

**“DO NO HARM”
REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPACTS OF
INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO
THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

Report of Visit from May 9 – 17, 2004

by Mary B. Anderson, Executive Director, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects

**CDA Collaborative Learning Projects
130 Prospect Street, Suite 202
Cambridge, MA 02139 USA
www.cdainc.com**

CONTENTS:

Purpose of the Mission: The Questions	1
Section I: Brief Introduction to Do No Harm Lessons	2
Section II: Impacts of Donor Assistance on the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict	3
Do No Harm Analysis	3
Donor Programming Options	6
Section III: Impacts of Donor Assistance on Conflicts within the Palestinian Society	8
Do No Harm Analysis	8
Donor Programming Options	10
Section IV: Conclusion	11
Appendix: Do No Harm Framework	13

Purpose of the Mission: The Questions

What is the role of international donors in complex conflict settings? How can the providers of humanitarian and development assistance take seriously the impacts they inevitably have on conflicts without overstepping their assistance-focused mandates and without compromising their commitment to political neutrality and impartiality?

These questions have been at the heart of the work known internationally as the “Do No Harm Project,” which is a collaborative effort of many UN agencies, donor governments and international and local NGOs begun in the early ‘90s. Through this project, many individuals and institutions involved in international assistance have examined and analyzed the interrelations of international assistance that is given in conflicts to the dynamics of those conflicts. This work has now included over forty conflict areas.

The purpose of this visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), initiated at the invitation of Mr. Fritz Froelich, SDC, was to consider whether and how the learning from these many other settings could or should be integrated into the programming of the international donor community working in the oPt. It became clear that donor impacts on conflict in this region occur at two levels—on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and on the divisions that currently exist, or that threaten to emerge, between Palestinian groups within Palestinian society.

Approach

The Do No Harm Project (DNH) has always taken an inductive approach, gathering the experiences of aid workers involved in many different kinds of programmes and looking, empirically, at how these programmes affect and are affected by the conflicts in which they are implemented. The approach in Israel/Palestine was also inductive. I interviewed individuals connected to a range of agencies involved in providing, and receiving, international assistance. My intent was to learn from the broad experience and insight of many people involved on a day-to-day basis in various aspects of donor assistance by discussing what impacts they observe aid has (with examples and illustrations) and what they see as options and opportunities for improving these impacts.

As many with whom I spoke know, I came to this region with some genuine doubt as to the relevance of the Do No Harm learning, gathered in civil and interstate wars, to the circumstances of Occupation. However, during my many conversations, it became clear that this learning is relevant and, in my judgment, helpful for understanding and improving the impacts of donor assistance in the oPt.

In my eight days in the region, I met with 51 individuals (both Palestinian and expatriate) from international donor countries and United Nations agencies, with 11 individuals from NGOs that receive international assistance (again Palestinian and expatriate) and with 5 Israelis involved in some way with international assistance. I also visited a number of programming sites on the West Bank. Unfortunately, because of Israeli/Palestinian violence, my planned travel to Gaza had to be cancelled. I did not meet with

representatives of the Arab donor community as most of them are not directly represented in the oPt. Inclusion of these actors in a review of this sort could, in the future, be instructive and extremely useful.

Outline of What Follows

Section I introduces, briefly, the lessons learned through the Do No Harm Project that provide the analytical underpinnings for what follows.

Section II deals with donor impacts on Israeli/Palestinian relations and Section III with donor impacts on relations among Palestinian groups and within Palestinian society. In each of these Sections, we first outline a Do No Harm analysis and, on the basis of this, provide observations about how donor actions may worsen intergroup relations. We then present ideas for programming options and adjustments that could ensure that donor impacts are positive, rather than negative, on these relations.

Section IV concludes with several overarching points, regarding donor coordination, impacts assessment and some comments on the extent, and limits, of donor power in relation to this complex conflict.

Section I: Brief Introduction to Do No Harm Lessons

Four findings from the DNH project have direct relevance to donor assistance provided to oPt. .

