



THE PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH EXPERIENCES FROM HONDURAS

Experience in Honduras has shown that psychosocial approach (PSA) enhances development's effectiveness and sustainability and contributes to human rights and peace building. This approach links the **personal dimension** (feelings, beliefs, values), the **social dimension** (culture, relationships) and the **material dimension** (poverty, natural and structural environment) of all individuals and looks at how it affects people's behavior. The [SDC tool](#) provides a conceptual introduction.

EXAMPLE: THE PSYCHOSOCIAL LENS IN CACAO PRODUCTION

Despite the tempting perspectives offered by the [PROCACAO](#) project, the farmers were reluctant to participate. Their resistance could not be understood from a purely economic perspective. The psychosocial analysis made clear that the farmers' environment had not been truly considered. Decades of conflict and violence had created a culture of mistrust among families and neighbors that also affected the relationship with the project staff. The latter were not trained to address issues of conflict and violence, and thus to provide the support needed. In a context of daily extortion, some farmers preferred to stay "small" to keep their families safe. Decades of poverty had also led to passivity and risk aversion.

EXPERIENCES FROM HONDURAS...

The SDC cooperation office in Honduras mainstreamed the PSA throughout the SDC country portfolio with the [EMPODERAT](#) program based on the recognition that **long-lasting conflicts and endemic violence had led to a culture of fear and collective trauma, which represented obstacles to sustainable development**. The objective of the program is thus to help overcome the culture of violence, polarization, and social conflicts, by **strengthening social cohesion and empowerment** of the organizations and communities. The EMPODERAT program considers PSA in three complementary ways: **as an analytical lens, as a specific intervention and as an institutional principle**.

...IN ANALYZING & SENSITIZING

At the start, an interdisciplinary team from SDC and EMPODERAT, with the support of an international expert created a conceptual framework and **translated it into the realities of SDC programs**. This meant analyzing elements of conflict and violence and sensitizing about the psychosocial dimension, resulting in a psychosocial diagnosis for SDC programs.

EXAMPLE: A GENDERED PSYCHOSOCIAL ANALYSIS

For a women's network, the PSA is about overcoming gender roles. As the psychosocial gender analysis showed, some of the main obstacles to women's empowerment are the fear of negative or even violent reactions to women breaking with the traditional gender roles, the feeling of guilt when missing out on the household and care work, the responsibility of generating income due to men's absence, little self-esteem and fear of speaking up. Thus, safe spaces among women, solidarity, self-care, emotional catharsis, and the reinforcement of confidence through the PSA were essential to women's economic empowerment.

...IN DEVELOPPING CAPACITIES & SKILLS

Based on the psychosocial diagnosis, EMPODERAT **developed psychosocial action plans for each program** with partners and program participants **as well as PSA-specific capacities**. This approach **needs time, space, and resources** to develop skills, deal with resistances, create trust and (high-level) ownership.

EXAMPLE: THE ABILITY TO ENGAGE RESPECTFULLY AND RESPONSIBLY

The engagement of EMPODERAT with the Honduran National Police, a hierarchical institution, would not have been successful without the conviction of (a) high-ranking official(s). To create commitment, it was important to show how the PSA added value to the institutional objectives. The police officers confirmed that PSA increased their understanding of themselves, strengthened their empathy, improved the relationship with superiors, and raised awareness about gender roles and conflict resolution. Ultimately, they affirmed that the PSA helped them to reduce rates of desertion.

...IN IMPLEMENTING & INSTITUTIONALIZING

Implementing the PSA meant integrating it as part of an institutional and programmatic practice. An outstanding example is the Inter-Programmatic Exercise, which **gathered four SDC programs** in the South of Honduras. In a joint analysis they identified entry points for PSA to **address environmental, human rights, economic, and emotional needs**. As a result, all programs developed **two-fold objectives (sector-specific and PSA related)**.

EXAMPLE: THE PSA AS A STRATEGIC PILLAR AND AN INSTITUTIONAL VALUE

A network of women lawyers for human rights defenders has integrated the PSA as a strategic pillar and core value. Lawyers are trained to look at the legal aspects of human rights violations. However, through the engagement with EMPODERAT, they realized that the psychosocial support to victims was essential, for them not to abandon the judicial processes. A safe space for victims helped to strengthen trust to a process that often comes with high personal risks. As an institutional value, the PSA helped centering self and mutual care among the lawyers, to strengthen their resilience as feminists in a very male dominated profession.

...IN MONITORING & LEARNING

The PSA promotes **long-term changes in people, communities, institutions, and systemic change in conflict and violence** patterns. Stories of change can be very relevant to communicate messages of hope, which help to overcome fear and frustration in **highly conflictive and authoritarian contexts**.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAINSTREAM THE PSA IN ANY GIVEN CONTEXT

TO ANALYZE AND SENSITIZE:

- » Take people's realities as a starting point.
- » Create space for emotional and social exchange among SDC staff, partners, and participants.
- » Integrate the psychosocial dimension into analysis at all levels and use the [tool for psychosocial conflict analysis](#)
- » Identify international and/or local actors (incl. Academia) to support analysis and sensitization.

TO DEVELOP CAPACITIES:

- » Be aware that the PSA needs a long-term vision and resources for capacity development.
- » Connect capacity building on PSA to the Program Cycle (i.e., when elaborating ProDocs), as well as to institutional procedures of partners.
- » Develop skills based on partners' needs (self-care, non-violent communication, conflict resolution).

TO IMPLEMENT AND INSTITUTIONALIZE:

- » Promote safe spaces for joint learning and trust building among local actors and with SDC staff.
- » Provide resources to local partners to implement and institutionalize the PSA.
- » Ensure management's buy in (SDC and partner) and institutionalization by living the example.

TO MONITOR CHANGE AND LEARN:

- » Invest in innovative ways of collecting data. Develop qualitative indicators to measure the PSA.
- » Identify powerful stories of change at the individual, collective, and institutional level.
- » Include the collaboration with (local) media to foster narratives about the PSA.

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