



# Practitioner's Guide:

## Do No Harm



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und Entwicklung



**FRCS**  
Food Security, Regional  
Cooperation & Security  
(Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan)

### Do No Harm

#### Brief Description



Since the end of the Cold War, international humanitarian and developmental assistance agencies have found themselves working increasingly in areas characterised by serious and often violent inter-group conflict. Many of these areas have become the sites of severe civilian-based civil wars, fought between subgroups of what had previously seemed to be a functionally cohesive society. Developmental cooperation with its activities and interventions cannot work neutrally in a conflict environment.

It has to be assumed that projects, programmes and other developmental actions impact the dynamics of conflicts.

In 1993, an international group of aid organisations commissioned the American NGO 'Collaborative for Development Action' (CDA) to look into this issue. CDA carried out a series of field studies in collaboration with bilateral donors, non-governmental agencies and UN agencies as part of the so-called 'Local Capacities for Peace' (LCP) Project. The result of this process is widely known as the Do No Harm concept.

Do No Harm is an analytical framework that can be translated into a set of working tools.

It provides an analytical and practical framework to explore how developmental interventions and conflict interact. Based on this awareness, the framework also assists in developing programming options to systematically support capacities for peace that connect people across conflicting lines.

The Do-No-Harm framework has four major components:

1. To identify connectors and dividers as the most important categories of information, with which to assess the interaction of aid with conflict.
2. To organise that information.
3. To highlight relationships between the categories, therefore allowing the anticipation of likely outcomes of programming decisions.
4. To generate possible options, and to test them.

The purpose of applying the 'Local Capacities for Peace' framework (Also known as the Do-No-Harm analysis) in a development policy context is:

- ▶ To better understand how aid and conflict interact.
- ▶ To avoid negative, conflict worsening effects of an intervention, i.e. aid that unintentionally exacerbates conflict ('Do No Harm').
- ▶ To discover opportunities, in which people can be helped to disengage from violent conflict ('Do Some Good' - peace promotion).

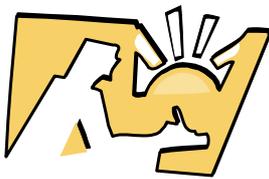
### Do No Harm

#### Proposed Main Users

Development organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, Private Sector, Others.



#### Purpose of the Method



There is a lively debate on the potential impacts of developmental cooperation (DC) in conflict areas. Although DC generally seeks to be neutral or non-partisan with regard to the parties at war, the experiences of aid agencies, in acute conflict situations at the beginning of the 1990s, have shown that the impact of their work is not neutral.

It can aggravate or reduce conflict.

Against this background, the question has arisen of how aid can be organised and implemented so that negative side effects on the conflict are avoided or at least minimised?

- ▶ LCP found that all conflicts are characterised by two types of forces. On the one hand, people within conflict areas are divided one from another along the lines of sub-group identities. On the other hand, at the same time, people within conflicts also remain connected to each other across divisional lines. Thus, LCP starts from the assumption that in all civil war situations there are still some things that connect people across conflict lines. The LCP framework is based on a systematic analysis of “connectors” and “dividers” in every conflict setting. Connectors and dividers can be found in institutions and structures, attitudes and actions, values and interests, experiences and symbols that might reinforce or inhibit capacities for peace and reconciliation among the population affected by war. The principle of Do No Harm is to avoid feeding into inter-group tensions, and to strengthen the connections between groups.
- ▶ LCP was able to identify clear and repeated patterns in the interaction between aid and conflict. The various identified mechanisms have served as the basis for the development of an analytical framework that helps to understand conflict dynamics and to assess the impact of aid on conflict.

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#### Purpose of the Method



The most frequent and prominent examples of how aid affects conflict fall into two categories:

(i) Resource transfers.

Provision of material goods and funds by donor agencies generally bears the risk of triggering or aggravating competition about access to and control over scarce resources. By channelling funds and resources through selected local institutions and organisations, donor agencies are taking sides, favouring specific actors. As most conflicts nowadays are rooted in competition for access to, or control over, scarce resources, it is not surprising that such transfers have a direct impact on a conflict situation and its dynamics. This is even truer when aid - provided in a situation of open warfare - ends up in the hands or under the control of politicians, local warlords, or militias. Such situations are exemplary, demonstrating how aid interacts with conflict and how it might - unintentionally - feed into or exacerbate conflict.

(ii) Implicit ethical messages.

