REF2021

Institution: Aberystwyth University	

Unit of Assessment: 19: Politics and International Studies

Title of case study: Enhancing Civilian Protection Practices of Nonviolent Peaceforce

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2017

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Berit Bliesemann de Guevara	Senior Lecturer in Peacebuilding, Post-War Reconstruction & Transitional Justice; Reader; Personal Chair	1 October 2013- present

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y/**N**

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Professor Bliesemann de Guevara's research into how to capture community experiences of violence had a direct benefit on the activities of Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) and its local partners in Myanmar. NP is a global non-profit organization which protects civilians in violent conflicts through unarmed strategies, working closely with local communities. It is the biggest international non-governmental organisation (INGO) working on unarmed civilian protection worldwide, having trained over 800 civilian conflict monitors to-date in Myanmar alone. Knowledge about communities' conflict experiences is essential to the work of NP. However, these communities are difficult to access in Myanmar, where mobility to and in conflict zones is government-restricted, intra-societal trust levels are low, and cultural and linguistic barriers hamper understanding. In response, NP Myanmar adopted a new method of engaging local communities based on Bliesemann de Guevara's research, with positive effects on conflict knowledge and programming, strengthened local ownership of protection practices, and generation of trust and collaboration. Having been developed and successfully used in the context of Myanmar, the method was subsequently also adopted by NP Philippines.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) A major challenge of international humanitarian and peacebuilding assistance has been how to develop programmes which are both context-sensitive and needs-based. This has been especially so in Myanmar, where a lack of access, trust and the marginalisation of local voices in conflict zones make knowledge of local contexts and needs difficult to determine. Building on the research and impact agenda of the Centre for the International Politics of Knowledge at Aberystwyth, Centre director Bliesemann de Guevara's research developed an adaptable, easily applicable method to overcome these problems in order to capture the everyday effects of violence on communities and better understand context-specific protection needs. The research was generated in three stages. First, Bliesemann de Guevara contributed to the development of *DrawingOut*, an award-winning, metaphor-centred drawing method. *DrawingOut* was designed to overcome tendencies in

existing methods to privilege language-proficient or highly vocal actors, to restrict participants' agenda-setting ability, and to limit participants' ability to voice experiences, emotions, and cultural taboos. Specifically, Bliesemann de Guevara contributed to this development through her long-standing research expertise in the development of alternative means of knowledge generation and local community engagement [3.1; 3.4; 3.6].

Second, Bliesemann de Guevara adapted the *DrawingOut* method as part of the AHRC-funded project "Raising Silent Voices". This project explored how local knowledge of conflict-affected communities in Myanmar can be accessed by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) to promote unarmed civilian protection [3.5]. Working in consultation with the INGO Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), the method was developed to enable users to better capture community experiences in an open and socio-culturally meaningful way. The method generates rich representations of how conflict and peace is understood in communities and addresses problems of access and trust prevalent in conflict-ridden states such as Myanmar.

Third, the project team piloted the new drawing method in two conflict-affected communities in Myanmar. Using the adapted version of *DrawingOut* devised by Bliesemann de Guevara, the team co-designed bespoke research workshops with three local research associates, who delivered the workshops in Rakhine and Kachin states in May and July 2017. The project team analysed the information obtained through the new method and explored the findings' implications for practitioner best practice [3.2; 3.3]. The research findings showed how capturing experiential knowledge in a more nuanced way through creative methods can make the work of INGOs such as NP more relevant to local people. They also showed the method's usefulness in different conflict settings within Myanmar (asymmetric warfare, communal violence). The findings suggested that adopting *DrawingOut* would enable better engagement with local partner organisations and lead to more context-sensitive training for community protection and peace workers.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Publications
3.1 Gameiro, S., Bliesemann de Guevara, B., El Refaie, E., Payson, A. (2018), `DrawingOut - An innovative drawing workshop method to support the generation and dissemination of research findings', *PLoS ONE*, 13(9): e0203197. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0203197

3.2 Julian, R., Bliesemann de Guevara, B., Redhead, R. (2019), `From Expert to Experiential Knowledge: Exploring the Inclusion of Local Experiences in Understanding Violence in Conflict', *Peacebuilding*, 7(2): 210-225. DOI: 10.1080/21647259.2019.1594572

3.3 Bliesemann de Guevara, B., Furnari, E., Julian, R. (2020), `Researching with 'Local' Associates: Power, Trust and Data in an interpretive Project on Communities' Conflict Knowledge in Myanmar', *Civil Wars*, 22(4): 427-452. DOI:10.1080/13698249.2020.1755161

Associated research funding
3.4 Using comics workshops to investigate and disseminate the infertility experiences of ethnic minority women in Wales: Welsh Crucible Small Grant: (1 December 2015 to 20 August 2016): Award: GBP7,400. Gameiro, S., (Cardiff) (PI) & Bliesemann de Guevara, B., Refaie, E., (Cardiff), Payson, A., (Cardiff), (Co-I's).

