

Psychosocial peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina: approaches to relational and social change

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Ethnic and religious divisions were primary, significant factors in the cause and escalation of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These issues remained highly volatile in the immediate post war process and continue to impact current social, economic and political systems and structures. Psychosocial peacebuilding theory and practices are important means to facilitate social and relational change, and help people move toward reconciliation and social action. The authors present cases that examine these issues, within the Bosnian context, addressing the importance of psychosocial trauma recovery, problem solving and confidence building workshops, as well as provision of safe spaces where war and social narratives can be shared, and healing and attitudinal shifts begin to take place. In this article, psychosocial, trauma informed, peacebuilding processes are shown to provide insight into the importance of integrating emotional, psychological and identity factors (inherent within complex and ongoing conflicts) with economic development and actions for political change. Both are necessary for individual and collective healing and creating new relational, social narratives and structures.

Keywords: attitudinal change, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic division, identity, narrative, peacebuilding, psychosocial, reconciliation, social action, trust

Introduction

The two specific cases presented in this paper represent psychosocial peacebuilding projects initiated by CARE International and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in post war Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The first one, through its Welcome and

Information Project (WICP), was conducted a year after the end of the war and the second one was conducted 15 years later, through the Choosing Peace Together (CPT) project. Both cases address the psychological and material damages caused by war and the ongoing post conflict relationship between various ethnic groups. The WICP intervention took place in Žepče, in central Bosnia, and engaged members of the Bosniak and Croat communities. The CPT programme took place throughout the entire country, engaging members of all three major ethnic communities, Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. In this paper, focus is also given to the CPT 'Peace Walk' project in Potoci, a small city village in the southwestern part of the country.

The authors examined intervention assumptions and practical strategies used to begin processes of change. Psychosocial trauma awareness education and peacebuilding practice are emphasised in each case, and the importance of listening, storytelling, sharing information, building trust and participant confidence is underscored. Both projects also address local social action processes, within a peacebuilding framework. These important issues are essential in peacebuilding processes that take a *whole of person* and *whole of community* approach to transformational change (Schirch, 2008). Furthermore, both projects include psychosocial trauma education and healing processes that begin with the individual, in his or her cultural context, as part of peacebuilding. From there, peacebuilding moves toward transforming

relationships between individuals and groups at community level.

Background

The complexities of the Balkan wars of the 1990s reflect geopolitical issues related to the fall of the Soviet Union, regional and local political and economic factors, as well as ethnic and religious identity issues that date back hundreds of years (Puljek-Shank & Puljek-Shank, 2008). Within the former Yugoslavia, it was Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) that experienced the longest and deadliest wars in the region. The civil crisis divided the people, leading to large scale violence and killing, internal displacement and the decimation of the infrastructures of the region's towns and cities. Many inhabitants fled and became refugees in other countries. Beginning in the early 1990s the relationship between the people in BiH changed to one of uncertainty and fear of the 'other,' although the historical and relational dynamic had not always been negative. Marriages across the three main ethnic communities were normal between the Second World War and the wars of the 1990s, as were the celebrations of each other's holidays and festivals. However, political realities shifted significantly in the 1980s, creating an atmosphere dominated by fear; where increased tension became a persistent and ongoing reality. Allegiances became more and more fixed to one's ethnic and religious group, and these affiliations determined ingroup/outgroup relational dynamics. Deep mistrust between ethnic groups led to interethnic violence and was fuelled by increasingly harsh political rhetoric and related identity manipulation. This occurs when politicians and other leaders use fear tactics to mobilise their group to protect its identity against the real or perceived threat of another ethnic group (Volkan, 1994), and to do this regardless of the cost. (Volkan, 1994).

War in BiH ended through the November 1995 Dayton Peace Process and the signing of the Paris Peace Accord in December of

the same year. What followed was a slow and complicated process of implementing the peace accord (Holbrooke, 1998). Since that time, BiH has struggled to improve political, economic and social stability for its citizens (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2013 Progress Report). The United States, the European Union and other members of the international community, have invested significant resources in post war reconstruction and institutional support. All of this was done in order to aid the transformation of the economy and political system, as well as to support the growth and confidence building of civil society. These efforts have had a positive impact on BiH and its citizens, and have helped to greatly reduce ethnic violence within the country. Nevertheless, deep ethnic divisions continue to stifle change within society and contributes to preventing BiH from realising its strategic potential as a land and resource rich actor within southeastern Europe.

