

CONCEPTS OF CARE: A WORKBOOK FOR COMMUNITY PRACTITIONERS



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Photo: Community celebration in Bindizi, Western Darfur, Sudan (2005) - Jayawickrama

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This booklet is dedicated to mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters and sons who are experiencing violence as part of their day-to-day life in disaster and conflict affected countries around the world and yet still have the strength to laugh and smile.

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INTRODUCTION

Part of the role of humanitarian workers in disaster and conflict affected countries is to provide caring support to people. The health care worker or the animator who works with children, women or camp co-ordinators must be able to listen, communicate and understand how to provide that caring support. Often it is assumed that the person has these basic skills whether or not they have ever been taught them.

This booklet has been written to support humanitarian workers who help people in disaster and conflict-affected communities, but whose training has not included developing their skills to improve well-being. It can also be used as a “refresher” for many kinds of helping professionals. We hope that many groups will use this booklet widely in their skills development.

We are also using this booklet as a platform to encourage cooperation across the many different areas of operation carried out by UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies. Our discussions with many IDP² community members and humanitarian workers showed an identified need for assistance and protection to be implemented simultaneously. There are many practical issues when these two aspects are being implemented in the same space (i.e.: in a camp setting or a village setting where IDP and host communities are together). We will shed light on some of these throughout this booklet, so that the readers will be able to consider and respond to these issues creatively.

Caregivers, community supporters, social workers, camp co-ordinators, community liaison officers and other animators must participate in communities without losing objectivity. By encouraging communities to tell you their needs, you can help them to identify both what they need and how to meet those needs.

² Internally displaced persons, or “IDPs”, are defined as:

“[Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border. (*Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, F. Deng, “Introduction - Scope and Purpose”, Para. 2.)

If you take the lead and solve problems for people, telling them what to do and making decisions for them, they will acquire no new skills. When you leave, they will be in the same place as before. They will not have learned how to find their own solutions.

If you just follow them and expect them to lead and you do not listen to them then you have further used up minimal resources and shared little of your own.

To stand beside is to listen, to be who you are with all of your talents and attributes, but not to act for others. In standing beside you help people learn how to cope on their own so that when you are gone the tools and impact remain.

In this booklet, we suggest some concepts of caring for people. These concepts can be used to improve wellbeing of communities as well as for integrating these concepts of care into other general activities. Use what you can and disregard the rest.

Throughout the booklet we refer to the reader as the “community practitioner.” This word has been chosen to describe all the practitioners who work with people in all contexts. We also refer to the recipient of the work as the “community.” This word has also been chosen to be applicable in all contexts.

Although this booklet is divided into sections, in actuality the processes all happen at once. They are divided to ensure that community practitioners understand each part, but, as in work and in life, they are all happening at the same time.

This booklet was written for individuals and groups to use in whatever ways are most useful. Please feel free to make copies. Use it as a whole or in parts.

PLEASE ENJOY READING!

OBJECTIVES OF THE BOOKLET

1. To develop the skills of community practitioners in listening and aiding individuals in the community
2. To put forward different mechanisms for improving wellbeing in conflict and disaster affected and related community settings
3. To build upon community practitioners' own abilities to empower people to find their way.
4. To enable community practitioners to teach others.
5. To provide support for people who perform the challenging and tiring work of helping conflict and disaster affected and related communities.
6. To promote community-ownership, empowerment and responsible care for women, men, girls, boys, youth, elderly and disabled people through utilising a range of skills for services and security within conflict and disaster affected communities around the world

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Please use this booklet in the way that suits your needs. Its small sections are designed for you to find quickly what you may want to use. It is also designed to flow from one section to another. For this reason, we suggest that you begin by reading each section and the whole book.

The entire booklet is to be enjoyed. The ideas are to be challenged, questioned, used and moulded to fit the community practitioner's working situation. It is intended to stimulate discussions among community practitioners so that they can grow in their work and achieve their goals in the community.

Please note that there are blank spaces in the stories where a name needs to be inserted. We think that it is up to you to fill in a name that you are familiar or with which your community can identify. So, please feel free to fill in the blanks accordingly.

BACKGROUND

‘Concepts of Care’ was conceived in 1999 in Sri Lanka, when Dr. Alison Eyre and Janaka Jayawickrama conducted a series of workshops for community practitioners. This booklet contains most of the concepts as they were originally developed combined with new ideas through the work in Western Darfur (Sudan), Peshawar (Pakistan) and Malawi. All the participants of the Concepts of Care workshops contributed to the development of this booklet. So, you can change and develop this booklet according to your needs and wants.

There are three fundamental ideas which underpin this booklet.

Community practitioner

Community practitioners are human beings in the same way as the people in the community with whom they work. A community practitioner is not a super woman or man who can do everything, work at the same pace all the time, and not get tired.

As a community practitioner, you may become happy, sad, excited, angry, nervous and frustrated about the situations in which you work. Remember that this is normal for any human being. Failures will rarely be your fault.

Your ability to be creative in difficult situations, laugh in happy moments with the community, cry with the community in sad moments is very important. As the community is going through difficult transitions in their lives, being another human being like them will help them to feel human too. It is part of your work and life. The concepts we are discussing throughout this booklet are not only for your work, but also for your own life as a woman or man.

Creativity and care

When we listen to our grandmothers and grandfathers we learn about our own communities. They tell us stories about brave men and women who changed the cultures and traditions that developed our communities. They were women and

men who worked while others were not working, thought while others were not thinking and acted while others were not acting. Simply put, they were creative people. As a community practitioner you are brave and creative.

