



The Community Psychosocial Approach (CPA) "Healing together"

Experience from the Great Lakes Region

The Community Psychosocial Approach (CPA) takes into account not only the traumatic life wounds of survivors of violence, but also their families and the community. It relies on collective healing resources to transform wounded communities into active, supportive communities. CPA is therefore a form of the psychosocial approach (PSA) that places specific emphasis on the active role of communities in healing trauma.

EXPERIENCES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

To contribute to community healing after sexual and gender-based violence in the Great Lakes region, Swiss Development Cooperation has been implementing a programme (Regional Psychosocial Programme 2011-2023) for over twelve years with its local partners in Rwanda, Burundi and DR Congo. Built around a community-based psychosocial approach called "Healing Together", this programme is based on the observation that sexual and gender-based violence is the result of **a set of dysfunctional relationships linked to a wide range of factors** (social, cultural, economic), including, in particular, gender inequalities internalised through patriarchal practices. In order to achieve holistic healing for survivors, this **cross-disciplinary approach** seeks to encompass all the dimensions of the socio-emotional and economic development of families, to restore mental health, to establish a culture of peace and respect for human rights, and to empower the community to take responsibility for its own well-being.

EXAMPLE: Healing couples in conflict to foster community development and peace

In a rural community in Rwanda, couples who have taken part in APC's community workshops describe a transformation that affects every facet of their personal, family and community lives. Initially, they become aware of themselves and the wounds suffered and inflicted by domestic violence. The couples then learn to understand each other, fostering the emergence of renewed trust between them. This individual change, which began during the initial workshops, has positive repercussions within the households. This new family dynamic is accompanied by a significant economic improvement: the dialogue and mutual trust established support better financial management within the households. Neighbours, witnessing these changes, are seeking advice on how to solve their own problems. Aware of the benefits observed within their family and community, the couples feel encouraged to become "resource persons", offering their help to other couples and families in conflict. In this way, they actively contribute to the healing of their community, promoting economic development and strengthening peaceful cohabitation.

...THROUGH ANALYSIS AND AWARENESS

Conceived by psychology professor Simon Gasibirege in the context of mass trauma following the genocide in Rwanda, the Community Psychosocial Approach (CPA) "Healing Together" has been developed over time in response to the different socio-political contexts of the Great Lakes region. On the basis of these experiences, Switzerland and its partners have developed Minimum Quality Standards to facilitate replication of the approach and to ensure optimal programming, implementation and monitoring of the approach.

Prior to any programming, NGOs are **selected according to specific criteria**: An NGO suitable for CPA must be firmly rooted in a community, with proven experience in participation and empowerment through dialogue and the establishment of long-term relationships. In addition, **community diagnosis**, involving not only local groups and NGOs, but also leaders of various sectors, administrative services, and local state institutions, forms the basis of planning: it helps to establish a shared understanding of the community's problems and the resources available to solve them. It also facilitates the involvement of local authorities and other state institutions from the earliest stages of programming in the target region.

EXAMPLE: Involvement of local authorities

In Burundi, the members of the community associations involved in implementing the APC organise regular exchanges with the local authorities and carry out joint missions to observe changes on the ground. The local authorities are committed to supporting the PCA and working closely with the members of the community associations. As a result of this active collaboration, one of the communities - the "colline" of Gahaga - has been singled out by the Burundian government, in partnership with the NGO CARE International, as the second "colline" in the country where the fight against gender-based violence is a reality. Local residents have presented the APC as a model of community resilience.

...IN DEVELOPPING CAPACITIES AND SKILLS

The CPA methodology is an intense process of group work. The **4 to 5 recommended community workshops** cover the following topics: awareness (1), grief (2), managing emotions (3), reconciliation and forgiveness (4), and finally the life project (5). The methodologies used reflect the community's socio-cultural and religious resources, such as dance, prayer and song. NGO **facilitators** are trained in the CPA methodology and undertake their own healing journey. They then accompany the community groups. Group participants learn to manage their emotions, forgive and make positive decisions for their families and communities. Some decide to become resource people, offering listening and home visits in their communities, and running workshops. The number of support groups grew, with the help of facilitators and resource people. The community develops resilience in the face of difficult situations, contributing to peace and social cohesion. This process is strengthened by the involvement of the state and by ongoing learning that feeds into advocacy initiatives.

Today, in the Great Lakes region, **a pool of trained facilitators** provides CPA expertise to other organisations and institutions in the region, such as the technical and administrative services present in the programme's support area (social development, gender, health) in order to strengthen social transformation and facilitate the appropriation of CPA.

EXAMPLE: CPA in the training of community authorities

An NGO in South Kivu is organising awareness-raising sessions with local authorities to promote the "Healing Together" CPA and help local leaders become aware of the wounds in their communities. These sessions, lasting up to two days, focus on the key elements of the CPA. On the first day, leaders take part in experience-sharing exercises, discussing the violence reported by members of their communities. They also reflect on their own role as "perpetrators" of violence, for example by denying women a voice in public. Thanks to these exchanges, they become aware of their actions, change their attitudes and begin to invite women to meetings of their entities. What's more, many of the authorities that have been trained now offer women spaces in which to raise awareness of violence prevention among their staff and other members of the community.

...IN IMPLEMENTATION AND INSTITUTIONALISATION.

From the outset, and intensively in the last phase, the regional programme worked on **the institutionalisation of CPA**, in particular its **validation and integration** into national policies (mental health, gender and the fight against gender-based violence). This advocacy has been supported by collaboration with **universities**, which provide scientific evidence of the effects of the approach and ensure that it is embedded in teaching by designing training modules on APC. At the national level, the CPA is discussed within the **consultation frameworks of technical and financial partners** in order to promote a common understanding of the CPA and to lay the foundations for a diversification of technical and financial support for the approach.

EXAMPLE: The strategy for sustainability of the regional program

To consolidate the PCA's achievements and ensure its sustainability through its partners, Switzerland has developed a four-level sustainability strategy. On the one hand, it focuses on communities by strengthening the capacities of members and their links with NGOs. On the other hand, it supports the NGOs so that they can maintain the quality of the programme, strengthening their search for funding, their expertise and their visibility. The strategy also involves public services in integrating PCA into their policies and ensuring protection and access to justice for survivors of sexual violence. Finally, universities, standard-setting institutions (e.g. the WHO) and donors are also strategic partners for sustainability.

...IN MONITORING AND LEARNING.

In the community monitoring system, community members are **actively** involved in defining **progress indicators** at different levels (individual, support group, resource persons and facilitators), and they contribute to adapting or modifying the approach. This method plans learning as a participatory and continuous process, integrating a cycle of analysis, practice and re-evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR "HEALING TOGETHER" IN A GIVEN CONTEXT

Analysis and awareness :

- Identify local NGOs capable of implementing the CPA according to their **community commitment**.
- Carry out a community diagnosis with all stakeholders to ensure a shared understanding and **involve the authorities from the outset of the programme**.

Developing capacities and skills

- Firstly, train **NGO facilitators** who work with community groups, some of whose members become "resource persons" in the service of their community.
- Supporting facilitators in their technical and personal development.

Implementation and institutionalization :

- **Advocate from the outset of the programme** for the **integration of the approach into local and national policies**, particularly on gender, health and development, and establish links with universities.
- **Involve technical and financial partners** (exchanges, site visits) to lay the foundations for broader support for the APC and encourage a long-term financial commitment.

Monitoring and learning :

Implement a monitoring **system** at individual, community, solidarity group, resource person and facilitator levels, designed to encourage empowerment and continuous learning.