'Implicit ethical messages' encompass factors such as the legitimisation of warring parties due to the fact that hostile sides have a say in determining when, where and how aid is provided to whom. Through such measures, they are granted a mantle of legitimacy. Another example is acceptance of the logic of war. If aid organisations decide to safeguard their measures by military or other armed protection, they accept 'the logic of war'. "Whoever has the better weapons decides who receives aid".

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#### Advantages



- ▶ Do No Harm does not necessarily require a deep understanding of specific analytical methods. It is a framework that is easy to understand and works with the knowledge of local people.
- ▶ Increases awareness about development and conflict interactions.
- ▶ Increases sensitivity of the role of donor-funded projects within a conflict context.
- ▶ Thinking along the line of connectors and dividers has proved to be a useful framework for analysis, with which aid organisations should assess their own immediate and longer-term impact. It is also a good entry point for the planning of conflict sensitive interventions.
- ▶ It emphasises the need for better cooperation among development actors. Uncoordinated or even competitive behaviour by aid organisations strengthens enmities amongst the local population.
- ▶ Underlines local people's opinions about impacts: The LCP approach highlights how conflicts are about perceptions and the meaning that people attribute to events, actions taken by organisations, etc. In conflict situations, people often have a clear perception of project attributes and specific actions (Whether the project fuels the fires of suspicion and competition, or whether it is fair and inclusive). The local population is an important source of information.
- ▶ It minimises the potentially negative impact of projects on conflict. Understanding and observing the cultural, political and socio-economic impacts and side effects of a project's work reduces the possibilities for unintended negative impacts. It also reduces the likelihood of projects being politicised.

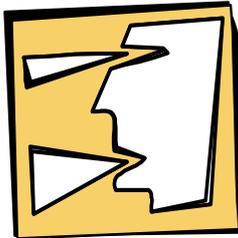
#### Limitations



- ▶ External forces and influences are not adequately taken into account. Outside forces affect and sometimes perpetuate war. This approach does not bridge the gap between communities at war, and the international context, in which the war occurs. It also fails to respond to the linkages between macro politics and international assistance.
- ▶ The results depend on the participants. Connectors and dividers can be biased depending on those participating in the exercise. Not everybody has sufficient critical self-reflection, especially if the participants come from the conflict parties themselves.
- ▶ There is a tendency to focus more on negative impacts. It is often easier to identify the negative impacts of aid than to clearly assess its positive impacts on the conflict.
- ▶ Evaluations of impacts on peace and conflict cannot be mere snapshots. Since conflicts are dynamic, impact assessment also has to become a dynamic process. Under changing circumstances, today's dividers may be tomorrow's connectors. LCP has to be seen as a continuous process.
- ▶ LCP needs to measure what are often immeasurable outcomes. Assessing the attempts to lessen conflict is difficult along two dimensions. The first has to do with the criteria or indicators for assessing progress. The second involves attribution (If violence decreases, this cannot honestly be traced back to the programme's efforts).
- ▶ Attempt to integrate Do No Harm as an operational instrument in an organisation often faces objections and resistance from within.

