Getting Do No Harm to "Stick":

Successes, Failures and Varied Approaches

A summary of lessons on supporting uptake of Do No Harm (DNH) prepared for the Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium (PEC)

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The Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium (PEC)

The Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium (PEC) is a project of Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) in partnership with CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Mercy Corps and Search for Common Ground (SFCG). The project is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY) and is field-wide effort to address the unique challenges to measuring and learning from peacebuilding programs. The PEC convenes donors, scholars, policymakers, local and international practitioners, and evaluation experts in an unprecedented open dialogue, exchange, and joint learning. It seeks to address the root causes of weak evaluation practices and disincentives for better learning by fostering field-wide change through three strategic and reinforcing initiatives: 1) Developing Methodological Rigor; 2) Improving the Culture of Evaluation and Shared Learning; and 3) Fostering the Use of Evidence to Inform Peacebuilding Policy.

CDA Collaborative Learning Projects

CDA (www.cdacollaborative.org) is a US based non-profit organization committed to improving the effectiveness of those who work internationally to provide humanitarian assistance, engage in peace practice, support sustainable development, and conduct corporate operations in a socially responsible manner. We help peace practitioners, and organizations improve the relevance and accountability of programming through better tools for conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity, program strategy, design, and monitoring and evaluation.

Introduction

This summary of lessons draws from several decades of CDA Collaborative Learning Projects' efforts to diffuse the Do No Harm (DNH) Framework as widely as possible and to support its application and integration by humanitarian and development actors. This brief paper recounts the range of methods we have used, their successes, and challenges. CDA has been lauded by others as the 'guardian' of DNH lessons and analytical framework and for contributing to the transformation of discourse on conflict-sensitivity in the aid sector. We have learned that changes in rhetoric and policy documents do not always result in sustained changes in practice, norms, and incentives. In our learning journey with colleagues and partners who continue to be guided by DNH principles and regularly apply the DNH Framework, we have seen that key lessons, implications and practical steps are "made sticky" when they meet the criteria described by Chip and Dan Heath in their book *Made to Stick* as "understandable, memorable, and effective in changing thought or behavior."[1] Our reflections below are relevant to organizations in the aid sector that focus on changing norms, practices and policies in an effort to improve the processes and results of their support to local actors and communities in conflict- , disaster- and poverty-affected contexts.

Do No Harm Gets Started

Do No Harm is one of the original frameworks for conflict sensitivity—essentially a way to ensure that aid actors of all types, at a minimum, avoid making conflicts worse in their areas of operation. As such, application of the DNH framework helps to avoid unintentionally exacerbating existing societal tensions. When applied to its fullest, the approach aims to contribute to peace outcomes by strengthening existing connections and local capacities for peace. The DNH principles are designed to apply to urgent humanitarian relief, longer-term development, and peacebuilding efforts. Similar principles have been adapted to apply to the operations of the private sector, particularly extractive industries.[2]

The DNH Framework was developed through an intensive process of field-based case studies (1994-1996), cross-case analysis, a series of consultations with aid practitioners and their organizations (1996-1997), and production of a final report in book form in Mary Anderson's *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—or War* (1999).[3] In the twenty years since the publication of the book, CDA has tried several approaches to disseminating the principles and ensuring application in practice.

The Early Years: Intensive Accompaniment

In 1997, CDA launched a process of integrating DNH principles and practical methods into the operations of fourteen international NGOs. CDA engaged several consultants familiar with the DNH approach (some of whom had been case writers during the research phase or otherwise participated in the process) who became liaisons, each assigned to work with one or more of the participating

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[1] Heath, Chip and Dan Health, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*. Random House, 2007.

[2] See materials on Responsible Business Practice on the CDA website (www.cdacollaborative.org), and the book: Anderson, Mary B., and Luc Zandvliet, *Getting it Right: Making Corporate-Community Relations Work*. Sheffield: Greenleaf Publishing, 2009.

[3] Anderson, Mary B. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – Or War*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999.

INGOs. The liaisons supported these organizations on a regular basis to apply the DNH Framework in program analysis, program design and redesign, and program planning. They undertook a series of training events at headquarters and in key field locations. In most cases, liaisons worked closely with an internal "champion" who advocated for adoption of DNH in policies and practice. In most cases, those champions were senior leadership staff working from organizational headquarters or from regional hubs. Most organizations had been the subject of one or more of the original case studies, and most of the champions had participated in the series of consultations that produced the DNH findings. At the same time, CDA staff worked with donor agencies, many of whom had supported the project financially, to ensure adoption of DNH principles as agency policy.

