

# “IN THE END NO WINNERS, NO LOSERS”

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT  
IN PEACEBUILDING AND  
RECONCILIATION FOR CONFLICT  
AFFECTED SOCIETIES

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# ACRONYMS

ACT	Action by Churches Together Alliance
CARITAS	Catholic organization for Relief and Development
ELN	National Liberation Army / Ejército de Liberación Nacional
FARC	Colombia Armed Revolutionary Forces / Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo
FDCD	Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (Lebanon)
FGDs	Focus group discussions
GBV	Gender-based violence
IASC	Inter Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of Red Cross and Red Crescent
IELCO	Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRW	Islamic Relief Worldwide
KII	Key individual interviews
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MECC	Middle East Council of Churches
mhGAP	Mental Health Gap Program of WHO
MHPSS	Mental Health and psychosocial support
PS	Psychosocial support
SPA	The Seven-party Alliance
UNHCR	United Nation's High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UOSSM	Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations
WHO	World Health Organization

# PREFACE

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“Psychosocial support and peacebuilding” is one of the priority areas in Felm’s peacebuilding programme (2017-2022). We believe that relational and psychosocial aspects should be integral to peacebuilding from early on. Part of human suffering caused by violent conflicts is the massive damage to human relations and social fabric. Restoring the social fabric, building trust among people and communities as well as acknowledging and addressing the wellbeing of people, their losses and the emotional impact of conflict, are essential for sustaining peace.

The premise of commissioning this baseline study is that conflict transformation, social healing, and, eventually, sustainable peace become possible only when the psychosocial needs of individuals, families and communities are sufficiently addressed. Thus, the purpose of the research is to deepen Felm’s understanding about the roles of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in three different conflict contexts and situations where Felm works through local partners: Columbia, Nepal and Syria. Methodologically, wide variances among the three settings in cultural contexts, conflict stage and access mean that only tendencies could be identified by a team that consisted of two researchers, who faced an enormous task. As Hamber (2009) reminds us, political violence is always laden with cultural and social meanings. This point cuts across this study’s recommendations that emphasize the importance of contextuality and the need for cultural sensitivity and understanding in planning and implementation of MHPSS in peacebuilding.

In Colombia and Nepal peace agreements have been signed, but different challenges and obstacles characterise implementation. In Syria the conflict is still ongoing, however, after a long standstill, the recent outset of the work of the Constitutional Committee spurred the negotiations at the official level. Also, relations between MHPSS and peace

building (PB) vary among the case countries.

In Colombia the importance of MHPSS was well acknowledged in the peace agreement and psychosocial support was integrated at different levels of the process. In Nepal, the needs of the affected individuals and communities for MHPSS have in large extent been addressed by the civil society actors and organizations. Baseline study findings suggest a relative lack of positive results for PB related MHPSS in Columbia, as well as a lack of inclusion in Nepal. Studies about MHPSS in the context of violence and displacement demonstrate that due to the lack of appropriate tools, few attempts have been made to measure the results of easily-accessible psychosocial activities (GIZ 2018). This is compounded by people’s greater mobility in the context of displacement, which makes long-term analyses more difficult (ibid) and by changes in the conflict cycle. Thus, it is difficult to estimate to what extent lapses from peace to atrocities have to do with less than adequate addressing of the MHPSS needs of the affected populations, comparing to other factors. In the Syrian context, some – albeit not by any measure enough – MHPSS services are being provided by various actors in different parts of the conflict geography as well as in the neighbouring refugee host countries, but psychosocial dimensions and effects of the war have at least not publicly been addressed in any attempts by external mediators to broker peace among the conflicting parties.

Contemporary peacebuilding architecture is characterized by complexity that requires adaptability and innovation from peacebuilding actors, as the environments of peacebuilding are disorderly, irregular and unpredictable. Complexity theory applied to the social world is looking at social behaviour and relations that are relevant to peacebuilding (Brusset, de Coning, Bryn, 2016). It is increasingly acknowledged that peacebuilding is about influencing the behaviour of social systems

(the patterned network of relationships constituting a coherent whole that exists between individuals, groups, and institutions) that have been affected by conflict (ibid). The systems thinking, while not providing magic new formulas in peacebuilding, can help us to have a more flexible and adaptive structure in working with complex issues. Systems thinking urges, instead of focusing on international actors in peacebuilding, a shift in power toward local agents. Peacebuilding challenges are borne of multiple causes and therefore solutions most likely require multiple actors and issues, all engaged simultaneously. If we want to be able to transform complex violent conflicts that negatively impact millions of people worldwide, we need to become better at understanding and working with conflict that in essence is the human condition, part of human existence (see Leroux-Martin and O'Connor, 2017). If relational and psychosocial aspects were better integrated into peacebuilding, perhaps this could also help peacebuilders to understand the complexity of the field through a new lens as well as to respond to conflicts in new ways that would improve the longer term results of peacebuilding.

Peace processes on the “top level” – or track one – often concentrate on bargaining deals between elites both at national and local levels and on the sharing of power and resources, with the focus on ending the violence in the first place. Questions concerning relational and psychosocial aspects of conflict including reconciliation are pushed to the future, waiting for the “right time”, usually due to the political reasons and sensitivities, but perhaps also because the conflicting parties may not have the tools and methods to deal with emotional, psychological and social dimensions of peace processes. However, finding ways to address the relational and socio-emotional issues, even in track one official peace processes, is necessary as ignoring them often means that peace will not be built on a just and sustainable foundation. Therefore, the findings and recommendations of the baseline study may be seen as first steps in developing an evidence-informed guiding framework for Felm’s peacebuilding work, which focuses on political (dialogue) processes, about how to bring MHPSS into political processes for building peace.

Despite the initiatives and recommendations by researchers and practitioners (e.g. Hamber 2009, special issue of *Intervention* 2017, Bubenzer and Tankink 2015, Gallagher and Hamber 2015, Tankink and Otto 2019) to consider and address MHPSS needs in the context of peacebuilding, in practice the linking of the two fields still remains in its early stages, especially in national peace processes.

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is defined in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for MHPSS in Emergency Settings as “any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder”. The term “psychosocial” emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the psychological aspects of our experience and behaviour, and our relationships within a specific context. From this perspective, mental health can be understood as “a dimension of relations between persons and groups more than as an individual state” (Hamber & Gallagher, 2015, p. 3) and MHPSS-focused approaches as seeking to preserve and improve people’s psychosocial wellbeing, and prevent and counteract mental disorders (GIZ 2018).

Integration of mental health and psychosocial support into peacebuilding goes further than “multi-layered approach to mental health and psychosocial approach”, which means integrating MHPSS into sectors with primary aims other than the enhancement of mental health and psychosocial support (see Horn et al. 2016). The findings of this report suggest that in none of the three country cases are MHPSS needs seen as life-saving primary needs either by

practitioners or donors. While it may be the case that MHPSS needs should not be prioritized as life-saving, evidence and research prove that abated mental health and psychological well-being may lower, for example, cognitive skills of the affected individual so that s/he cannot benefit from services in those sectors that are considered life-saving in emergencies (e.g. WASH). As stated earlier in this text, peace agreements can be, and almost without exceptions are, brokered without taking MHPSS issues into account. However, sustainable peace requires transformation on individual and community levels. In societies where protracted atrocities have taken place and individuals and communities have been targeted by (sometimes extreme and protracted) political violence, such transformation is not possible without contextualized and culturally sensitive psychosocial support. Moreover, members of affected communities need to reach sufficient level of normalcy and psychological as well as psychosocial well-being in order to contribute and participate in peacebuilding and peace processes (e.g. implementation of the peace agreement).

The need to address psychological well-being of affected communities and individuals that have been identified, as well as the foundations of good practices that have been laid in other sectors relevant in emergency settings, have led to attempts to create psychosocial peacebuilding (PSPB) (see, Bubenzer & Tankink 2015, Felm and IRJ 2019). As part of this attempt, the Baseline Study is for Felm a concrete step towards developing a guiding framework for psychosocial peacebuilding with partners from both fields.

In Helsinki 8.11.2019

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Introduction

The title of this report, “In the end no winners, no losers” is a statement made by a survivor of violence in Medellin, during an interview with victims of the conflict in Colombia in July 2017. This statement aptly captures the convolutions of peacebuilding and reconciliation work in conflict affected societies.

The “baseline research” on which this report is based, was commissioned by Felm and covers three different conflict settings: Colombia, Nepal and Syria. The primary objective is to deepen Felm’s understanding of how psychosocial support, its approaches and tools, could be better utilized and integrated in a more systematic and comprehensive way into peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in complex situations, during and after the conflict, and ultimately bring peace, justice and reconciliation in conflict-affected societies.

### Aims and objectives

Briefly put, the specific aims as stipulated in the ToR of the study are to:

- a) provide a general overview of the psychosocial support (PS) interventions and mechanisms, particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations, and in peacebuilding and reconciliation work
- b) provide for Felm a solid foundation and relevant information to help in the planning of future activities on PS for victims of conflict, and peace and reconciliation work.
- c) make concrete recommendations on entry points for PS in Colombia, Syria and Nepal. Thus, the baseline study addresses the factors, challenges and examines the prospects for PS in peacebuilding and reconciliation work in all three cases.

### Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative methodology, gathering data from a range of primary and secondary sources. The authors carried out fieldwork for seven weeks in different sites in Bogotá and Medellin in Colombia; Kathmandu

and Dhading in Nepal; Beirut, Zahlé and Sidon in Lebanon; and Gaziantep in Turkey. A total 82 “interactive interviews” (Corbin and Morse, 2003) and 15 focus group discussions were conducted with different categories of research participants, including a number of Syrian refugees inside and outside refugee camps in Beirut and Gaziantep. Due to security challenges, it was difficult to get closer to the Syrian border, we decided to conduct two focus group discussions via skype: one with teachers in a school in Idlib and another with a team in Kilis. In addition, an extensive review of literature on psychosocial support in peacebuilding and reconciliation work was carried out. Observation in the various sites, such as refugee camps and projects for victims of violence and displacement that the researchers visited during the fieldwork, was an important supplementary source of primary data.

## Summary of the findings

As situations during and after the conflict unfold, problems such as poverty, social exclusion, unemployment and unequal access to education, inadequate housing and degradation of the environment, corruption, gender violence and a general lack of human security become aggravated. These problems have social, political, spiritual, psychological and material implications for the wellbeing of conflict-affected populations. There is no doubt that a psychosocial approach to the social and economic reconstruction of conflict-affected communities has direct synergy with peacebuilding and development work. The three pillars of sustainable development are economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion. Admittedly, peacebuilding has become intimately intertwined with social-economic development, gender equality, reconciliation and social justice. Hence, the link between livelihoods, traumatic experiences and psychosocial well-being is indisputable.

Political transitions in fragile and conflict-affected countries, including Colombia, Nepal and Syria, do not occur along a smooth or simple trajectory; the peacebuilding path is fraught with tensions, creating turbulence that affects the political and social fabric in profound and sometimes, unexpected ways. The main findings of this baseline study are summarized below:

1. Though psychosocial support is intricately linked to peacebuilding, justice and reconciliation, psychosocial interventions remain relatively disconnected from the wider process of social, political and economic recovery of conflict-affected societies.
2. Psychosocial interventions are often short lived depending on the time and scope of humanitarian intervention projects. Often, short-term result-centered projects, aimed at fulfilling organizations’ need for concrete results to provide to donors, can be counter-productive, unsustainable and can exclude the community from the process; and produce outcomes that do not truly benefit the community in the end.
3. Though it is important to design programs that target specific groups, such as women and girls, it is important to ensure that the implementation of such projects is not detrimental to other groups or implemented at their expense. For instance, in many places where there has been systematic rape of women and girls during the conflict, targeted support for female victims should also pay relatively attention to men and boys whose wives, mothers and sisters may have been violated in their presence, with the aim of making the men also victims of sexual violence through humiliation.

4. Reconciliation is not a linear process and the debate on which one comes first, justice or reconciliation, is a subject of continuing debate. Peacebuilding and reconciliation during and after the conflict is long-term work. The trauma generated by political violence needs to be addressed through a psychosocial support framework which underscores that peacebuilding is a multi-dimensional, long-term process, that involves work at the individual, community and societal levels. As a Syrian man put it, “you cannot kiss each other when the bombs are exploding and bullets flying all around you”, meaning you cannot build peace when you are in a violent conflict.
5. In spite of the duality of religion (it can be a cause of conflict or a resource for peacebuilding), we recognize the importance of religious beliefs and practices, especially rituals, for reconciliation, re-integration and psychosocial support for individuals, families and communities affected by conflicts. Also, religious leaders are invested with moral authority which they can use to support their communities during and after the conflict. However, they also experience the conflicts that affect their communities and that impact can hinder their support.
6. A general observation that applies to Colombia, Nepal and Syria, is that competing interests of justice and reconciliation pose a challenge for those designing and implementing peacebuilding interventions and reconciliation processes. Demands for justice that do not take into consideration the realities of the impact of conflict at the societal, community and individual levels, especially retributive justice, can lead to further mistrust and intergroup disharmony, which in turn, can impede reconciliation and peacebuilding work. The risk is that groups can revert to conflict even after signing a peace agreement.

## Recommendations

In the recommendation below, names of organization or groups for which support is recommended are not given for several reasons. Felm can select its partners either on the basis of their work and interest, or other criteria that may be determined after careful consideration of all the pertinent issues.

### Colombia

1. Fear and uncertainty generated by the implementation of programs and policies for the integration of former combatants has, in some cases, created considerable challenges for peacebuilding and reconciliation. It is therefore helpful to work with different actors to build trust among various communities/groups, and between communities and ex-combatants. This can be done through targeted multi-level activities identified by the local people preferably through collaboration between communities, local and international actors (such as Felm) and the government.
2. In the emerging post-agreement period, the transmission of memory is crucial in the development of new identities of citizenship that are key to peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. Therefore, it is important to support memorialization activities and create safe spaces for individuals and families to express loss, grief and mourn and come to a closure, particularly for the thousands who were forcefully disappeared.

3. It is important to continue with support for programs which work with all sides to create dialogue, communication and respect in order to bridge the gap between the victims and the perpetrators. Support can be given through such partners as local churches and organizations which are already involved with psychosocial support and peacebuilding work.
4. Faced with millions of victims and the widespread impact of the violent conflict, it is advisable for actors in Colombia to work more with the two bottom layers of the intervention triangle. Therefore, it is imperative to find ways to encourage community-based psychosocial support from a long-term perspective, with the aim of enhancing community participation in and ownership of the peace and transitional justice processes.
5. For the marginalized, including Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities, the “territories” are important for economic sustenance, social, individual and group identity, spiritual and psychosocial well-being. Therefore, it is important to support development of livelihoods and education programs, particularly those aimed at lifting rural communities out of poverty and addressing the problem of illicit drug economies. It is also important to design and support activities and programs for the recovery of cultural practices, dignity and shared identities, for instance the performance of traditional religious rituals for the victims of violence

## Nepal

1. When designing and implementing development programs and psychosocial support interventions, it is important to take into account that in certain societies there are concepts of wealth and well-being that are not related to material possessions, for example, extended family connections and support, a sense of tradition and living in harmony with neighbors, and the surrounding environment.
2. Some of the thorny issues in Nepal include the unresolved issue of the disappeared and acknowledgement of sexual violence during the conflict. To address these issues, it is important to support community-centered interventions that promote recognition, acknowledgement and truth telling that can help to address the emotional, psychological and social impact of conflict, for example for those who are still not able to mourn their loved ones or move on with life.
3. It is useful to support the communities to discuss gender-based violence that occurred during the conflict, and its impact on recovery and resilience after the conflict. This is essential for the efforts to address human rights issues through programs that strengthen democratic values and encourage gender equality. However, there is no universal understanding of these concepts; therefore, the people should be encouraged to discuss them and find approaches that are sensitive to their culture.
4. Design and implementation of program activities in Nepal should take into consideration the impact of the recent social and political changes on communities, for instance, the challenges for the participation in the local government leadership of people who are traditionally marginalized and

excluded (Dalits, women and others). Support for enhancement of skills in protection, leadership and mediation in such communities is crucial for the development of a truly democratic, peaceful and stable society.

It is important to integrate psychosocial support into traditional mediation in order to help resolve resource-based issues, power sharing and distribution of economic opportunities. These issues are linked to human rights, inclusion, participation and human relations that affect the social and material well-being in various communities.

5. Supporting and working with religious leaders of different traditions to create dialogue and “religious literacy”, for example religious leaders who are interpreting the scriptures in ways that help communities to address deeply entrenched harmful cultural practices, such as Chhaupadi and caste traditions.

## Syria

1. Psychosocial approach should be integral to Track 3 diplomacy in order to help build “social capital”, and mend broken relationships across the lines of division among ordinary citizens in local communities that have been fractured by armed conflict.
2. It is vital to support the work of organizations in Lebanon and Turkey which are working with inside mediators to create opportunities for dialogue, and to build relationships between different groups inside Syria.
3. It is important to support the efforts for integrating psychosocial and economic dimensions when designing and implementing livelihood activities, aimed at both income generation and the recovery of dignity for the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Turkey.
4. To address such key issues as the stigma attached to mental health and psychosocial ill-being, there is need to mobilize the communities to recognize the centers where these services are offered; and to facilitate access for those in need of MHPSS services.
5. Some people are returning to Syria; therefore, it is important to identify and support the organizations facilitating return. Often local leaders play an important role in their communities and, with support, they can help to bring together different groups and communities and thus create the space for negotiations on how Syrians can live together after the conflict.

# Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION

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## Background

A wide range of violent conflicts in the post-Cold War era is marked by the phenomenon of intra-state, inter- and intra-ethnic struggle, which does not fit well with the conventional definition of civil war. These situations have become known as “complex political emergencies” (Clancy and Humber 2008). Unlike conventional inter-state warfare, they target social structures and networks; and usually the result is the “destruction of the affected people’s political, economic, social-cultural and health infrastructures” (Mollica, et al. 2014). Complex political emergencies create a wide range of problems experienced at the individual, family, community and societal levels. Societies that have experienced complex political emergencies and violations are marked by an erosion of the normal protective support systems and fractured social fabric, which in turn increases the risks of diverse problems; this tends to amplify pre-existing problems of social justice and inequality. Hamber, et al. suggest that conflict should be thought of “as a process of destruction or deterioration rather than as an event...reconstructing society after armed conflict is equally a multifaceted process that moves beyond addressing individual needs” (2015:2).

As Hamber, et al. further point out, conflict inflicts “psychological injury to those exposed to that violence.” They have to deal with “a variety of psychological issues, such as ‘complicated bereavement reactions, substance use disorders, poor physical health, fear, anxiety, physiological arousal, somatization, anger control, functional disability, and arrest or regression childhood development progression’” (citing Murthy

2007:183). Therefore, peacebuilding - the creation of cohesive societies - requires a long-term commitment to addressing the causes and consequences of conflict through both structural and relational transformation (Lederach 1997). Peacebuilding aims at establishing peace and preventing the recurrence of the past or the emergence of new forms of violence through institutional building, reconciliation, political and social economic transformation mechanisms (Hamber and Kelly 2005). Thus, peacebuilding is intimately connected with social-economic development, gender equality, reconciliation and social justice (Porter 2007). Addressing structural and relational causes and consequences of conflicts requires an approach that places a premium on the significance of the participation of the affected populations and communities. Hence, a psychosocial support (PS) approach that is also community-based has become crucial to peacebuilding.

## 1.1. Objectives of the baseline study

This baseline study is commissioned by Felm and covers three different settings: Colombia, Nepal and Syria. The conflict situations in these countries are diverse: the Havana Accord signalling the start of a process to end conflict and the prospect of transitional justice processes in Colombia; the unfolding political transition in Nepal a decade after the conflict; and the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Turkey; the complex situation of the internally displaced people (IDPs) trapped inside Syria by a deadly war - provide

a unique opportunity for this baseline study on psychosocial support in peacebuilding and reconciliation. Also, Hamber, et al, (2015:2) persuasively make a case that “armed conflict and the political violence that flows from it is deeply contextual, and that in trying to deal with the impact of armed conflict, context matters.” From this perspective, we shall examine each case and draw conclusions that can inform the work of Felm in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The primary objective is to deepen Felm’s understanding of how psychosocial support, its approaches and tools, could be better utilized and integrated in a more systematic and comprehensive way into peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in complex situations, during and after the conflict. The specific aims of the study are to:

- a) provide a general overview of the psychosocial support (PS) interventions and mechanisms, particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations, and in peacebuilding and reconciliation work.
- b) provide for Felm a solid foundation and relevant information to help in the planning of future activities on PS for victims of conflict, peace and reconciliation work.
- c) make concrete recommendations on entry points for PS in Colombia, Syria and Nepal.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the baseline study addresses the factors, challenges and examines the prospects for PS in peacebuilding and reconciliation in all three cases. Hamber et al. (2014:8) provide insights, which we consider useful for this baseline study.

*... attempts to build an evidence base for MHPSS have focused on clinical MHPSS services (by mental health specialists and psychotherapists) ... Relatively limited attention has been given to the effects of broad community based psychosocial interventions on collective well-being and social connectedness. We believe this is an important issue that needs to be addressed. More specifically, can and do psychosocial intervention and practices shape long-term collective social process of peacebuilding and wider social change, including processes such as development and social transformation?*

We hope that a more nuanced analysis of data drawn from each country in this study will take the cue and engage with the question that Hamber et al. raise in the above excerpt. We believe that the title of this report, “In the end no winners, no losers” aptly captures the convolutions of peacebuilding and reconciliation work during and after conflicts, which ravage the very core of societies. This statement was made by a survivor of violence in Medellin, during an interview with victims of the conflict in Colombia in July 2017.

## 1.2. Methodology

The baseline study adopts a qualitative methodology, gathering data from a range of primary and secondary sources. The authors carried out fieldwork for eight weeks in different sites in Bogotá and Medellin in Colombia; Kathmandu and Dhading in Nepal; Beirut, Zahlé and Sidon in Lebanon; and Gaziantep in Turkey. A total 83 “unstructured interactive interviews” (Corbin and Morse 2003) and fifteen focus group discussions (FDGs) were conducted with

different categories of research participants, including a number of Syrian refugees inside and outside refugee camps in Beirut and Gaziantep. Due to security challenges, it was difficult to get closer to the Syrian border, we decided to conduct two focus group discussions via Skype: one with teachers in a school inside Syria, and another with a team in Kilis on the Turkish border with Syria. The latter group is involved in various activities inside Syria. Key individual and group interviews were organized with the help of program staff of Felm in Colombia and Nepal. In Beirut, Zahlé, Sidon and Gaziantep, we relied on our own contacts to organize key individual and group interviews. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, but if the participants did not speak English, we relied on translation. It was agreed that field notes typed with verbal consent of the participants would be sufficient.

