

## MODULE 4 DO NO HARM PRINCIPLE

This module concerns the Do No Harm humanitarian principle.

### Help, but don't harm

Humanitarian assistance and development projects are designed to help people who may be struggling following natural disasters, conflicts, or other types of emergencies or unforeseen situations. However, *all aid delivery comes with consequences*, both good and bad. The 'Do No Harm' principle was developed in response to a growing recognition of the potential negative effects of aid. It is an expression that speaks for itself: the "Do No Harm" principle requires humanitarian and development actors to *mitigate, reduce* or *prevent* any negative impact of their actions on affected populations during their delivery of assistance.

Equally important are the *rights-based* and *community-based* approaches to humanitarianism and development as these encourage NGO and INGO efforts to *engage and empower* target communities and beneficiaries in decisions that affect their lives.

The "Do No Harm" principle can be linked to the rights-based and community-based approaches to aid assistance in many ways. For example, a good *communications plan* and *engagement with intended recipient communities and beneficiaries* are useful means to assess the Do No Harm outcomes of your project. By engaging with communities and beneficiaries, you can gain their feedback regarding the *suitability* and *appropriateness* of the project activities, types of assistance, existing tensions between targeted social and cultural groups, and more.

All of these factors can cause *harm* if not considered during project planning, *even if your intentions are altruistic*.

Of course, it's not always possible to help everybody, however, unfortunately, both in the past and the present *there is a tendency among NGOs and INGOs to focus primarily on the intended beneficiaries and communities*. Whilst this is good in terms of communication and monitoring of those receiving the aid, it neglects the predicaments of those who are not receiving the aid and ignores pre-existing underlying social and cultural tensions. Subsequently, the delivery of aid can exacerbate or incite conflict, albeit unintentionally. It's therefore important to *communicate and consult with non-beneficiary communities to explain why they have not been included, seek ways to include them in future aid projects, and minimize the negative attitudes between them and beneficiary communities*.

One of the best ways to limit negative outcomes from project interventions is to *engage community leaders, local authorities, intended and unintended beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders* to discuss your proposed project and your proposed beneficiary selection criteria.

By giving everyone the opportunity to give their input, you can:

1. Help to increase the positive level of reception and level of local acceptance regarding your project.
2. You can also adapt your project to match their vision of who should be supported, how, why and when,
3. Thus you can maximize the effectiveness of your aid delivery.

In terms of project assessment and the “Do No Harm” principle, it is also important to consider that in some contexts the common humanitarian purpose of supporting ‘the most vulnerable’ may be *culturally, politically or socially inappropriate*. For instance, if your project aims to assist disenfranchised women through cash-for-work programs, then this may cause social and cultural tensions within families wherein men are expected to be the breadwinners.

The “Do No Harm” principle should also be considered in all other parts of the aid project cycle, including monitoring and evaluation. For example, if there's going to be repeat funding for a project, you need to investigate whether the *previous project* has caused harm or has *mitigated any harm* to the intended and non-intended communities and beneficiaries.

So, to summarize, **here are some examples of the main factors that aid organizations should consider in relation to the “Do No Harm” principle:**

1. Support to IDP or refugee camps with the exclusion of local populations
2. School feeding projects, excluding those too poor to attend school.
3. Women-focussed projects
4. Focus on minority groups
5. Recovery or development support to selected communities.
6. Cash for work
7. Registered populations versus unregistered or undocumented migrant labour
8. Confidentiality and personal privacy