Liaisons returned to the field implementation sites every three months to train, advise and facilitate as needed, and to maintain awareness of the DNH approach among project teams. Finally, the liaisons were responsible for documenting the learning and feeding the experience gathered back to the learning project. CDA convened biannual consultations to gather the liaisons together with field-level project representatives and champions from the headquarters of the agencies involved, including some donors. The entire group generated ideas and options to deal with the difficulties faced by specific projects.

Over time, although the intensive period of accompaniment wound down, CDA staff and consultants continued to provide training and assistance to both INGOs and local NGOs seeking to incorporate DNH into their policies, practices and everyday routines. As a result of these intensive efforts, by the early 2000s, DNH was well known throughout the humanitarian and development world. Most of the Western donors had adopted explicit DNH or conflict sensitivity policies and incorporated DNH requirements in grant applications, such as requiring conflict sensitive context assessment or DNH analysis as part of program inception. Many individual aid agencies had embraced DNH policies and many continued to provide training to staff, often with CDA support. In addition, drawing on this extensive experience with direct application of DNH context analysis and program adaptation tools, CDA produced "Options for Aid in Conflict"[4] (also called the "Options Manual") as a complementary practical resource.

In the longer term, the results from this phase were both impressive and mixed. As already noted, DNH became widely accepted, was enshrined in policies, and had been introduced to many field and headquarters staff through training programs.[5] On the other hand, it became apparent that it was difficult to maintain momentum and deeper integration, as champions moved to new positions, trained staff rotated, and organizational inertia reasserted itself. At the same time, field staff found themselves confronted with multiple demands for compliance with important principles that were not well integrated: applying a gender lens to program planning, ensuring environmental sensitivity, and responding to increased demands for results-based management and monitoring and evaluation.

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[4] Anderson, Mary B. "Options for Aid in Conflict: Lessons from Field Experience." Cambridge, MA: Collaborative for Development Action, 2000.

[5] During 2001, the "DNH mainstreaming year," over one hundred aid agencies participated in training workshops and developed strategies for taking up the DNH concepts and making use of the framework in their work.

During this period, it was not unusual to find that people were paying lip service to DNH principles without actually applying the tools to their programming—and there were no consequences to ignoring DNH. No one was ever fired or even reprimanded in their performance review for failure to comply with DNH; nor had donors refused or withdrawn a grant based on violation of good DNH practice. In some cases of large emergencies, such as the 2004 tsunami, even people well versed in DNH asserted that in situations of urgent need they could not take the time to apply basic DNH analysis. In sum, it was apparent that, although organizations and donors had adopted DNH in principle, the actual practices were not sufficiently integrated into organizational routines to make them stick in a consistent manner.

Pockets of Sustained Application

In the early 2000s, for several years, CDA provided technical support for a fulltime international liaison based in Nairobi, funded by a European donor who was provided office and logistical support by a large INGO. The main role of this liaison was to nurture the development of a network of DNH experts and trainers in the East Africa region, under the title of Local Capacities for Peace International (LCPI). Despite some administrative and communications difficulties, the project did create a strong group of local practitioners.

Today, LCPI is a Kenyan-based NGO[6] that works with local, international, government affiliates and faith-based organizations to strengthen their ability to provide conflict sensitive development and humanitarian relief in Kenya and beyond. It has affiliated staff and consultants in other countries across East Africa. In this sense, the liaison process was a successful model for creating a sustained cadre of people dedicated to dissemination of DNH practice within a region. Connections between CDA and LCPI remain warm and mutually supportive. It should be noted that, while this group is strong and dedicated, as in other settings, they still rely on the initiative of donors and implementing organizations to engage in DNH application work.[7]

A Different Approach: A CDA Field Office Accompanies Local Organizations

In 2007, one of CDA's more consistent European donors had (in the context of a broad evaluation of CDA's programs) suggested that CDA establish a country presence in select locations in order to better ensure "uptake" of DNH and other CDA principles and practices. At that time, the initial reaction of staff had been to resist this approach. Some of that hesitancy was principled: CDA should support local efforts rather than enter situations itself on a more extended timetable. Other issues were purely practical, associated with the administrative burden for a small organization of maintaining an office and staff in another country.

