathway that builds on the learning cycle and engages with people being deployed to the field
  - ▶ Developing a suite of learning options, which could include:
    - ▶ Accessible refresher courses
    - ▶ Engaging trainees as trainers
    - ▶ Encouraging reflective practice
    - ▶ Challenging trainees to seek opportunities to teach others what they have learned
    - ▶ Establishing communities of practice
    - ▶ Seeking opportunities to collect and share case studies

The figure below articulates Kolb's learning cycle and how approaches to IHL learning could be structured against the cycle.

Figure 9: Cyclical IHL and humanitarian principles learning





### Finding 3:

## Application of IHL and humanitarian principles is supported if there is a critical mass of actors that understand and support the principles

This review suggests that there is insufficient literacy in IHL and humanitarian principles in the field.<sup>18</sup> The impact of training is weakened by the small proportion of humanitarian staff that understand and have the confidence to apply IHL and humanitarian principles. Some contexts lack the coordinated voice with consistent messaging that is required to bring about desired change.

*“There needs to be enough people in the field that understand the significance and importance and application or else it undermines it for the whole. There needs to be a critical mass.”<sup>19</sup>*

The dissemination of and training in IHL and humanitarian principles is essential for their effective implementation and promotion of respect for them.<sup>20</sup> Most dissemination and training among humanitarian actors occurs among staff in the RCRC Movement. This aligns with the Movement’s mandate and is a requirement for all its staff. However, their job and the achievement of the RCRC mandate will be greatly facilitated by a humanitarian community that has a greater understanding of IHL and an ability to support their leading role to advise on and apply IHL principles.

### IHL for humanitarians inside and outside the RCRC Movement

*“there is a deficiency in the Red Cross [with respect to IHL knowledge], not to mention outside of it.”<sup>21</sup>*

There is a significant difference in awareness of IHL principles between people who have worked within the RCRC Movement and in other humanitarian agencies.<sup>22</sup> Most survey respondents were from the RCRC Movement (46%), compared with 35% working for INGOs and 12% for UN agencies and 3% for donors. It is important for people within the RCRC Movement to understand the unique role of the RCRC in IHL, but also for agencies outside of the Movement to understand the legal frameworks, roles and responsibilities of different agencies.<sup>23</sup>

The responsibility for wide dissemination of IHL enshrined in the Geneva Conventions is articulated below. It establishes the importance of the ‘entire population’ being aware of IHL principles.



*“The High Contracting Parties undertake, in time of peace as in times of war, to disseminate the text of the present Convention as widely as possible in their respective countries... so that the principles thereof may become known to all their armed forces and to the entire population.”<sup>24</sup>*

(Geneva Conventions)

18 Interviews 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; O’Callaghan and Leach, ICRC, 2013, p. 294.

19 Interview 3

20 ICRC 2003

21 Interview 9

22 Interviews 3, 6, 11

23 Interviews 4, 6, 11, 9

24 Geneva Convention Dissemination Clauses (GC I, Art. 47; II, Art. 48; III, Art. 127; IV, Art. 7).

## RCRC Movement dissemination mandates

### STATUTES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

(adopted by the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross at Geneva in 1986, amended in 1995 and 2006).

#### Article 3. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

*(2) They disseminate and assist their governments in disseminating international humanitarian law; they take initiatives in this respect. They disseminate the principles and ideals of the Movement and assist those governments which also disseminate them. They also cooperate with their governments to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and to protect the distinctive emblems recognized by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.*

#### Article 5. The International Committee of the Red Cross

*(2) The role of the International Committee, in accordance with its Statutes, is in particular:*

*(g) to work for the understanding and dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts and to prepare any development thereof...*

#### Article 6. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

*(4) ...the functions of the Federation, in accordance with its Constitution, are inter alia the following:*

*(j) to assist the International Committee in the promotion and development of international humanitarian law and collaborate with it in the dissemination of this law and of the Fundamental Principles of the Movement among the National Societies...*

Interviewees suggested that IHL training and support should be extended to both humanitarian organisations and dual-mandate or development organisations. Of 21 IHL course descriptors reviewed, 47% primarily target humanitarian practitioners and 38% are targeted towards academics. Broadening the audience to include development practitioners and private sector organisations may help to increase interest in IHL outside of the more traditional humanitarian stakeholders.