3.5 Raising Silent Voices: Harnessing local knowledge for communities' protection from violence in Myanmar: AHRC-PaCCS: (1 June 2016 to 30 November 2017): AH/N008464/1: Award: GBP80,291: Julian, R., (Leeds Beckett), (PI), & Bliesemann de Guevara, B., & Furnari, E., (Independent Researcher: USA, Project Consultant), (Co-I's).

Awards
3.6 Welsh Crucible/Learned Society of Wales Award for the Best Collaborative Welsh Crucible Project, 2011-2015.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Bliesemann de Guevara's research had a direct beneficial impact upon the work of NP in Myanmar.

In Myanmar, 8.3 million people live amidst violent conflict and displacement. Knowledge about these communities' conflict experiences is essential to the needs-based programming of humanitarian INGOs offering unarmed protection. Gaining this knowledge is difficult, however, due to the Burmese authorities' access restrictions, low levels of trust after decades of military dictatorship and war, and entrenched power dynamics in local communities which can lead to the marginalisation of some local voices. In consultation stage, NP Myanmar staff had raised concerns about their limited physical, linguistic and cultural access to beneficiary communities to understand conflict experiences and protection needs, and the potentially negative practical effects of this on effectively training local unarmed civilian protection actors. Adopting the methods designed through Bliesemann de Guevara's research enabled them to address these problems in an effective manner.

The findings of the AHRC-funded project were shared with NP Myanmar during meetings in Yangon between 2017 and 2019. NP staff were also trained in the use of *DrawingOut* at a workshop in Bangkok in 2019. To support the dissemination and share experiences and findings, a booklet "Like a Shady Tree in Trouble: Experiences of War and Hopes for Peace of People Living Amidst Violent Conflict in Kachin State, Myanmar" was made available digitally and as hard copy [5.1].

DrawingOut was subsequently implemented by Nonviolent Peaceforce in Myanmar (NPM) in:

- the "Resilience" project, with 35 community peace workers in northern Shan state, Myanmar [5.2; 5.3];
- project evaluations with representatives of eight Burmese civil society organisation (CSO) partners coordinating community protection work in Chin, Mon, Kayin, Kachin, Shan and Kayah states [5.2];
- an NPM internal evaluation with 10 staff [5.2];
- the "Imagine Women Leaders" project, with 80 women community leaders/multipliers across eight states of Myanmar. These women leaders subsequently used the method for peace work in their own communities, though the next project phase with a further ninety women leaders is on-hold due to Covid-19 restrictions [5.4; 5.2].

Further, the successful use of the method in Myanmar led NP to also adopt it in a project evaluating the role of unarmed civilian ceasefire and conflict monitors in Mindanao, Philippines, in 2019. Similar to Myanmar, NP's work in Mindanao was affected by access restrictions, low community trust levels after decades of violence, and a systematic marginalisation especially of women and youth. Here, the adoption of the method has to date benefitted NP's work with 54 CSO representatives and community beneficiaries [5.5].

The adoption of the method by NP had three main beneficial impacts on its civilian protection practices:

1. Enhancing NP's conflict understanding and programming practice
All consulted NPM staff confirmed that implementing the *DrawingOut* method enhanced the INGO's knowledge about the violent conflicts in Myanmar by unearthing deeper, more authentic and more sensitive information more quickly [5.6]. NMP's Country Director reports: *'The advantage of getting…directly the information from the beneficiary is that you get it as it is. … [W]ith drawings you get that'* [5.4]. The Programme Director explains that the method enabled NPM staff to ask more relevant questions [5.7].

This enhanced information gathering was enabled by the method's ability to overcome language and cultural barriers amongst Myanmar's ethnic groups*: 'When you're trying to communicate*

with people with different ethnicity, different race, different cultural background…you will miss so much'; drawing helps *'pick[ing] up issues that people don't even know are issues'* [5.4]. For a Protection Officer, the method also enhanced NPM's ability to convey conceptual meanings: *'[I]n Myanmar there is no…word for resilience. […] But when we draw, they get that concept'* [5.2]. Drawing was experienced as 'a universal language' [5.2].

The method also increased the readiness and ease of NPM's Burmese interlocutors to share information. This advantage over other methods of social inquiry was already fed back to the project's research workshops; a participant from a violence-affected community related:
> *'I had many things that I was afraid of, because of family, because of environment, because of war. […] I fully participated in Yesterdays discussion and what I reflected myself was that I had never had a chance to express things inside my mind. Now I have got the chance to express [them]…'* [5.8]

NP staff confirmed this*: '[A]rt has something that helps you to open up more, and when you're drawing there's…more subconscious things that come to your mind…so I think it's easier for them to reflect'* [5.3]. The NPM Country Director summarises*: '[drawing] really became a way for us to, to comfortably get participants to be very open and to own the information that they were sharing in a way that makes them comfortable'* [5.4]. Drawing was also more inclusive as it enabled sensitive experiences to be expressed: *'[T]hose difficult, complicated questions that don't have a black and white answer are really well articulated when it's a drawing exercise'* [5.4]. It also enabled more open information sharing: *'[S]ince the moment that we held the workshop…they're drawing and they're open and explaining what they are feeling, that builds trust'* [5.3].