Additionally, divisive and contending historical and political narratives continue the 'blame game,' where each group holds the other responsible for starting the war and committing war crimes. These opposing narratives of the various ethnic groups define perceptions of the 'other' at every level of society and has inhibited progress towards improved social relationships and reconciliation between BiH citizens. Coexistence as a concept and practice is also problematic, as post war realities have caused members of various ethnic groups to move from more ethnically mixed towns or cities, to seeking safety within enclaves, where only their ethnic group lives or is clearly in the majority (USAID Bosnia & Herzegovina Tolerance Assessment Report, 2009).

Ethnicity and related religious affiliation were central motivating factors behind the violent acts committed during the war. Nowadays, they remain as significant relationship dynamics between ethnic groups; many survivors retain deeply entrenched grievances towards members of other groups. Also, due

to their prominent role in society, war survivors became (and remain) highly influential in shaping narratives of the war and its aftermath. The cases examined in this article focus on these survivors.

The first case describes an early, post war psychosocial and peacebuilding intervention in the central BiH city of Žepče, while the second case examines (in detail) a more recent intervention by the Choosing Peace Together (CPT) project in Potoci, a village 10 km from Mostar. In these cases, the authors describe their intervention assumptions and practical intervention strategies used to begin processes of change. Psychosocial trauma awareness and peacebuilding practices are emphasised in both examples, as is the importance of listening, storytelling, sharing information, building trust and participant confidence leading towards social action.

Žepče

In late 1996, CARE International, through its Welcome and Information Center Project (WICP), began work in Žepče. The city of Žepče had a pre war population of 17,000, divided between two ethnic groups, Bosniak and Croat. Prior to the war, Bosniaks were the minority community in Žepče, and identified with the majority Muslim Bosniak community in greater BiH. The Croat community, the majority ethnic group in Žepče, identified with Catholic Croats in other parts of BiH, and especially in neighbouring Croatia. When the various wars began in the region, Žepče's minority/majority and ethnic differences contributed significantly to the fear and violence experienced between the two groups. This quickly led to Bosniaks being severely mistreated by their Croats neighbours and were eventually driven from city by them. These historical facts were important for WICP to consider when hearing the narratives of each group, and within its attempt to restore relationships between these groups in post war Žepče.

The psychosocial, trauma informed component of CARE's WICP work in BiH, and throughout the former Yugoslavia, was meant to help individuals and groups exposed to traumatic events during war and to examine psychological and social impact on them (Joshi, 1997). Social services and psychological assistance, relatively well developed in the cities of pre war Yugoslavia, could not meet the demands of post war Bosnia, where war (actually a series of wars) took place throughout the country. This is why WICP's psychosocial services '*... were created to ease the trauma and stressors of war, as well as tensions and problems in the community created by the [displaced persons] return process*' (Hart, 2001). Additionally, in the case of Žepče, the Bosniaks who were displaced internally within BiH or became refugees in other countries during the war, sought WICP's services to assist them in the return process and to deal with the impact of war on their community. Croats sought this service to address their own psychological concerns related to war and post war family and social matters.

When CARE and other members of the international NGO community first began work in Žepče, they determined reconstruction and economic development projects were critical to both the Bosniak and Croat communities of the city. Through WICP, CARE offered an additional element toward these goals for Žepče; information and practical concepts on how to address psychosocial trauma and wellbeing issues of its Bosniak and Croat ethnic communities. WICP's objective was to work with members of each group to begin a process of healing and, over time, move them toward inter-group reconciliation. Along with general legal and social service information and advice, CARE and WICP in BiH had a goal of increasing psychosocial awareness and building relationships between ethnic groups (Hart, 2001). In Žepče, WICP focused on psychosocial and relational issues while working with the women of the city. Mixed

groups of women and men would have been preferable, but it was the women from both communities that approached WICP. Furthermore, in the earlier stages of post war Bosnia, it was difficult to bring men into psychosocial awareness workshops. Some of the reasons for this were cultural and often political, making it difficult for men to choose to attend such workshops. WICP decided to work with those persons who were interested in and ready to address the issues at hand. The Women of Žepče were ready.

