



**‘Trauma, Development, and Peacebuilding:  
Towards an Integrated Psychosocial Approach’**

**International Conference hosted by INCORE, University of Ulster**

**9-11 September 2008, Delhi, India**

**Funded by International Development Research Centre**



Executive Summary

29 January 2009



## **Executive Summary**

Trauma, Development and Peacebuilding Project, funded by the International Development Research Centre, sought to bring together a group of global experts working on trauma and development issues, as well as psychosocial projects. The first phase of the project brought together a 22 experts working on psychosocial approaches to trauma, peacebuilding and development from around the world at a roundtable conference which was held in Delhi, India from 9-11 September 2008. Through the presentation of theoretical and regional overviews, and individual case studies, the roundtable sought to analyse, critique, and disaggregate different approaches to trauma globally considering its impact on peacebuilding and development processes in societies coming out of conflict. In addition, the roundtable sought to help define a new research agenda in the field leading to discussions on a potential collaborative proposal by drawing on the experience of the different practitioners represented.

The roundtable began with Brandon Hamber and Mary Alice C. Clancy's (INCORE, Northern Ireland) overview of key concepts and critical questions regarding trauma, peacebuilding and development. Hamber and Clancy's presentation was followed by theoretical overviews by Stevan Weine (University of Illinois at Chicago, USA) and M. Brinton Lykes (Boston College, USA). Weine's presentation focussed on the importance of narratives in psychosocial work, while Lykes sought to situate trauma historically and an understanding of the psychosocial as implicating gender, race and class as well as to problematise the distinction between 'natural' and 'man made' catastrophes, citing the economic and social policies which exacerbated the individual and social suffering engendered by Hurricane Katrina.

The roundtable then moved to a discussion of regional overviews of South Asia (Shobna Sonpar, Clinical Psychologist and Psychotherapist, India), the Middle East (Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel), Latin America (Carlos Martín Beristain, Universidad de Deusto, the Basque Country, Spain and Pau Pérez Sales, Community Action Group, Spain), 'Western' Contexts (Saliha Bava, Houston Galveston Institute, USA and Jack Saul, International Trauma Studies Program, NYU/Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, USA),

and Africa (Mike Wessells, Christian Children's Fund/Randolph-Macon College/Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, USA).

The regional overviews were complemented, and sometimes challenged, by the presentation of case studies from Kashmir (Arvinder Singh, WISCOMP, India); Sri Lanka (Gameela Samarasinghe, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka); the West Bank (Rita Giacaman Birzeit University, Occupied Palestinian Territory); the Eastern Mediterranean Region (R. Srinivasa Murthy, World Health Organization, Cairo, Egypt); El Salvador (Mauricio Gaborit, Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, El Salvador); Colombia (Angela María Estrada Mesa, Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia); India (Inger Agger, Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims, Denmark); Nigeria, Kenya and Liberia (Augustine Nwoye, Kenyatta University, Kenya); Mozambique (Victor Igreja, Associação Esperança para Todos, Mozambique); and Ghana (Adolf Awuku Bekoe, National Coordinator for the Coalition on Domestic Violence Legislation, Ghana); and a comparison between ways of dealing with trauma in high-income and low-income countries (Joop de Jong, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands).

The following themes were prevalent throughout both the overviews and the case studies: the need to move beyond the PTSD v. psychosocial 'debate' while also recognising the tendency in the field to appropriate the term 'psychosocial' to describe practices associated with a limited, de-contextualised and individual-focussed PTSD approach; the importance of narrative as a means of creating and deploying more nuanced and multi-layered frameworks for dealing with trauma; the need to recognise both the importance and limitations of structural explanations of conflict, with a particular emphasis on gender; the importance of resiliency *vis-à-vis* psychosocial work, both as a metaphor and a scientific concept, and the attendant need to document help-seeking behaviours in order to operationalise the concept in various contexts; the importance of engaging collaboratively with communities when engaging in psychosocial work, be it in a 'community-engaged', 'community-based', 'community-led' or 'community-oriented' way; performance as a concept and metaphor for locating trauma and resiliency and potential means of social transformation; the need to better understand the violence which permeates situations of 'post' conflict; the need to determine whether or not psychosocial and

peacebuilding work can address issues of justice; the importance of questioning the practice and utility of a limited concept of peacebuilding in areas of chronic conflict; the need understand 'indigenous' healing practices without overly valorising them; the importance of fostering connections between war-affected communities and governments that are interested in their welfare; the need to better understand the process of how to integrate psychosocial work into public policy; the importance of determining how to transfer the accountability created in one social space to other spaces; the need to develop transculturally valid measurement instruments; the need to adopt a multi-disciplinary, multi-modal, collaborative and multi-systemic approach when engaging in psychosocial work, with a particular emphasis on the need to utilise both ethnographic and epidemiological studies when researching war-affected communities; and finally, the necessity for practitioners engaging in psychosocial work to retain a reflexive attitude concerning both their roles and the expected outcomes of their work.

Following from Brandon Hamber's summary of the key themes on the final day, the conference participants broke into small groups to determine the best way to proceed with the next stage of the project. Many options were mooted (see the accompanying five conference proposals in *Appendix B*), but a consensus emerged regarding the need to produce a research report; engage in research that moves the field forward by focussing on *what to do*, as opposed to what not to do *vis-à-vis* psychosocial work, with an emphasis on both documenting help-seeking behaviours and engaging in comparative analyses; and to develop instruments of measurement. In order to link this emphasis on psychosocial work to peacebuilding and development, many participants felt that the research should also focus upon how the accountability created through healing practices and rituals could be transferred to other social spaces; in other words, determining whether or not psychosocial work can foster wider social transformation and if so, how. A broad consensus emerged regarding the development of a book or handbook and a research network, although there was some divergence in terms of their proposed style and content. Various groups noted that, irrespective of what form the next stage of the project took, any research that emerged would have to determine appropriate definitions of 'psychosocial', 'culture', and would have to devise a concept that better captures the insecurity of everyday existence in areas of chronic conflict and areas of 'post' conflict than 'complex political emergency' currently does. Many participants also argued that the research should attempt to understand the various components of

'resilience' within societies, with the ultimate goal of determining whether or not there are any global common denominators. Finally, many participants felt that common instrument measurements would have to be agreed upon and broadly adhered to in order to allow for both overall coherency and comparison within the research.

The conference concluded with the decision to form a small, representative working group that could develop research proposals for the second stage of the project. At present, a tentative research proposal is being developed by INCORE to be distributed to participants for discussion. A more expansive second phase of the project, built on the key issues emanating from this report, will be proposed.