## Do No Harm

### Principles & General Procedures

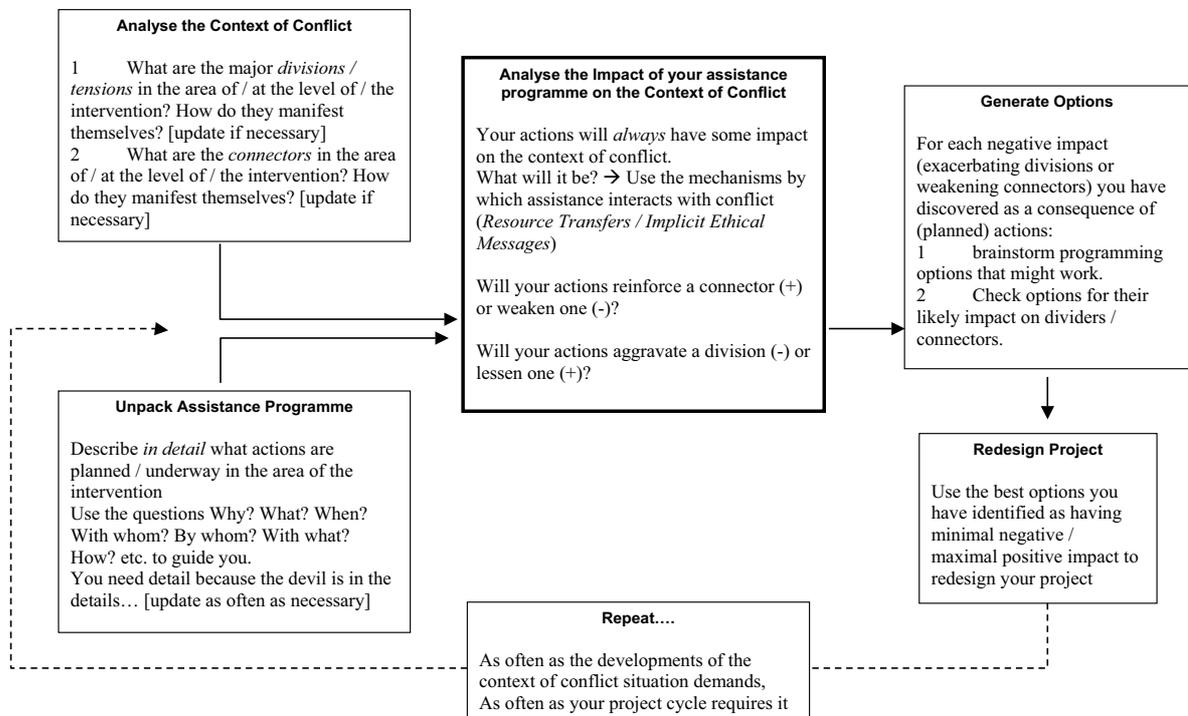


### Seven steps to apply the Do No Harm framework:

- ▶ Understand the context of conflict.
- ▶ Analyse dividers and sources of tension.
- ▶ Analyse connectors and LCP.
- ▶ Analyse the assistance project.
- ▶ Analyse the assistance programme's impact on the context of conflict through Resource Transfers (RTs) and Implicit Ethical Messages (IEMs).
- ▶ Generate programming options.
- ▶ Test options and redesign programme.

A general principle of the DNH framework is that broad participation in an analysis and assessment process by all parties is required. Broad participation will help to build a shared perspective of the problem and of the steps necessary to move forward.

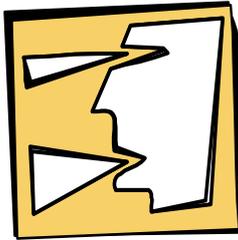
Table 1: Flow diagram for conflict assessment and project planning



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#### Principles & General Procedures



The **first and second step** is about identifying the dividers, tensions and war capacities in the specific context of conflict and assessing their importance. DC workers must first understand what divides people, the tensions between them, and the capacities for war, i.e. who gains from it. Not all tensions have the same potential for damage: some are local and matter only to a few people and others involve virtually everyone.

#### Step 1: Understanding the context of conflict:

- ▶ Identify the appropriate “arena” – the spatial and social environment, which is relevant to your assistance program;
- ▶ Identify which inter-group conflicts have resulted in violence or are dangerous and may escalate into violence;
- ▶ Analyse how the aid project relates to that context of conflict

#### Step 2: Analyse (Identify and unpack) dividers and sources of tension:

- ▶ Distinguish between root and proximate causes for conflict;
- ▶ Differentiate between sources of tensions or divisions, which affect small numbers of people, and those, which affect many, and between internal and external forces;
- ▶ Assess the importance of dividers, tensions and capacities for war.

The **third step** involves identifying the connectors and local capacities for peace in the same context, and assessing their importance. Often connectors and capacities for peace are not as readily apparent as dividers and capacities for war. One has to see where people maintain contact across fighting lines, and what is it that they share or define as their common ground.

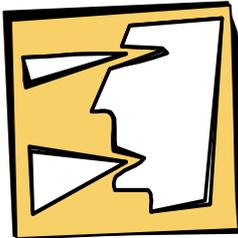
In assessing the importance of connectors, one has to see whether these capacities for peace are historically grown or are more recent connections, whether they are broad- or narrow-based, and how open and inclusive they are for all groups across the divide.

#### Step 3: Analyse (Identify and unpack) connectors and LCPs:

- ▶ What are the lines of conflict, in which connectors and capacities for peace are important?
- ▶ Where do people maintain overt contact and connections across fighting lines?
- ▶ Where do people stay connected in less obvious ways?

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### Principles & General Procedures



The **fourth and fifth step** analyses the developmental co-operation agency and its program. This involves identification of the pertinent characteristics of the aid agency, and assessing and reassessing its impact on the connectors and dividers. All aspects that affect and shape its programmatic decisions are listed, notably mandate, funding structures and sources, areas of intervention, target groups, composition of staff, etc.