- **For humanitarians** there is immense perceived value in increasing access to IHL and humanitarian principles training, both for people deploying outside of their home countries and for national staff.<sup>25</sup>

*"...The limited attention within the humanitarian community to the operational importance and relevance of applying the principles can, to a degree, be explained by a lack of in-depth knowledge and training on how they can be used...."*

- **For development practitioners** or those working for **dual-mandate organisations**, IHL and humanitarian principles training is important (according to 40% of interviewees). Understanding of and respect for IHL and humanitarian principles is paramount from a humanitarian perspective, but it is also critical from a development perspective insofar as it minimises the setbacks posed

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25 Interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13

by armed conflicts.<sup>26</sup> Complementarity between development and humanitarian actors is invaluable for humanitarian actors to navigate practical challenges of impartiality, but it is vital that development actors (including donors and state actors) understand the humanitarian model.<sup>27</sup> A Norwegian Refugee Council and Handicap International case study of the application of humanitarian principles in Nepal found that, in what is primarily considered a development context, people who responded to the 2016 Kathmandu earthquake conflated humanitarian principles with other concepts or questioned their relevance.<sup>28</sup>

*"[IHL is applicable in] any work that brings you into contact with issues around legal frameworks around treating people – it gives you an understanding of the situation that allows you to reflect a bit better on what are people's rights, what is on the table, what should be on the table."<sup>29</sup>*

## IHL, humanitarian principles and the 'nexus'

*"it's so important to try and reach the multi-mandated organisations and figure out how to talk about the principles and IHL in the nexus."<sup>30</sup>*

Global trends show the increased need for development partners to understand humanitarian norms. For example, the focus on the 'humanitarian-development nexus' at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), which received more commitments at the WHS than any other area, evidences the need to adapt to the shrinking humanitarian/development divide. Dialogue about respect for IHL and conduct of hostilities has been largely absent in nexus discussions.<sup>31</sup> To ensure the humanitarian-development nexus continues to strengthen in line with WHS outcomes, respect for IHL is vital.

## Recommendations

- ✓ Continue to build the evidence base on the relevance of IHL and humanitarian principles training, for example through:
  - ▶ Supporting research on the relevance of IHL and humanitarian principles in discussions about the humanitarian development nexus discussions
  - ▶ Widely disseminating research findings
- ✓ Promote courses to a broader audience, including development practitioners and private sector representatives, through adapting language of marketing materials and socialisation outside of traditional humanitarian avenues

26 O'Callaghan and Leach, ICRC, 2013

27 Schmitz Guinote, 2018. 'A Humanitarian-Development nexus that works'. <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/06/21/humanitarian-development-nexus-that-works/>

28 NRC & HI, 2016, p. 23. [https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/nrc-hi-report\\_web.pdf](https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/nrc-hi-report_web.pdf)

29 Interview 4

30 Interview 2

31 Schmitz Guinote, 2018. 'A Humanitarian-Development nexus that works'. <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/06/21/humanitarian-development-nexus-that-works/>



## Finding 4:

### Training for field practitioners needs to be practical and contextualised

*"Everything is so context dependent"<sup>32</sup>*

IHL and humanitarian principles training are extremely relevant for practitioners in promoting better understanding of frameworks, principles and – crucially – how they should be applied in the field. To promote greater understanding and application, training should be as contextualised as possible, allowing participants to learn and apply the knowledge relevant to their profiles and the scenarios they may encounter.

