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THE COLLABORATIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT ACTION, INC.

Options

For Aid in Conflict

Lessons from Field Experience

Mary B. Anderson, Editor

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OPTIONS MANUAL FOR AID IN CONFLICT:

LESSONS FROM FIELD EXPERIENCE

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many international and local staff of many aid agencies have offered their experiences for the writing of this Manual.

Over a three year period, from fall 1997 through summer 2000, a number of NGOs that have programmes in conflict areas collaborated through the Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP) to "field test" the ideas and approaches reported in the book, DO NO HARM: How Aid Supports Peace – Or War.¹

During this period, the LCPP provided "Liaisons" to work with NGO staff in the field. These individuals visited the NGO programmes every three or four months, first training staff in the DNH Framework and then engaging with them in applying this analysis to the local context. Together, they traced the impacts of the aid programme on the conflict and identified options and alternatives for working that would do no harm and support LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE. It was a fascinating venture!

Twice a year, these Liaisons and representatives of each of the field programmes met with LCPP donors, NGO headquarters people and LCPP staff to share and compare experiences, "add up" the lessons being learned, give each other help on special dilemmas and, in general, push the learning as far as we could.

All of the people in the twelve field programmes and specifically those who worked together in the six-monthly meetings are the authors of this book. Many are listed below by name. An even larger number of national and international field staff also deserve appreciation for their involvement in developing the ideas reported here.

¹ Anderson, Mary B., Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado and London, 1999.

In the lists of acknowledgments which follow, we do not identify the countries where the NGO programmes occurred. In every location, the NGO staff transparently engaged with local authorities and military personnel; they found such openness and inclusiveness to be important in applying the lessons of DO NO HARM in their work. However, because many of these areas are tense and insecure, we are concerned not to increase the risks to field staff by publicizing their LCPP involvement beyond their immediate context. Therefore, we omit the identification of field sites of individuals—at their request—here.

Although most of this book reflects collaborative thinking and writing, some sections were authored by individuals who are identified in footnotes. In other cases, individuals took responsibility for developing the core ideas and text which were then amended and developed by many others. Some footnotes also note these particular roles.

Special acknowledgment is due here to J. Marshall Wallace whose job it was to ensure that liaisons submitted written reports so composite learning was possible; who took on the massive job of indexing a large number of these reports so that we could identify common themes that came up in all contexts; and who in recent months, applied his editor's pen and technical expertise to the layered text of this Manual to make it both more readable and more accessible.

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To these friends and colleagues, and the many others in the field who constantly seek better ways to work, I owe appreciation for their roles in the development of this book and for the inspiration they provide.

Mary B. Anderson
Cambridge, September 2000

Dealing with War Trauma: a DO NO HARM Perspective

by Rupen Das

With increasing and intentional targeting of civilian populations in conflicts, there has been a growing awareness of the need to deal with trauma. However, with this growing awareness there has also been a lot of controversy as to how best to address this issue. On one end of the spectrum are those who say that in the history of warfare citizens have always been targets and that people have, thus, learned to cope with trauma. On the other end are mental health professionals who assert that, although trauma has always existed as a result of war, with the greater understanding we now have about mental health and the tools to address dysfunctional behavior, it is a moral obligation to help deal with trauma so people can live more fulfilled lives.

Both ends of the spectrum hold truth. Many communities have traditional methods of coping with trauma. But, with the breakdown of traditional societies and their social support structures, much knowledge of traditional medicine and coping strategies is also getting lost.

How communities and individuals deal with trauma from conflict can either be helpful in bringing healing between various groups in conflict or can deepen the DIVIDERS that separate them.

In all trauma recovery programmes there are two issues to be addressed. First is the issue of local capacity to deal with trauma. How is trauma understood and experienced in a particular community and what then are the culturally appropriate ways to programme for trauma recovery? Second, does this local capacity move the conflicting communities toward peace? Does the trauma recovery approach bring healing between groups or does it deepen the DIVIDERS between groups in conflict?

Key to healing of trauma is recalling the traumatic event. In the recalling and retelling a number of things happen. The cathartic process breaks the hold of the event and its associated emotions on the individual. If this process is carried out in the context of significant relationships, the experience and emotions can be affirmed as valid and, thus, be dealt with. This is an important step in the healing process.

The danger in the process is that, in recalling the traumatic event, the focus can be on those who caused the trauma and the need to seek retribution through revenge. Retelling may institutionalize a commitment "to never forget".

It is important to separate the event from those who caused it--though admittedly this is not easy. While there has been much controversy surrounding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the basic thinking has been that trauma needs to be brought into the light and the truth told. There is healing in just that. Forgiveness then is the responsibility of the individual; justice is the responsibility of the legal system.