Before fights start: scenario-based resources.

A Someone from your family has been injured or killed

Risk: Retaliation within hours, before anyone knows who was responsible.

WHAT TO DO

- Go to the close family first and sit with them. Do not tell them to calm down. A family that feels ignored is where the pressure for payback builds.
- Ask one thing of them: that nobody gathers men or travels to the other side until the facts are known. Give a time — "by tomorrow midday we will know more" — and keep it.
- Work out who is most likely to call men together, and make sure the person he listens to is physically with him now.
- Send someone to find out what actually happened. Two rumours naming two different offenders is the normal situation, not the unusual one.
- Get medical help moving. In many areas this takes hours, and it is the most useful thing most people can do.
- Start something visible — a complaint lodged, a mediator contacted, leaders meeting. Delay is what makes people reach for a gun.

WHAT TO SAY

"We have already lost someone. If we move tonight, another family loses someone tomorrow, and then it is our turn again. Give me until tomorrow to find out who actually did this. I am not asking you to forget it."

CONTINUED · BEFORE FIGHTS START

B Women can see a fight coming

Risk: The people who notice first are not in the room where decisions are made.

WHAT TO DO

- Agree now, while things are calm, on two people a woman can go to — and make sure everyone knows who they are. Working this out during a crisis is too late.
- Know the signs. Men sleeping away from home. Unusual food buying. Children kept back from school. Money moving. Visitors nobody can place.
- Treat what she reports as something to check, not as proof. This protects her as much as it protects whoever is named.
- Never ask a woman to go between armed men, carry a message to a rival group, or confront anyone. She is the warning system, not the intervention.
- Take it seriously the first time. A woman whose warning is dismissed once will not bring the next one, and the next one may matter more.
- Bring women into the planning, not only the reporting. Women's groups in several provinces have reached across lines that men could not cross.

WHAT TO SAY

"You saw this before anyone else did. Tell me what you noticed and I will find out whether it is real. You do not have to speak to anyone else about it."

CONTINUED · BEFORE FIGHTS START

C Men from outside are being brought in to fight

Risk: Paid fighters have no relatives here, no stake in the peace, and nobody who can talk them down.

WHAT TO DO

- Understand what has changed. The usual approach — find the person he listens to — does not work on a man with no connection to anyone in this dispute. The people to reach are the ones paying and the ones arranging it.
- Find out who is organising it. It is often someone with money and standing rather than anyone who will be present at the fighting.
- Talk to the people being asked to contribute. Many give money because refusing their wantok is difficult, not because they want a fight. Give them a reason and a way to say no, and make sure others say it at the same time so nobody stands alone.
- Say plainly what it costs. Paying for men and weapons is money that does not go to school fees, and it ties the family to a fight that will outlast the payment.
- Give money somewhere else to go. Funding transport for mediators, or for witnesses to reach court, lets someone back out while still being seen to act.
- Remember that an outside gunman can be prosecuted like anyone else, and that proving he carried an unlicensed weapon is simpler than proving who fired.

WHAT TO SAY

“These men will go home when they are paid. We are the ones still here afterwards, with their payback to answer for. Who is paying, and what do they want out of this?”

CONTINUED · BEFORE FIGHTS START

D Your own young men will not listen

Risk: The people with the guns are not the people with the authority.

WHAT TO DO

- Do not argue with them in front of an audience. A young man who backs down publicly loses exactly what he is afraid of losing, and he will harden.
- Find the one who is least committed and start there. In most groups one or two are carrying the rest.
- Ask what he thinks happens afterwards. Many have not thought past the attack itself — not about the payback, not about prison, not about the years his family spends away from their gardens.
- Give him something that looks like leadership. Protecting the school, the market or the road is visible, respected, and not a retreat.
- Use someone closer to his age who has already stepped back. An elder saying it carries less weight than a man of twenty-five who stopped.
- Be clear about the law. An unregistered weapon is a serious offence in its own right, and does not need an eyewitness to the shooting to prove.

WHAT TO SAY

“I am not telling you to be afraid. I am telling you that the men who did this in the next valley are either dead or in Baisu, and their families are still paying for it. What do you want to be doing in five years?”

CONTINUED · BEFORE FIGHTS START

E Your community is neutral and the fighting is coming close

Risk: Being drawn into someone else's conflict, or being treated as a side because you never said you were not.

WHAT TO DO

- Say it out loud and early. Customary practice in many places recognises neutral ground and neutral people — but only if your position is known before the fighting starts, not claimed afterwards.
- Mark your boundaries in the way your area recognises, and make sure both sides have been told.
- Speak to both sides separately, and say the same thing to each. Neutrality that is explained to only one side is not neutrality.
- Keep the shared things working — the road, the market, the aid post, the school. A neutral community that keeps those open becomes valuable to both sides, which is its own protection.
- Do not shelter fighters or store weapons for either side. One favour ends your neutral standing permanently.
- Offer to carry messages if both sides accept it. Neutral ground is where talks can happen, and that role has stopped fights before.

WHAT TO SAY

"This is not our fight and we are not taking a side in it. Our road and our market stay open to both of you. We will not hide your men and we will not hide theirs."