

## **DNH Guidance Note: Using Dividers and Connectors**

May 2010

### **Introduction**

Organizing our experience into categories offers the opportunity for greater depth of understanding. The Do No Harm Project has learned that organizing a broad context into as few as two categories makes a significant difference in understanding and insight.

Situations of conflict are characterized by two driving forces (sometimes referred to as “realities”): Dividers and Connectors. There are elements in societies which *divide* people from each other and serve as *sources of tension*. There are also **always** elements which *connect* people and can serve as *local capacities for peace*. Outside interventions will always interact with both Dividers and Connectors. Components of an intervention can have a negative impact, exacerbating and worsening dividers and undermining or delegitimizing connectors. An intervention can likewise have a positive impact, strengthening connectors and serving to lessen dividers.

Understanding what divides people is critical to understanding how interventions can feed into or lessen these forces. Understanding what connects people despite conflict helps organizations understand how interventions reinforce or undermine those factors that can mitigate conflict or become positive forces for peacebuilding in society.

### **Key Issues in using Dividers and Connectors**

1. It is important to be very specific. In the conflict situation, *what are people doing?*

If you think something is a divider, ask: *how* does it divide people? *Why* is it important? What is it about that factor that divides people? “Religion” is often named as a divider. Yet “religion” itself, while perhaps different for the different groups (e.g. Christians and Muslims), is often not itself the source of tension. How is the issue of religion being used *by people*?

Similarly, connectors and local capacities for peace should not be romanticized or over generalized. “Women” or “women’s groups” are often identified as connectors, as are “economic interests” or “infrastructure”. While in some places women reach across conflict lines, in others women insist on revenge for their loved ones’ suffering. Infrastructure or natural resources (such as a river) may connect people physically, but may be used in ways that create tension.

2. Dividers and Connectors are not people.

People are people. People think stuff, talk about stuff, and do stuff. That stuff people talk about, think about, and, most of all, do are Dividers and Connectors. There are no Dividers or Connectors without people actually doing something.

“But Nelson Mandela is a Connector!”

Nelson Mandela has become a symbol and as a *symbol* he has been used as a Connector to promote peace. Nelson Mandela the person has in fact become quite adept at using his symbolic presence. However, as a *person*, he is not a Connector.

By identifying a person as a Divider or Connector, it becomes difficult to respond to that person's behavior. We know that warriors can become peacemakers, guerillas can become farmers, and politicians can become environmentalists. Peace occurs because people change their behavior. If we label people, we interpret their behavior through that label and we may miss changes that signal opportunity.

" Hamas is both a Divider and a Connector "

No, Hamas does things, some of which are Dividers and some of which are Connectors. Indeed, it is especially difficult working in such a situation where an organization like Hamas creates an agenda which contains both Dividers and Connectors so that by supporting some Connectors, one appears to be supporting the full agenda. The challenge in working in a situation where an organization like Hamas (or the Israeli Defense Forces) is also operating is how to do our work in such a way that, first, we avoid supporting the Dividers and, second, we support Connectors in that environment without also supporting or being seen to support Hamas' agenda. This is not easy.

3. Dividers and Connectors are dynamic.

They change over time, getting better or getting worse. Change over time matters! You must track this! Update your understanding of the context regularly.

4. Teams do analysis work better than individuals.
5. Teams always have differences in opinion.

When the analysis of a context is done, we always find that there are different opinions among a team. While this can lead to conflict in the group, this difference is inevitable. People have been exposed to different pieces of information and at different times. People have different assumptions about the information they have gathered. Often there are pieces of information that are missing. Teams just haven't had the time to collect them!

These different opinions should not be a stumbling block, but rather seen as an opportunity to gather new pieces of information from the other participants. This process should also highlight where there is inadequate information and offer some ideas about what needs to be learned.

6. Dividers and Connectors exist in all contexts, even those that are not explicitly in conflict.

### **Key Questions**

The following questions can be used to unlock dividers and connectors in a variety of ways.

1. What are the dividing factors in this situation? What are the connecting factors?
2. What are the current threats to peace and stability? What are the current supports?
3. What are the most dangerous factors in this situation? How dangerous is this Divider?

4. What can cause tension to rise in this situation?
5. What brings people together in this situation?
6. Where do people meet? What do people do together?
7. How strong is this Connector?
8. Does this Connector have potential?

**How to do a Dividers/Connectors Analysis**

With a team:

*Step I*

Brainstorm (using key questions or other appropriate questions)

- Plenary
  - Everybody shares ideas and the ideas are collected on a flip chart
- Buzz Groups
  - In groups of two or three, write down ideas
  - Come together in plenary and capture ideas on flip chart for discussion
- Individual
  - Write down the three (or five) most important Dividers (or Connectors)
  - Create a headline (or title) for each
  - One sentence why it is important
  - An indicator for telling if the Divider (or Connector) is getting Better or Worse

*Notes: Use some categories to help the brainstorming process. Ask yourself if you have considered each category and the potential Dividers and Connectors in each of them. Ask the team if there are other categories that should be used to capture experience and jog memories.*

<i>One set of Categories is:</i>	<i>Another is:</i>	<i>Another is:</i>
<i>Systems &amp; Institutions</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Geography</i>
<i>Attitudes &amp; Actions</i>	<i>Economic</i>	• <i>village</i>
<i>Values &amp; Interests</i>	<i>Social</i>	• <i>district</i>
<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Technological</i>	• <i>province</i>
<i>Symbols &amp; Occasions</i>	<i>Legal</i>	• <i>national</i>
	<i>Environmental</i>	

*Step II*

Discuss.

Are these the right Dividers (and Connectors)? How do you know these are Dividers? Be specific.

How would you know if these changed? How would you know if they got Better or Worse?

*Step III*

Prioritize.

Which are the most important or dangerous Dividers? Which are the most important or strongest, or best potential Connectors?

Allow local staff to take the lead here.

#### *Step IV*

Options and Opportunities.

How can these Dividers (or Connectors) be affected? What can your team or organization do to have a positive impact?

What are you currently doing that is having a negative impact? Why is that negative impact happening? What can you change to affect the impact?

Can your Options and Opportunities be linked to the indicators you developed in Step II? How will you monitor changes?

If your changes do not have the effect you anticipate, do you have a back-up Option? Do you have a process for learning why a change has not had the impact you expect?

#### **Checklist for Dividers/Connectors Analysis**

1. Did you do the analysis with a team?
2. Who are the actors?
3. How likely is open conflict?
4. Did you find a Divider/Connector for each category? Why not?
5. Did you prioritize? Did you allow the local staff to lead this part of the discussion?
6. Did you determine Options for the issues you raised? Why not?

---

The Do No Harm Guidance Notes have been developed at the urging of colleagues and friends around the world who use Do No Harm. These Notes serve as statements about practice from the experience and deep thought of practitioners in many places and contexts. They are collaborative efforts of many people, with vast experience in the issues detailed in these Notes. These documents, however, are not the last word on these topics. We anticipate and expect that experience will vary across the world. Because of that, these Notes are living documents and will be revised as new information and contributions are incorporated.