Interviewees identified several ways in which trainings were better contextualised with improved participant feedback:

- **Make it practical.** Fifty-three per cent of interviewees reflected on the importance of practical exercises to consolidate small amounts of theory. This is supported by broader research in the sector, for example, an NRC report on the challenges to principled humanitarian action recommended that existing tools for applying humanitarian principles need to incorporate more focus on practical application.<sup>33</sup>

*"Role-play is great to elicit practical points. They go a long way, far beyond any PowerPoint or other approach."<sup>34</sup>*

ICRC research on the effectiveness of IHL training with military forces provides similar insights. A mixed-methods approach to IHL briefings, including case study reviews and practical exercises, proved the most effective form of training within the Australian and Philippine military forces.<sup>35</sup>

- **Use real scenarios and case studies.** Scenarios and case studies based on real events and real country contexts help strengthen applied learning. Interviewees considered that such scenarios were a good way to consolidate and apply theory, and much more likely to be retained and recalled by trainees.<sup>36</sup> Twenty-nine per cent of attendees at Australian Red Cross trainings between 2018 and 2019 intentionally provided free text feedback to request more scenarios and case studies.<sup>37</sup>

*"I think they needed to have more links forward to real-life situations... here is an example of what happened in situation X and here is how it should have worked."<sup>38</sup>*

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32 Interview 7

33 NRC & HI 2016. [https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/nrc-hi-report\\_web.pdf](https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/nrc-hi-report_web.pdf)

34 Interview 5

35 ICRC, 2018. The Roots of Restraint in War, p.29.

36 Interview 3, 5, 13

37 Australian Red Cross IHL training evaluation forms 2018, 2019

38 Interview 3

- **Integrate IHL training into technical or other trainings.** IHL and humanitarian principles trainings or modules contextualised to technical profiles were effective in helping trainees see their relevance to day-to-day jobs.<sup>39</sup> For example, one respondent mentioned first aid delegate training that integrated IHL, rather than standalone IHL training. This was seen to be a good model, because it made the concepts and case studies as applicable as possible to the scenarios the delegate was likely to face.<sup>40</sup> Another practitioner spoke about the need to have IHL training geared towards specific profiles to allow delegates to appreciate its relevance to their roles.<sup>41</sup>
- **Utilise trainers with strong IHL expertise and relevant lived experience.** Drawing upon field application of IHL and humanitarian principles is an effective strategy for enhancing training experiences. Dialogue around lived experience gives participants the opportunity to interrogate and debate nuance, particularly in situations where there is no clear-cut 'right answer' – a frequent dilemma in applying IHL and humanitarian principles in complex field contexts. For example, one participant reflected on their main takeaway from IHL training being when a trainer described a real-life roadblock scenario and talked through how they approached it.

Participants also greatly valued opportunities in trainings to ask questions of IHL practitioners about particular contexts or situations. This was especially important for humanitarians who knew where they were going to be deployed in the near future. One interviewee spoke of the enormous value she derived from discussing the context she was deploying into the following week.<sup>42</sup>

*"With regards to training – keep it simple – narrow it down to the fundamentals and keep it operationally relevant... approach it from what a field worker would have to know. Field staff don't really need to know about the statutes or what happens in Geneva."<sup>43</sup>*

## Humanitarian training

Many humanitarian organisations choose to educate practitioners with exercises such as immersive simulations or more simple 'desktop' case-studies.<sup>44</sup> Humanitarian practice frequently requires adaptive skills rather than 'routine expertise' to cope with evolving tasks and obstacles.<sup>45</sup> This suggests that humanitarian professionals generally benefit more from immersive training which simulates changing situations and tests adaptive skills.

Simulation training for practitioners intending to work in emergency responses has been deemed particularly essential because of the non-routine nature of emergencies.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, studies have found that professionals usually make decisions based on how they responded to previous similar situations, suggesting that prior simulation training would embed the best possible responses.<sup>47</sup>

Case studies or simulations of real-life scenarios should be part of IHL training curriculums.

39 Interviews 14, 5, 7

40 Interview 14

41 Interview 5

42 Interview 1

43 Interview 11

44 Cralla et al., 2015, p. 114

45 Smith et al., 1997

46 Cralla et al., 2015, p. 115

47 Klein, 1998

## Recommendations

- ✓ Revise training material to ensure it is as practical and contextually relevant as possible, through:
  - ▶ Collecting information about the training audience in advance of training in order to prepare country specific scenarios or questions
  - ▶ Utilising real life scenarios over fictional case studies
  - ▶ Promoting dialogue and debate about the practical application of IHL and humanitarian principles
  - ▶ Allowing time for trainees to ask questions about specific country contexts especially if many in the group are about to be deployed
- ✓ Mainstream IHL into other technical trainings to i) enhance relevance, and ii) broaden the audience of people that gain IHL and humanitarian principles awareness



## Finding 5:

### Awareness of IHL and humanitarian principles mitigates individual and operational risks in the field

Context-specific understanding of IHL and humanitarian principles by field practitioners is important in mitigating a wide variety of risks, in addition to enhancing humanitarian outcomes.