Creativity and care go hand-in-hand. For example, we observe our mothers as they care for us and help us with our problems. They laugh with us in happy moments and cry with us in sad situations. They give ideas to our families in difficult times. This is also how we can deal with a situation - look at many different aspects and assess the best way or ways to approach it. For example, in Western Darfur one of the main problems is unaccompanied children in IDP camps. There are many possible ways to deal with this problem - identifying a small number to provide community based parental care with outside assistance and supervision; agency based child care for unaccompanied children; adapting schools into child care centres with international standards; finding distant relatives of unaccompanied children to be part of those families with monitoring, supervision and assistance. These are possibilities and there may be many other approaches to this issue. The community practitioner can discuss these alternatives with the community and develop a strategy which may be a combination of approaches or just one.

Mothering is a universal concept of creativity and care. Every culture has stories of mothers. Even today in conflict-affected communities, there are many stories about mothers. They help us live and solve our problems.

Wellbeing, rights and justice

History has shown that social reform such as development of new human rights protection mechanisms and empowered roles for women are the best medicines for victims of war and atrocity. Health and illness have social, economic, cultural and political roots. This means public recognition and justice. Reactions to conflicts are not just a personal problem with the burden on the individual to recover, but an indictment of the socio-political forces that produced them.

Justice and wellbeing cannot be separated. As a community practitioner you must challenge and question ideas in order to understand them. As human beings we tend to accept ideas contained in traditional practices, written in books or told by someone whom we believe knows more than we do. These ideas are not always

true. We must think for ourselves and encourage our community to think. We all understand things according to our own culture, education, values and experiences. Understanding puts our beliefs into perspective.

This can be a challenge. One person's rights and justice can often be another person's punishment. As a community practitioner it is important to let your community make decisions based on access to information you have facilitated. You can only make decisions for yourself, but providing a community with all the information about a situation increases their understanding of the decisions they are making.

SECTION ONE

Who am I? Understanding yourself

Objectives

- To help community practitioners develop greater self awareness
- To enable community practitioners to understand the links between communities and themselves

Context

Who we are and how we feel is very important in both our work and our life. Communities learn as much as from what you do not say or do not do as from what you do or say. This means that your actions have an impact on the community in which you are working. What you do and how you do things—serves as a model for the community. Often, how you say or do something is more important than what you actually say or do.

For some people, it is scary to think that others look at them carefully. When you are in a community you will be watched when you walk, talk or even drink water. It can be confusing for the community practitioner how best to react within the community or with individuals. The better you know your self, the easier it is to come to a comfortable relationship with the community, and develop a relationship which respects both the community practitioner and the community. It is good to talk about this relationship with other trusted community practitioners and colleagues so you will not feel so alone.

Who you are is your greatest asset. The better you understand and care for yourself, the more useful you are. Community practitioners are people like anyone else in the community. They get angry, happy, frustrated, excited, sad and nervous—the same normal reactions to situations that everyone has. You are a person to take care of, too.

Exercises

1. Who are you? Are you a man or a woman? Old or young? Religious according to a particular faith? Do you belong to a tribe? What language do you speak?
2. What are your prejudices? What are your strengths?

Take some time to write down five words that identify who you are:

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
- iv.
- v.

Now read over the list. What do you think about the person who is all the things you have written above? What kind of a person are they? Would you like to work with this person?

3. What do you care about in your life and work? Is it peace, water and sanitation, food aid, shelter, women, children, wellbeing or human rights? Take some time to write down five things that are important to you.
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.
 - iv.
 - v.
4. Think of a time when you did something that made you feel really good about yourself.
 - i. How did it make you feel good about yourself?
 - ii. What was the special personal skill/gift that you brought to that activity?
 - iii. How do you use that special skill/gift in your work?

5. Think of something that really upsets you.
 - i. What about it upsets you? Can you think why this is?
 - ii. How do you react to this upset?
 - iii. How does the reaction affect your work and life?
 - iv. What about it is good?
 - v. What about it is bad?
 - vi. How do your feelings about it affect your work and life?

Who are you? Understanding the community

Objective:

- To develop the community practitioners' skills for understanding the community

Context

To be effective in the community with individuals and groups, we need to understand something about the person or community. This is important for many reasons. We cannot help people to solve their problems if we do not understand the situations in which they live. Their beliefs, their family situation, their work, their education, their past experiences, what they value in life, their special strengths and weaknesses are all important elements in problem solving. Taking the time to learn about a person or a community is a way of showing them that you care. This is essential for developing a caring relationship.

As the community practitioner learns about the community, it is also an important opportunity for the community to learn about themselves. Communication is two way. It must go back and forth between two or more people and is the beginning of the building of a relationship. This is a special relationship. Each person, the community practitioner and the community, is on a journey. The community is living their lives at a time when they need some help. The community practitioner is supporting the community during this part of their lives.

Community work at this stage has specific stages: A beginning, middle and an end. From the beginning, community practitioners must be aware of the end. To think about the end at the beginning may seem odd, but it is important. Community practitioners want to help communities to develop and to use their own strengths, not to depend on the community practitioner. This means that from the beginning, community practitioners must plan how to relinquish control. Essentially, they must plan how to say goodbye.