All NP staff reported that the method gave them better conflict understanding, which better tailored NP programming and practice to community contexts and needs [5.6]. As an NPP Project Researcher confirms, the outcome is *'a programme that's reflective of how people at the local community level see it to be working for them'* [5.5].

2. Strengthening local ownership of protection practice
The great majority of NP staff observed that the method strengthened local ownership of the peace process, improved inclusion and equality, and levelled power differentials in NP engagements with, and among, partners [5.6]. *DrawingOut* enabled diverse participants to set the agenda in engagements with NP and each other, which amplified marginalised voices and levelled power differentials: *'[T]he person who is drawing is the lead in determining what the information [is] and how they want to share it'* [5.4]. An NPP Project Researcher confirms that participants were *'more empowered to speak up, especially women and young people who are basically unseen and unheard in traditional Muslim societies and communities'* [5.5].

The workshop facilitator of the original research reported that the method empowered marginalised groups. With regard to ethnic and socio-economic differences she observed that the: *'majority tribe could listen to minority tribe's story, and also the educated man…had time to listen to very poor villagers…'* [5.9]. Confirming this, an NPM project officer relates: *'[T]he refugee people, they want to speak, they want to share their stories but no one['s] there to listen [to] their voices. So, this drawing, when they are explaining their feeling, their emotion, they feel empowered'* [5.2].

The method created ownership amongst those trained, which further levelled power and improved inclusion and equality amongst participants: *'[T]he advantage of something like drawings…is that it is actually an enabler for the [local] partner to be centre…, it really makes them central to the work that we are doing'* [5.4]. This helped NP to better and more inclusively implement its core principle of the primacy of local actors in its protection practice [5.3].

3. Enhancing trust and collaboration between diverse local partners
A majority of NP staff observed that the method enhanced trust and communication between NP's partners, which enabled new local collaborations for protection and peace [5.6].

NPM used *DrawingOut* in trainings and workshops with partners from geographically and ethnically different, and often antagonistic, states and regions. This improved communication and inclusion and generated an '*opening of how people communicate, human being to human being*' against a background of decades of violent conflict and military dictatorship, which gave '*the opportunity for people to reflect and talk about [difficult questions] and challenge each other*' [5.4]. For NPM staff, '*because of the conflict most ethnic groups, they don't really associate for 10 years, or for 5 years. So…they don't try trust each other. They need some time to build trust, but the drawing when they found…commonalities, there they can [engage in] trust building and relationship building among themselves also*' [5.2].

Similarly, in the Philippines the *DrawingOut* method improved communication, inspiring participants 't*o listen to one another and…to build friendship…and to rebuild the connection*' [5.5]. An NPP Project Researcher reports: '*sometimes when there's conflict, when there's war, the synergy [between people] breaks and it's a good process to rebuild and strengthen that connection using this methodology*' [5.5].

By establishing trust and communication among different Burmese partners, the method enabled joint visions for change and action. The NPM Country Director reports that the method enabled participants to '*start seeing that there's a sense of togetherness, having similar goals, having similar needs…going through the same violations really and wanting to come up with very similar solutions to deal with that. […] And then…bypassing gender or bypassing age, bypassing ethnicity, bypassing even geographical areas, how can they start working together*' [5.4].

NP's adoption of the method co-developed by Bliesemann de Guevara benefitted members of conflict-affected communities by improving NP's work with eight partner organizations and approximately 170 multipliers among protection and peace workers, civil society organizations and beneficiaries.

To expand the scope and significance of these impacts, the NPM Country Director has planned to employ the method across all NPM projects, when the Covid-19 situation allows, and considers their Burmese local partners' new willingness for collaboration among themselves far-reaching in terms of future protection and peace work:

> '*Once there's empathy and understanding, it actually becomes the foundation on how people respond in the future. The changes may be very small, but they incrementally make a big difference...*' [5.4]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 `Like a Shady Tree for Those in Trouble: Experiences of War and Hopes for Peace of People Living Amidst Violent Conflict in Kachin State, Myanmar', Julian, R., Furnari, E., Bliesemann de Guevara, B., Sue Mwan Phroe, Zon Sapal Phyu, 17 April 2020, Drawing Out. 24 p. Available at: https://drawingout.org/drawingout-used-with-victims-of-violent-conflict-in-myanmar/
5.2 Protection Officer, Nonviolent Peaceforce Myanmar (NPM), 10 July 2020.
5.3 Protection Officer, Nonviolent Peaceforce Myanmar (NPM), 14 April 2020.
5.4 Country Director, Nonviolent Peaceforce Myanmar (NPM), 16 & 19 June 2020.
5.5 Researcher, Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines (NPP), 29 June 2020.
5.6 Statistics summary of evidence.
5.7 Programme Director, Nonviolent Peaceforce Myanmar (NPM), 8 May 2020.
5.8 Male participant's statement, project drawing workshop in Kachin state, 25 to 27 May 2017.
5.9 Minutes, Raising Silent Voices project conversation, 15 July 2017.