CURRICULUM REFORM AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

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Title: Cross-Generational Cycles of Violence and Prospects for Sustainable Peace

Section 1: Introduction and Background

There have been significant advances in funding investments, national and regional structures, and comprehensive policies and programmes dedicated to peace and security across the globe. Concurrently, there has been an escalation of gruesome and senseless violence and conflict in some countries; intra-country conflicts continue to persist; we continue to struggle with fragile, weakening and/or failing democracies; and politically motivated violence, especially linked to elections and political coups, is a common occurrence; we still experience a rigid and stubborn patriarchy and high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); insurgent and extremists groups are on the upsurge; and there has been an escalation of corruption in many countries. Which begs the question, why are we losing the battle for sustainable peace despite so much investment in working towards its realization?

The answer lays in the lack of attention to unresolved psychic wounds and trauma (both collective and individual) as well as the resultant socioeconomic impacts of violence as the critical factors hindering the success of peacebuilding processes in many countries affected by conflict. War and conflict have long lasting effects on individuals, families, communities and societies. After conflict, the root causes of the conflict are likely to still be present and unresolved. Oftentimes the pre-existing divisions such as those along economic; cultural; racial and gender lines may have further widened as a result of the violence that occurred and its resulting trauma. This is especially likely when one considers that other sources of trauma such as colonialism means that societies had pre-existing wounds that were unhealed and rendered them fragile before the recent violence occurred, further increasing their fragility and the likelihood of violence reoccurring or persisting. Collective violence is a symptom of unresolved collective trauma that is both an outcome of recent and historical violence. Trauma is both a consequence of violence and conflict; but it is also a driver which ensures that these cycles are perpetuated across generations.

A cursory overview of the last 35 years shows that approximately 80% of the countries globally that have emerged from conflict return to violence in the years after. Most of these countries have not implemented holistic nor sustainable justice and reconciliation processes, which address the root causes and impact of violence, according to the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. Addressing the psychosocial consequences of violent conflict is a critical component in attempting to rebuild and reconcile post conflict societies.

In countries dealing with legacies of gross and systematic human rights violations, healing is central to individuals, communities and society coming to terms with past abuses and preventing their

recurrence in the future. Unresolved trauma leads to fragmentation, isolation and mistrust within families, communities and societies, which makes rebuilding peace and social cohesion difficult. Unresolved trauma is likely to perpetuate cycles of violence. Therefore, in order to ensure enduring peace and the non-reoccurrence of violence and human rights abuses, we need to both address the trauma that is a result of the violence and conflict as well as the root causes of that violence and conflict. Research shows that 'wounded' individuals; families; communities who have not processed their responses to their traumatic experiences are less likely to be able to resist the political, economic, cultural and social pressures which can, in turn, result in further cycles of violence.

It is not only trauma as a result of direct experiences that need to be addressed, but also the legacies of pain passed down from one generation to the next that also needs to be healed in order to achieve sustainable peace. Generations of people grow up in the midst of violence, normalizing it, becoming numb to it or losing the capacity to trust others or their institutions, further fragmenting societies and thus undermining efforts to build sustainable peace.

Within the education space, the continuous exposure to various forms of violence within communities (collective; sexual; economic; racial; domestic forms of violence as a few examples) also traumatizes generations and limits the ability of community members, including learners to develop the muscle to confront the obstacles that are preventing them from enjoying safe environments and ultimately thriving, which then ensures that the individual, their family and their larger community are left to deal with the consequences of this trauma, such as their ability to learn being affected and thus being unable to earn enough to get their family out of poverty as an example, which then results in the perpetuation of cycles of violence as poverty is one of the main drivers of violence. Other drivers of violence include unemployment; patriarchy; socio-economic inequality and discrimination; oppression; suppression of rights and unresolved trauma. Addressing collective, cross-generational, individual and familial trauma is key in stopping the cycle of violence, promoting safe spaces at school and community levels and ensuring that learners can thrive. However, a large emphasis is placed on the environmental factors that can mitigate the effects of trauma at the individual, family and community level. This is a specific challenge in many country contexts, especially in the global south, where individuals face various forms of constantly reoccurring trauma with very limited resources to provide them with the support they require in order to limit the effects of trauma, and in particular, cross-generational trauma.