Women of Žepče

The director of the Žepče health clinic, whose main clientele were Croat women, made the initial contact with CARE's WICP Project. The director indicated that her staff needed support in dealing with stress and trauma issues related to the war and current family, school and community problems. She asked local WICP staff members, and an international trauma and peacebuilding expert, to lead a series of workshops with her staff and other Croat women from Žepče in order to begin to address these issues. A week later, a Bosniak women's group made a similar request to WICP. They identified their need to address issues of war, rape, incarceration and being driven from Žepče by their Croat neighbours, as well as psychosocial factors concerning their groups' return to Žepče after nearly six years being either internally displaced or refugees in other countries.

The next step was to create safe spaces in order to address these needs in intragroup (internal group) settings. It was in these sessions that women's narratives were shared, emotions released and information examined about traumatic stress and everyday problem solving processes. Cultural symbols and metaphors were used to further

enhance safety and sharing of stories; past experiences about the war and current stories related to economic, physical and emotional health issues. Ongoing traumatic stressors, or aspects of continuous trauma (Fischer & Petrovic-Ziemer, 2013), were a result of everyday life experiences within the post war context. Both Bosniak and Croat women of Žepče knew these realities all too well, and sought ways to address them in the intragroup workshops for the purpose of benefiting themselves, and their families.

Content of specific workshops focused on the impact of trauma on the physical and emotional wellbeing of individuals and groups, with discussion about symptoms and possible responses to stress and trauma related issues. Problem solving techniques were also discussed for many types of everyday factors experienced within a post war context, related to such issues as education of children and jobs. WICP's involvement was an attempt to empower both groups of women by helping them identify their needs, find ways to fulfil them, and build on what they were already doing to increase individual and community wellbeing. This intragroup process had been going for three months when a special request came to a local WICP staff member; the groups wanted to meet each other.

As the intragroup meetings had progressed, women in both groups had entered a process of change; gradually moving from pain, anger and fear to an awareness of their deepest interests and needs. They had discussed their emotional and livelihood concerns within their individual groups and had come to realise their desire to take the next step engaging members of the other ethnic group (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992). A description of their first encounter follows.

Box 1: Zenica Meeting

The encounter between the Bosniak and Croat women of Žepče took place in the city of Zenica, 50 kilometres from Žepče. Several of the women had recently met before this meeting, and many were

meeting each other again, for the first time since before the war. It was a surprisingly friendly and open meeting. Quite emotional, as most of the women had grown up with each other, and/or worked together in the market, schools and factories of Žepče. Also, their children had attended the same schools. War had destroyed these connections and friendships.

The meeting produced an interesting and significant set of outcomes. First, they decided to form an official group called 'Women of Žepče.' They believed it would strengthen their position within the community, economically and politically. A lawyer from CARE agreed to work with them to establish this group as a legal entity. The women then asked the WICP team for information about starting a small business together. The business was eventually established when an international organisation gave the Women of Žepče several thousand chickens and helped them set up a poultry cooperative.

The bridge built between the Bosniak and Croat women that first day was just a footbridge, but one that allowed them to reconnect in order to build more tolerance and trust, and to acknowledge the reality of their coexistence and interdependence. The physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of this relationship needed further work and strengthening. There were also extreme political actors from both entities who would challenge them as they wanted the war enhanced division between Croats and Bosniaks to continue. Power came through the manipulation of ethnic identities by these political actors, and it was their way to increase or maintain power by keeping Bosniaks and Croats of Žepče divided and fearful of each other. The women of Žepče wanted to be able to counter this type of power, through an official legal organisation.

So, an important step was taken in the healing process through this coming together, and the women of Žepče helped to transform the conflict within their city relationally, economically and even politically, as their new organisation gave them a voice in the economic and related political matters of their community.

It will no doubt take decades to heal relationships between the Bosniaks and Croats of Žepče, but the values and attitudes developed in this meeting, and subsequent work engagements of these women, may encourage others in Žepče to risk creative coexistence, and over time experience healing and engage in the long process of reconciliation.