Exercise

_____ is a six-year-old girl in a small family. She is the first-born and has two siblings. One night their father and mother move to an IDP camp in the city after a long journey. _____'s father says that it is not safe in the village any more. Moving in to the IDP camp changes _____'s life. In the village she had her friends. She used to play and enjoy her life.

But in the IDP camp _____ has to fetch water, help her mother to cook and has no friends. She does not understand why the family needed to move from the village. She hates her father for this decision. She wishes that he would go away. To the great sadness of all, _____'s father does not come back from work one evening. Next day the community elders inform the family that someone had killed him. _____'s mother is then left with three children in the IDP camp.

_____ is very upset. Did she kill her father with her thoughts? An old woman in the camp had told her that bad thoughts could kill people. _____ is sure that she has killed her father. She is very scared that her mother will find out that it is her fault.

After a while, _____'s auntie becomes concerned about her. The time for mourning has passed, but _____ is not her usual self. The auntie comes to ask _____ to go to fetch water with her. As they walk, auntie tells _____ a story about a bird family who has lost the father. As the auntie tells the story, she drops her voice to let _____ fill the parts, the names of the bird, about their family... When they get to the part where the family loses the father, _____ bursts out "it is the child's thought, she killed the father with her thoughts!"

Now the auntie understands. She is silent as _____ tells the details. Is _____ sad because she feels that she killed the father with her thoughts? This is one thing that the auntie had not considered. As the auntie tells rest of the story she is sure to be clear that a child cannot kill another person with their thoughts. She talks about children's anger and sad feelings and how that is very common in difficult situations. Auntie says to _____ that it is quite all

right. They finish the story as they enter _____'s house. _____ gives her aunt a big hug. Now she can start her life again.

A Framework for understanding communities

When you meet a community there are things to look for:

- i. What are this community's strengths?
- ii. What are their weaknesses?
- iii. What are their common goals in life?
- iv. What do they consider important? What do they collectively value?
- v. How do individuals fit into the society, their families, and their communities?
I.e. What roles do they play as individuals within the society in which they live?
- vi. How do these roles influence their ability to problem solve for themselves?

Sometimes we are surprised about what a person has to say about themselves. They may see themselves very different ways from the way we see them. We can only know what they think if we listen to their stories about their thoughts and feelings. For example, a single mother who sells vegetables at the market may see only the restrictions that being a single mother places on her and not see the freedom that earning her own income can give her. She can only solve her problem from her own image of herself. We can help her to see her strengths by listening to her and helping her to identify them.

What is the problem? A clear definition of the problem you are working with.

Objectives:

- The identification of problems within the community
- Defining and understanding those problems

Context

Now that we have looked at who we are, and the community and who they are, we can look at the problems that concern the community. Sometimes communities are concerned with very different things compared with us. Also sometimes what we see in individuals in the community is a reflection of what is happening in the whole of the community. Remember: the community must lead and do the work. As community practitioners we serve as a catalysts and facilitators to enable a community to achieve their common goals. If our concerns are not theirs, we will need to gain their trust in order to be able to have an impact.

For example, our worries about early marriages of girls in the community which we might think violate human and child rights and damage the health of girls and their children, may not be shared by the community. They may not understand the damaging effects on girls and the social structure. They may believe that the best way to treat girls in puberty is for them to be married. It could be thought to be the only way to protect young people in this particular community.

To have an impact on this cultural and traditional practice, we need to gain the trust of the community, understand the problem from their point of view and work together on a solution. Working together on a solution as a community is a long journey as cultural norms are not easy to change.

Helping the community to identify the problems in their lives can be difficult. Often issues are confused with many emotions. The community practitioner needs to listen and to discuss the problems and continue listening to the problems within the community until there is mutual understanding. When there are many problems, we can break them down into single, separate problems. This helps both the community practitioner and community to understand problems more clearly.

(See UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations, July 2005 for further information)

A framework for understanding problems

Do not be afraid to express ignorance in order to help people understand why they do what they do. Some useful questions include:

- What is happening in your life right now?
- How do you feel about it?
- What are you most concerned about?
- Why is it important to you now?
- What are you intending to do?
- Why?

It is often hard to understand the problem. It takes time and it often seems to change. That is normal. It is important not to get frustrated. We must keep asking “why” until we are all clear about the problem and why it is important to the community. Helping people to understand their problems clearly is the first step towards supporting them to solve it for themselves. Their understanding is actually more important than ours because it is their own problem.

Whose problem is it? Ownership and responsibility for the solution

Objective:

- To clarify the role of the community practitioner in relation to the ownership of both problems and solutions

Context

When someone in the community has a problem, a common reaction is for community practitioners to take the problem on as their own. Unfortunately, this strengthens neither the person nor the community, nor is it likely to lead to a lasting solution. If the community practitioner helps the community to understand its problem and to mobilise their own strengths to solve it, a lasting solution can be found that the community owns and can use again. In order to do this, the community practitioner must let the community view its problems as its own. Particular consideration needs to be given to the role of the community practitioner when their lives within the same community. In these circumstances community practitioners may also be directly affected and may need support to clarify their role.

For example, if a woman has been raped, whose problem is it? While the community, her family, the elders and the traditional healers may all have a role, the pain is hers. The community has been shamed. She comes for help with her reactions to the situation. Even if the community is confused about the situation the woman and her community still own the problem. We can help them to cope with it, but we cannot take the problem away from them. If we can help her to develop her own strengths and help the community to accept her, then she can find a place for the pain in her life and the community can find a place for the shame in their lives. This means that there is a way to accept this shame. In time they can adjust to their situation and accept that they have little control over what has happened but much control over their response to it.