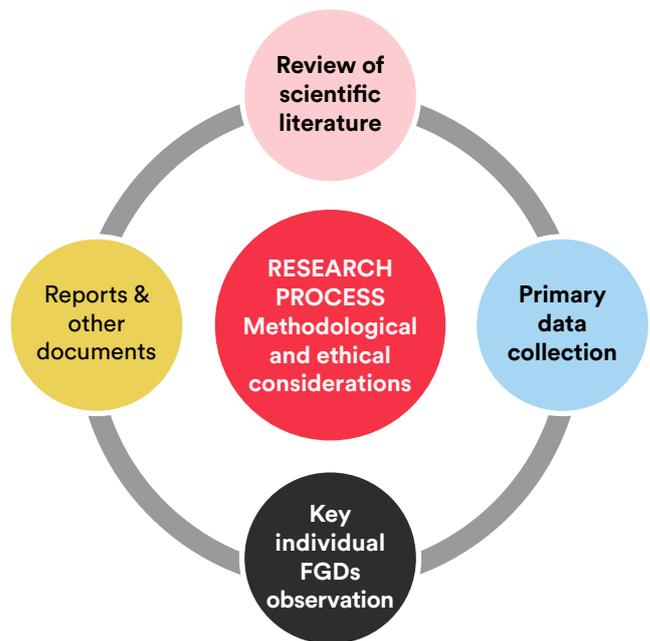


Figure 1. The research process.

To get an overview of the background of the conflicts, peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives, a number of sources including position papers, various project documents, previous needs assessment reports, annual reports, workshop consultations, and other material relevant to the study were reviewed. The report also engages with a broad selection of literature and theoretical discussions, with a view to drawing lessons and developing recommendations based on academic research.

We also visited different actors in each country – local, national and international organizations, which are involved in peacebuilding and reconciliation at different levels - to learn about their psychosocial work. A general review of relevant scientific literature was necessary to link the baseline study to current research on peacebuilding, reconciliation and PS in theory and practice. Depending on the situation, direct observation complemented other data collection methods, for instance, we conducted field visits to see peacebuilding and psychosocial activities and programs in different sites in Bogotá, Medellin, Beirut, Zahlé, Sidon, Gaziantep and Kathmandu. In

<sup>1</sup>See ToR Appendix 1.

consultation with Felm program staff and other contacts, it was possible to identify potential research participants. However, purposeful and snowball sampling proved to be useful as we built networks and established some rapport with different categories of study participants, including refugees. We started data analysis by identifying the emerging concepts and trends, to build an analytic framework for discussion and categorization of information and ideas. Thus, some themes would merge, “pulling others in and helping to make sense of them” (Smith and Osborn 2007).

## Ethical considerations

Considering that research permits were not procured beforehand; due attention was given to general ethical guidelines for this kind of study. Researchers observed the ethical requirement to inform the participants at the beginning of focus group discussions (FGDs) and key interviews that their participation was voluntary; and, that they could withdraw their participation without being required to give reasons and without prejudice. Researchers obtained verbal informed consent from each participant. Anonymity of individual participants was guaranteed, as well as due respect for participants’ opinions. A gender perspective was integrated into the research design and process.

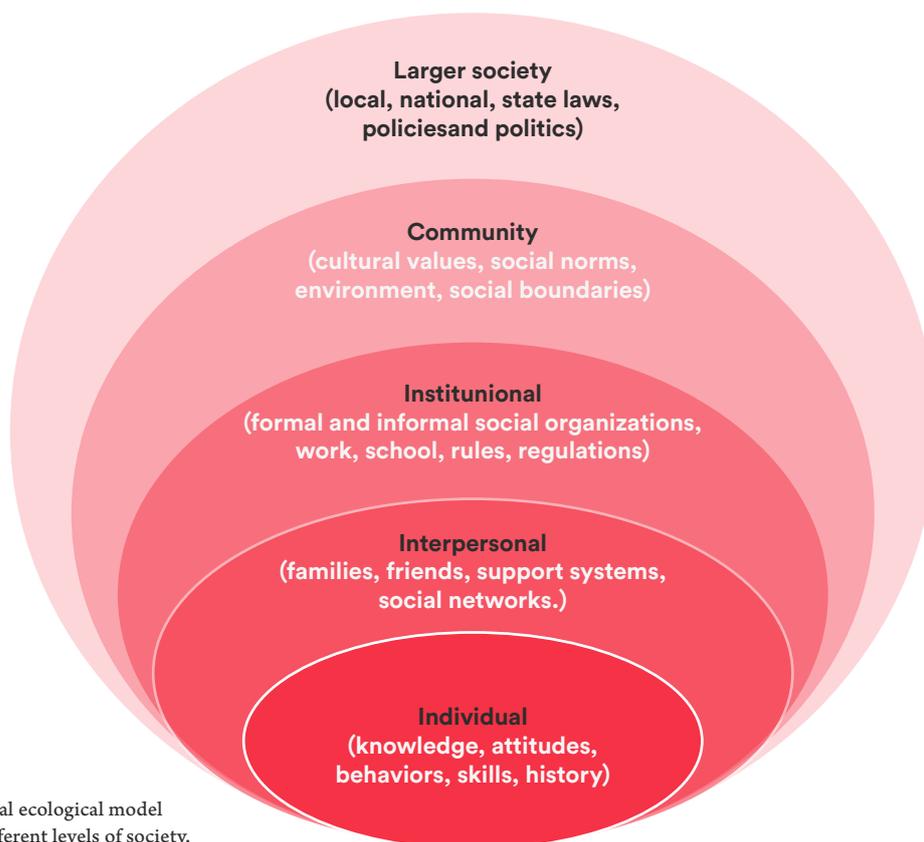
## Limitations

In Colombia and Nepal there was limited opportunity for the researchers to meet the victims; interviews were conducted largely with staff members of various organizations and government agencies. Therefore, the data from Colombia has relatively less input from victims who had direct experiences of violence. In Nepal, people with pro-government perspectives on peacebuilding and reconciliation work were not interviewed. The fieldwork was carried out in societies where a number of languages are used, even though

many interviews were conducted in English, we often relied on translators. The challenge with this was that on three occasions, the translators wanted to give a good impression on the work of particular organizations supporting the refugees, and the translation was skewed to achieve this aim. We decided not to use such interview transcripts for this report. We did not record individual interviews or FGDs because it became clear that using a voice recorder would make the respondents uncomfortable and even unwilling to participate in the study. Due to security reasons, some respondents were unwilling to reveal too much details about their work or the organizations with which they worked. The challenge with this is that sometimes important issues were discussed, but it was not permissible to use the data from such interviews and focus group discussion in the report.

## Conceptual framework

Many societies are collectivist, in that people define their identity in terms of their social relations and place the collective good above that of individuals (Triandis, 2001). This does not mean that their individual identities are unimportant - people usually negotiate multiple identities, the importance of which varies according to the context. In everyday life, the collectivist notion is manifest in a web of human relations – with members of one’s clan and ethnic group, and in people’s commitment to community affairs. Intra-state conflicts target this “human software” (to borrow from information technology sciences) of societies, that is, social structures and networks, and usually the result is the “destruction of the affected people’s political, economic, social-cultural and health infrastructures” (Mollica, et al. 2014). Mass displacement, attacks on civilian populations, massive losses of homes and belongings, amputations (as we saw in the peculiar form of violence in Sierra Leone, and more commonly as a result of war injuries), recruitment of



**Figure 2.** A social ecological model showing the different levels of society.

child soldiers and organized large-scale rape are salient characteristics of most intra-state conflicts. Therefore, to address the nexus of psychosocial support and peace building we shall rely on a social ecological framework that emphasizes the importance of social and physical environments.

The ecological model of health has its origins in the fields of psychology and human development. It focuses on the dynamic interplay of the individual and the environment, while an expanded model emphasizes the linkages and relationships among the different factors that affect wellbeing. Thus, an ecological framework helps us not only to organize our analysis, but also to identify opportunities for interventions and to assess whether the interventions produce the desired results (see figure 2). The contents of each layer are not considered as if they are static, they represent “ideas of different levels of analysis” (Higgins, et al. 2009).

There is no doubt that exposure to conflict poses significant risks to the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of affected populations; and sources of suffering are grounded in a socio-historical context of human rights violations (Lykes, 2001; Punamaki, 1989). Therefore, a more useful approach would be a holistic, culturally grounded approach to psychosocial support in peacebuilding and reconciliation – a transformative perspective in which healing is integrally interconnected with collective processes of social mobilization and transformation of institutionalized inequities toward the achievement of social justice and human rights (Wessels 2009).

*Peacebuilding supports the development of all relationships at all levels of society: between individuals and within families; communities; organizations; businesses; governments and cultural, religious, economic, and political institutions and movements. Relationships are a form of power or social capital (Schirch 2004:9).*

A transformative perspective identifies a holistic conceptualization of psychosocial well-being<sup>2</sup> that centers on risk, resilience, and protective factors which highlight the importance of community mobilization, culture, social ecologies, and social justice. In addition to that, our analysis of a psychosocial approach benefits from a social ecological framework, which addresses all levels of society.

As Chirico points out, it is important to bear in mind that the determinants of health, including social well-being, “are the range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors” (2016:13). At the individual level, attributes such as knowledge, behavior, attitudes, identity, economic status, values, goals and expectations influence behavior change. At the interpersonal level, social networks, social support systems, religion and customs can influence an individual’s behavior towards family, friends and peers. Factors at the institutional level include social institutions with rules and regulations that, for example, determine how individuals or groups access existing services.

At the community level, there are relationships among institutions, formal and informal networks, local leaders and a social environment which is often marked by certain boundaries.

At the larger society level are the local, national and state laws and policies, as well as global factors that shape the environment. For instance, political

emergencies and conflicts over resources at this level can destabilize communities and individuals and generate direct impact on the psychosocial wellbeing throughout the different layers illustrated in figure 2 above. A nested ecological framework acknowledges the centrality of the micro, meso and macro levels, and thus helps us to understand wide-ranging sources of risks, resources and psychosocial vulnerabilities in conflict affected populations.

### 1.3. Research settings: Colombia, Nepal and Syria

#### Introduction

The aim in this section is to provide a brief background to the dynamics which resulted in the need for peace and reconciliation processes in Colombia, Nepal and Syria. To situate the subsequent peace initiatives and psychosocial support in each context, it is necessary to identify the milestones of each conflict situation. Though it is not a comparative analysis as such, common characteristics can be identified across these countries: discrimination of ethnic and religious minorities and deeply entrenched social inequalities which can be traced far back to the histories of these societies.

#### Colombia

The conflict in Colombia began in the mid-1960s and became one of the longest armed intra-state conflicts of our times. It was complicated by an intricate illicit economy fueled by drug trafficking. Political exclusion and unequal distribution of land, power and wealth are some of the key factors behind the conflict.

On one side of the conflict were two main groups of left-wing insurgents, namely, FARC-EP (Colombia Armed Revolutionary Forces/Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo, created in 1964); and ELN (National Liberation Army/ Ejército de Liberación Nacional). On the other, were right-wing paramilitaries acting in opposition to leftist groups and the Colombian armed forces. By 1968, the official army in Colombia supported a number of authorized self-defense and paramilitary groups. In subsequent years, different self-defense and other groups emerged and morphed into violent armed perpetrators of massacres and targeted murders of social and political leaders. “The proliferation of armed groups coincided with a significant increase in the national rates of internal displacement” (Moreno 2014:153).

Throughout the conflict kidnappings, extortion, massacres, torture, forced displacement, executions etc.) have taken place. According to Colombia’s National Victims registry the conflict has left more than 8,5 million victims, a figure which accounts for more than 17 % of the national population. Of this large number of victims, more than 7 million persons were forcefully displaced.

The negotiations between FARC and the government of Colombia started at the Venezuela border in 2011. The timeline of the negotiations (Sugura and Mechoulam, 2017:3) present what seems to be a systematic progression as the parties tackled one bottleneck at a time, with the Colombian government in firm control of the process.

Following are some of the highlights in the peace negotiation process:

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<sup>2</sup>In its principles stated in the preamble to the constitution, WHO defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” For details, see WHO constitution [https://www.who.int/governance/eb/who\\_constitution\\_en.pdf](https://www.who.int/governance/eb/who_constitution_en.pdf).

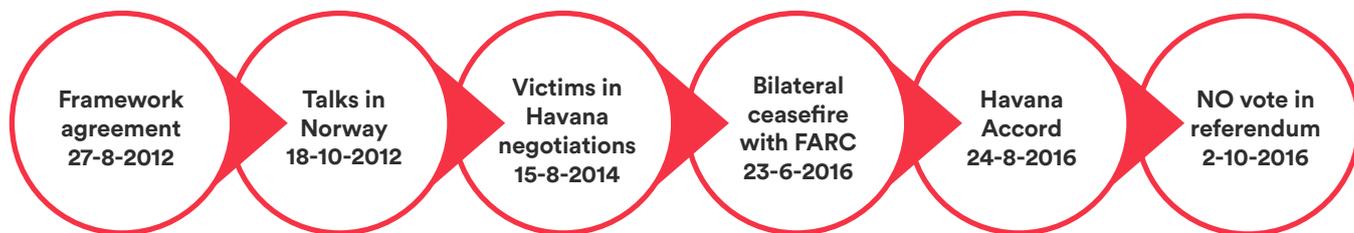


Figure 3. Colombia peace process milestones.

In June 2016, the Colombian government and the FARC rebels signed a historic ceasefire deal and the parliament unanimously approved the plan in November. This brought the country closer to ending more than five decades of conflict. However, the negotiations with the ELN have continued without a breakthrough, so far. Moreover, paramilitaries continue to be active and the level of violence has increased over the recent years. The integration of paramilitaries into communities also remains a challenge.

Besides huge losses of life, property and economic devastation, another major outcome of such a long period of conflict and gross human rights violations is a broken social fabric, the loss of trust among individual members of communities, and between groups. This type of conflict, which targets the core of the society - social relations, norms and practices, and culture in general – threatens both the society and the state. It is immensely difficult to resolve.

The adverse approach of the new Government towards the peace agreement has proved to be a huge challenge to the implementation process. Conservative Iván Duque Márques won the presidential elections in June 2018. He made a promise to his supporters that he would address the shortcomings of the peace agreement, and consequently its implementation has been hampered. In particular he has vetoed portions of the agreement’s transitional justice chapter. This has been strongly criticized both by the FARC political party and pro-peace supporters as the peace agreement has already been ratified by the Constitutional Court and the Congress. Furthermore, over the past year the number of internally displaced persons and cases of human rights violations have increased and created an environment that is apparently not conducive to the continuation of the peace process in Colombia.

## Nepal

The conflict in Nepal took place between 1996 and 2006. The main parties to the conflict were the government of Nepal and the Communist Party, the Maoists

(CPN–M). The causes of conflict were linked – though not exclusively – to poverty, lack of economic opportunity and underdevelopment, exclusion of marginalized groups from political power and horizontal inequalities between different ethnic groups (Selim 2015:104). Moreover, even though Nepal had succeeded in establishing a multi-party democracy in 1990, due to the intra-party and inter-party conflicts and frequent changes of the government, they had failed to address the myriad problems facing the common people.

Both parties to the conflict had their share of perpetrated human suffering with the death toll estimated to be between 13,000 and 16,500<sup>3</sup>. In addition, thousands of victims were reported missing and more than a decade after the conflict, nearly half of these are still missing. The conflict intensity peaked during the State of Emergency between December 2001 and January 2003, when the newly founded Armed Police Force (APF) was ordered to deploy against the Maoists. A ceasefire was agreed in 2003, but this proved to be short-lived. On 17 August 2003, 19 people – mostly affiliated with CPN–M – were detained and executed by an army patrol. Ten days later the conflict resumed.

In May 2005, seven political parties, including both factions of Nepali Congress (NC), and the Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), formed the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA). Its goal was to lead the country towards ‘full democracy and lasting peace’ (Thapa, 2017). In November 2006, the SPA and the Maoists signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This notwithstanding, the Madhesi uprising in 2007 opposed what they saw as exclusion in the new interim constitution. In the following year, the first national Constituent Assembly was elected, and the Maoists became the largest party.

The CPA set three broad tasks: socio-political transformation, integration and rehabilitation of the Maoist combatants and justice for the victims of human rights violations, all of which were important parts of the peace process. Integration of Maoists was a rather straightforward endeavour, while socio-

<sup>3</sup>Madhav, J. and Pyakurel, 2015. Kathmandu Post 21.11.2018.

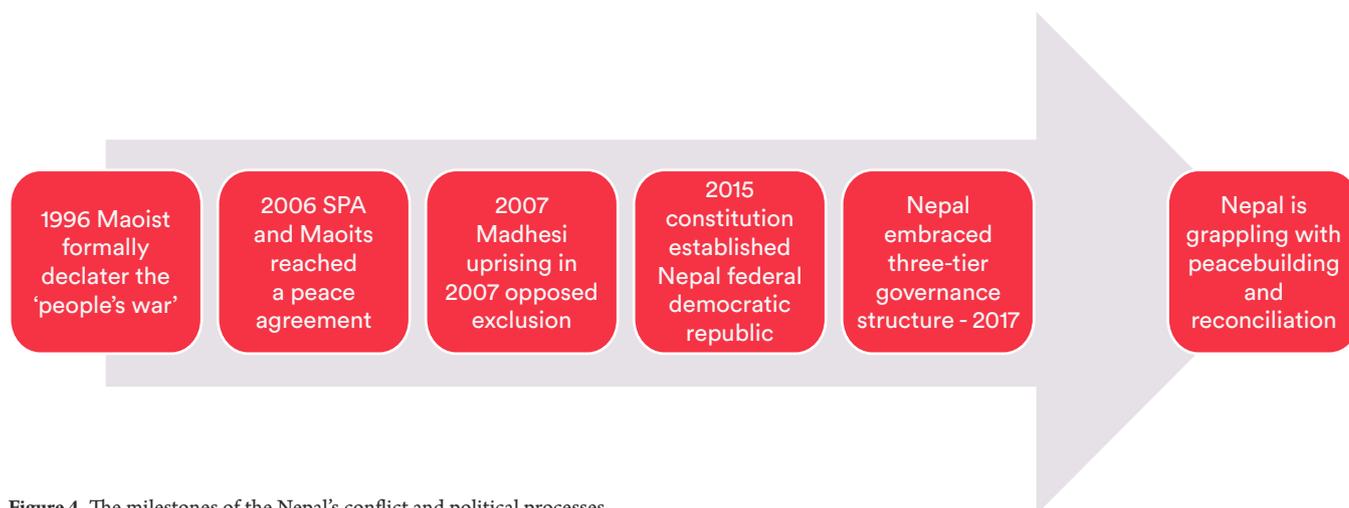


Figure 4. The milestones of the Nepal’s conflict and political processes.

political transformation gradually moved forward with the new constitution. Justice for victims, however, was relatively left behind.<sup>4</sup> Even though the drafting of bills for the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) was rather prompt, it took more than seven years to approve them. The commissions were not established until February 2015; and with about 60 000 filed complaints of rights violations to address, they continue face serious challenges in fulfilling their mandate.

In the 2017 elections Nepal embraced a three-tier governance structure at local level, provincial assembly and federal parliament. The demand for federalism was motivated by the desire for inclusion and “if one had to identify the central leitmotiv of Nepal’s political discourse over the past decade or more, the idea of inclusion would certainly be the one” (Thapa 2017:6). More than ten years after the conflict and in a new constitutional dispensation, Nepal is grappling with the challenges and prospects of peacebuilding; and the social-political reconstruction of communities fractured by conflict and fraught with deeply embedded cultural, religious and social inequalities.

## Syria

The war in Syria has its roots in “long-standing political, religious and social ideological disputes, economic dislocations from both global and regional factors” (Gleick 2014: 338) which found a vent in the wave of political unrest that came to be known as the ‘Arab Spring’, when peaceful popular uprisings toppled president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. Up until the conflict started in 2011, Syria was a lower-middle country with a per capita GNI estimated at US\$2,090 in 2008, a population of 18.7 million - plus 1.2 million Iraqi refugees and migrants, growing at about 2.5% annually (World Bank, 2010). The magnitude of the human and material cost of the unrest that started in Syria as a protest and later became a civil war, is unimaginable. It is estimated that half a million people have been killed and over eleven million people have been displaced, thousands forcefully disappeared, tortured and suffered grave violations of human rights. A quarter of the schools in the country have been destroyed or used for shelter and therefore no longer fit for educational purposes; while over 450 hospitals have been attacked (Kawabat and Travesi 2018).

The Syrian civil war has generated the biggest population displacement of this century. Displacement is considered to be a multiplier of social and economic pressures undermining the stability of Syria (Gleick, 2014). It is not possible to imagine how the Arab spring might have unfolded in Syria without the involvement of other countries when the internal conflict became protracted and violent. However, the involvement of other countries in 2012 when, with the support of Iran, Hezbollah fought on the Syrian government side, infused the conflict with new dynamics and set the stage for others to join the war. In 2013, the USA became involved and targeted those fighting on the government side.

The following year saw the involvement of what was then known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), with their quest to set up an Islamic Caliphate (Musaruwa, 2017). At Syrian government invitation, Russia joined the war in 2015, and targeted ISIL positions. Soon it became an international war as all the big powers wrestled for a slice of influence in the Syrian conflict. China, which is not directly involved in the war, flexes its muscle at the UN Security Council vetoing any attempt to legitimize international military intervention in Syria. Recent analyses suggest that the Syrian regime, with the support of the main key players, namely Turkey, Iran and Russia has won militarily and gained control over most of the area of the state of Syria, though in the northeast the Kurdish groups maintain an autonomous self-administration. However, “tensions remain over the question as to who governs the constituent parts of Syria” (Meijnders, et al. 2019:10). In addition, the Syrian army is still engaged in an offensive to wrench Idlib, the last rebel stronghold and the surrounding areas, from the control of the various opposition groups. Hence the conflict continues, with devastating destruction and horrific suffering of the population. This is the background to the Syrian refugee crisis in neighboring Lebanon and Turkey that is briefly described below.