1. Even as international donors maintain political neutrality, aid given in conflict settings cannot and does not have a neutral impact on the conflicts where it is provided.
2. The resources provided by donors, and the manner in which these resources are organized and delivered, play into and reinforce the relationships between contending groups in recipient societies.
3. In all societies, groups in contention are both “divided” by some factors (such as contending interests, structures, histories or competition over limited resources) and “connected” by other factors (shared interests, interdependent structures, some values, aspects of history, etc.)
4. The impacts of donor assistance on conflicts occur as the resources provided (and the systems of provision) *either* reinforce and exacerbate the dividers between groups (thus having a negative impact in that they worsen the conflict) *or* lessen dividers (positive impacts). Likewise, impacts are *either* negative if donors ignore, undermine and weaken the connectors *or* positive if they recognize, build on and reinforce the connectors. Experience shows that the impacts on dividers and connectors between groups in conflict are never neutral.

[For a fuller explanation of Do No Harm, and a diagram of the Analytical Framework, see the Attachment at the end of this Report.]

Section II: Impacts of Donor Assistance on the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict

Introduction

Everyone with whom I spoke, without exception (international, Palestinian, Israeli), agreed that donor assistance to the oPt plays into and reinforces the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. People noted that aid “relieves Israel of its obligations as an occupier,” that it “rebuilds whatever Israel destroys” and “enables” the continuation of such actions, that currently it simply “maintains” levels of poverty resulting from a strict closure regime and other aspects of Israeli control by providing major financial resources for food, employment, etc.

With this agreement, however, there was widely shared discomfort over its implications. Most people felt that they faced two extreme options – either to continue to provide assistance and, thus, support the Occupation or pull out altogether. No one liked these two bad options.

Do No Harm Analysis

Dividers: Occupation clearly divides Palestinians and Israelis. Daily interactions and prospects for the future are directly affected. As one person said, “Virtually all interactions between Palestinians and Israelis now occur either through press reports about violence or at checkpoints in the presence of guns.” This reinforces attitudes of mistrust, fear, and cynicism on both sides, further feeding separation and its likely continuation.

Connectors: On the other hand, polls consistently show that the majority of each population would agree to a two-state solution under certain security assurances, showing that, at some level, there is a broad degree of shared interest between Palestinians and Israelis in moving away from the constant violence. Polls also show that, within each society, the groups who favor total rejection of the “other” are considered “extreme” by their own co-nationals who resent being held “hostage” to these extreme views. (The demonstration of 150,000 Israelis on May 15 in Tel Aviv in support of withdrawal from Gaza conveyed this kind of resentment by many Israelis of the dominance of the extreme settler attitudes on political decisions).

Further, the direct and indirect economic costs to both societies of the continued Occupation could form the basis for additional “connectedness.” Although dividers between Israelis and Palestinians clearly outnumber connectors, there are nonetheless some important points of common interest that deserve donor attention.

How does donor assistance play into and reinforce (or reduce) these dividers and weaken (or strengthen) these connectors?

From the experiences told to me, the conclusion has to be that, currently, the patterns of donor assistance have more negative than positive impacts on the ongoing conflict. This is not inevitable! Below under “Options” we discuss some ideas for reversing these impacts. First, we outline how negative, divider-reinforcing and/or connector-weakening impacts occur.

1. Donor Structures. In the capital cities of Europe, decisions have been made that representatives of the donor processes should work only on the Palestinian side (based in East Jerusalem, or Ramallah for those who have not had a Consulate in East Jerusalem except for UNRWA whose HQ was moved from Vienna to Gaza City during 1995-6) with interactions concerning Palestinian Affairs and Aid issues for West Bank and Gaza with Israel mainly carried out through the Consul Generals represented in East Jerusalem, the UN Special Coordinator, The World Bank and the Norwegian Representative. Other diplomatic activities in relation to the peace process are taken care of by diplomatic representatives based in Tel Aviv or at capital level. This multifaceted separation between the assistance and the diplomatic branches of donor governments reinforces separation between the two communities with whom they relate. Consequently, the interactions between the donor community and Israelis often mirror the interactions of Palestinians and Israelis in their negativity.
2. “Routinization” of the Occupation. In many conversations, it seemed that the ongoing, daily interactions with the Occupation (closure, check-points, barrier/wall locations, applications for visas and other permissions, etc., etc.) have become so “normal” (and take so much time and attention) that staff of donor agencies develop an almost routine attitude toward them. Further, these difficulties are dealt with in an *ad hoc* way, varying from agency to agency and, often, addressing one issue, then another, then another.