This does not mean that the woman or the community has to accept rape as an act, but in order to move on there needs to be an acceptance of what has happened.

They need to live in the present and think about their futures, rather than living in past.

A framework for understanding ownership and responsibility of problems

1. Whose problem is it?
2. Who else is affected by the problem/situation?
3. Is the community ready to solve the problem?
4. If they are not ready, what would help them to become ready to solve the problem?
5. If they are ready what are their goals in solving the problem?
6. What role can the community practitioner play in helping the community to find a solution to the problem?
7. What are the community practitioner's responsibilities in assisting the community to solve the problem?
8. Does the community marginalize some of its members in order to avoid having to deal with difficult problems? Does this strengthen or weaken the community as a whole?

Sometimes communities are not ready to solve their problems. They may be overwhelmed, weak or not ready to let go. This can be frustrating for community practitioners and can make them feel that they could solve the problem better than the local community. If this is the situation, another way to look at it is to ask: "what can the community do to be more ready to solve the problem?" Often there is a small bit of light, possibility or opportunity - the positive things in a difficult situation. When these small possibilities are found and built upon, the community begins to gain confidence in its ability to solve problems.

Transitions: How changes affect communities

Objectives:

- To further the knowledge of the community practitioner about transitions
- To review the stages of a transition
- To identify the different coping skills required during transitions

Context

Most of the time when communities are in need, it is because something has changed, a transition has occurred or is about to occur, and they are having problems because of it. Sometimes, this change (i.e. becoming an IDP or becoming a widow) happened a long time ago and they have never adjusted. For example, a family may have had to move due to conflict or war and has not been able to accept the move and fully adjust. Sometimes changes are very hard to accept because they have not been chosen and people have been displaced. Sometimes it is difficult because during this move they have lost family members or have had to leave friends and a place that was comfortable and familiar. There are many reasons why changes are difficult. Often people are not able to fully say good-bye to the old situation and hello to the new one.

Sometimes the change is positive, like going to a new school or finding a job. But it is still change and it is scary when things are different. People often have problems understanding why a positive change can be so tough. Things that are different take time to adjust to.

Some changes are simply part of life, for example, growing older, a girl having her first menstrual period or an older woman losing her periods. For men, not being young with an able body can be upsetting as they get older. When the children leave the house for a job or after getting married, many older people feel very sad. It is a difficult adjustment. Male or female, young and old need help at times of transition in their lives.

Most transitions have three phases; before the change, during the change and after the change. In some transitions, some of the stages are very short. As an example

most IDPs have not experienced the first phase of transition, i.e. the change was not foreseen, and they may be experiencing longer periods in the middle phase. This can make the adjustment process take even longer because there was no preparation and no time to get used to the new change.

Exercise

1. Think of a change in your life

- What changed in your life because of this?
- Why?
- Have you adjusted to the change?
- If so, how did you adjust to the change?

2. Go back to the change in the previous exercise and think about the preparations needed before the change occurred, the change itself and the adjustment to the change. Did each stage have enough time? If they did not, how did this affect the adjustment to the problem?

Everyone copes with transitions differently. Some people love changes and embrace them. Others do not like them and are always looking to the past. Others just carry on and do not think about it. Sometimes they carry sadness about a change for a very long time. It is helpful to explore how a community deals with change.

- How do you handle change?
- Why?
- Do you like it?
- What helps you through a change?

A framework for understanding transitions

- Acknowledging a change as a change and being able to feel sad is very helpful.
- Many people feel out of control in a time of change. Finding even simple things like routines which they can control is often very helpful as they help someone feel more in control.
- Saying goodbye, even if it is after the change can be very helpful. If it is a sad good bye, following rituals or religious practices can often be helpful.
- Saying hello, meeting the new things can also help. It can help to bring back some areas of control.

As a community practitioner, it is sometimes necessary to help people to look to their past to see what they need and help them think about another time of change in their lives.

Useful questions include:

- What did they do that helped at that time of change in their lives?
- What did they do that makes them feel good about themselves?
- What are areas of their lives that they can control, no matter how small?

Only the people themselves can find the correct things to do, but the community practitioner can guide them with careful questions and providing information which can help them to learn about themselves and their lives.

Attitudes and Values: The role of culture and tradition in coping with change

Objectives:

- To examine how beliefs, attitudes and values shape people's abilities to cope with change
- To identify how religions and traditional practices help people adjust to change
- To help the community practitioner identify ways of adapting to change which are most useful and helpful for both individuals and communities

Context

The culture in which we grow up shapes our views about conflicts, violence and difficult situations, whether we are directly affected by them or not. Our culture provides the foundation of our attitudes and values.

Our attitudes and values are the sets of "rules" that help us make sense of our lives and make us feel safe. Often the things that we do not like or find most difficult to accept are those that do not fit in with our own attitudes and values.

However, if our actions make others uncomfortable our underlying attitudes and values may need to be reflected upon or even changed. Changing or challenging attitudes and values is not easy. Someone in a highly regarded community who makes a derogatory comment about a member of a less well-regarded community may be supported in their view by historical cultural values. If the criticised member of that lesser regarded community reacts against their critic (from the 'superior' community) the critic's community may not judge that reaction as acceptable. The "higher" community may perceive such members of the "lower" community to be unacceptable because they deviate from the "higher" community's socially accepted cultural values and norms. Communities can also harshly judge members of their own culture who violate the normal rules. For many people this can be very difficult and confusing.