Under a grant from USAID, CDA began providing training in DNH for local and international NGO staff in Myanmar in 2012 through a series of trips by US-based staff. After several such visits, a donor

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[6] Local Capacities for Peace, Kenya: http://localcapacities.org/
[7] A similar, albeit less intensive support was given to a group of organizations and individual humanitarian and development practitioners in South Asia. Many of them stayed engaged with the Do No Harm project through consultations, feedback workshops and subsequent reflective case studies on barriers to DNH uptake and the strength of networks.

representative suggested that DNH principles were more likely to "stick" if CDA established a presence in the country to reinforce learning and to accompany organizations in the application of DNH in practice. CDA then developed a proposal for a small office and submitted it to several donors. After some delays, CDA received a two-year grant in May 2015 from two donors which covered two international staff, a small office and several local hires. Later funding came from a donor consortium.

The Myanmar office was an experiment for CDA. Given the likelihood of donor support, the financial risks appeared low at the outset—although that situation changed over time. There was a clear need among both local and international organizations, as Myanmar itself was emerging from a long period of military rule. As the political situation was quite fraught and violent conflict continued in many regions of the country, the need for conflict sensitivity was evident during a rapid increase in development and humanitarian assistance, as well as ongoing peacebuilding efforts. CDA also had considerable experience in the country, since staff had been performing a series of field assessments regarding the local impacts of the oil pipeline of a major international energy company beginning in 2002.

The office began with a Country Director and Deputy Country Director (both international staff), soon joined by a senior local program staff person and an office manager. Later, three Fellows were recruited, young professionals who would boost the cadre of conflict sensitivity practitioners in the country. The donors asked CDA to devote a significant effort to working with aid organizations in Rakhine State— and this ultimately led to the addition of another international staff person focused primarily on that difficult context. In addition, the donors asked that CDA provide focused support by accompanying a series of local partner organizations, resulting in hiring of a staff coordinator for that effort. Overall, the program implemented a multi-pronged approach to promoting DNH in the country, including continued training reinforced by ongoing accompaniment of select partners, nurturing of a network of DNH champions, focused development of Fellows, and conducting and publishing of conflict sensitivity analyses.

Within eighteen months, the Myanmar office had expanded to include thirteen staff—as many as the entire Cambridge office of CDA. The head office, for a variety of reasons, was strained by the administrative burdens of personnel, financial and program management at a distance. The initial donor funding had supported directly associated headquarters costs and personnel, as well as regular visits by US-based staff to support the program content but did not cover core costs for the US office. Unfortunately, subsequent grants were far more restrictive, disallowing all but a small percentage of funds for core organizational expenses at the US end. Thus, the Myanmar office became a financial net drain on CDA.

Despite the administrative and financial headaches, programmatically, the Myanmar office was largely a success. An independent evaluation at the end of a grant period in 2018, noted that,

> "...CDA Myanmar succeeded in:
> - Recruiting and training three Fellows that continue to provide conflict sensitivity training to others around Myanmar;

- Publishing three well-received research publications[8] that increased awareness, dialogue, and collaboration on key conflict sensitivity issues in Rakhine and Kachin;

- Capacitating 21 champions, many of who have demonstrated their ability to train others;

- Providing coaching and mentoring to 11 accompaniment partners, all of whom reported changes in their practices and behavior, and nearly half (five) made concrete changes to their organizational policies;

- Raising awareness of basic Reflecting on Peace Practice Project concepts to over 140 individuals

- Creating three legacy products—the DNH manual, "DNH Help Forum" Facebook page, and arts-based facilitation toolkit—that can be used by partners and others interested in improving their conflict sensitivity skills; and

- Finally, demonstrating that CDA Myanmar "practices what it teaches" in terms of Respect, Accountability, Transparency, and Fairness in its engagement with partners."[9]

The evaluation report also noted several ways in which the initiative could have been strengthened in retrospect and might be improved going forward, as the CDA Myanmar Office became a local organization called RAFT[10] (named after the DNH principles of Respect, Accountability, Transparency and Fairness). Although the CDA office was considered a short-term effort from the beginning, there was no explicit plan or set of criteria for an extended presence, nor a clear exit strategy, either through establishment of a local entity or simply withdrawing responsibly and smoothly. In spite of these difficulties, DNH does appear to be taking root in Myanmar. While a small organization like CDA should weigh all options carefully when undertaking similar field-based sustained experiments, there are clear lessons here regarding what it takes to infuse DNH practice in a conflict zone, as noted below in the Conclusions.