The results of this *ad hoc-ism* are two-fold. First, people get caught up in particular battles and enjoy small “victories” (such as success in getting a portion of the barrier moved by ten meters) rather than remaining focused on the larger issue (the fact that the barrier is separating two peoples and reinforcing an illegal domination of one group over the other). Second, people lose sight of the cumulative effects of separate decisions. However, it is the accumulation of many “small” actions that constitute the Occupation and reinforce dividers between the two groups.

3. Relations to the PA and other Aspects of Palestinian Society. The refusal by one donor to provide any support to the PA reinforces (intentionally) the Israeli claim that “there is no one with whom to negotiate.” More problematic for other donors is the parallel fact that their emphasis on and support to reform of the PA unintentionally also plays into this Israeli claim in that, without strong interpretations to offset this implication, the focus on reform stresses failure, rather than success, of newly formed and still embryonic governmental or public administration structures. Here we also need to underline that Palestinians never

had a state and were largely lacking the administrative culture for a state. Over 90% of the public administration/governmental functions in Gaza and West Bank were created after the signing of the so-called Oslo Agreement between 1994 and 2000. A prevailing emphasis on weaknesses in Palestinian society seems to reinforce Israeli feelings that Palestinians are “not ready” to be peace partners. This judgment has not always held; between Oslo (1993) and Camp David (2000), the working assumption of the international community was that there was an effective peace partner on the Palestinian side.

4. Non-Coordination. Donor unwillingness or inability to coordinate certain important aspects of their work reinforces the ability of Israel to move ahead with various aspects of the Occupation. When donors use disagreement as the excuse for not cooperating, they convey the implicit message that it is legitimate not to cooperate with people with whom you disagree (an attitude that pervades I/P relations).
5. Attitudes. Donor expressions of cynicism, frustration, powerlessness, distrust and even of hatred mirror and, thereby, possibly reinforce Palestinian feelings that perpetuate and worsen intergroup dividers. Because much of the programming work with Palestinians is undertaken to ameliorate the impacts of actions by Israelis, donor staff often feel the same antipathy toward Israeli policies and practices that Palestinians feel. These feelings toward policy are often translated into feelings specifically toward the Israelis who carry out the policies and, by extension, generalized to all Israelis. (Of course, the policies and enactors of those policies deserve such feelings. The point here is not that these are inappropriate reactions but, rather, that donors by adopting and mirroring these reactions reinforce dividers between the two societies rather than reducing them.
6. Word and Labels. Acceptance and use of the language of Occupation can reinforce, in some ways, its “legitimacy.” Words that sanitize actions (such as “incursion” to describe dangerous, military entries to Palestinian areas where, at best, people are threatened and, worse, people die) reinforce the “business as usual” feelings on which Israeli policy depends.

Further, labels that apply to entire groups of individuals without differentiating among them (such as “terrorists” or “settlers”) accentuate dividers. Clearly not all members of Hamas are committed to terror and, while some settlers are driven by ideological zeal, others are living in occupied territories as inexpensive “suburban” neighborhoods and would, if politics demanded it, be more easily moved back into Israel proper. Political solutions become more possible with recognition of differences within seemingly intransigent groups.

7. Use of History. Many Israelis and Palestinians engage in recitations of history as one way of describing their victimization and explaining/excusing their present actions. I sometimes heard donors also recite histories as a way of explaining why

nothing new can happen, possibly reinforcing the likelihood that, indeed, nothing will happen.

Donor Programming Options

How can donors change or adjust programming to ensure that they avoid worsening dividers and that they recognize and encourage connectors?

Note Well: Even though all agreed that international donor assistance in some ways supports the Occupation, respondents also agreed that withdrawal of aid is *not* an option. Palestinians offered four reasons why they did not favor withdrawal: a) possible physical costs to people who lose support; b) loss of solidarity, c) loss of international witnesses to events in the oPt, and d) loss of hope by conveying the sense that the international community considers the situation hopeless. In addition, experience in other places suggests that withdrawal could increase desperation, and desperate people are not good peace-makers.

In DNH terms, withdrawal makes no sense because it would neither weaken dividers nor strengthen connectors.

<p>

A number of good ideas about options emerged in my conversations.