Adapted from Hart, 2001.

Such a psychosocial peacebuilding process provides an insight into the integration of tangible and intangible elements found in post war and ongoing, complex conflict situations (Katunga, 2003). It also demonstrates the process of taking the initial steps in healing individual pain and relationships, as well as changing attitudes and world views of former enemies. In this case, the CARE WICP team provided the women of Žepče safe contexts for sharing narratives and learning how to respond to emotional and livelihood needs. A partnership was formed between WICP and the two women's groups that began to address multiple interests and needs, within and across groups.

Coming together helped these women raise their level of self awareness and started to form a *bond* between them. It gave participants a sense of *meaning* to help them restore a sense of hope for a better future for members of both groups (Clark, 2002). In this sense, individual and collective narratives began to shift and participants took practical, as well as measurable, steps through the creation of the legal entity of Žepče women and the poultry cooperative. This helped change the way that the Bosniak and Croat women in the city experienced and related each other (Monk & Winslade, 2012). Informal follow-up after several months indicated that the women's relationships were holding. Further monitoring and

evaluation would have helped to determine the sustainability of the relationship building process. What is known today is that Croats and Bosniaks still live together in Žepče, while in many cities in BiH minority communities, for educational, economic and safety issues, have migrated to more secure and culturally compatible cities and towns.

Theories of change: making assumptions explicit

At the time of the CARE intervention in Žepče (mid-1990s), there were several basic assumptions of change at work. The first was that steps could be taken by the Bosniak and Croatian women of Žepče to begin a transformational process to meet personal and family emotional and material needs. It involved two types of support; in the first, WICP team members would offer psychosocial trauma information and a safe space to process war related issues, and the second would provide and elicit practical methods of resolving everyday problems in families. The assumption was that the two groups would eventually want to meet together, to begin the journey of coexistence toward reconciliation. This would take place if there were meaningful emotional and awareness raising experiences in both groups regarding the issues of post war trauma and related identity issues (in workshops, conversations and regular *'checking-in'*).

While these assumptions made sense at the time of the intervention, they could have been formulated more explicitly as *theories of change* had the contextual analysis process been more rigorous. This would have involved intentionally mapping all the stakeholders in the conflict, using various models to more definitively assess attitudes and behaviours of the two groups, and determining (in more depth) the root causes of the local conflict, as well as the external variables that influenced it (Fisher, 2011). Moreover, a deeper analysis and theories of change development would have benefited from the direct input of other actors, e.g., focus

groups with the women themselves and conversation with members of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) and international NGO (INGO) communities working in Žepče. Partnerships were not fully developed nor considered (de Jong, 2009). Also, there was no self assessment of the WICP team regarding the local context and culture. The WICP team members, except for the outside peacebuilding expert, were from BiH, with one member living just 10 kilometres from Žepče. Ethnically and religiously they represented only one of the two groups WICP was working with, in this case the Bosniak group. Nevertheless, a sufficiently strong degree of trust was built between both groups of women and WICP to allow the changes that took place to happen. Self assessment of the WICP team could have potentially deepened that trust.

In retrospect, the assumptions that guided this work, and CARE's overall knowledge and experience in the region, provided a basis for WICP's intervention strategies in Žepče. If these assumptions had been made more explicit as theories of change, WICP's work would have been enhanced. A more comprehensive analysis would have allowed for greater understanding of the regional and national cultural, political and economic influences on the people of Žepče, thereby providing a more nuanced intervention approach to the conflict. Deeper analysis would also have examined resiliency issues and community assets in order to further determine who to work with, and what systems and/or structures might best support partnership development for a more complete recovery process, for the women of Žepče and others in this war torn city.

Catholic Relief Services initiatives in BiH

Fifteen years after CARE's work in Žepče, and nearly 18 years after the end of war, the country remains deeply, ethnically and religiously divided. The division remains

in spite of numerous intervention efforts by local and international development and peacebuilding actors. The divide between the ethnic communities is a reminder of the impact of war on the people of the region, and the enduring effects of post war trauma that continues to plague BiH citizens. Reconciliation between the ethnic communities is significantly hindered due to these divisions (Pro Future, 2013). In addition, the inability to engage in a reconciliation process is supported by opposing and negative narratives of the different ethnic groups. These narratives support stereotyping and demonisation of 'others', and are usually carried forward by individuals who were active soldiers or direct war victims, and are regularly reinforced by the current political divide between leaders from the different ethnic communities.