Exercise

1. How does your culture deal with transitions in life?
2. How do you feel if you cannot practice these traditions?
3. Why?
4. How do you feel about others who do not practice these traditions?

Think of a time where you felt that someone hurt you because you are from a different community.

- How did you react to her/him?
- Why did you react that way?
- What made you feel hurt?
- What do you think were the attitudes and values that the person used to judge you?
- What helped you to feel better?

Boundaries: What makes us feel comfortable in our lives?

Objectives:

- To assist community practitioners to begin to explore boundaries in their work and life
- To help community practitioners protect their own boundaries and decrease “burn out”

Context:

A football ground or a city has boundaries that are easy to see. If one goes outside the boundaries, something different happens. Our lives also have boundaries, but they are not always easy to see. Things look different when we are outside of them. If we do things that are outside of our boundaries, we often feel uncomfortable.

Boundaries are relative and are influenced by our value system and the priorities we set at a certain stages of our lives.

We teach our children boundaries as they grow up. For example; to respect elders, to eat and sleep as necessary. As adults, sometimes life is very difficult or very busy. If we violate our own boundaries in order to take care of others, we do not take care of ourselves. May be we do not eat or sleep because we are busy taking care of others. We may not see the ones we love because we are too busy to take time off.

When we work outside of our normal boundaries, we can become tired and moody and less able to work effectively.

As we learn to understand our own personal boundaries, we can tell when we are going beyond our comfortable limits. We may do things that do not feel correct or we may not take care of ourselves. Sometimes there is no choice, as in a crisis, but in order to take care of ourselves after a crisis or demanding event, we must go back to the life and routines that feel comfortable and safe.

Community practitioners who are working away from family and loved ones may feel unhappy leaving them behind. They may send letters to communicate with them. If they need the job, they may arrange to go home by taking time off every three months. They may work during the weekends and late in the evenings to complete the work so they can take time off to go home.

If they do not get their planned time off because of urgent matters at work, they may begin to feel uncomfortable. It may feel like too long away from the family. Then, their boundaries have become stretched too far. They need to change the situation. If they do not, they will feel constantly stressed by the need to be in two places at one time.

Exercise

Think of a time when you went outside of your own boundaries of caring for yourself.

1. How did you know that you were outside your boundaries?
2. How did it feel?
3. How did this affect your actions?
4. What did you do to try to restore your boundaries? Did it work?

Often the communities we are working with also have to live outside of their own boundaries. This can create a lot of tension in their lives. It is a difficult thing for us to support them because it is often not easy for them to restore lost boundaries. For example if a man has been a farmer and the breadwinner for his family but he now has to depend on food aid from humanitarian agencies. It takes a lot of energy to live outside of normal boundaries. Helping people to understand how much energy this takes can be very helpful. It helps them to see that their difficulties are normal. It also can help the community to begin to redefine its own boundaries.

SECTION TWO

When dreams are crushed and denied: Trauma and psychosocial issues

Objective

- To broaden community practitioners' knowledge about trauma and psychosocial issues among communities that experience violence and other atrocities.

Trauma: Understanding shattered dreams

Objectives:

- To increase community practitioners' understanding of trauma
- To develop the community practitioners' understanding of the role of attitudes and values in community reactions to trauma

Context

Almost everyone who is working with conflict and disaster affected communities in the world talks about “trauma”. What does this mean? What is trauma? Is it just a clinical term that psychologists use or is it something that really exists? As we discussed previously about changes and boundaries, trauma can often be associated with uncontrollable changes in life and boundary violations that seem to have no solutions. So, if we are to understand how trauma affects a community, we need to understand that community's attitudes and values towards changes and boundary violations.

Human reactions to situations can differ from individual to individual even in the same community, and there is no universal response to violence and atrocities. How a community understands trauma and its reactions to it is related to a community's traditions, cultural values, socio-economic background, religious practices and relationships - all the factors which communities use to make sense of life. If we are to understand how trauma is perceived within a community we need to understand all those factors. For example, warrior tribes in Western Darfur may believe that being injured or killed in battle is a less traumatic experience than losing the battle whereas a farming tribe may find it more traumatic to lose their lands and their loved ones.

Trauma has existed throughout human history, and how communities define “trauma” is determined by their traditions, culture, religion and language. The emotional and psychological reactions to abnormal traumatic events occur in all societies but how they are understood and interpreted, and what is considered helpful in terms of recovery and healing is determined by cultural context.

Community practitioners need to listen to members of a community in order to learn about their views and methods of coping with trauma. We must identify and understand how a community experiences trauma and work with members of that community as friends. This will help them to own their problems and assume the responsibility for solutions.

Exercise

1. How much destruction, including loved ones dying or being killed, have you experienced?
2. How many threats to life, losses, and defeats have you experienced during the last year?
3. Do you feel hopeless, helpless, or unable to trust people based on the above experiences?
4. How are you dealing with these?
5. Is your culture and tradition providing you any support?
6. If so, how; if not, why not?

¹ **Important:** Having answers to these questions do not determine whether a person is traumatised or not. Rather these questions help to understand their situation.