<p>

1. Humanitarian Emphasis on Protection. Many of the daily experiences of closure and Occupation threaten the physical well being of Palestinians. For this reason, programming around issues of legal protections (applying, Israeli law, and International Human Rights Law) is well within an appropriate humanitarian assistance mandate. Some NGOs have conducted legal aid programmes for Palestinians over many years, working closely with Israeli human rights lawyers to take cases all the way up to the Israeli Supreme Court/High Court of Justice.

<p>

Donor programming to encourage and expand such legal assistance would provide direct linkages between Palestinians and Israelis who are both concerned about protection, would (when successful – which such cases have often been in the past) demonstrate some of the positive aspects of Israeli society to counter current Palestinian disgust, and would reduce the dividers that are regularly reinforced by negative encounters with unlawful actions undertaken in support of Occupation.

2. Research and Data Gathering on Economic Costs of Occupation. From what I could learn, a good deal of work on the economic costs of Occupation has been and is being done. However, I could not locate a full study that showed the direct, secondary and tertiary net costs to both Israeli and Palestinian societies. Such numbers, assembled over a period of the past ten years and projected into the

future decade could demonstrate, I suspect, a strong argument for a number of Israelis to object to Occupation continuation.

These data, assembled to show the costs in both directions, could form the basis for recognition of shared interests and, perhaps, encourage Israelis who suffer directly from the national budget squeeze to be more open to exploration of peace options. If well packaged, these data could constitute the basis for a large public relations/education campaign.

3. Regular Meetings of Donor Community with Palestinian and Israeli Official Representatives. As noted in the analysis section above, the structures under which the international donor community operates separate them largely from Israeli officialdom as they pursue a development and humanitarian agenda. A regularly scheduled, annual meeting of donor community representatives, Israeli authorities and Palestinian authorities could negotiate the terms for delivery of humanitarian assistance, specify the expectations and obligations of each party, set priorities that need to be jointly addressed, etc. This could result in a MOU signed by all parties which would form the basis for complaints about violations of IHL and agreed-to terms of assistance programming. It would also provide a regular venue in which individuals from the three groups, tasked with making appropriate humanitarian response arrangements could, over time, develop additional common analysis and commitment.
4. Transparency/Outreach Campaign. There are a few programmatic attempts by the donors to reach into Israeli society in terms that would highlight and reinforce their common interests with Palestinian society (and vice versa). Without any real attempts to cross this information barrier, there is no way to test whether there is, within broader parts of Israeli society (beyond the “peace” groups), a willingness to face and end the impacts of the Occupation on children, families, workers, etc. – i.e. “people like us.” Few donor publications are translated into Arabic; none, so far as I could learn, is translated into Hebrew.

Perhaps, donors could develop broad outreach programmes to inform Israeli society about the humanitarian assistance enterprise and about Palestinian positive efforts to address their own futures. I do not believe that such “messaging” will make a fundamental shift in Israeli society; however, experience elsewhere shows that failure to address and correct prevalent social stereotyping does reinforce dividers among groups. Regular appearances on Israeli talk shows, coverage of events other than violence, conveying the results of polls among Palestinian public, all of these could contribute to a more realistic view of Palestinians among Israelis who, now, gain most of their information from highly biased news sources.

5. Lexicography Initiative (Or the “Spade is a Spade Project”!) To address and lessen the dividers that are exacerbated by labeling of groups and/or “sanitized” descriptors of violent events, donors might undertake a direct effort to identify

accurate words by which to discuss and describe events with which they deal. The effort should not replace sanitized words with inflammatory language but strive to find accurate, descriptive language that clarifies issues and events. (It may be possible to draw on experiences elsewhere to speed this effort along.)

6. Programmers Seminar. For those in the donor community who are interested, someone could organize a bi-monthly “seminar” in which a group of Palestinian, Israeli and donor “thinkers” meet to re-examine and re-assess donor impacts on the conflict and to continue to explore options for new approaches and programmes that could help reduce tensions and support connections.
7. Engage More with the Arab Donor Community. Finally, I realize that I am not clear about the degree to which European and Arab donors actually interact and plan together. The fact that I did not hear much about this may mean that the occasions for doing so are limited such as the AHLC (or it could mean that I missed it). If there is now little interaction, taking steps to overcome this division among donors could both improve the overall analysis of donor impacts and options and also model how people coming from divergent backgrounds can work together on shared interests.