**80%** of interviewees saw IHL and humanitarian principles awareness as important in mitigating risks.

Knowledge of IHL and application of humanitarian principles mitigates personal risk. Understanding of principles and legal frameworks helps to situate personal behaviours within a framework, strengthening individuals' confidence in decision-making. Examples such as the importance of organisational branding in the field as a protective measure and negotiating politically sensitive situations using the framework of the principles were key examples that highlight the principles' value for personal risk mitigation.<sup>48</sup>

*"They give structure to the things I can and can't say. They also empower me to push back and give me a language to use on what we can and can't do."<sup>49</sup>*

ICRC has previously identified the links between personal security risks and applied humanitarian principles. The Safer Access Framework (SAF) for National Societies is a structured approach to meeting some of the challenges in operating in insecure or challenging environments. A key component of the SAF is Acceptance of the Individual. The SAF articulates:

*"To facilitate acceptance, National Society volunteers and staff should be representative of the community that they serve and should be recruited and deployed on the basis of their ability to represent their National Society and to adhere to the Fundamental Principles of the Movement ..."<sup>50</sup>*

This highlights the importance of knowing and behaving in ways that adhere to humanitarian principles on acceptance and personal security.<sup>51</sup>

48 Interviews 3, 4 and 9

49 Interview 3

50 O'Callaghan S and Leach, L. 'The relevance of the fundamental principles to operations: Learning from Lebanon', p. 298.

51 ICRC Safer Access Framework for National Societies. <https://www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/cooperating-national-societies/safer-access-all-national-societies>

## The importance of knowing what you don't know

*"You might not know the answers but you know the questions to ask."<sup>52</sup>*

Providing field workers with awareness, even at a foundational level, of IHL and humanitarian principles also provides them with a pathway to understand their own limitations of knowledge and when to seek technical expertise.<sup>53</sup> This mitigates the risk of misapplication of IHL frameworks. In the context of application of IHL and humanitarian principles, understanding your limits, when to seek help and when to seek more information is critical.<sup>54</sup> For example, one delegate reflected on the importance of knowing when they could handle situations themselves or when they needed expert technical advice.

*"When it comes to more technical discussions on IHL, I have always worked with a legal adviser."<sup>55</sup>*

One interviewee reflected on this using a medical practitioner analogy.

*"I know how to do basic first aid training but that does not make me a doctor and that's how I see IHL training."<sup>56</sup>*

Risk mitigation transcends risks to individuals to include risks to organisations and humanitarian operations more broadly. IHL and humanitarian principles literacy for humanitarian workers is important for humanitarian operations. It promotes consistent messaging, advocacy and reporting that contribute to increased adherence to IHL and humanitarian principles. As there is an expectation that all parties to conflict abide by IHL, then all humanitarian workers should be able to engage in discussions about the frameworks and abide by the appropriate frameworks and principles.

*"It gets messy when [humanitarian actors] mis-apply IHL when they have no 'brains trust'... In [Country X] there were a few moments when humanitarian actors would invoke IHL incorrectly and it would muddy the waters."<sup>57</sup>*

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52 Interview 6

53 Interviews 1, 3, 11, 7

54 Interviews 4, 7, 10

55 Interview 1

56 Interview 10

57 Interview 7

## Case Study: Risks of misapplying the humanitarian principle of neutrality

When speaking about risks of humanitarians not understanding and applying humanitarian principles, one interviewee raised the case of the provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan. The PRTs were civil-military units designed as stabilising forces; they provided security, delivered aid and supported reconstruction efforts. Some stakeholders criticised them for blurring the lines between government and civilian agencies. The PRTs contributed funding towards civilian programs, including those run by non-government organisations. The interviewee's organisation accepted funding from the PRTs, which resulted in the community perceiving it as non-neutral. The result was a loss of organisational credibility and access to the community.<sup>58</sup>

This case study demonstrates the danger in misapplication of humanitarian principles, both from the standpoint of the organisation and the humanitarian outcomes for the affected population as they were no longer benefitting from the organisations' support.



