

Field report

The intrinsic interlinkage between peacebuilding and mental health and psychosocial support: The International Association for Human Values model of integrated psychosocial peacebuilding

Katrien Hertog

In view of the evolving discussion on bridging the mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding fields, this article proposes that they don't need to be bridged, but are already intrinsically interlinked. The approach and methodology of the International Association for Human Values is presented as a conceptual and practical model of integrated peacebuilding, both addressing a gap in peacebuilding as well as working complementary to traditional mental health and psychosocial support methods. This article will present an overview of several congruencies between the mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding fields, illustrated with practical examples from International Association for Human Values programmes from around the world. The author argues that sustainability of peacebuilding cannot happen without psychosocial peacebuilding: an approach that integrates the full range of psychosocial factors into peacebuilding including, but not limited to, the integration of mental health and psychosocial support. She concludes that as an integrated field, we can move forward to the full and joint aspiration of both mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding, towards optimal health and positive peace.

Keywords: International Association for Human Values, mental health, psychosocial peacebuilding, psychosocial support

Introduction

Background and terminology

From the perspective of peacebuilding (PB) theory, the overlap between the PB field and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) seemed minimal until a decade ago. While there was attention for psychosocial aspects of PB, such as building a culture of peace, peace education, reconciliation and trauma relief, as well as in the more interpersonal field of conflict resolution, this attention came mostly as an addendum to the 'hard core' of peacebuilding, which focused on political, economic, security and justice issues (see Hertog, 2010 for an overview of the respective literature on this). However, sustainable peace remains elusive without attention to the psychosocial aspects, even when all the structural, formal peacebuilding blocks are in place. Providing vocational training for youth to increase employment opportunities and improve livelihoods will be hampered if the youth are depressed, do not have hope or are too worried to be able to focus on learning. Demobilisation and disarmament processes will be hampered without basic trust between groups being restored. The emotional, psychological, socio psychological and existential spiritual issues involved in

peacebuilding are integral peacebuilding aspects. They include, but are not limited to, attitudes, perceptions, cognitive thinking patterns, values, expectations, desires, emotions, traumas and wounds, assumptions, motivations, relationships, intentions, concerns, taboos, principles, norms, beliefs, identities, loyalties, worldviews and memories (Hertog, 2010).

Integral and structural aspects are interdependent, interacting and mutually reinforcing components for peacebuilding. Integral aspects are needed to bring structures to life and to make them function in the way for which they are designed, while political, economic, security and judicial institutions and structures can play a supporting role for integral aspects to develop in the support of peace (Hertog, 2010). Working on the integral aspects of peacebuilding allows for the envisioned peace to be internalised and socially supported, and hence more sustainable. In view of the anger, frustration, depression, pain, greed and alienation driving many conflicts around the world today, it is the need of the hour to complement existing efforts with an equally massive investment in the (often) intangible psychosocial factors of peacebuilding.

Over the last decade, attention to various psychosocial aspects of peacebuilding in theory, policy and practice has vastly expanded (see Hertog, 2010 for examples). However, we still need a better understanding of the specific contribution of integral aspects to peacebuilding processes and their specific way of interacting with, influencing, reinforcing or inhibiting the other respective areas of peacebuilding. For example, what is the effect of relieving posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in war affected populations on the reduction of interpersonal violence? Or do peace negotiations produce more results when accompanied by self-reflective methods for negotiators? Infusing the integral dimensions of peacebuilding in an integrative way into the peace architecture, allows us to really be able to speak

about *'the art and soul'* of building peace (Hertog, 2010).

In this article, peacebuilding and the violence it aims to prevent and address, are understood in their broader meanings. Peacebuilding is a wide range of activities carried out by many actors in different spheres and at different levels (see Hertog, 2010 for more on the definition of peacebuilding). Countless small and large activities contribute to a peacebuilding process: activities aiming to enhance public security, generate economic recovery, facilitate social healing, promote democratic institutions, build sustainable relationships or install mechanisms to resolve conflicts in a nonviolent way. Peacebuilding activities can be geared towards long-term changes, such as addressing principal political, economic and social root causes of conflict, or focus on short-term goals, such as management of humanitarian crises, negotiating settlements, addressing refugee issues or providing temporary essential government functions. Hence, it includes activities by state and non state actors, individuals and communities, religious and secular actors or theoreticians and practitioners at the local or grassroots level, the middle range or the top level. As a process, peacebuilding encompasses the prevention of violence up to the reconstruction of society after violence in a dynamic, but not necessarily linear process. It relates to the individual as well as to community, society, state, international and global levels. Similarly, violence is understood in its multiple dimensions, comprising physical, psychological, criminal, environmental, cultural and structural violence.

The International Association for Human Values approach

The International Association for Human Values (IAHV), a largely volunteer based, non-profit, nongovernmental organisation (NGO) with around 25 branches worldwide,