Section III: Impacts of Donor Assistance on Conflicts within the Palestinian Society

Introduction

Very few donors or recipients of aid had considered the impacts of assistance resources and approaches on dividers and connectors within Palestinian society. Yet it is very clear that the allocation of resources to various Palestinian groups, the distributional effects of choices made by donors about who to target (or not), the incentives that are encouraged by sizable resource transfers, etc. all play into the dynamics of intergroup relations among Palestinians.

Do No Harm Analysis

My brief visit does not qualify me to outline in any detail the dividers and connectors among Palestinian subgroups. However, in every conversation with donors and Palestinians in the oPt, I heard a variety of remarks about differences in NGOs, other civil society groups, between civil society and the PA, etc. People described intergroup rivalries and mistrust, competition among groups and “factions” within groups. Furthermore, many described a dynamic, changing picture in which former allies have become competitors or in which “movements” have become “institutions.”

At the same time, many of these same people reiterate the common desires of all Palestinians to have an independent state, to end Occupation, to be free to move, to be able to plan for the future and to engage in productive economic activities that will last

and grow. Strategies for achieving these ends differ, but the goals and loyalty to certain principles and personages are, apparently, still strong connectors.

To trace the real impacts of donor assistance on dividers and connectors within Palestinian society, one would need to take the time and engage the groups in a more thorough and specific outline of dividers and connectors than the brief sketch above. However, knowing that both forces exist within the community, we can outline below how donor activities interact with these and either feed into fragmentation of Palestinian society or reinforce its common progress toward a shared and healthy future.

How does donor assistance play into and reinforce (or reduce) dividers and weaken (or strengthen) these connectors?

1. Distributional Impacts. Donor decisions (or the processes by which such decisions are made) about who to hire (and not to hire), with which organizations to partner (and not to partner) and about who shall receive aid (and who will not) have impacts on relations between those who are included and those who are not. Further, differences in which beneficiaries receive which kinds of resources, over what time span and in what order also have such effects. When the aid process benefits some groups whose identity exactly overlaps with the identity of one of the subgroups who are in conflict, the distributional impacts of aid reinforce the divisions between these subgroups. In Palestinian society, for example, decisions (in some cases formalized) to refuse aid to anyone connected to Hamas reinforces the division between all those who are in anyway connected to this group and other groups in society. Because no group is completely monolithic, and Hamas meets many of the humanitarian needs of significant populations, this kind of labeled exclusion builds a dynamic into the current social processes that may pose problems for a cohesive future state. In short, policies that exclude Hamas from beneficiary groups worsen dividers and undermine connectors. Similar impacts can be traced in relation to local NGOs with whom donors partner. Who is selected and how, and who is left out and why, all affect relations among these groups within the Palestinian community, negatively or positively.
2. Legitimization/de-legitimization and Substitution Impacts. Donor emphasis on reform of the PA was often cited in cynical terms by Palestinians with whom I talked. It appeared that the judgments of the international community that corruption was a problem fed into already existing cynicism among Palestinians and perhaps contributed to the de-legitimization of the PA among some groups. As the Ministry of Finance has instituted systems for broad transparency and accountability, donors have supported this financially and with commendations. Similarly, some donor supported programmes substitute for government by assuming responsibility for civilian support that should be carried out by government. This can undermine and weaken the development of effective state and municipal institutions and, by doing so, weaken the connections among groups who depend on these authorities. Approaches that encourage cynicism and undermine the legitimacy of governance structures reinforce dividers; approaches

that build on strengths and support systems that serve all of society reinforce connectors.

3. Incentives. Experience shows that, in conflicts, donor assistance can be the only, or a major, source of income. Employment in the oPt has suffered greatly under closure so that UNRWA and the PA, as conduits of donor funds, constitute the major employers and many families depend on them for survival. Unless specific measures are taken to assure people that there will be employment and income when peace is achieved, current donor support can become (inadvertently) a disincentive for taking the risks associated with peace. I did not hear anyone stress this as important in the oPt, but it would be surprising if there were no issues to be dealt with on this front, after over fifty years of institutionalized support for Palestinian refugees. What will the employees of UNWRA do if/when that agency is no longer needed?

Donor Programming Options

Because the focus of my conversations was, largely, on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, I did not adequately explore programming options for reducing dividers and strengthening connectors within Palestinian society. However, a few ideas and principles of operation became clear.

