

# Do-No-Harm Approach: Lessons from Water Development across the Afar/Amhara Regional Border



**T**he USAID-funded Water Sanitation and Hygiene Transformations for Enhanced Resilience project (WaTER)<sup>1</sup> aimed to increase access to water in the water-scarce Argoba Woreda in Afar regional state by digging deep boreholes. However, during identification studies, it became apparent that groundwater potential was poor in this region but abundant in the Amhara communities upstream of the Amhara regional state, across the border from Afar.

However, the situation was sensitive. Ethnic and religious conflicts, particularly between Christian agriculturalists in Amhara and Muslim agro-pastoralists in Afar, have a pattern of flaring up and was particularly acute at the time the project was being planned. It became clear that, in order to build a water source in the upstream Amhara community to provide water for the downstream Afar communities, a conflict-sensitive approach would be imperative. Staff from the WaTER project therefore

<sup>1</sup> The USAID-funded WATER (Water Sanitation and Hygiene Transformations for Enhanced Resilience) project, led by the International Rescue Committee and implemented in partnership with CARE, aims to bring water and sanitation facilities, and hygiene behavioral change, to 146,000 pastoralists in Ethiopia's Somali, Afar, and Oromia Regions. Under the WATER project, key activities in the Argoba Woreda of the Afar regional state to date have included spring water development, replacement of diesel-powered water schemes to hydro-power systems, rehabilitation of one motorized borehole, construction of two blocks of sex-segregated school latrines, and community-wide mobilization around sanitation and hygiene promotion.

conducted extensive fieldwork to test a conflict-sensitive development approach called Do-No-Harm (DNH). This paper shares the approach and some of the findings on how to build a shared resource across community groups with a history of conflict.

# The approach

The DNH principle has been widely used since the 1990s in developing countries of Africa and Asia (<http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/node/103>). It is a tool that was specifically designed to guide development and humanitarian assistance programs in conflict-ridden areas. DNH enables development practitioners to implement projects in a conflict-sensitive manner through methods of analysis regarding existing situations. Conflict sensitivity implies the ability of project implementers to understand the context in which they operate, the interaction between the context and an intervention, and the ability to act upon this understanding in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts. DNH is used to enable community members to observe and analyze conflict-sensitivity situations in their own surroundings and participate in the creation of appropriate interventions.

The success of the DNH approach hinges on the full involvement and active participation of all key stakeholders—e.g., community members, regional government, leadership from rival community members to act as mediators, and continued monitoring by local community representatives who lead efforts to build a nonviolent and conflict-free society.

CARE started with a 5-day training to all project staff with the objective to strengthen understanding of key conflict-sensitive principles and to provide the team with the tools and approaches needed to support the application of conflict-sensitive principles. By the end of the training, participants gained the skills necessary to maximize the chances that the project would not escalate into a conflict, thereby maximizing the positive impacts of interventions. The training materials consisted of tools on DNH principles, conflict sensitivity, and timeline analysis.

# The context

Community members from both ethnic groups, the Amhara ethnic group in the Amhara regional state

and the Argoba ethnic group in the Afar regional state, move across the border primarily in search of forage and water for livestock during the dry periods and for the exchange of goods and services. The Afar agropastoralists in particular are historically particularly mobile.

Such movements, however, are periodically curtailed, restricting the socioeconomic interaction

*There are eight steps followed in the DNH approach. (see box).*

## The Do-No-Harm Framework

- STEP 1 Train staff in the framework
- STEP 2 Understand the context of the conflict
- STEP 3 Analyze the dividers and sources of tension
- STEP 4 Analyze connectors and local capacities for peace
- STEP 5 Identify and unpack the development intervention—even the smallest details contribute to impact
- STEP 6 Analyze the intervention’s potential impact in the context of the conflict through resource transfers and implicit ethical messages
- STEP 7 Generate programming options. If an element of the assistance program has a negative impact on dividers, feeding into the sources of tension or if an element of the program has a negative impact on connectors, weakening or undermining connectors, and local capacities for peace, then generate as many options as possible that can weaken dividers and strengthen connectors
- STEP 8 Test options and redesign program

of both communities. Violent conflicts over land and water in the region are often the points that ignite conflict. These have had the following negative consequences: loss of human lives, loss of livestock through robbery, socioeconomic dislocation (abandonment of the common market), and increased social segregation, disrupting kinship (including marriage) and other cultural ties.

For the Afar, living in the arid lowlands, water shortages are a major problem, particularly during times of drought, but also when existing water and pasture sources are disrupted for other reasons. The potential of the project lay in providing water into the Afar lowlands, from a spring in the Amhara highlands, but in ways that would be acceptable to both parties.



## Government and community discussions

Government officials from both the Ankober (Amhara) and Argoba (Afar) woredas held meetings facilitated by CARE Ethiopia to agree to start the process of finding a way to share water resources.