Psychosocial issues: Personal identity and social relationships

Objective:

- To enable community practitioners to understand the links between the person and the community

Context

Violence and atrocities destroy people's integrity, identity, and harmonious relationships within their community. Most conflict and disaster affected people are representing community-centred cultures. Because of their religion, traditional practices and norms, community centred cultures value honour and respect in relationships. Community practitioners who try to learn about psychosocial issues within the community need to understand the personal and community stories about integrity, identity and relationships. To learn about these is to learn about the psychosocial issues within the community.

Further, it is very important to understand your community's ways to dealing with losses and grieving processes. Different cultures and religions provide different leanings to losses and grieving processes. As a community practitioner you are more effective with this knowledge about your community. In some cultures and religions forgiveness is regard as a high moral value while another may not. While grievance is a process that can be seen in every culture, the way people grieve about their losses can differ from culture to culture. Each time you walk in to a community it is important to learn how communities are grieving about their losses.

Even though these stories are usually painful and complex, communities that trust and value community practitioners as friends will share these stories in their own ways. Community practitioners must not force the community to share these stories. We are walking with the community through a journey that will, in its own time, present painful memories from violence and atrocities. This is a normal process that the women, men, children, youth, old and disabled people in the community will go through. We might ask ourselves if we would share our own sad and painful memories with someone whom we do not know.

Exercise

When an armed group attacked her village, they killed _____'s husband and raped her. She was left with her three children and also realised that she was pregnant. _____ is now living with her parents and brother in the IDP camp. Her brother is angry with her and her parents are sad. In addition to her pain and suffering, _____ cannot bear to see her brother's anger and her parents sorrow. The family has been shamed and the community does not respect them anymore. _____ feels the pain of both her rape and the loss of her husband. He was good and loving to her. They had a happy life. Now _____ is alone. She is angry with herself and frustrated with her situation. Every night she sees dreams that armed men are chasing her. She does not go to the water point to fetch water anymore. She barely goes out of her house at all.

Questions:

1. How do you see _____'s situation?
2. What has happened to her as a woman, wife, daughter and sister?
3. What has happened to _____'s relationships?

Some useful questions to ask individuals, in a group in the community:

- How have difficulties changed your role in the community?
- Are there any cultural and traditional problems you are facing due to these difficulties?
- How are these problematic?
- How are you dealing with these difficulties?
- Have you re-experienced similar difficult situations in your day-to-day life?
- What other problems are you facing in your community, based on these difficulties?
- What type of support do you receive from your family/community?
- What kind of assistance or help do you expect from your family/community?
- What kind of assistance or help do you expect from the community practitioner?

Rhythm in chaos: Cooperating with what exists

Objectives:

- To help community practitioners work with existing situations and resources
- To clarify issues of power and responsibility

Context

Curing chaos by cooperating with it rather than trying to force order upon it may seem like the wrong thing to do. Chaos, however, occurs when change is necessary and resistance to that change is strong. Rather than trying to impose a solution to the chaotic situation, community practitioners would accomplish more by helping the community to recognize how the chaos challenges ideas and practices that are no longer effective.

Exercise

_____, the protection officer of an agency, walked into the welfare centre on a Sunday morning to meet with _____, who had just returned from the hospital after being beaten by an unknown group of men while she was coming back from work. When _____ walked in to _____'s house he heard shouting. _____'s husband was beating her and their five-year old son. When he saw _____ he stopped the beating. _____ was very angry to see the child crying and wounded. He told _____ that she could go to the women's shelter and offered to help her move out. Weak and still recovering from her previous experience, _____ just followed _____ with her son. They stayed in the shelter, where they received good care from the staff. _____ thought that he is doing the right thing by separating _____ and her child from the man who was abusing them. However, Thursday morning _____ heard that _____'s husband had committed suicide due to his shame at being separated from his wife and child. When _____ told this to _____, she was angry and started blaming him for separating them from her husband. _____ is confused. He cannot understand what he did wrong.

1. What do you think about _____? Did he do the right thing?
2. What made _____ decide to separate the family?
3. Is there is another way that _____ could have handled the situation?
4. Think of a process that _____ might have followed that would have been more helpful to the family.

A framework for understanding rhythm in chaos

- Women, men, children, youth, old and disabled people in the community are often the experts in the situation. Be honest with them about your lack of knowledge about the situation and respect them for being experts. Teaching us what they know helps them to recognize their knowledge and skills.
- The community may take time to trust you. Even if they trust you enough to share information you may need time to figure out how best to help them to use it. So, be patient and wait until you feel the time is right for intervention.
- To wait is not to waste time. Waiting until you feel you understand the goal of the chaos allows you to listen to and to learn about the community, which helps to build strong relationships with that community.
- After you find your entry point into the chaos, you have to be creative in the ways in which you enter. Human relationships have enormous potential for creativity. So, your relationship with the community will guide you.

It is normal for community practitioners to become angry and frustrated. It is also human nature to go for an easy solution. Doing so may give community practitioners power over the community, as it respects and trusts them as friends during difficult times. Due to such respect and trust, communities may follow community practitioners without question. This considerable power carries great responsibility. The activities of community practitioners involve very delicate and deliberate attempts to help communities who have somehow lost their ways of living. Thus, community practitioners must examine themselves in relation to both the power they have towards communities and the responsibility that such power carries. Community practitioners who respect the community demonstrate humility and honesty. We must challenge and explore the assumptions that lead to solutions in order to mould ourselves into suitable channels to help both ourselves and the communities we serve to jointly develop creative solutions to difficult situations.

