



## **Brief: The Role of Psychosocial Support in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation**

21 September 2018

Felm together with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation organised a seminar on the Role of Psychosocial Support in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation. The objective of this seminar was to deepen the understanding of how psychosocial support (PSS), the approach and methods, could be integrated in a more systematic and comprehensive way into peace and dialogue processes and post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation.

### **Theory of Psychosocial Support in Peacebuilding**

#### **“In the End No Winners, No Losers”, Psychosocial Support in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation for Conflict Affected Societies: Research Findings and Recommendations**

*Dr. Anne Kubai & Ms. Kathy Angi, Felm*

Here we outline the seminar’s outlook on theoretical ideas concerning psychosocial support (PSS) in peacebuilding context and their relation to each other. In the forthcoming work of Anne Kubai and Kathy Angi on PSS in the peacebuilding – both on theoretical reflections and practical efforts in Colombia, Nepal and Syria – the main research findings were presented. It was stressed that the exposure to conflict poses significant risks to mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of conflict affected population. Sources of suffering are grounded in socio-historical contexts of human rights violations. Armed conflict destructs the traditional family and community structures and disrupts daily lives and normal routines. Displacement, devastation of economic infrastructure and livelihoods have psychological and social consequences for the wellbeing of conflict affected individuals, families and communities. Therefore, a multisectoral and long-term approach is needed for reconstruction of a safe, democratic and economically viable society. Especially demand for justice is vast in all three research settings: Without taking into consideration the realities of the impact of conflict on societal, community and individual levels, this could lead to further mistrust and intergroup disharmony and pose a risk of continuation of conflict. It was also stressed that psychosocial interventions are still largely disconnected with peacebuilding and reconciliation. PSS

interventions are relegated to a secondary place, if not left out altogether and currently hardly any organization is doing PSS work comprehensive enough to impact peacebuilding in a fundamental way. More focus is needed in the future to strengthen the interlinkage of PSS and peacebuilding, both in theory and practise.

Children are of special importance in conflict situations, as they are a great lot more vulnerable to conflict's effects and trauma. There are many applications of PSS specifically for children varying in required resources and scope, but practical first steps for treating children with war-related trauma and PTSD are creating safe spaces and help them connect with adults and other children again. School, daily routines and more specific practices such as games that help children express and manage their feelings are useful. The findings will be presented more comprehensively in the forthcoming study.

## **The Nexus Between Mental Health & Psychosocial Support and Peacebuilding: A Presentation of Research Findings, Opportunities and Dilemmas**

*Dr. Marian Tankink, Consultant for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation*

To clarify the nexus between peacebuilding and PSS research, Marian Tankink delivered a presentation based on a literature review study that endeavours to build an integrated approach to psychosocial peacebuilding (PSPB) and preliminary guidelines for such activity. As for the review, one finding is that there is plenty of research on peacebuilding and PSS, but research rarely draws from both fields. The reviewed research is based in holistic and socio-ecological frameworks and concentrate predominantly on communal and/or family levels utilizing qualitative research methods. There exists a disconnect between scientific and practical spheres and a lack of governmental involvement and local ownership. Operationalizing collaboration, integrating training and teaching materials, creating new partnerships with organizations in other fields and more research are still needed. However, despite the lack of research, several typical characteristics in integrative approaches can be found. They often:

- are concerned with origin and effect of violence,
- work towards healthy human relationships,
- are interested in narratives of power,
- aim to restore trust and rebuild relationships,
- take health as an entry point to political transformation,
- view health as a social and ecological rather than individual matter,
- differentiate between individual and collective trauma,
- differentiate between experience sensitive and universal language and
- are concerned with human security in overall.

