

## **Creativity and Do No Harm**

**Issue Paper – March 2012**

When people describe their use of Do No Harm they often use the word “creative”. But what do they mean? Why is it important for people to be creative?

### **Three Creativities**

The concept of creativity in DNH appears in three distinct ways.

1. Incorporating DNH with other tools
2. Using DNH in ways that go beyond assistance in conflict
3. DNH spurs critical thinking

### **Incorporating DNH with other tools**

Over many years, there has been a discussion about how DNH interacts with or complements other tools. Several people have found ways to build DNH into the frameworks and analytical tools they already use.

In some cases, they use DNH in concert with other tools to develop a more robust context analysis. A development worker in South Sudan said,

“I blended parts of DNH with other participatory tools to develop a conflict analysis activity for rural communities. I went around with an artist and asked the communities to draw pictures of dividers and connectors. Then, the artist further developed the drawings and I reintroduced them at community forums. I asked the participants to sort the pictures based on dividers, connectors and what is in between. As a result, the community was able to discuss very sensitive issues at a deeper level. They were distracted by the drawings and forgot about individual grievances.”

In others, they see DNH as valuable, but that it does not cover everything. A development worker in Kenya made this point about DNH in two ways,

“I found DNH limited as a stand-alone tool so it helped me to have a background on Conflict Management. DNH is good for analysis, planning design, and evaluation - it opens people’s eyes and sensitizes them. But in conflict it helps to know Conflict Resolution tools for peacebuilding activities. ... I used PRA tools to fill in the gaps in DNH. DNH and PRA together are the perfect tools for sustainable development.”

Some have used parts of DNH in or to inform other tools and frameworks, even in some cases developing entirely new tools. A group in Kenya developed an approach they call Participatory Integrated Community Development (PICD), incorporating elements of DNH with participatory approaches.

CDA has often been asked to show how DNH can be used in other tools. We have resisted such requests as we have seen that people are quite capable of doing this themselves. Because so many of these efforts are led by people who are experts in the other tools, the results are far superior to what CDA, with our limited expertise, could accomplish.

### **Using DNH to go beyond “assistance in conflict”**

DNH began by looking discretely at the experiences of development and relief in contexts of conflict. In this early phase, CDA staff (chiefly Mary Anderson and Marshall Wallace) felt that the integrity of the collaborative learning process meant that CDA needed to advise using DNH in ways limited to where and how it was developed. The CDA team was certain of the insights that emerged through the collaborative learning process, but were not willing to oversell DNH as functioning outside the limited scope of that process.

However, that did not limit the efforts of countless DNHers around the world. Almost from the first day, people pushed back against CDA’s point of view and made use of DNH in many additional areas.

CDA’s official perspective changed in 2006 to one of exploring the other realms of DNH use (though the personal perspectives of Mary and Marshall about the utility of DNH had been persuaded by the experience of colleagues years earlier). Since then, we have heard many, many stories about and seen many, many people make use of DNH outside of traditional contexts of humanitarianism, development, and conflict.

Mindanao is home to the only known group of teenage DNH trainers. They talk openly about DNH as a source of personal growth: “From a shy girl who doesn’t know how to express herself and from somebody who doesn’t care about the things around me, I have changed...I now believe that if only we work hand in hand, we can transform lives and reform damaged relationships”.

### **DNH spurs critical thinking**

People use the term “creative” in a general sense to describe the critical thinking that DNH prompts. A development worker in Rwanda captured this perspective clearly and succinctly; “DNH pushes you to think critically and to be creative. It makes you question in innovative ways.”

### **What leads to creative use?**

People in Mindanao were the only ones who addressed this question directly. They said that the fact that their island has so many different types of organization working in so many different ways on so many different issues led directly to the creativity that so many practitioners there display.

However, if we try to apply this standard to other locations, we remember that most of the places where DNH has been introduced have similar circumstances of types and numbers of organizations and activities. South Sudan is another place with quite a lot of creativity around DNH and it too has a diverse group of organizations. By contrast, Kosovo, also with diverse organizations and activities, seems to have many fewer demonstrations of creativity around DNH (though many demonstrations of creativity in other areas). Diversity and number of organizations does not seem to be the only factor in creativity.