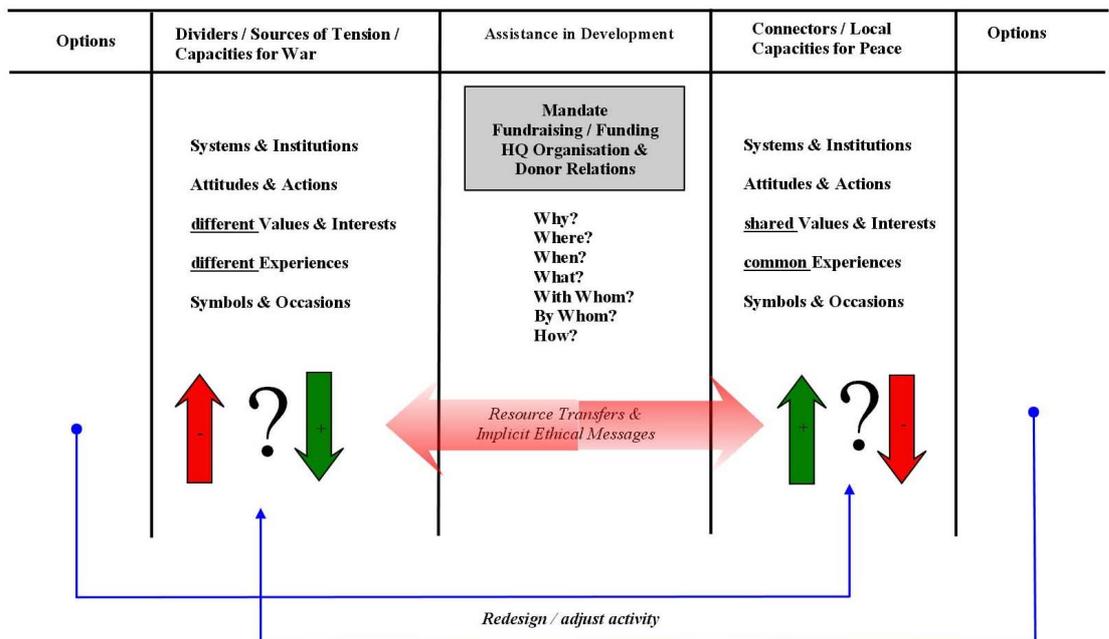
These steps also involve the relation of the programme characteristics with the findings of the context analysis (Dividers and connectors). The challenge is to anticipate how each programmatic choice will affect the context. For example, will a decision about staffing reinforce any division which was identified? If staffing choices are seen as reinforcing tensions, it is time to consider alternative options. This has to be done for each programmatic option.

#### Step 4: Analyse (Identify and unpack) the assistance project:

- Analyse the details of the assistance program. Remember: it is never an entire program that goes wrong. It is the details that determine impact.

Table 2: Context of the conflict

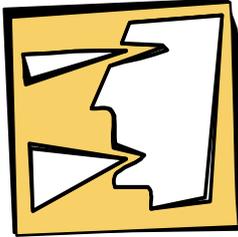
### Context of Conflict



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#### Principles & General Procedures



**Step 5: Analyse the assistance programme's impact on the context of conflict through Resource Transfers (RTs) and Implicit Ethical Messages (IEMs):**

- ▶ What is the impact of the programme's RTs and IEMs on dividers and sources of tension?
- ▶ What is the impact of the programme's RTs and IEMs on connectors and local capacities for peace?

Depending on the results of the Do No Harm analysis, the **last two steps** deal with potential negative impacts of the programme. Alternative options, which assist in re-designing the programme, will be developed and tested.

**Step 6: Generate programming options:**

- ▶ If an element of the assistance programme has a negative impact on dividers (Strengthening/reinforcing dividers, feeding into sources of tension), or a negative impact on connectors (Weakening/undermining connectors and LCPs), then generate as many options as possible. The question is how to do what you intend to do, in such a way as to weaken dividers and strengthen connectors.

**Step 7: Test options and redesign program:**

- ▶ Test the options generated using your and your colleagues' experience:
- ▶ What is the probable/potential impact on dividers and/or sources of tension?
- ▶ What is the probable/potential impact on connectors and/or LCPs?
- ▶ Use the best options to redesign the project.

These seven steps should be repeated as often as changes in the context of the conflict situation demand. The steps should be implemented at least as often as your project cycle requires.

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