Community dialogues to identify and map major resources in the intervention area were then undertaken. The meetings were scheduled and conducted in both woredas, separately, to understand the drivers and cause of conflict and its resolution. Community members mapped basic natural resources as part of the identification of basic sources of livelihood and causes of conflict. Afterwards, elders, religious leaders from both faiths, women, men, youth community members of different social groups, and community representatives from both ethnic groups met together to discuss the overall cause of conflict.

The options were then narrowed down to a water spring in the Haramba kebele in the Ankober woreda of the Amhara regional state, which could supply water to the downstream community in Argoba woreda in the Afar regional state.

During the cross-community dialogue, the scope of work was mutually agreed by the upstream community (Amhara) and the downstream community (Afar). The Amhara community upstream demonstrated a willingness to share its resources with the Afar community downstream. The reasons

for this included a greater understanding of the constraints faced by the Afar community, which led them into conflict with Amhara and an understanding that they could avoid future conflict by sharing increased harnessing of water resources together. In addition and critically important was the fact that the communities believed that improved socioeconomic relations could be restored, which were mutually beneficial to both communities, because of their different livelihood basis—i.e., trade between agriculturalists and agro-pastoralists.

Following all the discussions, representatives from both communities signed a peace agreement to restore peace and security and facilitate improved relationships in the future between the two communities.

## Construction and management of gravity-fed water system

The water system was then constructed. It consisted of a spring that fed water into a 100 m<sup>3</sup> concrete tank, then along a 10-km pipeline, with 10 water points. Water was provided to three water points in two villages in Ankober prior to reaching the Argoba woreda in Afar where the remaining seven water points were constructed.

The decisions about where to place the pipes and each water point were jointly agreed, with the

decisions involving both elders and government as power brokers but also women and girls in each community who traditionally are the ones who fetch water.

The hygiene and sanitation element of the work included community campaigns around improved hygiene, addressing taboos that have negative hygiene implications, distribution of behavioral change communication materials, and working toward open defecation-free kebeles.

A joint water supply, sanitation and hygiene Management Committee with members from both communities was then established to manage and maintain the scheme. There is an overall committee that directly manages committees under each water point. The committees have seven members out of which three to four members are women. Moreover, each water point has a caretaker who is responsible for minor maintenance and operation. CARE provided training for all committees and caretakers on good governance, addressing issues of participation, inclusion, accountability, and transparency. In addition, Ankober and Argoba woreda government officials signed a cooperation document to provide supervision and technical support to the maintenance of the water system and continue support with hygiene and sanitation.

## Value of DNH approach in conflict resolution and peace building

To determine what impact the WaTER project had on peace building and conflict resolution as well as to look at what was happening in terms of water, hygiene, and sanitation, an assessment was conducted in the Argoba woreda at the Haramba water spring in March 2014, 6 months after the completion of the water system.

The study found that water was flowing and hygiene and sanitation had improved. Most interestingly, however, beyond these immediate benefits, the assessment also found that community members in the Ankober and Argoba woredas were able to reengage in market activities. They now go once again to the same market to barter goods and services. Agropastoral communities of Argoba sell livestock and Ankober communities of Amhara sell

cereal crops. The joint committee responsible for maintaining and managing the water source and supporting ongoing hygiene and sanitation work continues to meet regularly and there have not been any incidents to undermine the water provision. Relationships between the communities are also improved.

### Impact of the spring development

With the DNH approach, the WaTER project was able to improve hygiene and sanitation and increase access to safe water of about 10,350 people as a result of the construction of a water spring with 10 km of pipeline expansion between two states: the Amhara regional state and the Afar regional state.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the main finding from the initiative is that it is possible to have a development intervention that has direct benefits for one community more than another, if a conflict-sensitive approach is undertaken. In this case, the Ankober community agreed to pipe water resources to the water-scarce Argoba community in order to restore peace in the area. The peace dividend then included restored socioeconomic relations between the two communities, which were mutually beneficial.

The DNH approach provides a method for collaborative planning, implementation, and monitoring of development activities, involving community members and government bodies. It is particularly useful in sensitive contexts to ensure that conflict is not exacerbated or ignited as a result of a development intervention. Given the potential for conflict when existing resources are altered and new ones made available, the DNH approach could usefully be mainstreamed as an approach within water resource development both for domestic and productive use, soil and water conservation interventions, and surface water-harvesting interventions to prevent conflict and promote peaceful sharing of resources.

The DNH approach is likely to help improve the sustainability of interventions because it invests time in establishing mutual trust, understanding, and joint ownership of resources between communities with a history of conflict. The involvement of local

government across the two communities and their understanding of the importance of cooperation are also pivotal. Their official and formal oversight is also likely to ensure stronger long-term support.

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