A Different Approach in South Sudan: A Donor Consortium

Over the past few years, conflict sensitivity has gained renewed momentum at the donor level, recognizing that conflict sensitive operations are critical to program, policy and overall aid effectiveness in volatile situations. For example, Peaceful Change Initiatives (PCI) has been working with a range of donors and embassies in Libya for the past several years through the Conflict-Sensitive Assistance to Libya Forum.[11]

In South Sudan, CDA was involved in supporting a group of donors (UK, Switzerland, Canada, the Netherlands) in a consortium with Saferworld and swisspeace during a pilot in 2016-2018. The donor

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[8] Two of these are on CDA's website cdacollaboraive.org: Aron, Gabrielle and David Gilmore. *Navigating Change: Crisis and Crossroads in the Rakhine State Context*. CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2017 and Aron, Gabrielle. *Reshaping engagement: Perspectives on conflict sensitivity in Rakhine state.* CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2016.

[9] "Evaluation of CDA's Program: 'Promoting Conflict Sensitivity Among Multiple Stakeholders in Myanmar'" Mathias Kjaer, Forseti Research, January 2019. [Minor typos in the original corrected.]

[10] RAFT Myanmar, https://raftmyanmar.org/

[11] Conflict-Sensitive Assistance to Libya Forum, http://peacefulchange.org/programmes/north-africa-libya/csa-forum/

group recognized the need for greater conflict sensitivity in ongoing aid, development, and peacebuilding programming. Out of this need, they issued a Request for Proposals for the establishment of a Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) in South Sudan. Saferworld, swisspeace and CDA had collaborated on other initiatives before applying jointly to implement the CSRF. Once funded, the CSRF was hosted by Saferworld's office in Juba. CDA played a learning function during the pilot phase, in which staff supported the project remotely and during periodic visits to South Sudan. Staff ensured regular and ongoing feedback, reflection and program adjustments, as well as documentation of the process and outcomes.[12]

The CSRF was designed to develop conflict sensitivity guidelines adapted to the South Sudan context; to conduct analyses regarding key issues/topics to support program and policy development; and to strengthen the conflict sensitivity capacity of donors and their implementing partners. A learning agenda was integrated across these other objectives, in order to gain from the pilot phase and improve practice going forward.

Since the program has only been in place for a bit more than two years, it is too early to draw firm conclusions about the effectiveness of this approach. Nevertheless, the model represents an interesting approach in contrast to the others outlined above, and several issues have emerged during the initial phase.

First, in addition to advancing conflict sensitivity at the levels of programs and operations, one higher level ambition of the CSRF was that it could help promote policy coherence in relation to conflict sensitivity across several donors and their key implementing partners. This could not be achieved during the two-year pilot phase, but will be an area for additional efforts during the follow-on project. Second, the effort was designed to promote greater efficiencies and effectiveness through pooling of resources and regular opportunities for shared learning and reflection. Although it is still too early to tell if the initial learning outcomes will be sustained, the early phase made some progress on these issues.

Conclusions

We understand these lessons in tandem with our observations from years of collaborative learning, advising, and influencing efforts, the success of which hinges on competing "change agendas", shifting funding priorities, and factors related to organizational development and culture. We know that in making new ideas and practices "stick," donors and implementing agencies struggle with issues of staff turnover, wherein those most dedicated to ensuring conflict sensitivity may move on to other positions, while new people enter the situation and have their own ideas and priorities. Gains in coherence may be lost simply because those who made the effort to reach across organizational divides leave the scene. In a different dimension, both donors and international implementing agencies must cope with the different perspectives and priorities between field offices and operations and headquarters, and, at

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[12] The initiative currently continues through the 'Better Aid in Conflict' partnership by Saferworld and swisspeace. The learning role was identified as important to sustain in the follow-up phase and is now implemented by a learning adviser based in Juba.

times, with other parts of government (diplomatic and military missions). These are seldom in alignment, adding to the difficulty of achieving coherence within a single entity, much less across several.