## Syrian refugees in Lebanon

The presence of a large number of Syrian refugees has been challenging for the Lebanese government and the host society. Lebanon does not legally acknowledge the refugee status of Syrians and entry visas are required of

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<sup>4</sup>Kathmandu Post 21.11.2018.

all Syrians before entering Lebanon. Their presence has increased competition for services, jobs and resources. Consequently, in 2015, Lebanon suspended a bilateral agreement that guaranteed the freedom to live, work, and conduct economic activities for citizens of Syria. The government adopted restrictive policies, in addition to a generally hostile rhetoric, that would discourage a prolonged stay of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Similar sentiments were echoed by a number of individuals that we interviewed, including political leaders apprehensive of what they described as:

*... the threat of demographic change as a result of a staggering 1.5 million Syrian refugees in such a small country ... we are well aware of the challenges of hosting Palestinian refugees, who have now become a permanent social, economic and political issue in our country with no change in sight.<sup>5</sup>*

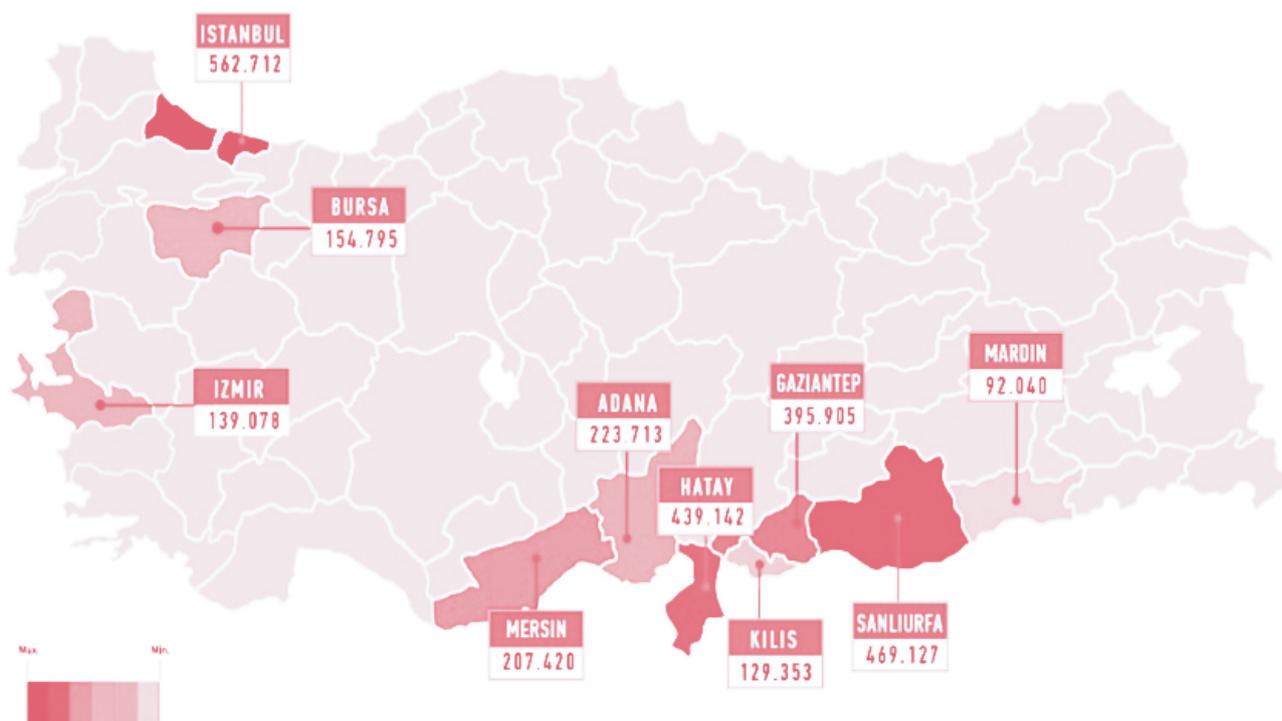
In April 2018, the Lebanese government rejected the outcome of the “Second Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” on the premise that the joint declaration focused on the voluntary return of refugees, and the need to ensure effective protection of refugees against the risks of forced evictions and returns. During the Lebanese parliamentary elections held in May 2018, one of the thorniest political issues was the question of what to do with Syrian refugees. Before the elections, the Lebanese president appealed to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to intervene in the Syrian refugee crisis and facilitate their return to Syria (Macaron, 2018). Evidently, Syrian refugees are trapped in a vicious cycle: they are restricted to only three job sectors, namely,

construction, agriculture, and cleaning. Work permits require a Lebanese sponsor and the payment of a large sum of money; therefore, they are difficult to obtain for many refugees who can hardly meet their daily basic needs. In addition, obtaining a work permit for rather lowly paid jobs, comes with the risk of losing UNHCR benefits and support. According to Human Rights Watch, around 74% of Syrian refugees aged 15 and above lack legal status, which further restricts their access to work, education and health care.

## Distribution of Syrian refugees in Turkey

Turkey welcomed millions of Syrians after 2015. The refugee population has shown a steady increase and by 6th September 2018, the statistics indicate that there were 3,555,464 Syrians in Turkey. The majority of Syrian refugees in Turkey are distributed in the following cities Istanbul, Sanliurfa, Hatay, Gaziantep, Adana, Merin, Bursa, Izmir, Kilis, and Mardin, in that order.

## DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE SCOPE OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION BY TOP TEN PROVINCE



Government of Turkey statistics showing distribution of Syrian refugees in the country.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Interviews in Beirut and Sidon, 20/4/2018

<sup>6</sup>Source: [http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection\\_915\\_1024\\_4748\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection_915_1024_4748_icerik).

# Chapter 2

# THE KEY CONCEPTS

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## Introduction

In this section, the key concepts of psychosocial support, peacebuilding and reconciliations are defined. The inter-relationship of the concepts and their impact on the programs for addressing the disruption arising from conflicts, and the processes of reconstructing the social fabric and restoring civil institutions for conflict affected societies are illustrated below.

### 2.1. Psychosocial support (PS)

The concept 'psychosocial' implies "the dynamic inter-relationship between psychological and social issues" (Williamson and Robinson (2006); and the continuous interaction and interdependence of the two processes. In other words, it is an:

*... interlinkage between psychological aspect of experience (thoughts, emotions and behavior) and wider social experience (relationships, traditions, norms and culture). From this perspective mental health can be understood as a dimension of relations between persons and groups more than an individual state. (Hamber et al. 2015:3).*

Psychosocial support aims at assisting affected communities to attain a stable life and integrated functioning; to restore hope, dignity, mental and social well-being and a sense of a normal life. The following definition fits well with our choice of an ecological conceptual framework.

The definition above emphasizes the interplay of the factors in the social ecology framework described above (the micro, meso and macro levels), and recognizes the contribution of environmental and cultural values to creating a sense of wellbeing. In their visual representation of wellbeing, Williamson and Robinson (2006) have identified seven domains of wellbeing and illustrated the interlinkages in the form of a flower. At the core of the flower is wellbeing and each petal of the flower represents a domain of wellbeing. These seven domains (biological, material, social, spiritual, cultural, mental and emotional) are equal in importance and though each one of them is distinct, they are clearly interlinked in intricate ways. The petals are surrounded by an outer ring which contains three key elements that are crucial for the achievement of wellbeing, namely, participation, development and safety. These domains also function at the micro, meso and macro levels to create an environment that allows the wellbeing of the individual and the community to blossom.

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## BOX 1. PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (PS)

PS aims to improve psychosocial wellbeing, which has three core domains:

- a) support and promote human capacity (strengths and values)
- b) improve social ecology (connections and support, through relationships, social networks and existing support systems of people in their communities)
- c) understand the influence of culture and value systems and their importance alongside individual and social expectations

Psychosocial wellbeing depends on having resources from these three domains to respond to emergency conditions and events. Challenging circumstances can deplete these resources, resulting in the need for external interventions and help to bolster and build individual and community psychosocial wellbeing (Williams and Kemp, 2016, p. 83). Source: New Zealand Ministry of Health (2016).

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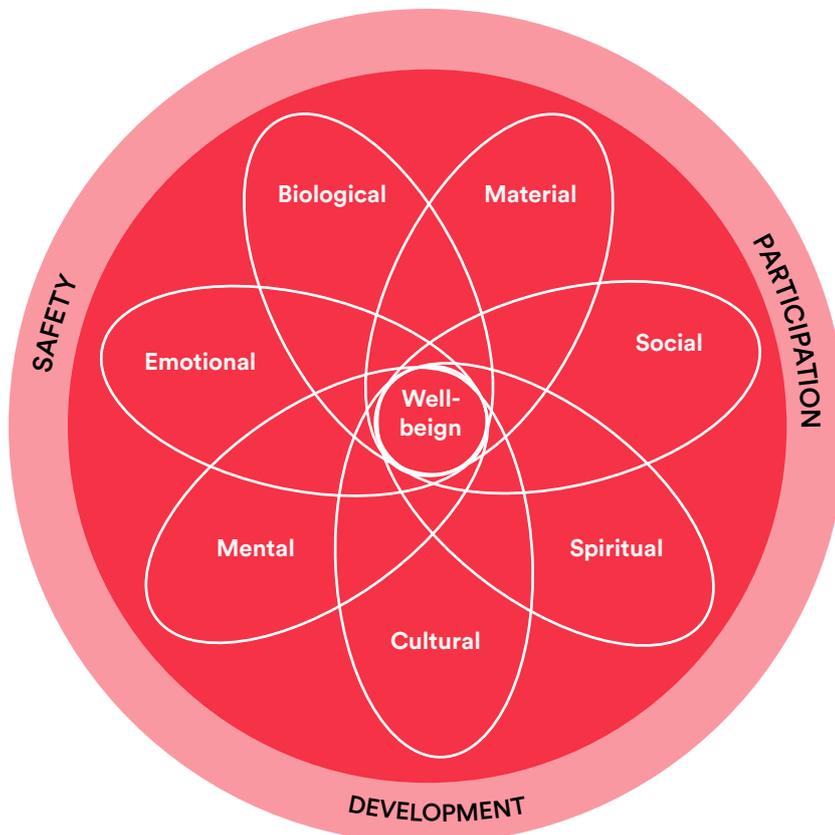


Figure 6. The 'flower of well-being'.

It is also evident from this physical presentation that wellbeing is driven by participation, that is, the engagement and agency of people. In conflict situations, social networks and relations that protect individuals and communities are often destroyed and the resulting disruption can negatively influence the participation of affected communities. It is here that psychosocial support comes in because it facilitates people's efforts and priorities in seeking wellbeing.

Though communities have the potential to draw on the skills and resources that they need to take control of their lives, often there is need to apply those skills through a psychosocial approach. Accordingly, strengthening the capacity of the various actors as well as communities to deal with challenging situations can significantly reduce the risk for people to suffer from long lasting psychological problems.

Essentially, a psychosocial approach requires taking into consideration the relationship that exists between the social conditions and the mental health of the population as a whole. Some of the important issues to consider are: how the emotional state of people is affected by the social conditions in which they live; and how emotional burdens can influence their response to other people as well as the social situation. In the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2007) guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, six core principles of good practice, which are presented in the table below, emphasize the need to be sensitive in addressing social and political conflicts in the community or the larger society.

#### **BOX 2. IASC MHPSS CORE PRINCIPLES**

1. Human rights and Equity (for all genders, creeds, ethnic and economic groups)
2. Participation (of affected and local people, assessment through planning, implementation and evaluation)
3. Do No Harm (being sensitive to culture, faith, traditions, local economy, conflict)
4. Building on available resources (local people, local supports, local government)
5. Integrated support systems (collaboration between programs, local and external)
6. Multi-layered support (different people have different needs, coordinate family and community support, self-help, groups and specialists)

#### **The guidelines also recognize that:**

Armed conflicts and natural disasters cause significant psychological and social suffering to affected populations. The psychological and social impacts of emergencies may be acute in the short term, but they can also undermine the long-term mental health and psychosocial well-being of the affected population. These impacts may threaten peace, human rights and development. (Ibid., 1).

Thus, the guidelines emphasize the impact of conflict or other crisis on the psychosocial well-being, peace and development of affected populations. At the local level, the principles can help to organize the support to affected families, communities, and individuals, be they victims or perpetrators of violence in conflict situations. At the regional and national government levels, they can strengthen the systems to provide protection and care for the population. Hence, these principles are in line with the peacebuilding goals of restoring civil systems of support and governance after the disruption caused by conflicts.

This "means that we have to think about the social context of violence and not only its individual consequences", but also "how the social and political context influences individuals. Such an approach has a direct synergy with development and peacebuilding work" (Clancy and Hamber, 2008:20). Admittedly, the trauma generated by political violence needs to be addressed through a psychosocial framework (Mayer, 1995) which underscores that healing is a multidimensional, long-term process that involves work at the individual, community and societal levels. In other words, an ecological approach that effectively addresses these different levels.

### BOX 3. AN INTEGRATED PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITIES TO HANDLE CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

- Integrating psychosocial support means being sensitive to psychological and social needs in all aspects of programs, including peacebuilding and livelihoods.
- Psychosocial support can be integrated into project activities that respond to the destruction of social relationships.
- Psychosocial support can ultimately reduce the risk of lasting adverse effects of the destruction of the individual and collective structures by traumatic situations that occur in social and political contexts.
- Community-based psychosocial support strengthens community structures by encouraging local participatory decision-making, working with and building on local resources.
- Psychosocial approach links the individual and wider social processes that are anchored in specific cultural, social and political environment.
- To enhance community resilience through psychosocial support in peace building, it is important to use local cultural resources and epistemologies that are familiar and culturally appropriate for the different ethnic communities and faith traditions.

A psychosocial approach is essentially communal and participatory, and therefore particularly suitable to addressing socio-cultural consequences of political violence. An integrated psychosocial approach allows a link between individuals and wider social processes, anchored ecologically in a specific cultural, social and political environment. We have learned from experience that most affected people will recover their ability to function in their daily lives once their community is stable and functioning normally. For instance, when schools are open for boys and girls and marketplaces supply food, people begin to get a sense of normal routine, which reduces the levels of stress, even when the conditions remain the same. Then, people are able to meet and talk and share information about their situation, and in the process provide support for each other.

An important point to note is that though every conflict situation is unique in important respects, when the sense of normal routine prevails people are able to improve their social functioning, and thus draw from intangible resources such as social capital, even during a crisis. These are signs of gradual change, which always depend on a specific context.

## 2.2. Peacebuilding

Though the concept of peacebuilding was known by the mid-1970s, it was not until 1992, when the United Nations General Assembly brought it to the international agenda in its report titled “An agenda for peace”. Then the UN noted “that post-conflict peace-building is a new and evolving concept” and recognized the need “to deal with the underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian causes and effects of conflicts in order to promote a durable foundation for peace. The assembly recognized

*“... also that the concept of post-conflict peace-building is aimed at the creation of a new environment to forestall the recurrence of conflicts, bearing in mind that each situation in which post-conflict peace-building may be undertaken is unique and therefore should be considered on a case-by-case basis” (UN 1992:4).*

The Assembly stresses that activities related to post-conflict peacebuilding should be carried out within a well-defined time-frame; and that post-conflict

peacebuilding be undertaken on the basis of agreements ending conflicts or reached after conflicts. However, in the academic discourse

*... the meaning of the term “peacebuilding” has become broader; it now tends to cover all activities undertaken before, during, or after a violent conflict to prevent, end, and/or transform violent conflicts and to create the necessary conditions for sustainable peace (Reychler 2010:4).*

Therefore, peacebuilding activities should be undertaken during conflicts, such as the one in Syria, with a view to negotiating for short-term goals like cease-fires and cessation of hostilities, to give room for creating dialogue that is needed for the establishment of long-term peace processes. This is important because, as Huyse and Salter remind us, “accountability, reconciliation, truth telling and reparations are the instrumental objectives that pave the way toward broader targets, thereby establishing a framework for the building of sustainable and effective democratic processes and institutions” (2008:181) which can promote sustainable peace.

There are a number of definitions of peacebuilding, but Spence provides a relatively more comprehensive and normative definition of peacebuilding that links it to psychosocial support:

*... those activities and processes that: focus on the root causes of the conflict, rather than just the effects; support the building and rehabilitation of all sectors of the war torn society; encourage and support interaction between all sectors of society in order to repair damaged relations and start the process of restoring dignity and trust; recognize the specifics of each post conflict situation; encourage and support the participation of indigenous resources in the design, implementation and sustainment of activities and processes; and promote processes that will endure after the initial emergence recovery phase has passed (2001:137-8).*

Peacebuilding requires sustained effort, constant negotiation and dialogue because as new alliances emerge, the risks of renewed conflict become real. Political transitions, especially in fragile and conflict-affected countries, do

not occur along a smooth or simple trajectory; the peacebuilding path is fraught with tensions, creating turbulence that affects the political and social fabric in profound and, sometimes, unexpected ways (UNDP 2014).

### 2.3. Reconciliation

Reconciliation has been variously defined in a growing corpus of literature, particularly after the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) appropriated the timeless concept of reconciliation by introducing new elements, in order to create a transitional justice process that was geared towards the specific social historical circumstances of Apartheid. Research about truth and reconciliation commissions that have in recent years become a common 'remedy,' has generated a large corpus of knowledge about peacebuilding in post-conflict societies. However, with the exception of a few case studies, relatively less attention has been devoted to the influence of PS on different reconciliation mechanisms. This is particularly important because each case of reconciliation is different in terms of the nature of the root causes and triggers of the conflict; and the specific circumstances, in which both the conflict and reconciliation take place.

#### BOX 4. RECONCILIATION

*"... reconciliation describes coming together; it is the antithesis of falling or growing apart. Reconciliation has a normative - almost a moral - aspect as well. It is the coming together (or re-coming together) of things that should be together... reconciliation connotes the coming together of things that once were united but have been torn asunder - a return to or a recreation of the status quo ante, whether real or imagined. For many, it is encompassed in the question as to how a society ravaged by war returns to some kind of normality when neighbors living sided by side have endured and perpetrated against one another crimes of an imaginable horror" (Daly and Sarkin 2007:5).*

Contrary to Daly and Sarkin's suggestion, it is not possible to return or recreate the status quo ante: for instance, life that has been lost cannot be brought back; limbs that have been lost can only be replaced with prosthetics; and people whose lives are shattered can only pick up the pieces and move on. Similarly, a fractured social fabric cannot be restored to its status quo ante, but new social relations can be created that can eventually contribute to repairing the social fabric or creating a new one. The case of post genocide Rwanda (in spite of its peculiarities), best illustrates that peacebuilding and reconciliation processes do not recreate status quo ante in societies devastated by conflicts. Reconciliation is not a straight forward process and the debate on which one comes first – justice or reconciliation – continues in a growing body of literature on case studies.

Daly and Sarkin raise the question of what reconciliation means in different circumstances and countries, which is relevant for our overview of the trend towards alternative forms of justice and reconciliation mechanisms. In the last decade, there is a marked interest in the use of traditional justice systems to respond to the atrocities of conflict, war and oppression in different parts of the world (Kofi Annan 2004), often employing indigenous forms of justice aimed at reconciliation and restoration of broken relationships, rather than the punishment of perpetrators. Peacebuilding interventions and programs are subsumed under the umbrella notion of transitional justice. Broadly defined, transitional justice involves "salvaging the truth from suppression or distortion, putting past wrongs right, holding perpetrators accountable, acknowledging victims' suffering, restoring social relations, and healing of individuals" (Ingabire, et al. 2017:241).

It is Bishop Desmond Tutu who first brought the role of religion in peacebuilding and reconciliation to prominence through the work of the TRC in South Africa. Traditionally, myths and rituals served to provide narratives of connectedness of those who shared them, which in turn, provided a permanent bond through generations. Nonetheless, the performance of rituals - veneration of symbols and respect for taboos, values and norms - functions as a double-sided blade: on the one hand, it can and does provide the basis for unity, identity and purpose, and thus contributes to a shared sense of community, which in turn strengthens social cohesion. On the other, quite often, the performance of rituals provides the

basis for exclusion of others, and in many cases, threatens social cohesion and peacebuilding.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of this double-sidedness, we recognize the importance of religious rituals not only for reconciliation, but also for maintaining social order, preventing the escalation of conflicts, enforcing positive conformity to established rules and regulations of public order and morality so as to keep communities functioning in a healthy manner. The point to note here is that traditional religious beliefs and practices are an integral part of peace and reconciliation processes among many communities in different parts of the world. Available evidence has shown that the role of religion in peacebuilding and psychosocial wellbeing cannot be safely ignored when designing and implementing peacebuilding and PS interventions.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.4. A Practitioners' perspective on psychosocial support and peacebuilding

The last decade has witnessed an increasing emphasis on crosscutting the PS into emergency sectoral responses. The guidelines such as those produced by the IASC reflect this shift and give weight to the importance of psychosocial support in emergencies, including conflict. However, a recent review of literature on current theory and practice in peacebuilding and mental health and PS (Tankink and Bubenzer 2017) revealed that the policy documents as well as other literature covered by the review, made no specific reference to the role of

mental health in the well-being of conflict-affected people. They assert that “the status quo is, by and large, that addressing post conflict mental health needs with PB (peacebuilding) infrastructure is not yet regarded by practitioners as fundamental to sustainable peace” (2017:8). Not surprisingly though, this prevails two decades after the link between peacebuilding and PS was acknowledged first time by the UN in 1998, when “Health as a Bridge for peace” was established by the World Health Organization as a framework for implementing programs in conflict and post conflict situations.

As Hamber et al, (2014) highlight, peacebuilding interventions for societies emerging from conflict are now common. However, research focusing explicitly on the relationship between PS work and peacebuilding is relatively limited (citing Wessels and Monterio 2006). Also, though the work of IASC has significantly promoted an integrated approach to community based psychosocial support (CBPS) in humanitarian contexts (see the intervention pyramid shown in figure 7 below), “interventions tended to focus on enhancing individual well-being through interventions that recognized the value of both the ‘psycho’ and ‘social’ components of mental health” Hamber et al, 2015:7). Thus, the need for an integrated approach focusing on psychosocial and peacebuilding cannot be over-emphasized. However, “the challenge remains to creatively link individual-family-and community-based interventions into a larger peacebuilding approach in society” (Tankink and Bubenzer, 2017:8).