There are two underlining assumptions in the suggested PSPB approach. First, integrative approach is more likely to lead to sustainable peace, than separate approaches. Second, individuals or communities who have not yet processed their trauma are less likely to resist any pressures that may lead to subsequent cycles of violence. Approach itself is based in a holistic overlook that integrates the theories and practices of both fields. One key aspect to understand is that psychosocial

intervention is more than healing a trauma. Instead, it captures all the psychosocial needs of people including their daily stressors. It combines ecological and social capital frameworks in to a PSPB model, that incorporates psychosocial initiatives and peacebuilding initiatives through cultural framing and development activities while building on existing resources. The PSPB framework could be further refined with guideline topics, suggested by Kubai, Angi and Tankink.

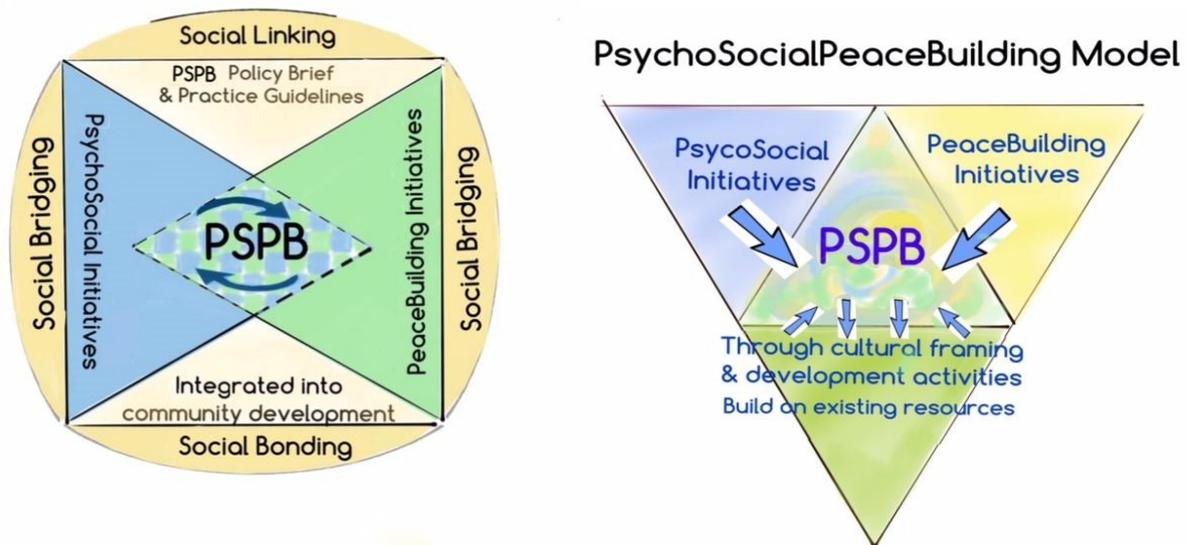


Figure 1. Ecological and Social Capital Framework.

## From theory to practice

After prior theoretical considerations followed a panel discussion on how the theory resonated with practical experiences of former presidential counsellor on human rights in Colombia, Paula Gaviria and general secretary of Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Kenneth Mtata.

### Colombia

In Colombia, there are around 8 million people that are victimized by the conflict, and around 3 million of them needs psychological support of some kind. Some 800,000 have received such help, which means that there is still a massive demand for PSS services. To a large part, reconciliation and rehabilitation of communities, that includes both victims and perpetrators, has not yet happened, and Colombia remains deeply divided country. However, Colombia has taken steps to decrease the division by the ministry of health and community efforts, which entails a process of collective operation with the help of 2,000 national leaders' network. Also, the peace agreement between the government and FARC holds a component of collective rehabilitation that strives for collective coexistence on both individual and collective level, linking both peacebuilding and PSS approaches.

The implementation of these efforts is sadly very much underestimated, and the PSS services are far from being at the centre of peacebuilding activities. Therefore, the most potent strategy to deliver

support for victims and rehabilitate the country is to strengthen and support civil society organisations and work through them. The general idea is to help victims go beyond their victimhood and recognize them as survivors who must act for themselves and not wait for others to do it in their behalf. In this process, the government, international community and NGOs can activate and provide resources for local and community level helping them to succeed in their efforts.

