

## Barriers to and Supports for Do No Harm

In each of the Do No Harm Reflective Case Studies, and in discussions with our colleagues, people mention that there are barriers they must overcome to learn, use (or use effectively) and disseminate the DNH tools and lessons in their organization. They also mention that there are people and policies that act as supports for DNH, encouraging them to take on and use DNH.

In every place, people talk about these barriers and supports differently, but many of the same issues came up everywhere. This paper lays out the most commonly mentioned barriers and supports, and the reasons people gave for mentioning them as either a barrier or a support.

- Staff Turnover
- Incentives and Disincentives
- No clear definition of what it means to use DNH
- Availability and accessibility of DNH materials

### STAFF TURNOVER

The movement of staff members and organization officers from position to position within an organization, or from organization to organization was mentioned as both a barrier and a support. DNH has found no evidence that individuals lose their capacity or willingness to use DNH tools and lessons in their work. In fact, many people take the tools with them to new positions and aid in the spread of DNH.

#### *Staff Turnover as a Barrier*

When program staff trained in DNH move on to other organizations, remaining staff may feel time pressures and the space for reflection on their program's impacts is reduced. In Afghanistan, one NGO worker said, "We have lost many of our key staff to government, including many we trained in DNH. Now, we are few and our staff are very busy, but not very reflective, not thinking in a long-term perspective."

When organizations moved from a relief to a development phase of their activities, they cut down the number of staff in a particular country. This also affected the organizations' capacity for DNH. In Rwanda, in 2000, one organization laid off dozens of people in the transition from relief to development in their projects, including many senior managers and field directors who had been trained in DNH. One person noted, "We were really trying to practice DNH where we were, then it stopped." People said they have seen that when staff leave, the organization's institutional memory for DNH goes with them.

We often heard that when country directors and other senior officers in an organization left their position, the organization's use of DNH either sparked or dwindled because of that person's initiative. If a senior staff member is a driving force for the use of DNH, when they move, the organization's DNH capacity can move with them. This was seen to be the case especially when they were replaced by someone who did not support DNH with the same vigor. "My experience with NGOs, both Afghan and international, is that they are driven not by mission or mandate, but by personality. If a key figure

(perhaps the director or program director) is interested in Do No Harm, they will use it. If not, it will be scrapped, even if they have used it for a long time in many projects.”

### ***Staff Turnover as a Support***

Individuals who find DNH useful in their work are likely to implement it wherever they go. Often these people learned DNH while working in an organization that encouraged staff to use the tools. “While many staff members are no longer with their original agencies, some are actively using Do No Harm strategies in their work in other places like NURC, USAID and the National University’s Center for Conflict Management.” In taking it with them to a new post, they help spread DNH from organization to organization or from country to country within an organization.

Those same staffing shifts that can leave organizations with little leadership support for DNH, can spread the tool to other countries, as was the case for Oxfam in Africa: “Oxfam shifted their focus to Burundi and Congo, where emergency and refugee situations requested a more urgent involvement, including the use of DNH/LCP. The Rwanda country director became head of Oxfam Quebec’s offices in Burundi in 2003, where he immediately asked for a DNH workshop that went very well and still influences the work in that country.” Individuals that use or drive DNH do so regardless of the environment they are working in. If one of these DNH “champions” moves from an organization or position, they take their DNH capacity with them and use it in their new position.

## **INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES**

People identified a number of incentives and disincentives for using DNH. These are structures, events or characteristics of the tool itself that people felt made it easier, or more difficult to apply to their work.

*“One NGO valued DNH because it did not take too much time to collect useful data, so it was useful even in emergencies. Another had just the opposite view, that DNH took too long, and therefore it was useful more as a concept than as an analytical tool.”*

### **DISINCENTIVES**

#### ***Funding and Timing***

In times of humanitarian crises, donors funnel money into an area, and there is a push to spend that money as quickly as possible. Do No Harm can get lost when organizations are receiving money and feel they cannot turn it down. This was noted by several people interviewed in various case studies. When organizations move from development work to relief work, DNH is often left behind due to time constraints on staff and the pressure to spend large amounts of money very quickly. Many people also noted that when a disaster occurs, like the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, a large number of organizations come to do relief work in an area. Performing an analysis on such a crowded context is overwhelming.

#### ***Lack of Accountability for Harm Done***

International aid organizations hold themselves accountable to their donors. They apply to donors for funding and report on the use of donors’ funds based on their initial proposals. Organizations use DNH terminology in their funding proposals because they know that donors are looking for it. This has been referred to as “the ticking box effect”; proposals note that organizations will use DNH in their programming, but in practice it is left behind. Many people observed this happening to Do No Harm.

“The framework is used by some not in the process of creating a program, but for ensuring that the buzzwords are used in the proposals. In ‘checking it away’ the value of the framework is lost.” Because some people consider DNH to be donor-driven, they decline to use it and instead get their proposals funded because they mention it. Donors rarely monitor for the use of DNH beyond the funding phase, and so they have no means, beyond organizations’ annual reports, of knowing if DNH is actually being put to use.

At the community level, the recipients of international assistance feel as if they have no choice but to accept the assistance offered by organizations. If there are negative impacts from the assistance, there is no mechanism for people in communities to hold organizations accountable. If NGOs are not held to account for the negative impacts their projects have on local people, they have no motivation to reduce those negative impacts.