1. Identify Specific Connectors. Above I outlined the most general connectors that were clear in my conversations—namely, the goal of ending Occupation and establishing an independent State. For effective assistance programming, however, it would be important for donor staff to work with Palestinians to identify specific, often more localized, common purposes and shared interests around which to develop programmes. With some effort to do this, ideas would likely emerge (if experience elsewhere is repeated here) where groups that currently disagree and /or compete with each other could agree on some common efforts. The idea is not to create a disagreement-free society. (That would be dull!) Rather, the responsibility of donor assistance is to ensure that, where its resources are channeled supports cohesion and the development of joint efforts across the schisms in societies, rather than ignoring these and inadvertently feeding into them.
2. Develop Strategies for Encouraging Public Accountability. Addressing corruption and weaknesses in societies without, at the same time, encouraging cynicism and internal divisive criticism (as discussed above) is a challenge for donors in all conflict areas. It would be foolish to ignore corruption and failure. The issue is *how* to work on these issues. Several strategies have been tried and worked elsewhere.

First, when donors model transparency and accountability, themselves, this sets a standard for operations that are seen to work. In Palestine, one immediate way to demonstrate transparency is to ensure that all major public donor documents (such as evaluations, reports, etc.) are translated into Arabic. So long as all donor documents

remain only in English, this means that only some segments of society can be fully informed about operations.

Second, engaging in open discussion about decisions that need to be made, ensuring Palestinian representatives are included in making decisions that affect them, publicizing both information about processes and criteria for decision-making as well as final decisions once they are made, all help develop the systems and institutional approaches for accountability.

Finally, in many areas, donors have effectively developed forums where authorities and civil society interact on issues of common concern. In this situation, an annual meeting in which donors meet with PA and/or municipal authorities that are open to public attendance and that encourage public participation could be one option.

3. Training of staff and partners in Do No Harm analysis. Experience elsewhere shows that when people become aware of the patterns by which aid can either worsen dividers or reduce them, and either weaken connectors or strengthen them, then they can carry out the appropriate analysis in the circumstances where they work and find appropriate programming options to improve impacts. Training in how to do this analysis has proven helpful to the staff of donor agencies who work in other conflict areas; it like would be useful for those working directly with communities in oPt.

Section IV: Conclusion

In many of my conversations, people stressed the fact that the Occupation is “the problem” and that there is very little they can do about that. Of course, humanitarian assistance is not the instrument for ending conflict and bringing peace. However, where divisions exist among conflicting groups and international assistance is provided, the impacts of the latter on the former are undeniable. **International donor aid does not create conflicts, but it does influence whether they worsen or abate**, the likelihood that they continue unchanged or that some new steps can be found.

With this recognition, donors can stop feeling as if they must always react to volatile and unpredictable circumstances and, instead, get out “in front” of the way they handle the interactions of their assistance with the conflict. They can clarify how impacts occur and they can find opportunities to change the space in which they operate and, perhaps also, the space in which political actors must operate. Politicians are responsive to events and constituencies. If donors can create new modes of engaging people in giving and receiving assistance, and by doing so get agreement on humanitarian space that expands their effectiveness, they can change the political space to which political actors have to respond. Will this bring peace? Unlikely. Will it contribute positively rather than negatively? Yes. It is that simple.

A Word on Donor Coordination. While donor coordination is certainly preferable and could significantly reduce the control of Israel on donors’ support of the Occupation, it is

not necessary before anything else can happen. That is, if one or two or three donors were to be able to agree today that they would start setting up an annual review process which includes Israelis and Palestinians along with donors to establish an MOU regarding humanitarian assistance, they could do so without waiting for all donors to have to agree. If this first step proved useful, others could be welcome to join at any time.

If OCHA were to include a programming area concerned with legal protection for Palestinians, donors could each decide how much to contribute to this area and how, best, to organize an effective programme. Coordination could enhance positive impacts, but it is not essential for getting started.

Each donor has power to shape the impacts of its aid. To spend time developing complex systems for coordination could, inadvertently, sidetrack individual action and delay efforts to adjust programmes. Coordination should only be pursued as it becomes the logical next step and there is sufficient agreement that this makes sense. Then it also becomes easy.

A Word on Impact Assessments. The focus of this Report is not on the direct impacts of donor assistance in oPt (such as nutritional status, morbidity and mortality, shelter provision, etc.). Rather, is in on the “side-effects” that occur in the social and political realm even as donors address fundamental human needs.