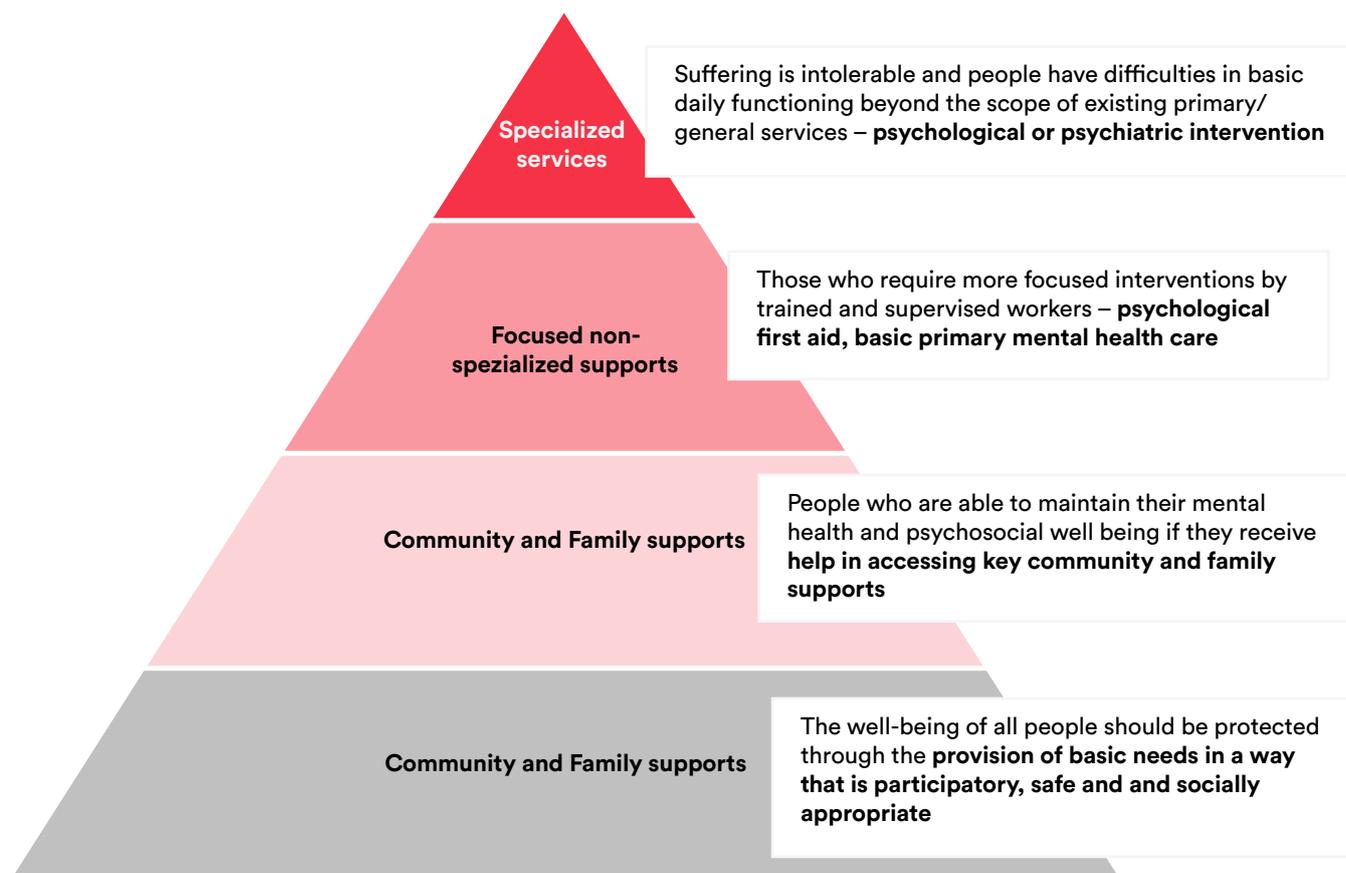


Figure 7. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2007) guidelines and the intervention pyramid.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>See the reference to scripture in the case of Nepal on page.

<sup>8</sup>This issue is further elaborated in the section on the role of religious leaders in Nepal.

<sup>9</sup>The IASC intervention pyramid has become widely accepted, even though community based psychosocial support is still not fully integrated into most humanitarian interventions.

# Chapter 3

# PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND PEACEBUILDING IN COLOMBIA

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## Introduction

This section focuses on the challenges and prospects of peacebuilding, transitional justice processes and psychosocial support in Colombia after the Havana Peace Accord which was signed on 24th November 2016. The agreement was signed between the government of Colombia and the biggest guerilla group – Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) to mark the beginning of the end of the long-standing conflict. It provided a roadmap path for Colombians to start transitional justice processes, which include the acknowledgment of the various types of victimization, some form of restitution, peacebuilding and reconciliation. Besides the challenges for the implementation of the Accord, the new government has continued negotiations with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and other armed groups, who are suspected of being behind the recent violent activities and insecurity in different parts of the country.<sup>10</sup> The negotiations with ELN started in Ecuador, but in April 2018 it withdrew its support

and the talks were transferred to Cuba. In January 2019 ELN carried out a car bomb attack in Bogota leaving 21 police cadets dead. Since then the negotiations have been suspended.

### **3.1. Building trust and moving forward after signing the Havana Accord**

Ending conflict and building trust between warring parties is usually a multi-pronged process, involving different levels of negotiation. The example from Colombia serves well to illustrate the challenges therein. After the referendum, FARC questioned its own trust in the government – whether the government would deliver its part of the deal. The implication of this uncertainty was that it increased the mistrust that was there at the beginning of the

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<sup>10</sup>For instance, in January 2019 there was an attack on the police college in Bogotá, in which 21 police cadets were reported to have been killed and ELN was alleged to be behind the incident.

negotiation process. This happened because the government did not seem to have worked specifically on trust-building before or during the negotiations. Indeed, that is what is likely to happen when PS is not integrated or ignored at the initial stages of the peace processes. In this case, the impact increased mistrust, which in turn, risked undermining the next step of the peace process. It was clear that “any deterioration in ELN confidence in the state would imperil the possibility of a peace accord with it in the near future” (International Crisis Group, 2017:20).

One of the key challenges after the agreement is the integration of members of the armed groups. In the following extract, staff from an institution supported by the previous government described the situation thus:

*This is a new scenario – we have to keep the individual and the new re-incorporation with FARC. We have to adjust the model because FARC has a collective interest. This is a big challenge. We have to strengthen communities because they are living with FARC in 26 containment areas. These communities need to learn how to live with FARC, to identify goals to work with FARC. At this stage, the state has said it will do this and that, but they have to talk with FARC and adjust to their interest – we don't know at this moment how to do that...there is no common ground yet... This process has several bureaucratic stages, they need to be careful and sensitive with trust-building because the agency has worked with their enemies (the paramilitary) and deserters. Trust is tricky...<sup>11</sup>*

A related issue is security among different groups after the armed groups have laid down their arms, creating a power vacuum in areas that they controlled. Other groups are moving into these areas formally controlled by the armed groups, FARC for instance. This calls for the strengthening of institutions and law enforcement to be able to address the resurgence of coca farming and encourage people to focus on the livelihood activities designed by the peace Accord to substitute drug and illicit economies. The arrival of new groups in these areas can pose a threat to the implementation of the Peace Accord because increased political violence is likely to affect the transition of combatants in the armed groups to civilian life.

Available evidence suggests that disarmament is unlikely to succeed if there is no trust between the parties concerned. Giving up arms creates a sense of vulnerability and insecurity for the armed groups and former combatants (‘what if there is need for protecting ourselves?’) if there are no guarantees for the safety of individuals and security for groups after the DDR exercise. As Hertog suggests, emotional, psychological, social and existential issues are integral to peacebuilding. They include attitudes, perceptions, values, expectations, desires, emotions, traumas, wounds, concerns, intentions, taboos, norms, beliefs, identities and memories (2017:279).

## Competing interests of justice and reconciliation

Here we illustrate the complex challenges of “cultivating peace” (Ware, et al, 2014) in the wake of violence on a societal scale, dealing with the social, political, economic and justice challenges as well as the psychological aftermath

<sup>11</sup>Focus group discussion, Bogotá, 28-6-2017.

<sup>12</sup>Remarks made by President-elect Ivan Duque during the televised swearing in ceremony on 7-8-2018 in Bogotá.

of largescale violence in Colombia. The violence that lasted more than five decades left millions of people affected in different ways: psychologically, socially, economically, culturally and historically marked by the conflict. Therefore, the aim of the Havana Accord is to end the conflict and pave way for peace and reconciliation processes at different levels, between the state and the various communities, the marginalized identity groups, the former armed groups and the civilian population including victims.

In the aftermath of the Havana Accord, Colombian society is struggling to find a balance between justice and reconciliation or between retribution and forgiveness. The peace accord has paved way for the perpetrators of atrocities to be integrated into society through peacebuilding, justice and reconciliation. However, at the individual and community levels, thousands of victims who feel that it is difficult to deal with the pain and suffering inflicted by the armed groups, oppose amnesty without some kind of retribution, such as prosecution and imprisonment before integration. These sentiments were echoed at the national level in the remarks made by the new president at the swearing in ceremony on 7th August 2018:

*We are receiving a country with many challenges, complexities and difficulties. Not only is it a country that continues to experience convulsions to violence, but also, one that has seen the exponential growth in illicit crops in recent years; and there are some people who are re-using the weapons of violence and want to continue persecuting citizens.<sup>12</sup>*

It is clear that even though the peace agreement was hailed as a historic end to the conflict, the violence has not ceased. Armed groups are still fighting for territory and the new government has vowed to overhaul the agreement. The new president is said to be opposed to political participation by members of FARC who have been convicted, unless they serve their jail terms first. It is said that he is opposed to the mechanisms of transitional justice. People are already alarmed by the use of drones to pinpoint and spray coca crops and destroy them. The question is how this situation will impact the various forms of violence that are still prevalent in the rural areas. Many rural areas witnessed a dramatic increase in violence in recent months after the elections at the end of 2016.

Again, the very concept of reconciliation presents another problem because in theory, the term itself can be interpreted in different ways and it can mean different things to different people and groups affected by conflict. In practice, reconciliation is inherently burdened with multiple layers: the national, inter-community and the individual. At the individual level, one has to reconcile himself or herself with a life indelibly marked by violence (Kubai 2005). Furthermore, reconciliation is “not in itself a univocal concept”. For some, it is an ideological device created in order to deal with past crimes and thereby face the future; while others use it as a means of resolving conflict. Yet for others, it is a means of ensuring justice for the victims of violence. Finally, it can be a method of coming to terms with the experience of pain, and /or facilitating the moral construction of a shattered society (Kaggwa, 2004).

## External factors determine the need for and timing of psychosocial support

The need and timing of psychosocial support is, at times determined by external factors. In Colombia, initially the most important issue was the recognition of the victims’ needs:

When the victims' rights were recognized, their access to the hearings was guaranteed, and they wanted to ask questions about sexual violence.

*They wanted to ask 'why' it happened. Human rights organizations carried out their work and started to sue in order to guarantee the victims some rights during this process. During 2004, a lot of work was done by organizations. The Constitutional court took a decision that it is important to guarantee the human rights for victims. The decision was the beginning of a dialogue with the state ... This was very important to implement the victims' law because the court set precedents...<sup>13</sup>*

A space of delimited time was established to those affected by the conflict through forced disappearance, recruitment, sexual violence, murder, stolen property, personal injuries and threat, to declare themselves victims in order to receive benefits. Therefore, it was important to establish a registry for people to register themselves as victims. In this particular case, it was necessary to resolve the controversy surrounding the scope of the law on reparations, the definition of victims and the peace process, because recognizing victims required acknowledging different perpetrators including FARC, ELN, paramilitaries, as well as government forces. Decisions had to be taken and criteria established regarding the support that could be given to the different categories of victims in view of the prevailing circumstances and the scope of the law.

#### **BOX 5. SUMMARY OF ISSUES RELATED TO THE SCOPE OF THE LAW ON REPARATIONS**

- a) *Indemnities became a big challenge because it was not only the money that was needed;*
- b) *It was necessary to consider how PS dealt with the emotional consequences produced by victimization;*
- c) *Restitution focused only on land;*
- d) *Dealing with memory and symbolic reparations:*
  - *recognizing and acknowledging what had happened during the conflict;*
  - *ending denial by the government;*
  - *taking important measures such as searching for missing people;*
  - *asking for forgiveness by the state and guaranteeing non-repetition*

The first challenge with the implementation of these interventions is sustainability in view of the magnitude of the demands for support by millions of victims estimated to be more than 20% of the total national population of 40 million. It should also be born in mind that in many cases, there were no mechanisms to provide support to victims who were required to prove their victimhood during the registration process, which often brought back traumatic memories of direct experience of violence. These disparate events and processes occur at many times over many years and trigger psychological reactions, hence the need for services to be available beyond the immediate aftermath of the crisis. It is also important to remember that the tension between the individual experience and the collective narratives causes great pain, sometimes triggering the need for support.

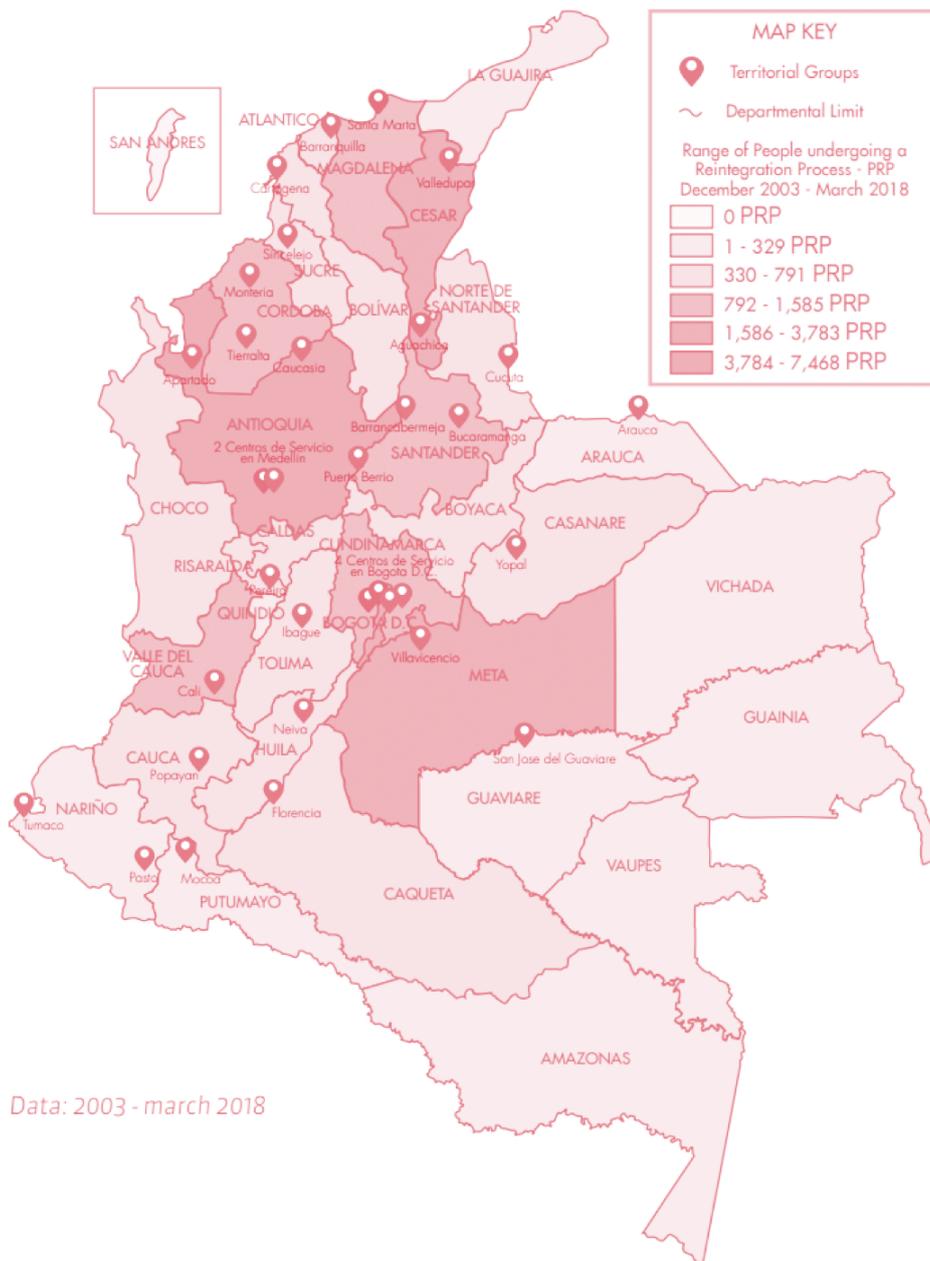
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<sup>13</sup>Interview, Bogotá, 30/6/2017.

## 3.2. Reintegration of ex-combatants

### Introduction

The Colombian Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization ([www.reincorporacion.gov.co](http://www.reincorporacion.gov.co)) statistics shows a huge number of members of armed groups in need of reintegration. Reintegration of former members of armed groups after signing the Havana peace agreement is one of the major challenges for the new Colombian government. Figures 8 and 9 below shows the government estimates and distribution of ex-combatant to be re-integrated.



**Figure 8.** Range of people undergoing a reintegration process by region.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Source: ARN 2018, Reintegration in Colombia, <http://www.reincorporacion.gov.co/en/Documents/Hoja%20de%20Datos%20en%20Ingles%20Marzo%202018.pdf#search=map>.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

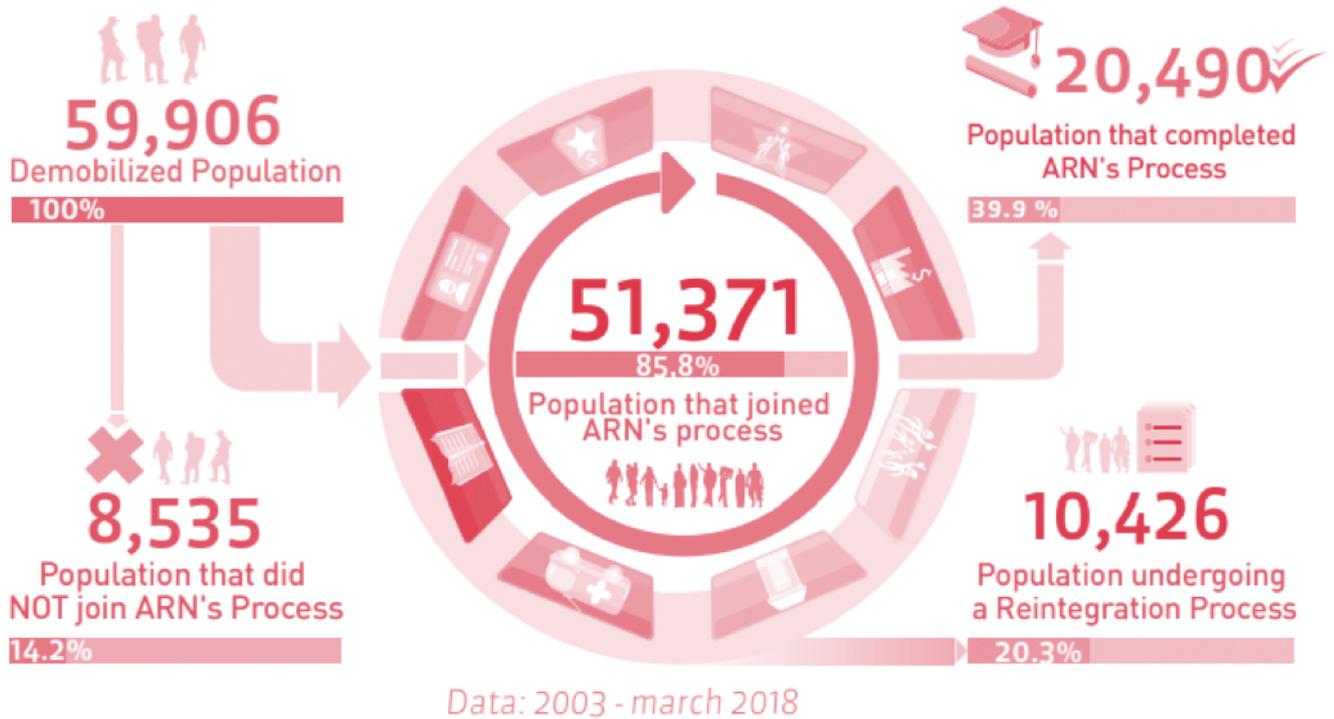


Figure 9. Reintegration process.<sup>15</sup>

## Victims' perspectives on reintegration of ex-combatants

The sensitivities associated with victimhood can and often do pose challenges to peacebuilding and reconciliation work. The communities in which victims have to live side by side with people who committed atrocities after the re-integration of the former combatants, are aware of the complexity of re-inserting them into the communities. It involves a multifaceted process of negotiation at the individual, community and society levels.

### “We do not want demobs in our communities”

In a number of places, particularly the most affected areas, members of communities that are expected to receive the demobilized ex-combatants have expressed their apprehension not only about the process, but also about how social relationships and a history marked by pain and suffering are to be dealt with, both at the individual and community levels. Such sentiments were aptly summed by residents of Arauca in the following words.

*‘Demob’ is one who leaves the combatant life... We need to make a learning process, the label they have is strong, we do not want demobs in our communities. A woman left her child and went to the rebels to build another country. Many children were killed. We lived with war for 53 years and peace will not happen by signing papers in Havana. Also, there were women who had children during the war. We are preparing the link with these people, they say we need the mothers so that they can return to their families... the situation in Bojaya... they were against the war all the time. It is clear that Bojaya does not have guerilla members. Any family which has guerillas cannot shut them out...they have imposed a war and we do not want to be with these people. It is sad to open doors to people who killed so many, who have gone to homes and asked them to accept forgiveness for combatants... we cannot, no one has a double life. You cannot remain silent.<sup>16</sup>*

Peace and reconciliation work must take into consideration the psychosocial issues raised in this excerpt. On the one hand, “returning the children of war to families” can be a challenge both for the receiving families and the children themselves. Finding acceptance and generating trust is difficult in such

<sup>16</sup>Interview, Bogota June 25, 2017.

circumstances; these children might also be stigmatized or rejected outright because their parents are perpetrators of violence on the communities that are expected to accept them. On the other hand, the children belong to their families, and hence the communities cannot reject them, despite the challenges of accepting them back.

The questions of memory, identity and belonging are some of the key issues in peace and reconciliation work. As the picture on the cover page shows, the victims of the conflict will always be remembered by their families. Related to the issue of remembering the loved ones who were killed or disappeared, is the nature of the new relationship with the ex-combatants (perpetrators) when they return to the communities. The challenge was presented to us by residents of Arauca in the following words: “people will not hire them. People will not have them as neighbors”. When asked what the receiving community is going to do about the ex-combatants, the answer was, “we are people of Arauca, we live here... a camp can hold 600 very young ones... There is multiple circumstances, they are local people... the authorities have to sensitize villagers”. From this we learn that it is not yet clear how re-integration is going to be done and with what outcomes.

Apparently, re-inserting the ex-combatants into their communities is not a linear process, it is difficult for a number of reasons. First, the people feel that the war was imposed on them and second, it is difficult to accept the ex-combatants for what they have done. Yet the community cannot remain silent because these combatants are also local people, and thus part of the people of Arauca who must live there. An important point to note here is that the combatants have to re-negotiate their belonging to the community. Here negotiations are from both sides because the community too has to negotiate with the combatants. How is the community to come to terms with its sense of betrayal that the children of the community participated in perpetrating atrocities and caused such suffering? Community and belonging are not to be taken for granted and they are not to be perceived as static attributes of groups and people. Belonging is contested, fluid and dynamic, it involves negotiation and struggle.