Recognising the fact that former soldiers and war survivors are highly influential in shaping narratives, and that they play a significant role in creating and maintaining a climate of mistrust, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Caritas of Bishops Conference in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Caritas Bk BiH), initiated the peacebuilding programme 'Choosing Peace Together' (CPT) in 2010. CRS has been in BiH since 1993, and although it is an international Catholic organisation, has acquired a local reputation as an organisation that helps all people, regardless of their ethnic or religious background.

Theories of change that informed CPT's work in the region were the following: if people who were the most affected by war (e.g., former war camp prisoners, family members of missing and deceased persons, and individuals suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or other psychological difficulties) could overcome their trauma and enabled to begin a dialogue process among themselves and within the wider community, that will help form new personal narratives. These narratives would acknowledge personal suffering and begin

to move away from further outgroup discrimination.

A second theory of change was that if these marginalised individuals (e.g. most affected by war) share their experience of change with members of their own ethnic community, then members of that community would become more open for contact with 'others', and therefore able to rebuild trust and confidence among people of all ethnic backgrounds. These theories of change are supported by Saunders' (2001) findings that personal storytelling at appropriate times can prove effective in giving a vivid and convincing account of what has happened. It can also bring about empathy and sympathy with the storyteller.

Choosing Peace Together psychosocial programme

A significant number of people directly impacted by war in BiH participated in CPT psychosocial workshops, seminars and capacity building trainings. CRS and Caritas BK BiH publicly invited associations of victims to participate in the CPT project. A large number of Bosniak, Croat and Serb victim association replied requesting that their members participate in organised workshops. Over 200 members of victim associations, from 38 municipalities across BiH, have participated in the CPT project. These war survivors were also of different ethnic, religious, age, gender and geographical backgrounds. In numerous and various venues, they were given space and supportive environments to tell their war and post war narratives, and begin individual and collective change processes. In psychosocial workshops and seminars (non violent communication, trauma and forgiveness), CPT's objective was to empower participants on both a personal and collective level. This was done in order to enable dialogue and allow for discussions about the revival of social relationships, towards the possibility of reconciliation.

Justad (2006) explains the importance of supporting sustained dialogue processes for individuals and communities in post war societies to help reduce tension, stereotyping, outgroup discrimination and negative attribution, in order to facilitate the creation of positive relationships among adversaries.

In this sense, communication becomes a major channel, through which negative feelings and perceptions are discovered, connected and modified among the parties (Abu-Nimer, 2003). In the CPT workshops and seminars, participants had the possibility to address personal trauma, build self confidence and to improve interethnic relationship among their peers. This process of professional psychosocial support, with ethnically mixed groups of beneficiaries, provided space for channelling traumatic experiences in a way that individuals could transform their victims' identity into an identity of active supporters of reconciliation, within their local and other communities. Abu-Nimer (2003) refers to this process of change in people, relationships and systems as a possibility and necessary to resolve conflicts. This process of changing people into '*change agents*' is very important for reconciliation. He also emphasises that giving voice to the voiceless and empowering the marginalised can produce tremendous energy for change and transformation on the part of individuals and societies, and is essential to the sustainability of peace.

Individual levels of change: former war victims, today's peace activists

Individual cognitive change noticed through beneficiaries' participation in the CPT project is understood as a process consisting of different phases. The first phase is linked to the beneficiaries' motives to be part of a reconciliation process. These individuals are primarily connecting with their deep need to resolve personal trauma, as well as curiosity about the other's experiences. The second phase is empathy initiated through

a safe space for storytelling and listening, as well as discussion about the past. Storytelling helps convey holistic meaning and nourish caring within a process of humanising the other, and healing trauma (Duryea & Potts, 1993; Abu-Nimer, 2003).