## **Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe had a long independence war with the British colonialists in the 1960's and 1970's that demanded death of about 80,000 people. In the 1980's violence returned in form of an ethnic conflict that resulted in deaths of about 20,000 people. Later, violence has spurred in violent seizure of white-owned farms in 2000 and in electoral conflict in 2008. To this day, Zimbabwean society has not progressed to the healing process of wounds caused by conflict, and oftentimes political figures have exacerbated the trauma instead of relieving it. Therefore, Zimbabwe has been in a "slow cooking" process, that has done little to help people with trauma to move forward. National Peace and Reconciliation commission has been introduced, but its angle has been to negate the accountability of the perpetrators, hence disregarding the victims in a fundamental way. This creates a sense of illegitimacy of state-led process in the views of the victims in the reconciliation process.

How should the reconciliation process in Zimbabwe be approached instead then? An important starting point is the fact that 86 percent of the Zimbabwean population spends at least an hour a week in religious activities. This makes the church a central access point for those who wish to address most of the population. The reconciliation process takes a lot of time, to which international NGOs tend to have no time for. Local actors, however, represent competences that are highly committed in the work. Church is such local institution, where people are known, and human capital is aplenty, though not necessarily most professional.

## **Addressing Personal Trauma**

In the seminar, the process to address personal trauma was addressed as well. First, help people with traumatized past to tell independently their own narrative of what has happened. Second, focus on responsibilities of different parties. The complexity of guilt should be acknowledged as people can be at the same time a victim and a perpetrator. Third, the perpetrator should go through a process of repentance. This aims at a new social contract, where newfound trust is being created in the belief that parties will not lean on violence in the future. Fourth, Parties engage in a process of restitution, which aims at a sense of compensation and mutual satisfaction. Absolute demand for justice or automatic amnesty will not suffice, instead the mutual understanding should be achieved. Fifth, restoration should be achieved. A new vision for future or a common project can help in national healing, since dwelling in the past is often unconstructive. Empowering people and helping them understand the importance of the reconciliation process is vital so that they *belong* in it. In terms of nation-building, human mind counts more than material aspects, such as infrastructure.

## **Reflections on Future of Psychosocial Support and Peacebuilding**

Many insights were put to the table while discussing about how to get forward with PSS and peacebuilding. Especially the integration of PSS and peacebuilding deserves some deliberations. It might not be all that realistic to fully merge them in to an all-powerful framework. Instead it could be useful to think about their overlap, where development, for example, also take part. Multi-sectoral approach and Robert Ricigliano's systems approach, for example, could provide a good framework of contextualising the overlap of different fields while emphasizing this overlap's necessity. It should be noted that what might cause confusion in the overlap of PSS and peacebuilding is thinking their relationship horizontally, when more accurately their relationship should be viewed vertically. Peacebuilding as well as development represent a larger and more abstract framework, whereas PSS represents a specific and concrete tool, that is a manifestation from the whole complex of peacebuilding.

In the context of this, there are several aspects to consider as for steps for future. First, better coordination and communication are the next step of getting forward. Information and knowledge need to flow between numerous actors and between top and grassroots. In the grassroots, communication should aim to build such narratives that are most attractive to majority of peoples involved. Second, we need to acknowledge that peacebuilding takes a systemic and long-lasting effort to be effective, and it should be comprehensive and well-timed endeavour. Third, importance of locality and conflict sensitivity are crucial part of any intervention. Context specificity and general guidelines are not mutually exclusive, but both are needed. However, general guidelines should be given subsidiary role in relation to context. Fourth, prioritization of resources is an area that requires constant thought. Here the central question is, how to define the magnitude of problems in hand and come around to efficient and efficacious allocation of resources. Fifth, as we are thinking steps towards the future, peace technology should be weighed in as an option to consider. However, it is important to remember, that peacebuilding and especially PSS require people to people interaction, and that peace technology represent only a tool to be utilized in human-led processes.