This dilemma clearly illustrates the challenges encountered when developing and implementing PS programs and peacebuilding work in communities affected by conflict. In such cases, the challenge lies in the competing demands for reconciliation and justice for all. Hence, the question is: how do Colombians in the current post-Havana situation identify the perpetrators and punish them for the atrocities they have committed, as well as identify and ensure reparations for the various categories of victims and at the same time achieve the aims of transitional justice, build peace and bring about reconciliation in a deeply wounded society?

## Fear, physical and psychological woundedness

It is not easy to eradicate mistrust and fear in local communities when the ex-combatants come to live in their midst. Therefore, psychosocial support is key to building trust between groups; and in helping individuals and communities to deal with fear. Both fear and mistrust of the ex-combatants has the two elements of the psycho and the social. Trust and fear involve (individual) emotions and relations (social) with others. Therefore, peacebuilding and transitional justice programs must include trust-building activities in order to bridge the gap between the perpetrators and victims. This is imperative also in Colombia.

One can easily suggest that an integrated psychosocial approach must

be multi-dimensional in order to address these challenges simultaneously, focusing on both the perpetrators and the victims of atrocities. However, its implementation poses specific challenges when people are overwhelmed by a sense of physical and psychological ‘woundedness’, inflicted by armed groups on the civilian population. The pain is still raw, and there is confusion about what to do in this situation, and how to bridge the divide between the different groups. This fear was clearly expressed by a respondent from one of the most affected areas:

*... there is still fear and aggressive behaviour, confrontations with authorities... Acceptance... many communities have issues with people who are demobilized, fear about how to treat them, accept them even if there is gossip? Also, infidelity leads to broken families, and children have problems and drag the communities down with them, family and community goals are joined... Gossip splits up community. It does not portray reality... immensely negative effect... Does not help to build community. People will fear and reject a person. It will block the purpose of the community.<sup>17</sup>*

The fear and uncertainty generated by the implementation of programs and policies for the integration of former combatants seems to be a considerable challenge for peacebuilding. If people do not feel safe or trust the authorities to protect them, how can they build peace and bring about reconciliation? If people do not trust the ex-combatants, whether they be FARC or paramilitaries, they do not want to “sit face-to-face” and talk with them about integration. The wounds are just too raw and they are ‘bleeding’, so to say. The ex-combatants are part of the community, but people are afraid of them. Relying on Bar-Tal, we can describe such sentiments in terms of “a collective fear” that “cuts deeply into the psychic fabric of society’s members and becomes linked with a social ethos of conflict. The main problem with fear as a collective emotional context is its stability above and beyond the changing of the actual or social context.” (2007:448).

Interventions that do not address the root causes of fear, are unlikely to contribute to social cohesion because fear and mistrust are not only difficult to address but are also the most enduring emotions during and after a conflict. They become obstacles to the reconstruction of a broken social fabric that is characteristic of societies that have experienced protracted conflicts and gross violations of human rights. In such situations, it is important that psychosocial interventions are designed with a long-term perspective to aid communities and individuals to appropriate their innate resources and strategies for survival, resilience and recovery.

The conflict in Colombia lasted for more than five decades and the fieldwork for this study was carried out shortly after the Havana Accord. It was evident that in the immediate aftermath, many people expressed the feeling that the Havana Accord had generated a “different type of emergency, a power vacuum in areas formally controlled by FARC, causing fear and insecurity because of FARC laying down their weapons.”<sup>18</sup> For the general population, particularly the receiving communities, the main issue was “what to do with these people who had committed atrocities”. Therefore, there were different demands from different communities and regions. It was clear that the society was not prepared for the changes and the implications of the peace and transitional justice process.

The post-Havana Accord and the subsequent peace initiatives in Colombia

<sup>17</sup>Interview, Bogotá, 26 /6/2017.

<sup>18</sup>Focus group discussion, Bogotá, 27/6/2017.

present a rather complex matrix of actors and victims, competing interests and perspectives on peace and justice, and a social fabric in chaos. These are the results of five decades of conflict that left the society deeply wounded. Hoping that the subjective and objective referents during the conflict led to the negotiations and the initiation of the peacebuilding processes, the question is how will the society hold and sustain the pressure from competing interests of peacebuilding, reconciliation and justice for thousands of victims and perpetrators?

## Dealing with the past: An example of victim-perpetrator acceptance and support

Here, we shall present an example of trust-building work done in prison that brought a perpetrator to acknowledge what he had done and be ready to face the victims in his community upon release. A man who went to a seminary and became a prison chaplain after surviving a horrific attack where 25 people were killed, talked openly about what happened. In prison, there was no psychosocial support from the government, the prisoners were required to serve their time and pay their dues. While working as a Chaplain in prison, he became aware of a story about a prisoner who was a member of the FARC group that carried out the massacre which he narrowly survived with serious injuries. The prisoner had been recruited into FARC when he was 14 years old after his father, who was a well-known killer in his commune, was murdered.

By the time he was 18 he had distinguished himself as a ruthless member of the armed group in the North-East region, but he was arrested and imprisoned for 14 years. The Chaplain visited the prisoner regularly for a period of two years and prayed for him. Their relationship was not easy. The question was how does a victim take in an ex-guerrilla? Both of them said that it was not easy to find acceptance, but through open discussions about the causes of the conflict, the different factors such as the role of the government and the fact that he was thirteen when he joined, and that he had been in jail for 14 years, they were able to accept each other.

The chaplain spoke about the need for them to establish a relationship that would enable him to offer support to the prisoner and the prisoner to accept the support. The chaplain commenced “starting to take care” of him. The prisoner eventually became a spiritual son” to him. This interview was conducted just one week after he had been released from jail. The two men, the perpetrator and the victim, were now living together. The chaplain said that he wanted the prisoner to return to his community and find his teenage son, who he had fathered before he went to prison. The chaplain also wanted to help him to return to the community and be re-united with the remaining part of the family.<sup>19</sup> This ex-combatant explained in a moving testimony how difficult it was for him to find acceptance in the community without the spiritual and material support that the chaplain had continued to provide for him, his family and the surrounding community in a commune that is characterized by poverty and a high level of violence. The interview ended with a sense of hope when the chaplain revealed that the ex-combatant had started to use the skills that he had acquired in prison to make bags to sell and earn a living.

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<sup>19</sup>This case was presented in a focus group discussion with both the perpetrator and the survivor in Medellín in July 2017. The two men told us about their lives before the attack and later on the activities in prison through which they met and the process that ultimately led to forgiveness and deep friendship between them.

There are similar cases of people who have to deal with the past, but this case of the perpetrator, who now lives with a victim of a vicious attack in the community where he was a well-known killer, is an example of how psychosocial support to both the victims and the perpetrators of the atrocities can bring them together in a new relationship. The relationship that these two described in this interview, is not the one they used to have before the vicious attack and imprisonment of the perpetrator. It is also not the same relationship that the perpetrator used to have with his community. In this example, several domains of psychosocial well-being can be identified, namely the social (in relationships), spiritual, emotional (trust and acceptance of each other), material and mental. There is no doubt that the integration of these psychosocial elements is crucial for sustainable peacebuilding.

## 3.3. Churches and religious organizations’ PS work

The Catholic Church is the largest in demographic terms, and CARITAS Colombia carries out a number of programs aimed at accompanying victims. It is also involved in advocacy work.

### The legal personality of the Catholic and religious pluralism

Historically, the Catholic Church has been the majority church in Colombia. In the 1886 constitution, Catholicism “was regarded as ‘the nation’s religion’ and a fundamental element of social order (Prieto, n. d. p. 237). However, in the 1991 constitution Colombia is described as a secular state and the constitution recognizes all denominations as equal before the law: “No church or religious denomination is or will be official or established. However, the state is not atheist, agnostic or indifferent to the religious sentiments of Colombians” (Ibid. p.238). Thus, religious pluralism is one of the fundamental components of the 1991 law, which also implied a clear separation of church and state. However, “the state recognizes the legal personality of the church, the dioceses, religious communities, and other entities that possess ecclesiastical canonical legal personality” (Ibid. p. 243).

Religion has continued to influence the Colombian society in different ways; for instance, the ELN (National Liberation Army/ Ejército de Liberación Nacional), was established by militants espousing a radical form of liberation theology. This is an example of the two sides of liberation theology, on the one hand seeking to empower the poor, and on the other taking up arms. During the referendum, mainly conservative evangelicals and some Catholics opposed the peace agreement for fear that the law might allow same-sex marriage. Some suggested that if people vote for the peace they would be voting for same-sex relationships.

### Accompanying the victims

When asked how CARITAS Colombia supports people affected by the conflict, the staff of the organization reiterated that all the churches and denominations have good relationships. In the various church jurisdictions, local teams work in cooperation and alliance with other actors, for instance in collaboration with the state, they can identify territories where projects can be implemented. They can lobby and participate in local and national scenarios. In addition, they have legal councils for training victims in advocacy for accessing rights, building

skills and the implementation of social projects for families and communities both in rural and urban areas, for general social inclusion.

The Episcopal Social Pastoral and Charitable Commission is responsible for the coordination of all of the Catholic related NGOs, including CARITAS Colombia. Some of them work together to support and implement different psychosocial activities and programs. CARITAS' work of providing support was summed up thus:

*CARITAS was a pioneer in public pronouncements on victims of the conflict, and it was one of the first to carry out research about forced displacement by the armed conflict in 1995. The results of the research were used by organizations to force the government to acknowledge that forced displacement occurred in different parts of the country. In 1994, the Episcopal assembly focused solely on forced displacement. There are 76 ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the church in Colombia, and there is an explicit policy of accompanying the victims and representing them to the state and making suffering visible. In 1987, Law 387 provided for the state to recognize the victims, attend to the emergency and address displacement. In the first decade of 2000s the state was aware there were victims, but not who, how many or where they were. The church helped create the first registry of the displaced. The registry was called Ruth after the one in the Bible. From this information system, it was possible to create other systems to classify victims, which was an important first step to help determine the types of support that different organizations can provide. Although it was a challenge for some victims to register due to threats from combatants and the requirement to prove victimhood, in certain areas the authorities used this register to verify victims.<sup>20</sup>*

Here the church played an important role because, as the respondents explained, the church started the registry in "good faith." Therefore, CARITAS insisted on ethical behavior and that the government authorities also show good faith when dealing with victims, for instance in their demand for proof of victimization. This was important because there was an assumption that victims were opportunists, and this had a negative implication for trust in the public realm. It would also hinder support for victims in the public domain. Thus, the church provided accompaniment for victims, not only through registration, but also by encouraging the government to understand the complexity of the impact of the conflict on the population. For instance, there was some deeply entrenched mistrust among those displaced by different armed groups, partly because others were accused of having members of their families in different armed groups which were responsible for the displacement. The church lobbied the government to recognize forced displacement and the suffering endured by those forcefully displaced, and therefore take measures to address the problem. Some respondents pointed out that it was not easy to enter into an alliance with the state, but they had to do this because "the church is an actor that can strengthen institutions, recognize victims and find a negotiated way out of a conflict."<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the church lobbied for a differential approach to recognize poor and marginalized populations such as Afro-Colombians and indigenous groups.

*For the church, making the victims visible also means making the government understand the suffering created by the armed conflict. Psychosocial support is new in the last twenty years' response. In each jurisdiction, there is a team from Social Pastoral. They work in cooperation with other actors to analyze realities so they can decide where to implement. Colombia is centralized, but with forced displacement the entities of territories are strengthened. The teams are bridges between the national and regional.<sup>22</sup>*

The church works with the individual, family and community. Below is an example of community level accompaniment:

*Attention is given to the individual, family and community, for example in the case of a family of returnees, psychosocial support and protection is provided. . . understanding what happened and with what impact on the family. Sometimes they feel guilty because conflict happened in their territory. The discussions help to ease guilt. What they say among themselves, sometimes heals. After what happened has been discussed and understood. Then what are we going to do if it happens again and in relation to the state that is supposed to protect us? That is why family prefers that the affected family talks about their pain rather than the psychologist. The community is ready to hear what has happened, what a person says. Sessions are limited in time and frequency and many times people feel uncomfortable. . .*

*Parish priests train and accompany people. They have their own skills, but also sometimes they don't know what to do about human rights, the law etc. Active listening is a good tool, but victim is tired of proving victimhood. This is why when people go to the priests they feel they have protection and care. In a pilot project, priests trained in gender perspectives because they did not know what to do when dealing with victims of sexual violence or trafficking. This project was replicated in other regions.<sup>23</sup>*

In cases of forced recruitment, parish priests can talk to recruiters of paramilitaries to stop, and in the past, they have confronted the recruiters and demanded the recruits back into the community. The church has also provided psychosocial support in some of the most difficult times, for instance in finding the disappeared, returning the bodies, and emotional support. The armed groups also see the priests as moral pillars, for instance when they return the kidnapped for ransom, etc. It is evident from the foregoing that the priests are invested with moral authority on which they can rely to accompany individuals, families and communities as they deal with the psychosocial impact of the conflict.

The protestant churches work through NGOs such as Church World Service, Lutheran World Relief, and Fundacion Mencoldes (Mennonite) and Lutheran World Federation. DiPAZ is a network of about 14 churches, including Pentecostal churches, FBOs, theological institutions and Christian movements. By the time of this interview, DiPAZ had been working for four years. The government approached DiPAZ and Social Pastoral to coordinate activities for the acknowledgement of victims. DiPAZ made arrangements to meet the victims before a public appearance, to learn their stories and to help them reconstruct their memories so they could participate in the planned events. In this process, "the most important event is when the perpetrators acknowledge their responsibility. Then accompaniment continues."<sup>24</sup> This form of accompaniment is also practiced at Casa de Paz, which is a

<sup>20</sup>Focus group discussion, Bogotá, 6/7/2017.

<sup>21</sup>Focus group discussion, Bogotá, 6/7/2017.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Interview, Bogotá, 6/7/2017.

congregation (Misión Emaús) of the Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO, Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia) located on the edge of a violent neighborhood in Medellín. Felm supports the peacebuilding and PS work of IELCO through “Casa de Paz” (encouraging compassionate dialogue and support with all its neighbors) and through “De la Guerra a la Paz”, a project focusing on peace and reconciliation work between former FARC combatants and communities.<sup>25</sup> During the group discussions in Casa de Paz, members agreed with the observation made by one of them that

*The Christian church would like to help but they don't know how. I think we have found a way to respect different opinions and in this church there are different opinions but no one is forced to think one way. I think there is a social awaking and processes like the Casa de Paz are inspiring to other churches. They are necessary processes. They are deep. They have large impact. Listening to stories like today's because often we don't know each other's stories, this is an ideal point in time for what we are thinking of as “our project” so that people who are interested can find a way.<sup>26</sup>*

However, during the discussion, some women respondents raised questions about what they considered to be a new challenge for psychosocial work: (a) “How do you approach the people?” (b) “The process is short, funding is targeted and is short, and you need to deliver something, how do you measure or show value of what you have achieved?” The discussion came to a conclusion that that “you have to have ways of meeting the people, not tied to a project.”

## Government agencies and PS interventions

In Colombia various government agencies approach victims differently, for instance, through the PAPSIVI program the Ministry of Health works with victims at local municipalities' health departments. The President's Council on Human Rights, the Victim's Unit, the Interagency Cooperation on Reincorporation and Normalization and the Ombudsman's office, have a different approach. For example, among them there is no consensus on whether to work with the individual and family as a unit or to work with the community and social groups. There are divergent opinions on whether the interventions by these agencies should aim at addressing mental health problems or providing social support to the people in order to be able to deal with the impact of the conflict.

Though the work with the individual and family could lead to improved wellbeing for that specific person, the social environment may still be difficult. An alternative approach is to work with the community and social groups to address the divisions that impede social cohesion and prevent the communities from re-integrating those who have been displaced or been in combat. Both approaches are necessary because, as shown in the ecological framework, individuals and families live in communities. Individuals have their personal traits and communities have their attributes. Therefore, for some individuals and families, there is a need for focused support for the unique challenges that they face, both due to the consequences of the conflicts and to their unique circumstances.

With such a large part of the national population in need of support the

psychosocial work has produced mixed results. It was mentioned repeatedly that finding enough trained and experienced staff to deliver the necessary services was a problem. In consultation with victims and the academy, the Ministry of Health has identified an array of issues and provided guidelines to the staff that work with victims through municipal governments. For instance, when a victim contacts the local PAPSIVI office, a professional staff member meets with the individual and the family to hear their request for support. The client determines the focus of the support that they need. Then they plan for a set of weekly activities to guide the worker and the client towards the desired goals. Interviews with those who had completed the 8-12 session program often revealed that they had just started to be able to talk about things when the programs finished. This left them feeling as if the wounds had been opened and not healed.

If the client goes back to PAPSIVI for further support, they would need to start over with a different professional and tell their story again, build a new relationship with another person which could be expected to come to an abrupt end due to the time limit for such sessions. Another criticism of this approach is that it focuses the intervention on the individual or family and their problems as the unit to be ‘fixed’, rather than recognizing people's suffering as a result of the impact of the violent social environment.

The Focus on the community as the unit to be ‘fixed’ is an approach that has been developed within the Victim's Unit and the Interagency Reincorporation and Normalization Unit. Contextually, the ‘client’ is the community that was affected by the violence rather than the individual. The focus of the work here is to address the harm done to the community: memory, inequalities, the shattered social fabric and the reintegration of both victims and perpetrators of the violence.

## An overview of needs in Felm's working area

Felm works through two primary partners in Colombia, LWF and IELCO primarily in areas where congregations are located. LWF focuses on Choco which is one of the poorest departments of Colombia, with a high indigenous and Afro Colombian population. In addition, the area is characterized by significant agro-business and the illicit economy. LWF also works in Arauca which has endured guerilla violence and is now faced with the challenges and prospects of the re-integration of many FARC and ELN members into the local communities.

One of the challenges that is often not acknowledged is that, the staff of these organizations are Colombian people who, like others, have lived through the years of the conflict and have experienced its impact. It is therefore not unexpected that, even as they serve vulnerable people in such areas as Choco and Arauca, the staff of the religious and church organizations struggle with a secondary layer of trauma that comes from working with people who have direct experience of various forms of victimization. For instance, a woman who had experienced direct violence for having witnessed murder and torture perpetrated by the paramilitary, explained how, after living in hiding for a long time, she began to organize a group of victims and began to work with them. When asked how the group of victims was formed, she explained that she was familiar with her neighborhood and “a spontaneous group emerged.” She had “to go out and face the people, even people related to the dead soldier.” Eventually the group became “very important for people with similar experiences.” This is the situation of being a victim who is re-victimized by working with others who are victims. Such a situation needs to be addressed through sustainable staff care.

<sup>24</sup>Interview, Bogotá, 6/7/2017.

<sup>25</sup>In addition to the peacebuilding, reconciliation and PS work by IELCO, Lutheran World Federation works in Arauca, offering PS support for mine victims.

<sup>26</sup>Interview, Medellín, 4/7/2017.

Support for this must be a priority issue in budgeting and not relegated to the “not life-saving” category of activities that may not receive budget allocation.

The choices of target made by these organizations reflect the priority given to the most vulnerable groups. The programs are designed to strengthen the communities to defend their rights through education, civic participation, developing livelihoods and dialogue with groups reintegrated into the communities. This type of work requires long term commitment to building trust in the community and to strengthening its capacity in the face of ongoing threats from external groups. Sustainable funding for a long-term commitment is greatly needed.

In addition, the polarization of the Colombian population makes it difficult to find common ground and this is evident in the work of the church groups. Therefore, the work of building bridges is slow and challenging. Support for human rights, transitional justice, and reintegration of ex-combatants or those forcefully displaced is dealt with by the Women’s ministry, congregations and Diaconal ministries. Support in training staff for this work can make much needed contribution to moving the processes forward.

# Chapter 4

# TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN NEPAL

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## Introduction

After the conflict, many social and political improvements were made, for instance in the interim constitution of 2007, gender violence was prohibited, and in 2008 the Nepal Peace Trust Fund was established to facilitate the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The key issues to be addressed included, “integration and rehabilitation of fighters, conflict affected communities; security and justice; and peacebuilding” (Thapa and Canyon, 2017). However, in Nepal’s new constitutional dispensation, the injustices (some of them deeply embedded in the culture) that led to the conflict (as well as other root causes and the impact on society) remain unresolved more than a decade later. Some of the issues to which our attention is drawn include the new political structures and processes, questions of belonging, the role of mediators and the implications for peacebuilding.

## **4.1. Victims’ perspectives on the peace and reconciliation process**

There are different views regarding transitional justice in Nepal. The international NGOs and UN agencies that support peacebuilding in Nepal (depending on their mandate and focus) spoke about the successes and challenges for their interventions. The local people that were interviewed felt that, in spite of the implementation of new governance structures and efforts aimed at an inclusive transitional justice process, little progress has been achieved. Thapa and Canyon observe that

*Service and relief and recover packages are limited to a few trainings, limited financial compensation (a few thousand rupees per person) and there are still thousands of victims who have been denied their basic rights to food, lodging, medical services, psychosocial*

*counselling, children scholarships, income generation and employment opportunities and reintegration into society (2017).*

As mentioned earlier, no interviews were carried out with government agents or individuals working in the government. Most of those interviewed had been affected by the conflict in some way, or they were working with those directly affected. When asked about the peace process and the situation of the victims, their response was unequivocal:

*There is no hope. No one to listen. Commissioners don't listen... We have gone to court, we have gone to the media. They still don't hear the pain of the victims. We have filed a case against amnesty in the Human Rights Act. Victims have no voice. There are 70,000 cases before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but no decisions. They say they have not enough manpower and for the years the commission has existed, not a single complete decision. The commission has got an extension for one more year, what will they do that they could not do in ten years? They wrote a nine-page report about their procedures, but no decisions... It seems the consensus has been to not reveal the truth. If there is no evidence then there is no prosecution. Perpetrators are protected. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a western idea to care for victims... In Nepal, traditional in our society when there is a crime, there is the Panchayat<sup>27</sup> – some people chosen to hear what happened. They listen to both sides and then decide the consequences. This is a local nonpolitical system. The truth and Reconciliation Commission is imposed from outside...*

*The commissioners are appointed but do not know the pain of the victims, and do not know how to respond. Panchayat were local leaders and politically active... Villages were purged of leaders. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is leading the traditional criminal investigation team in seven provinces in the country. The investigators are not talking to perpetrators, they are not interested in the pain of the victims. There is no psychosocial support when taking statements, when asking "what proof do you have? Who are the witnesses? Bring them here." Investigators are not trained in this kind of work. Victims are forced to sign that they have reconciled. Paid 1,000,000 rupees. What more do you want?*

The government view is that the transition period in Nepal is accomplished: reparations, such as the one mentioned above, have been paid to victims, combatants have been demobilized, a new constitution has been written, elections have been conducted and a new government is in place. However, this interview passage clearly captures the reality on the ground. Furthermore, these processes have not been inclusive and the victims feel that the perpetrators were not held accountable, some of them got "big positions" after the conflict, as some of the victims put it. The questions asked by a number of those interviewed were: (a) "How long should we have to wait for justice?" (b) "When will it conclude?" (c) How do we attain justice?"<sup>28</sup> These questions remain unanswered. Another person said that the truth should be published to end the pain as soon as possible. Yet another clarified that, with the merger of political parties, transitional justice

<sup>27</sup>The 1962 constitution created a Panchayat system under which political parties were banned. Under this system, people could elect their representatives while the real power remained in the hands of the monarch. "The Panchayat system preserved and reproduced an exclusionary Nepali national identity" (Selim 2018:77, citing Pandey 2010). "The Panchayat was toppled by a popular movement" after "three decades" of existence (Ibid.).

becomes more challenging. The conclusion was that transitional justice concerns are entangled in political and legal issues - the human factor, the psychosocial, and the root causes of the conflict are overshadowed by legal issues. It has been a long time and so many victims are exhausted.<sup>29</sup>

In the words of the speakers in this focus group discussion passage, the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a western idea to care for victims". These words capture the prevailing attitude toward the commission. In view of this, one is tempted to agree with Dixit's suggestion that "the donor largesse that arrived with conflict prevention, peacebuilding and post conflict rehabilitation tended to be diversionary" (2018:4). In what can be interpreted as an affirmation of the above sentiments, many of those interviewed expressed what seemed to be a widely held opinion, that peacebuilding is "work of the government" and therefore ordinary citizens have little to do with it.