The next phase is where the relationship between victim and perpetrator becomes clearer, regardless of ethnic backgrounds; and where the idea of exemption from collective guilt is accepted. After humanising others and separating their personal identity to form a collective one, the concept of joint activities becomes a possibility. It is born from constructive discussion in safe spaces, and leads individuals into an activist phase of their transformational journey.

It is important to point out that not everyone included in the CPT programme reached the final phase. This was the case with certain individuals who needed greater psychosocial support (persons with little or no previous therapeutic work done to address their trauma); or individuals wrongly motivated (e.g., those who took the workshops for material and economic gain), or participants with firm attitudes that reconciliation is an impossible process. Also, politically motivated individuals did not generally experience the change process described above. Where changes did take place, it was noted through observation of individual's behaviour, the feedback given in evaluation of specific workshops, and also the number of peacebuilding initiatives and events where they participated after attending the programme.

It was those individuals who reached the final phase of the processes offered by CPT who frequently became peacebuilding advocates and activists. They started joint initiatives to present their personal narratives to the broader community, through a storytelling activity called '*My world, my words*.' It takes place as a public event where there is discussion among three survivors of different ethnic backgrounds. At first, they speak about their war experience, the

changes they have experienced and attitudes they currently hold towards others, and war. After their presentation, people from the audience (youth, peers, academics and others) have a chance to ask questions, and discuss (with the speakers) about war, their own experiences and current peace issues in BiH.

Storytelling: the next level of change

The storytelling process helps individualise members of the opposing group, and challenges the dehumanisation of their behaviour and nature (Halpern & Weinstein, 2004; Justad, 2006). Empathy and sympathy are closely connected to the willingness to meet the other side and enter into a dialogue with them (Justad, 2006). These concepts were also realised in the CPT *Storytelling in Brčko* project in northeastern Bosnia. Through the project, dialogue significantly increased trust between Bosniak, Croat and Serb ethnic groups in the city of Brčko, and within the surrounding region. The dialogue process also enhanced intercommunity collaboration regarding public policy issues important to all ethnic groups (Brčko Public Speaking event 7 March 2013)

Narratives and storytelling are important in peacebuilding work, and although different narratives can be the source of controversy and conflict (for instance, historical and identity narratives), others are a means for healing through the revealing of self histories, uncovering truths and activating memories, in order to constructively integrate multiple group narratives into one overall. Moreover, these narratives have the potential to provide intersubjective understanding in political dialogue and

consensus building processes (Sanz, 2012.) Personal stories can also be encouraging, because empowerment happens by acknowledging the sufferings individuals and groups have experienced. When creatively included in transformational change process narratives, they help build peace and open communication between people (CPT Mid-Term Evaluation report, 2013).

CPT sponsored public speaking events in BiH, helped members of different ethnic groups hear about, or recognise for the first time, others suffering from war. For instance, in Bihac, a city in northwestern Bosnia with a majority Bosniak population, a speaking event was organised for the students at the University of Bihac. A large number of students self reported that they had never known that any other ethnic groups, apart from their own, had suffered as a result of the war. Another example of a change process took place in the town of Stolac in southwestern Bosnia, where a deep division between Bosniaks and Croats exists. Memories of the war and war camp incarceration are strong there, but it was within this context that a former Croat prisoner of war from another town in the region asked his former prison camp guard, a Bosniak from Stolac, to help him organise a public speaking event in Stolac. The help was given, and the former prisoner was the main speaker. No results are known of this and other speakers' impact on the Bosniak and Croat audience, but the fact that this public speaking event took place at all is an indication that new forms of communication and memory activation are possible, and may play constructive roles in providing insight into the experiences of others.

Box 2: Potoci peace walk

Potoci is a small town near Mostar, in the southwestern part of BiH. It is located in a valley and divided in two by the river Neretva. Before the war, all three majority ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) lived there. At the beginning of the conflict in 1992, coalitions of Bosniaks and Croats fought against the Serbs, who were forced from the region and resettled in the east of BiH.

In 1993, the coalition between Bosniak and Croats ended, and armed conflict between these two groups started. Two war camps were established. One on the right side of river Neretva (a war camp for captured soldiers and civilian Croats) and other on left side (a war camp for captured soldiers and civilian Bosniaks).