Over this twenty-five-year period, several lessons have emerged. Some of them correspond to "received wisdom" in other fields, while the conflict settings for most conflict sensitivity work have required additional learnings.

- Training is necessary, but not sufficient for actual application in field program settings. Most participants in training gain awareness and are introduced to basic skills and tools, but it is the rare person who can move directly from a training workshop to make changes in a project or program, especially if there is only one person from that organization that received the training. (This lesson has been learned and relearned over many decades in many fields!)

- DNH can seem deceptively "easy to apply" and very accessible as a principle for accountable development practice. Most people think they understand "how" to do it, then realize that for significant course corrections and behavior changes to occur, DNH requires internal commitment to continued learning, application, reflection with staff from both program/technical and operations/procurement units.

- In many settings, full translation of DNH/conflict sensitivity materials—based on both language and culture—are required to ensure that local practitioners have access to complete materials and concepts. Incorporation of arts-infused and creative methods appropriate to local cultural practices also appear to be helpful in promoting a deeper understanding.

- Accompaniment works as a follow-on to training but requires a) careful assessment of existing organizational capacity and assessment of existing systems where DNH is immediately applicable or an easy entry point for integration, so staff can have a tangible sense of how DNH enhances and advances what they already know and doing; b) repeated follow up visits and training of many staff members; c) application of assessment tools; and d) a margin of flexibility and willingness to change program/project designs or approaches.

- Internal organizational champions are helpful, but their placement in the organizational hierarchy and decision making makes a difference. Also, champions move on, and are not always replaced by others with equal enthusiasm or skill. Better approaches to mentoring and handoff from champions would mitigate this dynamic.

- Full implementation of DNH/conflict sensitivity is a process of organizational systems change at several levels. Such changes involve, at a minimum, organizational policies; staff orientation processes and performance standards; program planning/design requirements; procurement and other logistical systems; and regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms with sufficient organizational flexibility to respond to information received.

- Relations from implementing agencies to donors and among donors themselves represent crucial enabling factors for consistent application of conflict sensitivity principles, with implications regarding consistent funding requirements, accountability, reporting, and information sharing. Vertical relations from donor field offices in conflict zones to headquarters are also involved, requiring skilled management of communications and the ability to achieve alignment across

distance and inevitable differences in perspective.[13] The same dynamics (with variants) occur within implementing agencies, especial international NGOs. While local NGOs may experience a milder form, field-to-capital relations can emerge even within the same country.

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[13] See the three resources listed below for examples of such mainstreaming, vertical integration and application across larger agencies, documented by CDA.

Additional Readings

The CDA publications cited throughout this paper are available on the CDA website: www.cdacollaborative.org under Publications. Some additional lesson summaries and promising practices documented by CDA about uptake and mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity by donor and implementing organizations include:

Goddard, Nicole. "Conflict Sensitivity Mainstreaming Efforts." Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2014.

> This paper seeks to review what has been done to mainstream conflict sensitivity by different organizations since 2000 and what the impacts of those efforts have been. It examines mainstreaming efforts and offers recommendations for steps that can help to fully integrate conflict-sensitive thinking and analysis into the work of aid agencies and companies.

Goddard, Nicole, and Dilshan Annaraj. "Conflict Sensitivity Meta-Trends Analysis." CDA Collaborative Learning Projects and World Vision International, 2017.

> This paper is based on CDA's review of data collected in Integrating Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity (IPACS) reports compiled by World Vision International, representing programs in 12 countries, interviews with key World Vision (WV) staff in national offices and regional offices, surveys of World Vision Peacebuilding Officers, an in-depth review of the Kenya national office's application of conflict sensitivity in its programming and consultations with WV staff and external organizations.

Goldwyn, Rachel on behalf of Management Systems International, A Tetra Tech Company, and CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. "Conflict Sensitivity Integration Review." United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2016.

> This document is part of a wider endeavor capturing evidence and developing guidance for USAID on how best to strengthen the integration of conflict sensitivity within USAID's planning and programming cycle. The document has been developed as part of FACTRS –Fragility and Conflict Technical and Research Services. The objective of FACTRS is to support strategic technical research and learning for the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation in USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA/CMM) to ensure that USAID policies and programs on fragility, conflict, and violence reflect the highest quality, evidence-based research and analysis.