### **"In the new democracy, it is illegal to discriminate but slow to practice"**

In conflict affected societies, violence does not often end with the cessation of hostilities, in deed, gender-based violence (GBV) has been known to increase in the aftermath of the conflict. There are several explanations for this, which include the devastation of the social fabric and loss of livelihoods, all of which negatively impact the well-being of communities emerging from conflict. In such situations, GBV may also increase due to changing roles as many households that become female-headed or child-headed are usually the most vulnerable. As Arinō points out, the consequences of armed conflict "are not limited only to the issue of sexual violence, they are much broader in nature and refer to the effect the conflict has had on men and women, and as a result, on the relationships between them, particularly power relations" (2008:7).

In Nepal, women were deeply affected by the conflict in a number of ways, for instance "gender violence, the large number of women combatants in the Maoist ranks, as well as the signing of a peace agreement that largely excluded women" (Ibid.p.5.). Besides, the situation is further complicated by the traditional and religious structures that determine the role and place of an individual, depending on caste and other hierarchies such as ethnic and regional identities (dalits, Chepang, Musahar, bonded labourers etc.). The challenge is well captured in the following statement made during an interview: "in the new democracy, it is illegal to discriminate but slow to practice. One village, one caste, one vocation, one caste."<sup>30</sup>

Without the possibility to prove the missing persons are alive or dead, their families continue to suffer because they are unable to mourn their loved ones and make a closure. They are trapped between hope and despair. In such cases,

*"The suffering of the family is not only emotional... missing persons are often the breadwinners, and the loss of income can plunge a family into poverty. In Nepal the situation is made worse by the legal requirement that a person must be missing for 12 years in order to officially be declared dead. During this period family members are unable to move on, transfer property, remarry, or simply perform final rites. Until they obtain adequate proof of death, relatives cannot mourn, and they may feel guilty if they do not attempt to begin the mourning process (ICRC 2008:9).*

<sup>28</sup>Focus group discussion, Kathmandu, 23/2/2018.

<sup>29</sup>Interview in Kathmandu, 19/2/2018.

<sup>30</sup>Interview, Kathmandu, 27/2/2018.

## “Who will understand my pain?”

### I have run out of tears”

Ditya's husband is missing. She described her situation in the following focus group discussion:

**Case 1. Ditya:** *My husband disappeared. His whereabouts are still unknown. The children were three and four years when their father was kidnapped by Maoists. They have always asked who took him. Now they are adults. Now I also care for my father-in-law who had a heart attack, mother-in-law died. When the commission was formed, we were very happy. The Commission extended its term. When do we get justice? How long do we live in this pain? My children will have their own lives but I will have to live with this. I am not allowed to receive allowances for widows. How many times will I have to tell my story? Who will understand my pain? I have run out of tears. I am looking forward to finding the truth, having some justice.*

*There is a social security allowance (SS) amount for widows all over the country. But... victims of the disappeared, they don't get that amount because there are no documents. Victims have been raising this issue but the commission must make recommendations for it to be implemented. Victims say they should not have to wait while commission works. They give some documents that these people have been killed and are now transferred to Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). No PS is given, just summary information. No evidence, no remains found. Just government declaration, family is just informed of transfer...the Government says that peace and reconciliation is internal business, not for INGO.*

**Case 2. Ashraf:** *As someone working with victims' groups for 10 years, justice issues are entangled in political and legal issues. It had never been considered a social issue. The human factor, the PS, root causes of conflict are overshadowed by legal issues. It has been very long so many victims are exhausted.*

*There is a hierarchy of needs... the upper class want justice and prosecution, the poor want daily subsistence. Politically, time is more problematic but now with political parties emerging, now justice is more challenging. The government and political parties are happy to provide reparations because it comes from gov't. They just want it to go away without prosecutions. We are only dealing with the spillover violence, killing etc. The root causes have not been addressed – social inequality, poverty, economic inequality.*

**Case 3. Jaya:** *Whenever there is a victims' meeting... how long do we have to introduce ourselves as a victim. Some say this is our identity, which must be recognized. What is behind martyrdom? We want the state to recognize. But the new government might change that... Now all who were killed are martyrs, so that they can gain votes. This is all political. This is playing on the psyche of the people.*

For more than a decade after the civil war, the survivors and participants in this focus group discussion are still waiting for justice. Therefore, for Ditya to be included in the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes it is important to design and implement interventions that address her material as well as her psychosocial well-being; what she refers to as the human factor which has been overshadowed by the political and legal dimensions of peacebuilding and reconciliation. These are: social inequality, poverty, economic inequality and PS interventions that can address her pain and enable her to meet her basic needs

in a dignified manner. Addressing the issues raised by this woman, requires an approach that integrates five crucial elements; namely, development, justice, PS, peacebuilding and reconciliation. The five dimensions are interlinked and the circular formation underpins the non-linear nature of peacebuilding and reconciliation work. Here, our analysis of the issues raised by this woman benefits from Lederach's (2009) suggestion that the notion of “circularity” is important in understanding conflict transformation as social change.

### “I have been advocating for justice for years but there is no peace”

Another example is that of Kalyan. He explained that he had no objection when the government and the Maoist began fighting, but the citizens were caught in the middle. Both parties have committed injustices against the people, yet they have not yet realized what they have done in the past, and they are being promoted and getting supreme positions. Below is an excerpt of the interview.

*For me peacebuilding has not been initiated. In the past, we were under the feudal leaders, but we could survive with an egg from the market. Now there is no environment to live a normal life. If this continues, we expect the conflict to come again. As for me, I respect the law but this is a problem. I have found that political parties have been faking peacebuilding to receive more support from the international community. We are thinking about getting revenge... It has been 17 years with no justice. My experience was that... the Maoists came and divided my livestock and property among themselves. They ordered my family to leave by midnight. I think that the government has no intention for justice. I had 10 buffalos, now I have none. My property is still not returned. This is the reason I am so furious. I am living on loans. I again object when justice has not been done when people are in power. I have been advocating for justice for years but there is no peace. Victims still receive threats because there is some mechanism of surveillance, so there is not peace.”<sup>31</sup>*

Kalyan does not trust the government to deliver justice for all the victims. At the end of the interview, it felt as if we had come to a dead end, one was left wondering how he and others like him can be included in the peace building processes without first addressing the psychosocial issues that he raised. He, too, links peace and justice with the return of his property; and points out that there is a risk of going back to conflict and revenge. This and many similar examples support the argument that doing justice and peacebuilding is a delicate and complex process.

Therefore, when designing and implementing peacebuilding and reconciliation interventions, it is important to understand that the need for justice, and the trauma arising from protracted conflict, influences the way affected people perceive peace and reconciliation. It is therefore, vital to link peace work with the wider social and economic processes, in a way that goes beyond the conventional meanings of these concepts.

### Who defines a victim?

Protracted intra-state conflicts are characterized by widespread political violence. Defining and categorizing victims of mass violence as a result of

<sup>31</sup>Interview, Kathmandu, 27/2/2018.

such conflict, is often a daunting task for governments. Yet the process of defining and classifying forms of victimization and the people victimized in widely different ways, is crucial for peace and reconciliation work in societies emerging from conflict. An example of the challenges for addressing various forms of victimization, is that the government's definition of victims of the ten-year conflict does not include sexual or gender-based violence, the families of missing persons, or torture. These people cannot access any form of reparations or justice, despite the profound effect the direct experience of violence may have had on their lives. This power struggle over who decides who is a victim and what abuses can be recognized, causes great psychological distress, compounding the recovery from the experience itself. Though the needs for psychosocial support as well as family and community support are clear, this support may not fit the priorities for community development.

The case of Verified Minor Late Recruited (VMLR) is another example of the complexity of dealing with victims and victimization in Nepal. The Centre for Mental Health and Counselling (CMC) in Kathmandu, provides PS to a group of VMLR. The members of this group were directly involved in the activities of the Maoist movement, and after the conflict they were gathered into rented houses under supervision of a Maoist leader in each cantonment. The same discipline as when in combat was observed. The VMLR were kept segregated from cantonments and their families and they did not get any compensation. However, a return to their communities without any compensation would be understood as failure and therefore they would be seen as "those who failed" in the war. This became a stigmatizing label and it carried a sense of shame for these young ex-combatants because they were "not successful soldiers". They were blamed by their families who declined to accept them back. It must be admitted that these difficult circumstances generated distress for them, and perhaps this partly explains the relatively high rate of suicide in this group during that time.

When the Prime Minister tried to settle this group, the state mechanism prevented this from happening. Evidently, this group was caught between the state and the society, both of which attached different labels and categories to the people who were recruited as minors and often fought in the frontlines. The government determined that they could not get compensation for their role as soldiers because they were minors; while their families rejected them for not getting any compensation. Hence, the two sides of the stigma (more or less like a coin) with which they were faced.

## Challenges for appropriation of the concept of forgiveness in Nepal

In Nepal, Hinduism played an important role as a religion and polity, and served as the basis on which the national Nepali identity was developed. Disparity among the various social groups, "...ethnic and cast groups such as janajati, madheshya and Dalit increased through Hinduisation, institutionalization of the caste system...Hinduisation created a feudal oligarchy" (Selim 2018:74-75). Therefore, people's understandings of the occurrence of harm and attribution of responsibility, notions of victimization as well as punishment, are largely shaped by Hinduism. In the Hindu culture the notions karma ('the law of cause and effect') and anger, are related. One's actions (karma) determine ones future lives (Selim, 2018:197, citing Smith 2009). Furthermore, because of karma, "individuals face the consequences of their actions in subsequent reincarnations" (ibid). Nevertheless, "the notions of non-violence (ahimsa), forgiveness (kshama) and peace (shanti)

are included in key Hindu scripture's and texts, demonstrating the error in hate, anger and violence, and the advantages of consensus, compassion and justice (Selim 2018:197, citing Coward and Smith 2004). There is a sense in which those who accept the law of karma may be willing to suppress the desire for revenge by accepting the futility of going after perpetrators, in the belief that inevitably they will ultimately face the consequences of their actions, in the future. Therefore, although forgiveness may be relevant in Hinduism, the belief that what happens to an individual is a consequence of their past deeds shapes the response of many victims of the conflict. The notions of forgiveness and reconciliation cannot therefore be applied in the same way as among Christian populations. During the interviews, some of those affected by the conflict expressed a sense of deep pain and loss, most of it irreparable as their lives were deeply impacted by the civil war. Some of the women who had been sexually violated and others whose loved ones had either been killed or forcefully disappeared, expressed a desire for peace and justice, but they did not talk about forgiveness and reconciliation. Apparently, though some of the people interviewed said that they 'accepted' what happened during the conflict as inevitable, still they were unequivocal in their demand for justice. Others demanded some form of compensation for material losses and recognition of the sacrifice made by their loved ones who died during the civil war, especially those fighting on the government side.

## 4.2. Psychosocial counselling in Nepal

### Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction psychosocial counselling program

Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) recognizes the need for psychosocial support for war-affected people. Therefore, the ministry prepared guidelines for providing psychosocial counselling services, care and support to affected persons and their families. In its efforts to standardize psychosocial counselling and support services program, the ministry prepared an implementation manual for operating procedures for the program. The manual refers to the IASC guidelines and the interpretation of the PS approach by the MoPR indicates that its focus is on the top layer of the intervention triangle. In this manual, psychosocial counselling is defined as "a planned intervention, between the client and counsellor, for assisting the client to alter, improve or resolve his/her behavior, difficulty or discomfort...it aims at enabling the client to respond to problems of both a psychological and social nature in an integrated fashion" (MoPR, 2015.6).

The implementation procedures and coordination by the various committees and service providers are well described in the manual. What is clear from the manual is that psychosocial counselling approach is medicalized and focusses on the individual; while "community level psychosocial services" aim at creating "common experiences" for community members and "shared understanding among them" (Ibid. p.6). However, neither the government officers who had direct experience of implementing the program nor its beneficiaries were interviewed, therefore, it is not possible to determine the achievements of the program.

### The work of CVICT and TPO

Here we shall briefly present two clinical MHPSS programs that provide PS through highly trained psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers,

working at levels 2 and 3 of the MHPSS intervention triangle. (a) We were informed that the Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT) provides clinical psychosocial counselling interventions, introduced during the Maoist people's war. Originally, CVICT focused on torture survivors, but later broadened its scope to include other victims of organized violence and, systematic violations of human rights (Tol, 2005:319). During the conflict, CVICT methods of dealing with psychosocial distress were essentially clinical, though they worked in "a culturally informed manner" (Ibid. p. 321). (b) Transcultural psychological organization (TPO), established in 2005 identifies itself as one of the leading organizations working in PS and mental health in Nepal. Their services, as described in their report, include individual, family and group counselling, problem focused therapies, psycho-education, specialized psychiatric and psychological services. Therefore, both CVICT and TPO are largely clinical in their approach to PS.

It is illustrative, though, to note that in Nepal, people seek healthcare in institutions that practice medical traditions, including visiting different healers as well as priests who perform religious rituals. It is reported that CVICT counselling had features in common with the local traditions, though Tol (Ibid. p.322) gives more credit to the impact of what he considers "more formal interventions". Here, it is important to bear in mind the observation made by Tol et al, that usually, scientists and practitioners fall "between the two extremes of universalistic and cultural relativistic positions, practicing a basic western talking cure, but adapting it to the cultural environment of the country in which they practice. In addition to this observation, these clinical counselling interventions must be treated with caution, in view of the drawbacks of the trauma approach (Wessels 2009) to PS in communities affected by political violence, or gross violations of human rights.

### 4.3. Religious leaders and interfaith support for peacebuilding

#### Introduction

In Nepal, more than a decade after the end of the Maoist war, peacebuilding entails a long and intricate process of social a change at all levels of society. An important point to note is that:

*the demands for transitional justice have extended beyond the spheres of truth seeking, accountability, reparation, reconciliation, and national reform... there have been strong calls for social justice transformations to address structural inequalities, poverty, and social exclusion, and transitional justice principals, processes and mechanism have, to a certain extent, been seen as vehicles to those ends" (Duthie and Seils 2017:168).*

It is from this backdrop that the role of religious leaders is examined here. Regarding the role of religious leaders, Cismas and Heffes (2017:2) inform that:

*Religious leaders belong...to the analytical category of religious actors. This category can be empirically delineated to include those state and non-state entities that grant religion a central place in their functioning by means of adopting a religious organizational structure, religious doctrine, religious motivations, or by espousing a predominantly religious discourse. Whereas their religions, goals, and indeed the forms they take differ—and therefore*

*we can distinguish between (individual) religious leaders, non-state religious associations, armed groups and religious states of various denominations— what unites religious actors is a common claim that they are legitimate interpreters of religion.*

This observation reflects the context of Nepal, where a variety of actors can be identified as religious groups, organizations and individuals.

According to the constitution, Nepal is a secular state. However, to understand the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding in Nepal, it is important first to bear in mind that historically, Nepal has a predominantly Hindu background. This religious tradition has, to a large extent, influenced the political and social changes, including the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. Religious minorities include Buddhists, Jains, Muslims and Christians. In 2004, religious leaders from different faith traditions came together and established the Inter-religious Peace Committee which later became Inter-religious Council of Nepal. Since its establishment, the Council has gone through some transformation, but that is not relevant for this discussion. The focus here is the participation of interfaith groups in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

In 2017 a new law prohibiting facilitating someone to convert from one religion to another was enacted. The criminal code bill, approved by the parliament and signed by the President, banned religious conversion and the hurting of religious sentiment. Article 26 of the constitution states that, "No one shall attempt to change or convert someone from one religion to another, or disturb/jeopardize the religion of others, and such acts/activities shall be punishable by law." The Christians view this as restrictive of religious freedom and some of them feel that it has implications for interfaith relations and dialogue. Like in many other places, religious beliefs and practices in Nepal are part of the culture, and therefore social differentiation and hierarchies such as the caste system, which have a religious basis, are deeply entrenched in the psyche of the Nepali society.

#### Interpreting the religious traditions to address inequality and build peace

One of the ways in which some religious leaders are responding to traditional forms of inequality and discrimination, especially against women, is by trying to interpret the scriptures in view of the post conflict social and political challenges in Nepal. A younger generation of Buddhist monks aptly captures the opportunities and challenges for religious leaders' work with peacebuilding and psychosocial support:

*As a young religious leader, we have to understand the young minds. We must understand what they young need. When I went to orientation on child marriage, a young Hindu leader said it is difficult when we know the harmful practices. We know this and we must accept it. We all have some problems. Some problems we do not see because of the old generation, because their heart is not in the scripture. Culture and tradition is not a religion. If we accept religion, it should change our life for the better. Some cultures are not making our lives better and bringing happiness. We have to show people what is in original scripture, separate that from tradition. In our country people base beliefs on tradition. But religions believe in peace, not in conflict. The older generation does not accept. We need to organize interfaith gathering of young leaders. Change misunderstandings of interfaith. Some thought it was a new*

*religion, others think it is where you are converted. If we think all religions are one, we can live together in peace. We all need to have these interfaith programs so we can build peace. When we meet and get to know each other, we can build positive thoughts about each other.*

*When we have harmful practices programs, we work together to teach that this is not religion but a bad practice. He showed people things in their scripture that spoke against harmful practices, they were surprised. Even religious leaders did not know these things. To benefit society, religious leaders need awareness about scriptures because in Nepal people inherit religious positions so they need more training about society. Most religious leaders only know about religions. If they are given more training, they can do better at caring for community. We need to think above our own religion when we work together as religious leaders.<sup>32</sup>*

The key issues that the Buddhist leader raises in this passage are pertinent to psychosocial support for the individual community. For instance the intergeneration perspectives about practices and the role of the youth. He makes it clear that it is necessary to address the intergenerational gap because it has an impact on the understanding and practice of religion, and hence on the society. He clearly points out that interfaith collaboration is not well understood and some people are questioning whether it is a new religion aiming at conversion. These views were echoed by another member of the interfaith group who explained that it is not easy to establish sufficient trust among interfaith networks and groups, though they are trying to collaborate. It is important to take note of his opinion that the prevailing cultural practices are not making life better for individuals and communities. Thus, his work targets core issues of social relations and trust among different social groups.

This religious leader went on to give the example of how he is dealing with the practice of Chhaupadi (exclusion of menstruating women). He presented the dilemma he is facing as a religious leader choosing to confront an ancient tradition and advise families against the practice. He has to find a way to approach the families and explain his interpretation of the scriptures and illustrate to them that there would be no repercussions to the family and society at large if a menstruating woman was allowed into the family rather than being secluded from the home during the menses. He concluded that “challenging the tradition is difficult and it will take time to bring about change in society.”<sup>33</sup> He said that the topic is not only a taboo, and finding the right approach is a challenge. However, he expressed a sense of hope for change as now a few families are allowing women and girls to come into the house, but stay in a separate room so as not to ‘contaminate’ the rest of the family with the uncleanness of menstruation. The challenge for him arises from the fact that “the legitimate authority of religious leaders is predominantly grounded in tradition... because the religious leader is perceived to have the authority by virtue of tradition” (Cismas and Heffes 2017). By addressing the impact of harmful practices, he is not only advocating for psychosocial support, but actually providing the support to those women who are subjected to these discriminatory practices as well as the community that has to embrace the idea of changing traditions that they have known to ‘protect’ the communities for centuries.

Targeting the practices that promote inequality in the Nepali society is important especially for the new administrative structure where women have

been placed in positions of decision making at the local government levels. Though the change is likely to be gradual, often with the new roles and status accompanied by tensions or violence at the family level, the space has been created for women to participate and speak out about issues affecting their communities.

## Other psychosocial support activities

Religious leaders in Nepal have also been involved in other activities at the local context where they play significant roles in psychosocial support for individuals and families. They provide psychosocial support to people during times of loss of deaths of family members and the communities. Referrals for professional support may be made when the grief and mourning create impairment in the affected people’s ability to complete day to day activities. It must be remembered that psychosocial support does not eliminate the consequences of human rights violations that occur. People also grieve for the loss of their community, the broken relationships and the stress that this loss can cause. Religious leaders are at hand to provide spiritual and often even material support.

Here we present some work of the United Mission to Nepal, a faith-based organization which brings together different groups implementing a wide range of activities for psychosocial, peacebuilding and development. In their inter-faith peacebuilding project, they worked for ten years in three districts with five faith communities in Sunsari. They supported conflict transformation activities. They worked with the most vulnerable in these communities. They invited members of different faith traditions to work together to prevent future violence arising from different understandings of group identities. Work with this issue was necessary because in the constitution, although one can be open about their faith, they may proselytize others. There is no doubt that people have stereotypes about other people’s religions. They conduct social activities, for instance, they invite Muslim to talk to people in churches about inter-faith projects and what peace means to an individual. They said that, eventually, after a ten-year process, the community now recognizes what peace means. Religious leaders lobbied for the local government because they wanted them to support the peacebuilding processes. On one occasion, faith leaders came together to inaugurate a new school because, unlike politicians their moral authority is based on their religious leadership roles. They also worked to provide support to a group for the widows who are discriminated against. Development work should come hand in hand with peace, therefore, they worked for community social development. They were emphatic that now they have a good relationship with government.

