The Henry L. Stimson Center

Do No Harm Policy

I. Purpose/Scope of Policy

The Henry L. Stimson Center (The Stimson Center)'s programs and projects operate in countries around the globe carrying out its mission of promoting international security, shared prosperity, and justice through applied research and independent analysis, deep engagement, and policy innovation. The purpose of the "do no harm" policy is to facilitate greater awareness and intention about adopting research approaches that do not perpetuate harm unnecessarily. It seeks to promote reflective activities regarding the Stimson Center's research projects that may help avoid, for instance, exacerbating conflict and violence or inflicting unintended negative consequences on research participants, beneficiaries, and their environments.

This internal policy was designed by and for the Stimson Center and agreed upon by its leadership; it applies to employees and contracted partners. The principal investigator (PI) for each research project is encouraged to evaluate the application of this policy to their project and to ensure compliance. When questions about application arise, PIs can turn to the Vice President of Research and/or the President and CEO for guidance. The Stimson Center will share the policy with funders upon request.

II. Definition of "Do No Harm" Concept

"Do no harm" is a principle that encourages the Stimson Center's staff and its partners to take a step back from an identified research intervention to consider the broader context in which it takes place and to mitigate the intervention's potentially negative effects on those most impacted. Within the context of Stimson's research activities, this includes effects on the lives of those most directly affected by our interventions, such as individuals, communities, the economy, and their environment(s).

"Harm" is defined as negative consequences or impact on people, including but not limited to professional, mental, emotional, or physical effects.

The basis of practicing "do no harm" is based on six lessons:

1. Whenever a research activity engages with a context, it becomes part of the context.

2. All contexts in which we live are defined by a number of factors and elements in societies that may contribute to division or tension, or help groups connect or coexist.

3. Many research activities interact with societal factors and elements.

4. Actions (what an organization does, the resources it brings into a context, how it brings in resources) and behaviors (how staff interact with communities and the messages communicated through those behaviors) have consequences.

5. The details of a research project matter and determine its impact. By analyzing the details of a research intervention within the context of the project environment, one can better determine how outside actions and behaviors may impact the research context and those within it.

6. There are always alternative options for project interventions, and improvements can always be made by adopting new and better decisions once more is learned.

(Adapted from the CDA Collaborative Do No Harm and Peacebuilding Lessons; CDA DNH Trainers Manual 2016; Oxfam Expert Blog; and Wallace (2014). *From Principle to Practice: A User's Guide to Do No Harm*. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects)

III. Objectives

The Stimson Center's "do no harm" policy intends to prompt the identification, prevention, and mitigation of unnecessary harm on research participants, beneficiaries, and their environments. In doing so, its two main objectives are to spur:

- Advance evaluation and recognition of the potentially negative effects of planned research interventions.
- Monitoring risk of harm and adopting preventive and mitigative actions as needed throughout the research process.

IV. Examples of Policy Application

"Do no harm" should be considered and applied throughout the duration of a research project – from research conceptualization to dissemination of written products. Specific examples of how it may relate to the research process may include, but are not limited to:

- Assessing the risk of harm to research participants in establishing and maintaining contact with them.
- Selecting a secure method to establish contact with research participants and to communicate with them thereafter.
- Ensuring security of information both online and offline.
- Ensuring informed and voluntary consent when conducting interviews, including offering the option of non-attribution with regard to statements, insights, or information provided.
- Sharing of findings with stakeholder communities, including research participants and beneficiaries

Potential strategies to prevent/mitigate harm:

- Take your lead from local interlocutors about appropriate means of communication, as they are likely best positioned to judge the risks and to suggest what works best for them.

When in doubt, connect with the Stimson Center's Communications team or IT colleagues on digital communication best practices.

- When engaging eyewitnesses and/or victims, follow internationally recognized best practices about the protection of individuals' identities and potentially their persons.
- Adopt a data management and storage policy.
- When anonymity is requested, separate research data from participants' personal information (e.g., make use of a scrambling key).
- Consult with stakeholder communities about how and when they would like research findings shared with them.
- When engaging with a vulnerable community, adhere to standards of cultural competency and look to local actors for guidance.

This list is not exhaustive; PIs should consider the unique needs, challenges, and constraints for each research project undertaken.

V.   Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed on occasion to determine if any changes should be made or applied.

VI.   Paths of Recourse

If questions arise concerning a projects contribution to harm, concerns should be raised first in writing with the project/program director concerned, and with the Vice President of Research Programs in copy. If circumstances prevent the project/program director from being the first point of contact, concerns can be brought directly to the Vice President of Research Programs or the President and CEO.