It may seem difficult to assess political or social impacts of aid deliveries. They are intangible and immeasurable. In complex settings, how can one trace what actions are responsible for which outcomes?

Experience in many settings shows that this is not as difficult as it may at first appear. Identification of context-specific dividers and connectors is intended to focus attention on real, observable factors that, within that context, reinforce socio/political fragmentation or socio/political cohesion. Once these are identified, it is possible to observe whether they are worsening or abating, weakening or strengthening and it is possible to see where donor actions play into these tendencies, negatively or positively. With this awareness, impact assessment becomes quite do-able. Again, one or two donors could take this on in the contexts where their work is concentrated and demonstrate, to others, their improving ability to identify, analyze, trace and assess their impacts in these areas.

APPENDIX:

What is “Do No Harm”?

Beginning in the early 1990s, a number of international and local NGOs collaborated through the LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE PROJECT, also known as the “DO NO HARM” PROJECT (DNH) to learn more about how assistance that is given in conflict settings interacts with the conflicts. We knew that assistance is often used and misused by people in conflicts to pursue political and military advantage. We wanted to understand how this occurs in order to be able to prevent it.

The collaboration was based on gathering and comparing the field experience of many different NGO programmes in many different contexts. Through this, we were able to identify very clear patterns regarding how assistance and conflict interact.

Why Try To Do No Harm?

Although it is clear that, by itself, assistance neither causes nor can end conflict, it can be a significant factor in conflict contexts. Assistance can have important effects on intergroup relations and on the course of intergroup conflict. In a DNH PILOT IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT area, for example, one NGO provided 90% of all assistance local employment in a sizable region over a number of years. In another, the NGO estimated that militia looting of assistance garnered US \$400 million in one brief (and not unique) rampage. Both of these examples occurred in very poor countries where assistance's resources represented significant wealth and power.

At the same time, giving no assistance would also have an impact—often negative. The DNH has thus chosen to focus on how to provide assistance more effectively and how those of us who are involved in providing assistance in conflict areas can assume responsibility and hold ourselves accountable for the effects that our assistance has in worsening and prolonging, or in reducing and shortening, destructive conflict between groups whom we want to help.

Conflicts are never simple. DO NO HARM does not, and cannot, make things simpler. Rather, DO NO HARM helps us get a handle on the complexity of the conflict environments where we work. It helps us see how decisions we make affect intergroup relationships. It helps us think of different ways of doing things to have better effects. The aim is to help assistance workers deal with the real complexities of providing assistance in conflicts with less frustration and more clarity and, it is hoped, with better outcomes for the societies where assistance is provided.

The Do No Harm Framework: Outline of a Seven-Step Approach to Assistance Programming in the Context of Violent Conflict

STEP 1 **Understanding the context of conflict**

- identify the appropriate “arena”—the geographic and social space which is relevant to your assistance programme
- identify which inter-group conflicts have caused violence or are dangerous and may escalate into violence?
- how does the assistance project relate to that context of conflict?

STEP 2 **Analyze (identify and unpack) dividers and sources of tension**

STEP 3 **Analyze (identify and unpack) connectors and LCPs**

STEP 4 **Analyze - identify and unpack - the assistance project**

analyze the details of the assistance programme. Remember: it is never an entire programme that goes wrong. It is the details that determine impact.

STEP 5 **Analyze the assistance programme’s impact on the context of conflict through Resource Transfers (RTs) and Implicit Ethical Messages (IEMs)**

- how do the programme’s RTs and IEMs impact on dividers and sources of tension?
- how do the programme’s RTs and IEMs impact on connectors and LCPs?

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

IF an element of the programme has a negative impact on connectors weakening / undermining connectors and LCPs

THEN generate as many options as possible 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 programme**

Test the options generated using your / your colleagues experience:

- What is the probable / potential impact on dividers / sources of tension?
 - What is the probable / potential impact on connectors / LCPs?
- Use the best / optimal options to redesign project.

IN PROGRAMMING DOING STEPS 1 TO 6 **DOES NOT** MAKE SENSE **IF YOU DON’T DO STEP 7 AS WELL**
THE POINT IS: **IMPROVE** OUR PROGRAMMES USING THE EXPERIENCE WE HAVE

"Do No Harm" Framework for Considering the Impacts of Aid on Conflict

Context of Conflict