They supported capacity building in negotiation skills, advocated with local government and made press releases to create awareness when women were abused on the way to Hindu celebration. The interfaith leaders made press releases against violence and bad social behavior. Furthermore, they made radio programs to inform the public about their activities. Thus, interfaith groups work in psychosocial support in different ways: while the Inter Religious Council of Nepal negotiated for religious freedom, allowing different religious groups to practice their religion freely, another group became the Inter Religious Network on Violence against Women. On several occasions, religious leaders from different faith traditions have come together to speak against violent incidents and mediate disputes among different groups. Thus, religious leaders are taking the lead as they continue to provide support to their communities in the face of social changes and political struggles for power, that are seen as threats to ancient traditions.

<sup>32</sup>Inter-faith FGD, Kathmandu, 19-2-2018.

<sup>33</sup>Inter-faith FGD, Kathmandu, 19-2-2018.

## Chapter 5

# **CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR LINKING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND MEDIATION PROCESSES IN SYRIA**

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The current situation in Syria is a civil war with a myriad of local and international actors entangled in a deadly conflict. Involvement of international parties on different sides features Turkey, USA, Iran and Russia, among others. Though not directly involved, China is reported to exercise its veto power to thwart any attempts to pass resolutions at the United Security Council level. Different organizations inside and outside Syria are engaged in negotiations, mediation and providing material and psychosocial support. It is difficult to talk of peacebuilding in an active conflict situation, therefore most of the interventions focus on services to protect and relieve the suffering of the affected communities inside Syria.

### **5.1. Inaccessibility to services and hierarchy of needs in refugee settings**

The Syrian conflict has generated the largest forced displacement crisis in the 21st Century. It is estimated that more than ten million people have been displaced, with the largest number of internally displaced persons in Syria, followed by numbers of refugees in Lebanon. With such large numbers of refugees, the resources in the host countries are stretched and the refugees are often struggling to cope. A visit to the camps as well as families in rented accommodation in the urban areas revealed that living conditions for most Syrian refugees in Lebanon are dire<sup>34</sup>. A closer examination of the services offered to refugees with different needs, reveals that the service providers determine the needs, and PS may not be prioritized among the needs considered more urgent or life-saving in what seemed to be a hierarchy of needs, depending on the interest of the organizations supporting refugees. For instance, according to interviewees, some Christian organizations emphasized the spiritual dimensions, often encouraging conversion, and linked conversion to Christianity to their to material support to the refugees. Though it was not possible to decipher whether conversion was voluntary or influenced by the prospects of getting the support that was desperately needed, in two cases in Beirut, it seemed that there was a sense in which two small Christian NGOs' prioritized spiritual support among Muslims.

Syrian refugees interviewed in the camps in Lebanon claimed that each of them received an equivalent of 40 US dollars per month per person from UNHCR<sup>35</sup>, which they said, was inadequate and needed to be supplemented through employment. The problem though, they said, was that when they work without permits often they are "exploited by employers who refuse to pay for work done or even further reduce the meagre payment because they know that without a work permit, one cannot complain to the authorities."<sup>36</sup> The UNHCR (2018) "Vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon" shows that 75% of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon were unable to meet basic needs like food, health, shelter and education in 2017. Moreover, 77% of female Syrian refugees, and 67% of male Syrian refugees in Lebanon faced verbal harassment. For such refugees, in addition to inaccessibility to the PS needed, there are seemingly insurmountable structural challenges.

Lebanese authorities have been reluctant to establish camps for the Syrian refugees, because they fear a long-term settlement such as the case of the Palestinian refugees. Therefore, while some live in camps in designated parts of different cities, most of them in Tripoli, others live within host communities in private apartments and other forms of housing, for which they have to pay monthly, market rate rent. The result is that many families are crammed into small living spaces.<sup>37</sup> Unlike camp refugees, reaching and providing PS to urban refugees creates a number of challenges.

### **5.2. Discrepancy between national policies and the international refugee law in Turkey and Lebanon**

Turkey has tightened its southern borders since the onset of the Syrian migration crisis. After 2015 when millions of Syrian refugees entered Turkey, they were no longer granted refugees

<sup>34</sup>Interviews in Zahalé, 18/4/2018.

<sup>35</sup>It was not possible to verify this claim with UNHCR. The refugees in the camp in Beirut explained that this amount is inadequate because the cost of living is rather high, and thus a challenge particularly for the refugees.

<sup>36</sup>Interviews in Zahalé, 18/4/2018.

<sup>37</sup>Interviews in Mt. Lebanon 20/4/2018.

status. Instead, the Turkish government ratified the 'Law of Foreigners', offering 'temporary protection'. Temporary protection is not a legal but an administrative concept, which leaves the refugees in a precarious situation. Under this law, decisions can be taken to deport individuals on grounds of public order or terrorist affiliation without requiring proof or evidence. If the administration decides that any of these grounds are applicable, a refugee will be deported. Previously they would wait for a court order for deportation, but after the bombing in Istanbul in 2016, people are often deported without further recourse to due legal process. However, in some cases, such persons can appeal and the courts, relying on the Geneva Convention Article 33<sup>38</sup> which prohibits "refoulement" of refugees, or removal to places or countries where their lives or freedom would be at risk on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, can put injunctions on deportations. The principle of non-refoulement is an essential protection instrument under international human rights, refugee, humanitarian and customary law. Turkey complies with the international law, except in the application of the emergency decree. The judicial appeal mechanism helps to defer decisions on deportation, however, in practice there is tendency to by-pass the law. In addition to this, is the misuse of voluntary return, when persons sign under duress and are returned to Syria. The UNHCR mandate in Turkey does not include the registration of refugees.

The situation in Lebanon is different, but Syrian refugees continue to experience challenges similar to those in Turkey. For instance, Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 UN convention on the Status of Refugees and it lacks a coherent national legislation dealing with refugees. However, its constitution amendment in 1990 asserts that: "Lebanon is (...) a founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and that "the Government shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception". (Janmyr 2016:10). This notwithstanding, these principles are rarely practiced in the local courts (Ibid); although international law takes precedence over national law, it is often not applied when dealing with refugees. Prior to 2015, Lebanon operated an open-door policy allowing Syrians to enter the country. According to the residency rule that came into force in 2015, Syrian refugees applying for renewal of residency permits are divided into two categories: those registered with UNHCR, and those who are not and therefore need to find a Lebanese sponsor to be able to obtain legal residency permits. Two issues complicate the process of renewing residency permits: the requirement of fees, and arbitrary application of the regulations, both of which make it difficult for refugees in either category to renew their permits. In such circumstances, arbitrary arrests of refugees without residency permits and other forms of human rights abuses are common. In these precarious circumstances, an overwhelming majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon lack legal status.

Registration of marriages is another legal challenge for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Many of them are not aware of the consequences of not following the necessary legal procedures. Due to the extended stay, the number of

marriages among refugees is growing and documents as proof of marriage and registration of marriage are necessary conditions for accessing services as a family unit (NRC, 2014). In the sectarian State of Lebanon the religious tradition of a couple guides the marriage contract. In addition to a religious marriage certificate, a couple is required to obtain a marriage certificate in accordance with the Lebanese law.

Furthermore, in cases of marriage between Syrians and Lebanese, authorization from the General Security Office might be required. If the couple has not registered their marriage, they cannot obtain birth registration for their child. It is difficult for such a child to have proof of identity as well as the legal bond to the parents and the family (Ibid.). It was reported that 92% of refugees did not meet the legal and administrative requirements to register their children born in Lebanon (Human Rights Watch 2016). The UNHCR (2008) also confirms that "obtaining legal documents, specifically legal residency and birth registration, continues to be a challenge for Syrian refugees". Thus, refugees are caught in a vicious cycle - they cannot register births to get identity documents, while at the same time, they are required to possess such documents, without which they may not even be allowed to leave the country.

### 5.3. Mediation attempts

The initial mediation in Syria was led by the League of Arab States and the UN, which jointly appointed Kofi Annan as the first envoy to Syria in February 2012. Annan "drafted a six point plan, outlining a framework for a supervised truce that would lead to a 'Syrian-led political process'... With Russia and the US at loggerheads over Syria, a clearly frustrated Annan resigned his mission" (Lundgren (2016:4), as the international powers failed to provide the necessary support for his efforts. The second UN envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, was appointed soon after Annan in August 2012. Brahimi "adopted a more cautious and consultative approach... trying to convince the parties of the futility of continued war and repeatedly stressing the tremendous humanitarian costs" (Ibid.). Nevertheless, Brahimi lost trust with the key players and he, too, resigned in May 2014. The UN appointed its third envoy, Staffan de Mistura in July 2014. In view of his predecessors' failure to negotiate a peaceful deal acceptable to the myriad parties to the Syrian conflict, de Mistura took a different approach, namely, the preference for "limited truces" over "a comprehensive, top down ceasefire" (Lundgren, 2016:5). In July 2015, the UN mediator claimed that the Geneva Process "had uncovered 'shared sense of urgency' among most stake holders" (Ibid). Subsequent developments in Syria, for instance, the mounting war exhaustion and the consolidation of the ISIS, an important factor in the war, and Russia's direct military intervention in Syria, fostered a new diplomatic attempt which brought together what came to be known as the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), to negotiate a new peace plan based on the Geneva Communiqué. Hence, the Security Council Resolution 2254 which formalizes the new peace plan and paved the way for negotiations. In February 2016 the ISSG presented a proposal for "nationwide cessation of hostilities" (Lundgren, 2016:6). However, the war against the Salafi Jihadist opposition, who were excluded from the ceasefire mediation process, continued unabated, while the ceasefire remained fragile as different groups found it difficult to contain hostilities (Ibid.).

Amidst the challenges related to the perceptions of the conflict by the parties, a plethora of actors and their vastly divergent interests and the geopolitics (regional and international), the UN appointed its fourth mediator,

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<sup>38</sup>Article 33 of the 1951 Convention provides: "No Contracting State shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his (or her) life or freedom would be threatened on account of his (or her) race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." See UNHCR Advisory on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol."

Geir Pedersen in November 2018 (Hellmüller and Zahra 2019). At the start of his mission, Pedersen stressed the importance of working on the issues outlined in Resolution 2254 and emphasized the need for rebuilding trust and confidence in order to pave the way for a political process between the Syrian government and the opposition. He was clear that “after eight years of conflict, this process will be long and difficult”, but possible to move forward “step by step” (Security Council, 2019:3). Furthermore, Pedersen underscores the desperate need to meet the humanitarian and protection needs of Syrians across the country, notably the 73,000 people in al Hol and the civilians remaining in Rukban who are in dire need of food and medicines. He made an appeal for action on the release of detainees/abductees, and clarification on the fate of missing persons to both Syria’s Government and the opposition, he said that progress on this humanitarian issue “would be an important confidence-building measure” (Security Council, 2019:3). He made clear his intentions to advance the process by reaching out to Syrian refugees, civil society, women’s groups, and other Syrian actors through the Civil Society Support Room (CSSR). In this approach, one can identify the following elements where psychosocial support is crucial in the mediation process:

- Building and gaining trust among the various actors, without which it has hitherto been impossible for them to agree on a workable peace plan in Syria.
- Addressing the issue of the missing persons for both sides to the conflict. This is important from a human rights perspective for both the victims; and their families who continue to bear the pain and suffering because of their missing loved ones.
- Ensuring participation of the Syrian people in the peace negotiations is important because it gives them an opportunity to contribute to peacebuilding, social cohesion and the reconstruction the fractured Syrian society and state. Psychosocial support is particularly crucial for the peacebuilding efforts and the envisaged social, economic and political reconstruction processes in Syria.
- Meeting the humanitarian and protection needs of people across Syria is important for the mediation process because the humanitarian crisis occasioned by the conflict has adversely affected the physical and psychosocial well-being and safety of individuals, communities and entire populations. As illustrated in figure 7 before, the IASC guidelines promote an integrated approach to psychosocial support in humanitarian contexts.

In addition to the international mediation efforts numerous Syrian groups are involved in mediation efforts. Describing such local mediation initiatives, a refugee in Beirut said that his group is working with support of some peace organizations to bring together “outside opposition, not inside opposition.” He went on to describe a meeting that was held in a church (‘a neutral place’) in Aleppo where people came – many from government and opposition and confessed that they were fed up with the war, with the conflict. They want peace, economy, trust-building and reconciliation to take place. There were many Sunnis in the meeting. Maybe down deep they don’t like Assad. But for the sake of rebuilding Aleppo, they will tolerate that. There is a deep tension between Alawites and Sunni. Until that time, people don’t object to being together to rebuild Syria again<sup>39</sup>.

## ‘When you are facing war you must respond’: Addressing violence against women

When asked to describe the status of PS for Syria, a Syrian woman living in Gaziantep and working with groups inside Syria described the need for PS in the following interview excerpt:

*I worked inside as a volunteer for two years... We worked with community based psychosocial support (CBPS) in women and girl-friendly spaces, life skills, case management for gender-based violence (GBV). Some cases need health support, legal consultation, mental health therapy; we deal case by case, with women who suffer, have lost their husband, been raped etc. We tried to engage women and girls to talk about issues. It is not easy to get their families to allow them to come to friendly spaces. To work with adolescent girls, one must take into consideration the whole Syrian context – community leaders, parents, teachers, school managers, husbands, and raise awareness with all of these people. Also, we face problems sometimes to allow them to come to centers so we have mobile teams and go out to them. All services we target on them when they come for that. When they come for medicine we take time to explain about early marriage. There is a common point - all types of violence that women face in community. It works in the Syria context. Some men do not welcome direct work with their women. This indirect work is working. I think PS for women was not so effective. You have to empower women, not just respond to their problems - the need to be strong to defend themselves, to provide them tools to be strong inside. We must prevent this from the beginning: training, workshops, discussions among women, awareness raising of the whole community because a lot of factors affect women’s lives in Syria. The authorities and the cultural norms, the men - all affect women in the family more than in the community. Some men don’t respect their wives. GBV is kind of complicated because everyone likes children but not everyone likes women.*

*You must empower them because PS does not have a very big impact on the women. Everyone is doing PS and not everyone is qualified. One session is not PS. If it is not a whole program it is not PS... For me, when you see women taking good positions in the community, participating in local council, in management level in NGOs, even in private work, that is a dream. Someday, I want to see Syrian woman taking roles and expressing themselves more and more.<sup>40</sup>*

This woman is unequivocal in her conviction that when one is faced by war, one must respond. It is imperative to respond. She raises a number of issues concerning the nexus of violence against women and PS in a war situation:

(a) She links the need for health support, legal consultation, and mental health therapy case by case for those who have lost their husbands and those who have experienced sexual violence (rape). Thus, she calls for a holistic approach, paying attention to the various domains of well-being, as well as working across the different tiers of the PS intervention triangle.

(b) She introduces an important point about the methods of providing

<sup>39</sup>Interview in Beirut, May, 2018.

<sup>40</sup>This woman did not say that she was working with any organization in Gaziantep and she did not reveal the names of the groups she was working with in Syria. She emphasized that when faced by war, one has to act in response, regardless of group affiliation or association. Interview, Gaziantep, 25/4/2018.

PS in a war situation which she sums up thus: 'This indirect work is working'. She makes it clear that it is sensitive to work with women or girls to provide PS in the Syrian context and, as an insider, she enumerates the challenges thereof. She advises that providing PS alone is not a solution, the best method is to combine different services, for instance when women go to the hospital, they can also get other targeted services. Most important, women must be empowered 'to provide them tools to be strong inside'. In the words of this Syrian female refugee, one can say that the needs for PS cannot be better stated.

## Approaches to psychosocial support for children in Syria

Current estimates indicate that one in every six children globally are living in conflict zones, which, according to UNICEF, means a 75% increase since 1995. In stable situations, the multiple layers of the ecological environment of a child can provide protective insulation from the harsh realities of the world around them. In conflict or post-conflict environments, these protective layers are often destroyed. The parents that we interviewed in Lebanon and Turkey, said that safety, unemployment, lack of adequate housing, lack of health care and education for their children are their greatest challenges.

Psychosocial support for children can be approached in a number of ways, depending on the situation in which the services are delivered and the available resources. The situation of children inside Syria is aptly captured in the following excerpt from an interview with a group of people who are working in Idlib:

*Concerning about how we introduce Psychosocial Support is that every child has war and peace at the same time. Now because of the current circumstances the importance of PS is very high. We have so many traumatized children. They don't trust themselves. They are feeling like they are threatened all the time, they are not outgoing. They can't concentrate. They drop out of school!*<sup>41</sup>

During a Skype interview with teachers working in a school in Idlib, they explained how they equip young children with survival skills in case their classrooms are bombed:

*As PS workers, we are trying to help the students and put them in safe environment so they can feel their childhood again. We give them activities like sport, cinema, ask them to do things to trust themselves again like initiatives to return to normal life... Now we are in a school, so how to react if we are targeted. How to protect themselves to know what they are going to do. This is prevention. In the case of targeting in a school, the children should go to the basement. Maybe sometimes go under the desks to protect themselves. Open their mouth so not cause problems in their ears. If the place is targeted, turn the body to get less harm... Lean on me. Go under the stairs. Go in corners because it is stronger there. Put paper on every young child's wrist with name and father's name so they can get back to parents.*<sup>42</sup>

We were informed that the PS services in Idlib are delivered by workers trained in basic psychosocial intervention in a school setting in an active conflict zone. Their efforts focus on building supportive relationships, skills in expression of feelings, preparedness for emergencies, and mobilization of parents and community members to support child protection. The teachers in Idlib described the PS given to children and their families thus:

*In our school case management is life skills, peace education (values of peace IDEAL course). We have a non-social student. When we see this, we gave him paper to draw something. He painted his Daddy as a carcass and his mother in prison. He has problems at home. Mom remarried. The child is with grandparents. After school he works for money. In some classes we give him extra help to restore trust in himself. He made his first friend after a month... You usually show how to take care of hygiene and be protected from strangers. The program: (a) how can I protect myself; (b) if a stranger says to come with me, what should I do; (c) if someone tries to exploit them (human trafficking). In Syria we have 48 schools and centers. We have about 20,000 students all together, everywhere in the north of Syria, in Idlib.*<sup>43</sup>

The teachers further explained that the first point of contact when the child comes to school is the psychosocial support officer, whose job is it to provide psychosocial support for school children. They described the cooperation between family and the school psychosocial officer. For instance, "when a family has a child who has an issue, the parents approach the school and discuss their concerns with PSS officer. Even the PSS officer coordinates with the class teacher; and if a teacher notices something, he calls PSS officer. PSS officers often assist with activities in the classroom."<sup>44</sup>

In this excerpt, the teachers do not only describe PS for the children; they also raise a wide range of pertinent issues in Syria: the child who draws his father as a carcass may have seen his father killed; the mother remarried and may have neglected or abandoned him; and his grandparents may be unable to look after him and that is why he works after school. This sums up the full range of the impact of the conflict on the society as a whole, namely: broken families, child labor, poverty and widespread psychosocial impact. In addition, access to many children in need of protection, is limited by destruction of the educational infrastructure, and internal displacement throughout Syria. However, a recent analysis of the situation in Syria shows that the government has regained control of more than half of the Syrian state territory. With the exception of Idlib and Afrin in the northwest which are under the control of the Syrian rebel forces, and Turkish forces respectively; and the Kurdish controlled North-East region, large territories in the central and south-western parts of the country, the major cities of Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, Homs; and most provincial capitals, are in the government controlled region (Lund, 2018). In spite of the devastation caused by the war, the Syrian state still runs schools, hospitals and other institutions. Some state-ran institutions continue to operate in government-controlled areas and also in rebel-controlled areas such as Idlib. Many people in Syria continue to travel in order to access government services or humanitarian aid (Ibid).

However, the "World Disasters Report" of 2018 suggested out that generally, humanitarian actors tend pay more attention "to areas, population groups and sectors where the most information already exists, or where there are easy wins or particular gains to be made" (IFRC 2018: 33). Therefore, in Syria it is important for the international and local actors on the ground<sup>45</sup>, to explore opportunities to work with the government in integrating psychosocial interventions with other programs, in order to provide comprehensive services, both at the local community, town, province, regional and national

<sup>41</sup>Skype interview teachers and PS workers, Gaziantep, 24/4/2018.

<sup>42</sup>Skype interview with teachers, Gaziantep, 24/4/2018.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

levels. Already existing psychosocial support programs can be expanded, diversified and made more inclusive of all the sectors of the conflict-affected population. Hence, further efforts should be invested in the plans for continued psychosocial support over time through local participation and external partnerships in order to ensure the sustainability of the programs. Finally, every effort should “do no harm”.

The horrific descriptions of the situation of the children in Syria presented in a focus group discussion via Skype with teachers in Idlib, Syria are corroborated by World Vision “Syria’s children are living in the midst of the most significant humanitarian protection crisis in living memory. We are failing to protect their lives, their childhoods and their futures”. The World Vision’s Syria Crisis Response Director was quoted in the World Vision Report of March 2018 as saying that “While their survival is and should be everyone’s priority, we need to go beyond just keeping these children alive. It is imperative that they are able to lead happy, healthy and productive lives after Syria”. It was reported that, currently, children are lacking many of the things they need to live those kinds of lives.

## Community Based Protection for Syrian children in Lebanon

A number of organizations and programs work to mobilize community members and parents to be actively engaged in the protection of children. For instance, World Vision and Islamic Relief Worldwide in Lebanon work together to engage religious leaders to address harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage. Child marriage is a widespread practice in many countries in the region, including Syria. This is in spite of the many years of women’s and children’s rights campaigns against the practice. During the interview with the staff of Islamic Relief Worldwide, it emerged that child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon was on the rise, for two main reasons: (a) First, the parents are eager to protect their young daughters from potential sexual abuse, which traditionally incurs dishonor to concerned families and communities, and thus they deem necessary to marry the girls off. (b) Second, due to lack of work and the economic hardship that families experience in such a challenging refugee situation, some parents marry their daughters off not only because it “makes one less mouth to feed” as the interviewees put it, but also because family ties created through such marriages can bring both social and economic benefits in the prevailing circumstances.