SECTION THREE

Action planning: Community based programming

Objectives:

- To highlight different approaches to the gathering of information
- To assist community practitioners in action planning, goal setting, and the use of indicators for monitoring and evaluating actions.

Context

You have built the relationships necessary to help a community identify its problem. What do you do next? It is very important to have a clear approach to what you are going to do with all the information you have collected. The steps below are just one way to organize your approach. You may have a different way. That is all right. The important thing is that you have a clear way to think your approach through. It is important to encourage the community to develop its own methods and to let them know yours. Often you will each have a different approach or method. This is fine and normal. You will both learn from each other.

Step 1 Defining the problem

1. As seen by the community
2. As seen by the community practitioner
3. As seen by other people/agencies who are important in finding or implementing a solution

The first step is to clearly state the problem. While we may have to initiate this step, we must then encourage the community to state the problem clearly in their own words. Different people can sometimes see the same problem in very different ways. That is all right. Different perspectives can increase the options available for solving problems.

To discover a good problem solving approach we must take the time to define the problem fully. Take the time necessary for this step. Ask more questions if you need to. It can be helpful to ask “why” until the problem is clear. Often even the community is not totally clear on the exact problem and why it is a problem. This step helps to deepen everyone’s understanding.

Step 2 Goal setting

A goal guides the actions that will be done. Set a clear goal to help the community to organize its thoughts so that everyone can work for the same purpose. Setting goals also helps community practitioners to be more organized in their approaches.

Goal setting can be confusing because the initial ideas often change. That is why this step takes time. It is important to be open to changes and new ideas.

Below is a way to set goals:

1. Clarify the problem. This helps the community to identify its **goals**, which then provide a basis for action.
2. Community practitioners can set their own goals as long as they fit with the goals of the community. As community practitioners play supporting roles within the community, their goals must support the goals of the community.
3. **Brainstorming** - look at the goals and to imagine all that could be done to meet them. It is the beginning of the move to action.
4. Review the goals with the new ideas in mind. Do the goals remain the same?
5. State the goals clearly.

Final goals must be:

- Clear, understandable and complete.
- Measurable. That is to say that you must be able to measure whether or not the goal was achieved
- Goals must be **achievable** and **realistic**. If a goal cannot be accomplished, it will frustrate the community that sets it. Dreams

and hopes do not need to be achievable, but concrete goals must be more realistic.

- Goals must have a **time frame** so that everyone can know when the goals have been reached.

Step 3 Action Planning

The challenge in action planning is to find realistic actions that can guide the community to solve its problems and achieve its goals in a realistic way. Achieving goals can often need actions which seem very small or “insignificant”. For example, it can help just to notice that creating the right timing or being clear in expressing their needs can increase their effectiveness in whatever circumstances they have to work in.

No matter what the size of the project, it is important to be very clear. If the actions are not clear, it is very hard to know whether it is going to work.

Step 4 Indicators

So you have identified the problem, set the goals and determined the required actions. A week later, how is it working? Have new problems appeared? We may need to set new indicators for the action plan.

What are indicators? Indicators are the things we look at to see if the action has worked as planned. They are very important as they can guide us in how to proceed.

Below is an **example** of the process of setting indicators.

Planting a tree

Problem: A tree needs to be planted

Goal: To ensure the tree will grow

Action:

1. decide on the best place to plant the tree
2. choose sapling/obtain seed
3. prepare the soil
4. water the ground
5. protect the tree

Indicators:

1. the sapling/seed starts to grow
2. the tree produces healthy leaves
3. the tree is strong enough to grow by itself

In the above example, the indicators are directly related to the goal and action. They show the problem has been dealt with.

It is easy to do this with planting a tree. It is more difficult to do with a community. Setting our indicators so that they guide us in the action allows us to monitor and evaluate progress. In the above example, monitoring whether or not the tree flourishes helps us to evaluate whether or not how the tree was planted was successful. How can we monitor if the tree is growing well? It is important to remember that indicators may reveal whether the action worked or not. It is just as important to know what is not working as what is working. The whole process is a learning experience. It is not realistic to think that all actions will work.

Exercise

Think about a challenge in your work or life. Clearly state the problem, the goals, the action and indicators. Check if each step is clear and concise.

Ownership and action

Objectives

- To explore who owns which part of the problem
- To identify who else is involved in planning and outcomes

Whose problem is it? This is a difficult question. While a problem may appear in the community, is it theirs? Or yours? Or a problem for the humanitarian agencies?

Each person and community has a role in the situation. It is a good idea to look at how. For example, when a woman is raped, many people are involved.

- The **woman** must deal with her bruises, her pain and her fear
- Her **family** is responsible for helping her to continue to be a mother, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, etc
- The **community** is responsible for caring for its people in a way that promotes her identity and relationships within the community
- The **community practitioner** is an enabler to help them deal with their problems. The community practitioner's role is to help the woman, family and community to see the problem in a way that they can all come to a workable solution. This may mean providing information and contacts. It may mean listening and encouraging. It may mean finding a way to promote protection in the community. As always, our role is to be caring and supporting and enabling

Exercise

1. Do you agree with the above scenario? Are other people or factors involved? Who or what are they?
2. Choose a problem and look at the role of all of the players involved. Who else might need to be involved?
3. What is the role of the community practitioner?
4. Describe some of the skills that you used to do this exercise. Are they skills that you could use in other situations?
5. Think about different ways to approach a problem.