Another factor in creativity that we have noted, seems to be the state of the conflict. It appears that if the conflict is in a state where there are spikes of violence, then people are more creative with DNH. While this still needs considerable examination to determine if it is in fact what is happening and not just an artifact of the case studies, we can begin to ask why this might be the case.

It may be that in situations of uncertainty, where violence is a possibility but not assured, people are actively looking for ways to mitigate or prevent violence. This in turn might lead to creative uses of DNH. If this is the case, then we should see less creativity in situations with either very low-level violence *and* situations with very high-level violence.

### **Thoughts for exploration on high violence situations**

1. Situations with high levels of violence might not lend themselves to creativity because there is little to be gained. The violence is already sufficiently high and such a constant factor to be dealt with that attempts to mitigate or prevent it seem almost impossible. In these cases, it may be that DNH use is really focused simply on not making the situation worse and on protecting the security of staff and beneficiaries. Making things better (called by some colleagues “Do Some Good”) is not on the agenda.
2. It might be that such situations are more likely to be considered humanitarian or relief situations. The mode of humanitarianism might not lend itself to creativity in DNH (though again, we have seen creativity demonstrated in other ways by humanitarian workers). Is it possible that development work leads to more creativity in DNH than humanitarian work?

### **Thoughts for exploration on low violence situations**

Situations with low violence might not have the same urgency as others. Prevention and mitigation might seem unnecessary if violence is rare.

Cambodia and Kosovo both are places where the active violence levels are low in comparison to many of the other cases. They differ radically in the uptake of DNH, with organizations and people in Cambodia clearly finding great uses for DNH, while in Kosovo the uptake has been much less. However, in neither place do people discuss *DNH* as where their creativity is demonstrated.

This is not to say that there is little creativity in Cambodia or Kosovo. There is quite a lot! However, the creativity does not appear to be around DNH (or conflict-sensitivity). If the conflict doesn't seem severe, then perhaps it is not as important in the minds of many to be creatively conflict-sensitive?

### **Creativity: Organizations or Individuals?**

It is clear from the cases that individuals are creative. At the same time, organizations can influence how the creativity is directed. Networks appear to show that creativity can spread.

How creativity and creative uses spread from person to person, organization to organization, and place to place needs to be further explored.

### **Knowing DNH and Creativity**

Most of the creative DNHers we have seen and talked to know DNH very well. It seems that to be creative and effective, practitioners need to know the tool inside and out and to have been using it for some time (in many cases for years).

There are some outliers. The youth in Mindanao come to mind as relatively new practitioners who have pushed DNH. They do, however, have mentors who have been DNH practitioners for many years.

The development workers in Kenya and Mindanao we have talked to are among the most experienced users of DNH, often with 5 (or even 10!) years of experience using DNH. In both places, we also found several of the most individually creative users. The cases looking at those practitioners explored how DNH has been used with dozens of people, across many organizations, and in almost every conversation people referenced at least one of the three types of creativity above.

While we think that practice with the tool of DNH is necessary for creativity with it, we are interested in exploring this idea further.

### **Tools and Principles and Creativity**

"Do No Harm" is often referenced as a "principle". It is also, of course, a tool. The creativity we have seen seems to come from those who have made extensive use of Do No Harm as a tool

and not just as a principle. The practitioners in Kenya and Mindanao referenced above have been users of the DNH tool.

This idea also needs to be explored. Are we so tool-oriented that we are missing creativity that grows out of principles? We can speculate that types of DNH work that apply the Implicit Ethical Messages (the ABCs) in daily behavior might be more difficult to see and understand as “creative”.

### **Questioning the Hypotheses in this Issue Paper**

CDA has not met every DNH practitioner. The case studies are, by definition, limited in scope. In addition, a creative user may not have discussed their practice in terms of creativity or in ways that a case writer could interpret as creative.

Given these limitations, we welcome more information and discussion around this topic.

### **Is Creativity Important?**

In a word: sometimes. We are always struck by people’s creativity. It is interesting and stimulating. It can open up whole new ways of seeing the world and make actions to change the world stronger. We have seen so many examples of this.

But at the same time, there is something to be said for those who know how to use their tools well even if they do not tread outside of the mainstream. Effective development and humanitarian work is happening all the time in ways that are not flashy and do not draw attention to themselves. Many people’s lives are better because assistance workers did their jobs directly, simply, with grace and respect. In the end, that too is how to Do No Harm.