Therefore, one of the most difficult challenges for child protection that dominated the FGDs in Sidon was child marriage for girls, to which many Syrian children are vulnerable. We were informed by the interviewees that, to address this problem, some international organizations involved in child protection, for instance Islamic Relief Worldwide, enlist the help of influential community religious leaders who have the moral authority to engage with the tension between traditionally established practices and the rules and legal requirements for child protection. On the one hand, some religious leaders argued for the deeply embedded traditional practice of child marriage, which is also permissible in Islam; while on the other, some were favorable

to negotiation and dialogue in the interpretation of the traditions in view of the harmful health implications of child marriage. The divergence of opinion was also emblematic of the fault-line in the refugee community. According to the interviewees, the challenge is that both the religious leaders who support the practice on the basis that it is admissible in Islam, and those who interpret the same tenets and oppose the practice on health grounds, are right in their opinions and therefore they cannot be faulted.<sup>46</sup> The conclusion of the FGD was that engaging prominent religious leaders in both camps, with a view to encouraging dialogue, was crucial to addressing child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

## 5.4. Summary of challenges and prospects for PS in Syria

When asked to comment on the situation on the ground regarding provision of psychosocial support, Dr Sayid, a Syrian psychiatrist living in Turkey and working with groups in Syria, had the following to say:

*There are numerous challenges for psychologists working remotely inside Syria. They need courses so that they do not cause harm to the people they try to help. I still do some supervision, but I still hear about the harm being done. Without a functioning government and without rules, some people make certificates and go to work as psychologists. For some, it is like this: ‘I teach you this psychosocial work, it is easy’. Some people do not have the necessary background or skills; they did not study. Thus, we have many psychologists without adequate training. We should establish a minimum two-year training program to prepare people to work inside Syria... Now they are thinking about this - how to build capacity for psychologists.<sup>47</sup>*

Another interviewee with different concerns, placed emphasis on what he considered to be activities that, in his opinion, “reduce psychosocial support to entertainment activities”. He went on to describe what he considered to be fatigue with this approach and argued that “the reality on the ground is that men and women need skills to be able to rebuild their lives and hope for their future”.<sup>48</sup> A number of the people interviewed shared this opinion - that people need skills and support to rebuild their lives. The need for psychosocial support as people struggle to rebuild their lives after such a devastating conflict is evident; and the IASC guidelines (see pages 18, 24-24 above) emphasize the significance of psychosocial support in emergencies, including conflict.

There is no doubt that there are different points of views among the people interviewed, regarding psychosocial programs in Syria in terms of their adequacy, methods of application and the staff. Nevertheless, available evidence suggest that most of the MHPSS work is carried out in numerous health care facilities across the country. For instance, the Union des Organisations de Secours et Soins Médicaux (the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations – UOSSM) operates thirty-eight medical primary, secondary, tertiary care clinics: thirty in the north and eight in south of the country. Efforts have been made to integrate WHO mhGap<sup>49</sup> program in all primary health centers. A Syrian child psychiatrist participating in the supervision of these programs reiterated during the interview that nearly all clinics have MHPSS through WHO mhGap.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to outreach psychosocial programs in different places where security has been restored, some of the organizations involved in MHPS work in Syria are using technology and social media to reach people who need

<sup>45</sup>There are numerous international organizations and local community-based groups that are working in different parts of Syria to provide services. See the list in the appendix above.

<sup>46</sup>Interview, Sidon, 20/4/2018.

<sup>47</sup>Interview, Gaziantep, Turkey, 25/4/2018.

<sup>48</sup>Interview, Gaziantep, Turkey, 26/4/2018.

psychological support. For instance, the Syrian Association of Psychiatrists has developed an application for carrying out audiovisual psychiatric consultations and interviews electronically. This service which is internet-based, has become available across the country and it also benefits from the support of hundreds of Syrian doctors living abroad (Hedar, 2017:933)

In a war situation there are many causes of stress, including deceased or missing relatives, material losses, displacement, health needs and insecurity (UNICEF, 2014).

Conflict-related violence, as well as issues related to adaptation to new settings (Hassan et al, 2015), further complicate the situation of the refugees. In addition to these stress factors, in the Syrian culture mental health needs are associated with stigma, which hinders those in need of psychological support from talking about their mental health needs, from seeking help, or even attending follow-up sessions after screening. At the same time, we recognize that each conflict situation is different and therefore, one has to take into consideration the fact that doing psychosocial work in the Syrian conflict situation can be challenging. In view of this reality, it is important to take into bear in mind that "it is difficult to obtain an accurate indication of these needs given the above variables and also considering the frequent movement of these populations (Ibid. p. 82).

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<sup>49</sup>mhGap is a WHO developed tool-kit for health care professionals who have no MHPS training but need basic knowledge for diagnostic purposes. According to WHO a country is defined by a MH gap when there are 1 or less psychologists and psychiatrists per 100.000 inhabitants. UOSSM sends these material sets to professionals in social work and health care including MDs

<sup>50</sup>Interview, Gaziantep, 27/4/2018.

# Chapter 6

# CROSSCUTTING THEMES

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## Introduction

Usually, conflict situations are aggravated by social problems that are linked to or created by conflict. Such social problems include poverty, social exclusion, unemployment and unequal access to education, inadequate housing and degradation of the environment, corruption, gender-based violence and a general lack of human security. Considering that all these challenges have social, political, spiritual, psychological and material implications for conflict-affected populations, the psychosocial support has direct synergy with peacebuilding and development work. Regarding sustainable development, the World Bank recognizes that growth must be both inclusive and environmentally sound in order to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity for present populations to continue to meet the needs of future generations. The three pillars of sustainable development are, economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion.

### **6.1. The link between livelihoods and psychosocial well-being**

#### **The nexus of psychosocial support, development and peacebuilding**

The IASC guidelines recognizes the impact of conflict and disaster emergencies on populations and the nexus of psychosocial support, development and peacebuilding:

*Armed conflicts and natural disasters cause significant psychological and social suffering to affected populations. The psychological and social impacts of emergencies may be acute in the short term, but they can also undermine the long-term mental health and psychosocial well-being of the affected population. These impacts may threaten peace, human rights and development. One of the priorities in emergencies is thus to protect and improve people's mental health and psychosocial well-being (IASC 2005:1).*

Therefore, peacebuilding has become intimately intertwined with social-economic development, gender equality, reconciliation and social justice (Porter, 2007). Hence, the link between livelihoods, traumatic experiences and psychosocial well-being is indisputable. To create an integrated approach to promoting the psychosocial wellbeing of affected communities, psychosocial interventions need to be linked to wider development contexts such as education and healthcare.

## BOX 6. DEVELOPMENT

- *Livelihood work with conflict-affected populations — where individuals often have ‘invisible wounds’ — must be holistic, humble and requires a healthy mix of psychosocial and economic interventions (Wessells 2014).*
- *A rights-based approach is an integral part of human security development approach*
- *A combination of psychosocial support and economic support is more likely to promote well-being in ways that neither intervention can achieve on its own.*
- *In many cases, the psychosocial and the economic elements are complementary and synergistic - psychosocial improvements are crucial for the transformative success of the economic activities, therefore, it is necessary to support the efforts for integrating psychosocial and economic dimensions in development work.*

Livelihood resources include tangible assets such as natural (land, water minerals) physical (shelter, infrastructure, equipment), and financial capital; as well as intangible human resources (education, skills, health) and social (institutions, relationships, trust) (Brocklesby and Fisher, 2003; Schreckenberget al. 2010, Scoones, 1998, Hussein 2002). In addition to these are gender, power, markets, rights, and legal frameworks. Livelihood strategies include agricultural intensification and expansion, livelihood diversification, and migration (UN, 2009). In the development agenda, the scope of the definition of livelihood has widened to include the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual aspects of life.

On the societal level, development means sustainable social-economic development (Williamson and Robinson 2006) which has implications for all the seven domains of well-being. It must also be borne in mind that development is a dynamic process. While they acknowledge that the seven domains of well-being have global relevance, Williamson and Robinson also recognize that these divisions “are fairly arbitrary” and they are derived from a “particular cultural and educational perspective” (2006:13). They point out that there are other aspects of human interaction such as political, economic, legal, etc. They reiterate the importance of the ecological interrelatedness of the individual and the group. A “fundamental premise... is that the individual and group well-being are intimately related...we all require at least occasional help from others and depend on those around us not to do us harm” (Ibid.). Psychosocial support for affected communities therefore, should be a constituent part of peacebuilding processes that include the following:

- social-economic development
- gender equality
- reconciliation and social justice
- education and growth of human capital; rebuilding of social fabric and improving the human rights environment.
- memory and identity in post-conflict period: transmission of memory is crucial in the development of new identities of citizenship that are key to reconciliation processes (Porter 2007).

Addressing structural and relational causes and consequences of conflicts requires an approach that promotes the participation of the affected populations or communities. Hence, a psychosocial approach that is also community-based and holistic is crucial to peacebuilding. It is therefore, important to link psychosocial support for individuals and groups with wider processes of transformation for social justice that can change the structures of oppression, marginalization and exclusion that may have contributed to the conflict in the first place. In the next section, we present a variety of PS approaches to peacebuilding.

An integrated framework for psychosocial support in peacebuilding

The diagram below presents an integrated approach model illustrating the nexus of the following key domains: justice, social economic development and peacebuilding and psychosocial support in processes that eventually result in social change. This nexus can also be inferred from one of the principles of WHO which states that “the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and it is dependent on the fullest co-operation of individuals and States” (WHO 2006).



**Figure 10.** An integrated approach to psychosocial support, peacebuilding, justice, social and economic development (adopted from Kubai 2018).

When a society emerges from a conflict and new relations are developed and social structures are rebuilt, social change begins to occur. As suggested above, a quest for justice needs to take into account the competing interests of transitional and retributive justice, reconciliation and forgiveness among people who experienced and perpetrated atrocities, dealing with memory, and the re-integration of perpetrators and ex-combatants – who may also be wounded in different ways and often have to deal with shame and rejection. The achievement of peacebuilding therefore, is inextricably linked to the reconstruction of social structures, DDR process as well as addressing culture-based, gender, ethnic, regional and religious inequalities, all of which are inextricably linked with social reconstruction and economic development of post conflict societies.

#### **BOX 7. HUMAN SECURITY**

- *Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms - freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations*
- *It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations.*
- *It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.*
- *Human security reinforces human dignity. People's horizons extend far beyond survival, to matters of love, culture and faith...*
- *Human security builds on people's efforts, strengthening what they do for themselves (Commission on Human Security, 2003:4).*

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## **6.2. Peacebuilding, psychosocial support and human security**

In spite of the growing recognition of the significance of an integrated PS among various agencies, there is still a deficit when responding to conflict situations and PS often does not go in tandem with many interventions in peacebuilding. It is evident that PS is often not integrated into the various interventions for peace and reconciliation work. When the UN published its 1994 Human Development Report, the concept of human security was included in the protection of the well-being of persons. In 2001 the Commission for Human Security (CHS) was established and in its final report *Human Security Now*, human security is defined.

According to the UN, it is important to protect people from critical and pervasive threats and situations, which include conflict and gross violations of human rights, among others. “It also means creating systems that give people the building blocks of survival, dignity and livelihood. Human security connects the different freedoms: freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to take action on one’s own behalf” (Othman, 2007:7). Admittedly, freedom from fear of the devastating impact, pain and suffering caused by conflicts is a psychosocial issue for affected communities. Human security “deals with threats that have not been sufficiently addressed; the capacity to identify threats, and “to mitigate their effects when they occur.” It means helping victims cope with the consequences of the widespread insecurity, thus it also provides a framework for responding to psychosocial needs during crises arising from political violence (as well as other crises).

The concept of human security emphasizes that these disasters are preventable or their physical, social and emotional effects on individuals, families and communities (Kubai 2018) can be mitigated to ensure the well-being of individuals, families and communities. By paying attention to the security of the person (individuals and families), psychosocial issues that cannot be addressed through the state security approach, can be brought to the core of peacebuilding interventions. Therefore, it is not a matter of linking, but acknowledging that PS is intrinsically embedded in the core principals of human security.

# Chapter 7

# CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

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## Introduction

### 7.1. Gaps in current approaches

Though the importance of the integration of PS into the humanitarian response and relief deployment has been acknowledged, a closer examination of a wide range of examples reveals that PS interventions in peace building and reconciliation work are relegated to a secondary place, if not left out altogether. There is a common tendency to compare PS interventions with others which are considered to be “more important” or to “have direct impact on the peace processes.” In her analysis of peacebuilding and MHPSS in Northern Uganda, Rokhideh (2017) makes important observations about the characteristics of the interventions, namely:

*... they have largely been (1) short lived; (2) targeted specific groups at the expense of others; (3) failed to respond to the daily needs of the population and (4) remained relatively disconnected from the wider post conflict recovery process. To address the full range of conditions affecting societies emerging from complex emergencies, psychosocial interventions must be responsible to the needs and changes that arise during the delicate war-to peace transition (2017:215).*

### 7.2. Funding mechanisms and prioritizing immediate needs

Though the major funding agencies have recently expanded their work in response to conflict situation, funding psychosocial support for peace and reconciliation work in complex conflict-related crises is rarely considered a life-saving activity. There is therefore no doubt that, funding is one of the fundamental causes of major gaps in psychosocial support in conflict situations. When planning a response for different needs, usually the practice is to categorize responses as immediate and short-term to alleviate suffering, or what is referred to as “life-saving”. These include food, shelter, water and immediate mental health. When the immediate crisis is resolved, often within six months, the funding ends. Then a different kind of funding earmarked for recovery is put in place and eventually, subsequent types of funding focus on development. In such cases little or no resources are allocated for psychosocial support.

Thus, short-term funding regimes and the compartmentalization of different types of support can and often do generate challenges for psychosocial support in conflict situations for two reasons: (a) psychosocial support is not linear, it is complex and requires an integrated approach and (b) psychosocial support in peacebuilding and

reconciliation work requires a long-term approach in order to address the often widespread and long-term impact of conflict at the individual, community and societal levels. With such funding regimes, psychosocial support initiated under one funding appeal after the crisis, may be stopped at the end of the funding period. It must also be borne in mind that:

*... when planning services, financial donors often require that short term funding is used solely for the alleviation of immediate needs, arising directly from the emergency situation, and do not allow the setting up of programs with a longer-term perspective. This is unfortunate because a lot can be achieved if a longer-term perspective is adopted from the onset, without forfeiting the focus on immediate needs (Ventevogel, 2013).*

The implementation of services depends on the funding cycle, thus the decision is often not based on the needs of the aid recipients. For instance, in conflict settings where there is little trust, new social relations take time to build and are slow to materialize. There is no doubt that termination of funding can adversely affect peacebuilding and recovery processes, which are essentially long-term. Yet, peacebuilding and recovery processes depend on such social relations that are essential for repairing the social fabric destroyed by the conflict. Building trust between former enemies, which is a challenging and slow process under any circumstance, is unlikely to be achieved when the clock is ticking because funding is coming to an end. In such circumstances, it can be a matter of assessing the risks for the programs to determine the priorities.

In conflict and post-conflict situations, it is important, for psychosocial support and peacebuilding to meet both short term and long-term goals rather than be condensed in order to fulfil administrative criteria of the donors. As Lambourne and Gitau (2013:26) remind us, “the psychosocial dimension of transformative peacebuilding suggests that both peacebuilding and sustainable development depend on the capacity and agency of individuals to participate effectively, as well as relational transformation to support social cohesion and community participation”. Lederach proposes that the response to conflict needs, should be understood as a changing process which should address “the immediate problems and the broader relational and structural patterns... Change processes must not only promote short term solutions, but also build platforms capable of promoting long-term social change” (2009:8). Hence, the funding schemes for interventions should be sustainable, considering that it takes a long time to bring about transformative change in social relationships in conflict-affected societies.

### **7.3. Organizations’ need for concrete results to provide to donors**

While the notion of ‘theory of change’ is important in the implementation of development and humanitarian crises, the issues of who determines the nature of expected change; and how it is to be measured remain debatable among practitioners. The ambiguity surrounding the concept of theory of change notwithstanding, the need to link theory and practice has become recognized. At the same time, the ways in which development, peacebuilding and humanitarian work are interconnected have been recognized by practitioners and stakeholders. Thus, it is not always easy to determine what kind of change is expected after a conflict that has caused widespread violence, displacement and destruction of the social fabric, and resulted in immense suffering in a given population. The psychosocial approach “underscores that recovery is a multidimensional, long-term process” that involves work at the individual,

community, and ‘macro’ levels in society and defies the measurement of impact. This approach therefore, recognizes that efforts towards reconstruction of a safe, democratic and economically viable society will benefit individuals struggling with their individual healing processes (Weston 2001).

However, they often do not fit the expected tangible results (especially statistics of people who have received support) to provide to donors. Many foundations and multinational agencies would consider Lederach’s long-term, learning oriented timeframe, as a show-stopper since, it directly contradicts the dominant ‘project mind-set’ which organizations are used to. Short-term projects fulfill organizations’ need for concrete results to provide to donors, even if the outcomes do not truly benefit the community in the long-run. Often they are carried out without a complete understanding of the people and circumstances that engendered the conflict. Although this result-centered approach is common, we concur with Lederach’s suggestion that it can be counterproductive, unsustainable and can exclude the community from the process.

### **7.4. Concluding remarks**

Violent conflicts lead to immense suffering, and peacebuilding and psychosocial support as concepts are well known. However, the direct impacts of gross violations of human rights: political violence, poverty, marginalization and discrimination, are not often linked with indirect impacts, such as mental health and people’s broader well-being. Therefore, studies that aim to help build preparedness and awareness and to create new co-produced knowledge, collaboration and participatory approaches between the academy and the humanitarian fraternity are timely; and the humanitarian agencies across the globe are turning to evidence-based programming for their interventions. At the same time there is keen interest to support the development of novel interactions, including with local communities, and/or interfaces for the understanding and perception of the impact of humanitarian crises that bring together different actors and approaches in the field.

Though the period of the wars in the three countries described in this report, varies: fifty-three years in Colombia, ten years in Nepal and nine years in Syria, the concept of the ripe moment for conflict resolution (Zatman, 2006, 2008, 2010), provides a useful framework for reflecting on the past and current peacebuilding initiatives. The three conflict situations differ in important respects. However, relying on the notion that parties resolve their conflict only when they are ready to do so, our analysis leads to the conclusion that the increased suffering resulting from the conflict had the effect of solidifying the resistance of the various groups, rather than generating perceptions that could promote the idea of negotiations. There is no doubt that this has enduring implications for peacebuilding, justice and reconciliation because bridging the gap between victims and perpetrators, rebuilding the social fabric and bringing about social, political and economic reconstructing requires a multi-sectoral approach. More importantly, it takes a long time to set a conflict-affected society onto a recovery path.

The three case studies, namely, Colombia, Nepal and Syria are at different stages of peacebuilding and reconstruction of societies fractured by prolonged intra-state conflicts. Previous research on conflict-affected societies such as Rwanda, South Africa, Guatemala, Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina has revealed that, social, political and economic reconstruction are intertwined with transitional justice. After many countries plunged into intra-state wars and genocide at the beginning of the 1990s, peace and conflict scholars wrestled with the question of which comes first for societies fractured by conflict: peace and reconciliation or justice. Over the years, it has become evident that it is not

a question of which comes first. Peace and justice have proved to be inextricably intertwined; they cannot be conceived in a linear progression, one after another. As the axiom goes, delayed justice is justice denied. Peace and justice cannot be deferred without risking serious consequences for the reconstruction and development of the affected societies. The mending of the social fabric and rebuilding of trust among communities that have been broken by the conflict must be given priority.

Political violence causes deep psychological and physical wounds on society as a whole, both the perpetrators and the victims. The loss of life and material, and the destruction of the infrastructure, as well as the loss of livelihoods for individuals and communities, have lasting adverse impact on societies affected by internal conflicts. To help people cope with the loss of their loved ones, their material possessions such as homes, which not only have sentimental value but are also linked to social and individual identities, psychosocial support inevitably becomes a core element of the peace, justice and reconstruction processes and programs. The implications of this, as has been illustrated in this report (p.71 above) are clear in Colombia, Nepal and Syria.

In Colombia, the peacebuilding and social reconstruction processes are at a nascent stage. The different organizations, visited during the fieldwork for this report, were debating the obstacles to establishing peace, justice and reconciliation processes, and how to link these processes to economic development. It is evident that psychosocial support is crucial for achieving justice related to the issues of the territories: the marginalized groups and replacement of the narcotic farming and trade, with appropriate forms of livelihood for the victims of the conflict, particularly those in the rural areas; and the reintegration of ex-combatants into the local communities. There are no quick fixes for these challenges. Furthermore, sporadic violence in many parts of the country is still prevalent, as the new government continues to wrestle with the implementation of the Havana Accord. It is evident that much has been done to lay the foundation for peace and justice - millions of victims have been identified and pathways for negotiations with the different armed groups have been established. However, the road ahead towards sustainable, peace, justice and reconstruction of this fractured society is long and difficult, after a conflict that has ravaged the society for half a century.

In Nepal, many of those affected by the conflict are still waiting for justice, more than a decade after the conflict. Perhaps, the situation might have been different if greater efforts had been invested at the end of the conflict, with a view to establishing pathways that would lead to the establishment of peace and justice; as well as development processes. It is important to focus on both the impact of the conflict and the cultural traditions that define the Nepali society. Peace and justice might not be achieved if sections of the population are discriminated on grounds of religion and culture. The trauma of this form discrimination is long lasting and research has shown that it is a major impediment to social, political and economic development. Therefore, post conflict peacebuilding and justice for the victims must include justice for the communities that have traditionally endured discrimination, aggravated by the political violence during the conflict.

On the one hand, available evidence shows that the changes in the political system have generated hope for the society, as some of the people interviewed reiterated during the discussions that: "in the new democracy, it is illegal to discriminate but slow to practice. One village, one caste, one vocation, one caste" (p.44 above). It was clear that the new administrative system, which provides for the representation of minorities such as women and Dalits at the municipality administrative level, has the potential to help address the social inequalities. On the other, though much emphasis was placed on changing the

political system and building the state, some of the victims of the conflict that were interviewed were of the opinion that peace and justice should have been prioritized early in the political process after the conflict. This was especially the case for those who are still not able to mourn the loved ones who lost their lives during the conflict. Others have found themselves in a state of frozen uncertainty; they cannot remarry and go on with their lives because the status of their missing loved ones is still unknown, while justice for victims of sexual violence also remains a very thorny issue. ■

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Annexes of this research report are available by request (overview of local and international actors working on this field in Colombia, Nepal and Syria; list of key and group interviews, list of organizations interviewed, interview questions)

**“IN THE END NO WINNERS, NO LOSERS”**

**PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN PEACEBUILDING AND  
RECONCILIATION FOR CONFLICT AFFECTED SOCIETIES**

**Anne Kubai and Kathleen Angi**

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