Village elders greet Afghanaid representatives on May 28, 2010 in Nechem, Afghanistan.  
Maximum Exposure PR / Shutterstock.com

## Recommendations

- ✓ Consider IHL and humanitarian principles through a personal security, reputational and operational risk mitigation lens
- ✓ Ensure that all staff receive training prior to field deployments, particularly in conflict contexts
- ✓ Embed modules on IHL and humanitarian principles into personal safety and security courses, focussing content on being contextually relevant

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58 Interview 12

# Conclusion

International legal frameworks and core humanitarian principles continue to be relevant in a world where conflict frequency has more than doubled over a 15-year period,<sup>59</sup> the nature of warfare is rapidly evolving, and natural disasters are becoming more common. Within this complex and rapidly shifting environment, understanding and application of IHL and humanitarian principles is increasingly relevant to traditional and non-traditional humanitarian actors.

Many opportunities exist to enable learning about IHL and humanitarian principles to reach a broader audience, be contextualised and made increasingly relevant, ultimately contributing to better humanitarian outcomes.

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59 ICRC 2018, p. 13



AusAID Development Adviser Jeremy Guthrie and DFAT Political Adviser Kali Graham conduct a shura with local Afghan tribal leaders in West Dorafshan, Uruzgan Province. Photo: Cass Morgan, AusAID

## Summary of Recommendations

In order to enhance humanitarian outcomes through IHL and humanitarian principles training, **humanitarian and development organisations should:**

- ✓ Consider IHL and humanitarian principles through a personal security, reputational and operational risk mitigation lens
- ✓ Ensure that all staff receive training prior to field deployments, particularly in conflict contexts
- ✓ Continue to build the evidence base on the relevance of IHL and humanitarian principles training, for example through:
  - ▶ Supporting research on the relevance of IHL and humanitarian principles in discussions about the humanitarian development nexus discussions
  - ▶ Widely disseminating research findings
- ✓ Strengthen de-briefing processes for staff, including regularly asking questions on how IHL and humanitarian principles have been applied in the field
- ✓ Seek opportunities to utilise data to strengthen the evidence base on training impact, and feed back into case studies to tailor training content
- ✓ Embed modules on IHL and humanitarian principles into personal safety and security courses, focussing content on being contextually relevant
- ✓ Consider IHL and humanitarian principles as a learning journey rather than a one-off training
- ✓ Mainstream IHL into other technical trainings to i) enhance relevance, and ii) broaden the audience of people that gain IHL and humanitarian principles awareness

In order to enhance humanitarian outcomes through IHL and humanitarian principles training, **training providers should:**

- ✓ Consider IHL and humanitarian principles as a learning journey rather than a one-off training. Opportunities to foster this learning journey include:
  - ▶ Developing a structured learning pathway that builds on the learning cycle and engages with people being deployed to the field
  - ▶ Developing a suite of learning development options, which could include:
    -  Accessible refresher courses
    -  Engaging trainees as trainers
    -  Encouraging reflective practice
    -  Challenging trainees to seek opportunities to teach others what they have learned
    -  Establishing communities of practice
    -  Seeking opportunities to collect and share case studies
- ✓ Promote courses to a broader audience, including development practitioners and private sector representatives, through adapting language of marketing materials and socialisation outside of traditional humanitarian avenues
- ✓ Revise training material to ensure it is as practical and contextually relevant as possible, through:
  - ▶ Collecting information about the training audience in advance of training in order to prepare country specific scenarios or questions
  - ▶ Utilising real life scenarios over fictional case studies
  - ▶ Promoting dialogue and debate about the practical application of IHL and humanitarian principles
  - ▶ Allowing time for trainees to ask questions about specific country contexts especially if many in the group are about to be deployed
- ✓ Embed modules on IHL and humanitarian principles into personal safety and security courses, focussing content on being contextually relevant
- ✓ Mainstream IHL into other technical trainings to i) enhance relevance, and ii) broaden the audience of people that gain IHL and humanitarian principles awareness

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