Letting go and holding on: When is the work done?

Objectives

- To say good-bye
- Accepting success and failure

Context

In order to encourage a community's independence in solving problems, we begin to say good-bye the moment we begin to talk to the community. This is a funny thought, isn't it? Communities ask community practitioners for help because they are in need. If we help them to fill the need on their own, eventually they will not need us anymore. Then, we will say good-bye for now.

Once we become involved with other people, their issues, problems and lives become important to us. As this usually makes us feel good, we seek further contact. When they say good-bye, we miss them.

Also, if we take on all a community's problems, our lives will seem very heavy. Not only is it harder for them to say good-bye and be on their own, but we also will have difficulty coping with that heaviness in our own lives.

Sometimes, we must move on before the community can solve its problems. That makes saying good-bye even harder. Sometimes we even feel like we have failed because we were not able to solve the problem. It is important to remember that solving problems is rarely in our control. Our work is not easy.

Being able to see both the problem and the solution as belonging to the community is very important. We cannot change anyone else. Only the community can make its own changes. We simply facilitate and help. Community practitioners who are not clear about this take on stresses that are beyond their control.

It is also important to leave a community structure to continue the work that the practitioner has initiated. It can be in a form of psycho-social support group or committee who will agree on their tasks and functions.

Caring for the community practitioner

Objectives

- To identify the community practitioner's needs
- To develop the self care of community practitioners

Context

Community practitioners care for people in the community. We take care of people we like and people we do not like. We care in easy situations and in difficult situations. But who cares for us? Who comforts us when we are exhausted and overwhelmed? Community practitioners have only themselves and their knowledge to work with communities so it is essential that they care for themselves.

Is it a strange thought that we have to care for ourselves? Who has the time? Who has the energy? Isn't it selfish to care for ourselves when others have needs? But- if we do not care for ourselves, we will "burn out" or get sick or lose interest in our work. Losing our ability to help others helps no one, neither community nor family.

Taking care of yourself: questions to ask

1. What do you do in your leisure time?
2. Do you have any hobbies?
3. Do you take time off before you are burned out?
4. With how many people do you smile per day?
5. Do you take time to laugh?
6. What do you do when you have a problem? Talk to family or friends?
7. What are your own problem-solving mechanisms? Do you feel satisfied with them? Why?

CONCLUSION

The three sections in this booklet have provided the community practitioner with a range of ideas and exercises which will help in their work with communities. The sections below summarise the objectives identified throughout this booklet and will assist you in reviewing the process of your work.

SECTION ONE

WHO AM I? UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

Objectives

- To help community practitioners develop greater self awareness
- To enable community practitioners to understand the links between communities and themselves

Who are you? Understanding the community

Objective:

- To develop the community practitioners' skills for understanding the community

What is the problem? A clear definition of the problem you are working with

Objectives:

- The identification of problems within the community
- Defining and understanding those problems

Whose problem is it? Ownership and responsibility for the solution

Objective:

- To clarify the role of the community practitioner in relation to the ownership of both problems and solutions

Transitions: How changes affect communities

Objectives:

- To further the knowledge of the community practitioner about transitions
- To review the stages of a transition
- To identify the different coping skills required during transitions

Attitudes and Values: The role of culture and tradition in coping with change

Objectives:

- To examine how beliefs, attitudes and values shape people's abilities to cope with change
- To identify how religions and traditional practices help people adjust to change
- To help the community practitioner identify ways of adapting to change which are most useful and helpful for both individuals and communities

Boundaries: What makes us feel comfortable in our lives?

Objectives:

- To assist community practitioners to begin to explore boundaries in their work and life
- To help community practitioners protect their own boundaries and decrease "burn out"

SECTION TWO

WHEN DREAMS ARE CRUSHED AND DENIED: TRAUMA AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES

Objective

- To broaden community practitioners' knowledge about trauma and psychosocial issues among communities that experience violence and other atrocities.

Trauma: Understanding shattered dreams

Objectives:

- To increase community practitioners' understanding of trauma
- To develop the community practitioners' understanding of the role of attitudes and values in community reactions to trauma

Psychosocial issues: Personal identity and social relationships

Objective:

- To enable community practitioners to understand the links between the person and the community

Rhythm in chaos: Cooperating with what exists

Objectives:

- To help community practitioners work with existing situations and resources
- To clarify issues of power and responsibility

SECTION THREE

ACTION PLANNING: COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMMING

Objectives:

- To highlight different approaches to the gathering of information
- To assist community practitioners in action planning, goal setting, and the use of indicators for monitoring and evaluating actions.

Ownership and action

Objectives

- To explore who owns which part of the problem
- To identify who else is involved in planning and outcomes

Letting go and holding on: When is the work done?

Objectives

- To say good-bye
- Accepting success and failure

Caring for the community practitioner

Objectives

- To identify the community practitioner's needs
- To develop the self care of community practitioners

Thank you for your time and energy in reading this booklet. We hope that it has been useful to you. Please share this with your friends and co-workers and also read it again from time to time.

The ideas we have written may have been new to you. You may want to read this again after putting the ideas into practice. Do not hesitate to combine these ideas with your experience and creative thinking. You and your community know both the problems and the solutions better than anyone else.

Finally, please provide us with your feedback. The more we work together on these ideas, the better we shall be able to work with the wide variety of problems and communities we encounter in our work. We are all in this together, so let's share our talents, ideas, failures and successes.

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