Horrible war crimes took place during this period, which resulted in a great number of victims; people who, even today, suffer severe health or psychological problems.

Years after the war, people very reluctantly returned to the town. Through international support, houses were eventually rebuilt and people slowly rebuilt their community. However, for many years Bosniaks lived on the left side of river, and Croats on the right (members of the Serbian community have not returned to Potoci). Hostility and hatred between these two groups remained, or became more intense. Even today, Potoci is faced with these ethnic problems.

Five Croats from Potoci (former war camp prisoners) participated in the CPT project by attending multi ethnic, psychosocial workshops organised throughout different parts of BiH. The Bosniak association of victims from Potoci was not willing to participate in these workshops. At the beginning, even Croat cooperation was limited. However, with time, and the opening of a safe place for dialogue, they were able to share their narratives and needs and began to build constructive relationships with other members who participated in the workshops. Over time, attitudes on reconciliation become more and more positive for all participants of the workshops.

For one of the participants from Potoci, a former war camp prisoner, a cognitive and behavioural shift stated to take place, which resulted in a request to CPT to help him organise a 'Peace Walk in Potoci' with a group of young people from different ethnicities and religions of the town. The aim of the event was to raise awareness of the need for embracing reconciliation processes, and to show that people who were heavily affected by the war could be agents of change and builders of peace.

This person believed that reconciliation was possible and that people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds could and should visit each other. The 'Peace Walk' involved walking through Potoci, visiting both the Croat and Bosniak sides of the town, and taking coffee in cafés on both sides.

(The walk was organised during the 'Peace Camp for Youth, 2011' by 'S.K.' (Former war camp prisoner) and proud leader of the Peace Walk in Potoci.)

The peace walk in Potoci is just one of many examples, of movement from individual cognitive change to social behavioural transformation, that a number of CPT project participants experienced. Participation and storytelling was also a motivator for a number of joint peacebuilding activities in BiH, such as the commemoration of International Peace Day (21 September 2012), which was led by two associations of former war camp prisoners, one Bosniak and the other Croat. Furthermore, a number of associations of members from different ethnic backgrounds (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) united their efforts and created a coalition with the aim to pressure the BiH

Government to create and adopt a 'Law for Victims of Torture'.

These, and other local peacebuilding activities, showed that providing safe spaces for reflection and dialogue, even within and among the most vulnerable groups in BiH, could lead to positive change and help form new behaviours that promote and support healing and reconciliation.

Conclusion

The WICP and CTP projects of CARE and CRS demonstrate the need for psychosocial, trauma informed peacebuilding within post war contexts, where ethnicity and religion are significant and divisive factors. In BiH,

these projects help create safe spaces for ingroup stories of traumatic events and related pain and anger to be shared, and the beginning of a healing process to take place. As a result of these specific peacebuilding activities in Žepče and Potoci, attitudes began to shift, leading to individuals and groups choosing to engage in meaningful encounters with members of the other side. Throughout these long and delicate change processes, trust was established, first among those asked to intervene and be the catalyst for bridge building across groups, but most importantly between members of the different ethnic communities. Trust building led to the acceptance of each other's narratives about war, and opened discussion regarding future relationships. This was the case in Potoci and Brčko, and other towns and cities influenced by the CTP project. Trust was also a foundation for constructive engagement, between Bosniak and Croat women in Žepče, that resulted in actions taken to address the relational and economic needs in their community.

Lessons from these cases can be applied in other contexts where ethnic and religious divisions have led to large scale violence and war. Chief among these lessons is the foundational step for any peacebuilding endeavour; executing thoughtful and well structured analysis processes that make assumptions more explicit, leading to the development of theories of change. This process is based on listening to, and learning from, a cross section of people within post war contexts, and becomes the basis for the development of comprehensive intervention plans, as well as strategic on-the-ground partnerships. For psychosocial issues, these plans focus on individual and collective psychological and practical needs and cross sector relationships, and provide direction for potential joint social action. Peace building processes, including psychosocial approaches, not only require people with the requisite knowledge and skills of the

field, but also individuals and groups fully committed to being involved in partnerships of change with those who have been directly impacted by the conflict.

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