## **INCENTIVES**

### ***Relevance***

Many people note that DNH is useful and relevant in their personal lives. In areas where talking about peace is difficult, people find it easier and more concrete to talk about dividers and connectors, or that it gives them a language with which to discuss their differences. “DNH trainings provide a valuable space for having dialogues on these sensitive issues. It is hard to talk about these things in Rwanda, even still now, and these retreats are useful for discussing not just broader, project related issues, but also staff dynamics. ..It is a process of healing for all participants.” In Afghanistan, people said DNH “offered ways to think about and respond to the difficult circumstances. There was a language for describing ethical dilemmas and perception of shared values and ideas. Not many knew the methodology well enough to implement it completely, but they found it helpful conceptually and analytically.”

People said that when they were able to see the relevance of DNH to their personal lives, they were more likely to implement the tools in their work.

### ***Combinations with other tools***

People use a variety of tools, methodologies and approaches to relief and development work. Many find that DNH fits with or complements other approaches they use. They use DNH in combination with other tools, or alternate between tools, without feeling as if they must *only* use one or the other. Many develop their own approaches by combining one or more other approaches with DNH. In Kenya, one woman described the combination of Do No Harm with Participatory Rural Appraisals as, “the perfect tool for sustainable development. We defined Dividers as those things that prevent participation and Connectors as things that strengthen participation.” In Afghanistan, “those who focused on evaluation spoke of using DNH in combination with, or alternatively with, Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment. They reported that DNH combined easily with other approaches and was compatible with them. This helped them to continue using things which they knew and found useful.”

### ***Champions***

Some individuals take on DNH and push very hard for others to learn and use the tool. These people have become known as ‘champions’. They drive uptake within an organization, or among many organizations. They are generally influential, well-placed or simply outspoken proponents of the tool. While not strictly *incentives* for using DNH, these individuals can provide incentives within an organization or can substantially motivate people through their actions to take on the tool.

## **NO CLEAR DEFINITION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO USE DO NO HARM**

Some people view the Do No Harm Framework as a tool for their programming. Others are less apt to use every piece of the tool in their work, and instead incorporate DNH as a lens to their understanding of how their program has impacts on the context in which they operate.

Those that use DNH as a lens in their work have dissected the Framework and chosen the pieces of it that they see as applicable to their program or context. Many people have said that the piece of the DNH framework that they use the most consistently is the Dividers and Connectors Analysis. In every case study, people spoke about identifying dividers and connectors more than using any other aspect of the DNH framework. Others, specifically those interviewed in case studies, talk about DNH as a way of thinking. In Rwanda, “most frequently, people described ‘using Do No Harm’ as being about having a certain ‘consciousness’ or ‘mindset’ more so than actually following a specific set of steps on a flipchart on a regular basis.” In Sri Lanka, people described DNH as “a set of big values relating to humane and ethical practices that enable organizations to ask the question, ‘what kind of footprint do we want to leave?’” or as “a paradigm shift to assess the organizational footprint on a local context.”

The language used by the project is problematic for some people as well. For some, the term “Do No Harm” has come to mean “Do Nothing.” In Spanish, the project name and framework has been translated as “Acción sin Daño” (Action without Harm) because the phrase ‘do no harm’ does not translate meaningfully into Spanish, but this also addresses the misconception that in order to not do harm it is best not to intervene at all. Interestingly, a similar problem was cited by a trainer in Kenya with the projects previous name: Local Capacities for Peace Project. “People saw the word ‘peace’ in the name and immediately identified it as a peacebuilding tool. To move them away from that, we started using the name ‘Do No Harm’ in trainings.” Many people continue to use DNH as a peacebuilding tool. But some people identified problems with this approach. In Sri Lanka, one person commented, “It becomes very complicated and perhaps a misuse of the framework or perhaps stretching it beyond its original intent; not only are you trying to do no harm vis-a-vis the development project, but you are also trying to do ‘good.’ Does the framework lead to ‘good?’”

### ***Practitioners will use the tool according to donors’ definitions***

When donors require certain tools or approaches to secure funding, these will be written into proposals by organizations, but may not be followed-through.

In other cases, donors define using DNH as understanding and reducing risk for field staff. Rather than applying the tool to the program to determine the affect of the program on the local context, organizations use DNH to gauge the level of risk to their staff due to conflict in their context. “In seeking to lessen and avoid risk for organizations and staff they may be losing sight of the community.”

## **AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF DO NO HARM MATERIALS**

CDA Collaborative Learning Projects makes all of its documents and tools public and does not hold copyrights to any publications posted on its website. This allows anyone to download, reproduce and adapt CDA’s tools and publications as they see fit. This was identified as a significant support for the use of Do No Harm. Anyone who is interested in learning about DNH can find all of the materials and case studies on the CDA website and download and copy them without restrictions. Many organizations take advantage of this when creating their own conflict-sensitive tools and materials for training staff.

People often say that DNH materials are clearly written and easy to understand and use. They are not academic or densely worded, which allows people to easily contextualize the materials. Staff and DNH trainers in a number of organizations in Sri Lanka said, “DNH training, or ‘presentations’ are very accessible and easy to understand due to the fact that they are not overly academic or abstract. The key principles and concepts can be explained in simple terms with instructive example and vignettes provided in the DNH book and training materials.”

However, a number of people also identified the lack of widely-available translations of DNH publications into local languages as a significant barrier to training local people in DNH. In Somalia, several people identified this barrier in their work in local community settings. Trainings conducted in English were not very effective and materials had not been translated into Somali by organizations for this purpose. In other places, people request local examples or vignettes on DNH for training purposes: “There were many requests that CDA contextualize or localize DNH: find and publish local examples, make DNH and its tools into something that feels as though it came out of the Afghan situation.”