Section 2: How is trauma transferred onto generations within the family system?

Psychological or emotional trauma is damage or injury to the psyche after living through an extremely frightening or distressing event and may result in challenges in functioning or coping normally after the event. These challenges are often experienced at an individual and collective level. Collective trauma is trauma that is experienced by the collective psyche of specific groups or societies and is not merely mass trauma or the sum of individual traumas. It is the recognition that collectives (organisations, communities, societies) can be traumatized, and in order for peace to be created and sustained, this trauma needs to be healed, as collective trauma when unresolved, gets transferred onto the next generation. Professor Michelle Sotero of the University of Nevada says intergenerational trauma comes in three phases:

- Phase 1: The dominant culture performs mass trauma on a people via "colonialism, slavery, war, or genocide."
- Phase II: The affected population shows physical and psychological symptoms in response to trauma.
- Phase III: The initial population passes these responses of trauma to subsequent generations, who in turn display similar symptoms because it is in our DNA.

While we recognize that children and youth can become traumatised by the collective trauma present in systems such as education; religious institutions and workspaces, the focus of this paper is on the family system. However, the family system does not exist in isolation, it is embedded within a sociopolitical context that exerts an influence on it and which in turn is influenced by the family system. It is through this embeddedness that trauma is experienced by the family system and where the unresolved trauma of those within the system influence their context as well as those within the system.

Children, adults and families often experience normal developmental challenges at different points in their lives. This includes the physical, cognitive, verbal, emotional, and social changes experienced from birth, early and late childhood, adolescence, as well as early through to late adulthood. Trauma at different stages of development may expose children and youth to different risk factors and increased vulnerability to violence. This trauma is often experienced within the family and education settings as the systems that have the most influence on the child or youth until they reach developmental maturity and/or independence. Unspoken and unprocessed trauma is particularly dangerous to the mental health and well-being of the next generation as through the projection of unprocessed traumatic memories of the previous generation, they are often left to either try to undo the woundedness of the past or to repeat the cycles of violence experienced by their parents. This highlights the need to adopt a trauma informed approach to the education system that is cognizant of and actively works to understand learners and their ability to learn using a trauma lens.

Based on the various mechanisms of cross-generational trauma transmissions and moving away from thinking of the effects of trauma in isolation of contextual influences, there are a number of ways in which the trauma can manifest within the child and the family. We can think of family trauma in two ways; either as a traumatic event that the entire family directly experiences, which can be a collective trauma such as war, or as a traumatic event that one member experiences that then affects the entire family, this is usually a parent or parental figure that experiences the trauma.

The way in which the trauma is engaged within the family also has a direct impact on the way in which it manifests within the family and the child. Some ways in which trauma can be passed down intergenerationally to children within the family is through the passing of traumatic memory genetically to unborn children, the avoidance of the topic which can lead to the child creating their own narratives of what happened (usually ascribing blame to themselves which has consequences for future interpersonal relationships and indicators of career success in adulthood), the child feeling guilty about bringing the issue or traumatic event up and an overcompensation to try protect the parent from the memory of what they have experienced, or there can be an over disclosure whereby parents may share inappropriate details of the experience with the child or expose them to details at inappropriate stages in their development. All of which leads to the direct

and indirect traumatization of the child, who in addition to their own symptom presentation, often experiences similar symptoms to the parent.

Trauma has a direct impact on the parents' psychological well-being and can manifest itself in a number of complex ways which directly affect their children. Often parents experience a breakdown in their way of relating to others and the world which has an impact on their ability to parent. Different theories will explain these mechanisms differently, but the main and most impactful way that one's parenting is affected is through one's ability to form healthy attachment relationships between themselves and their children. Parents as a result are often unable to act as protective shields for their children, unable to effectively respond to their child's needs, unable to teach their children how to effectively manage their emotions and feelings of being unsafe in a healthy manner. The development of insecure and disorganized attachments again affects the long-term abilities of children to form healthy interpersonal relationships as adults and they carry into adulthood the childhood beliefs and experience that the world is an insecure and dangerous place.

Section 3: Lessons, Reflections and Recommendations

It is important for the mental health and psychosocial support and peace building fields to be involved in engaging with collective trauma and helping to interpret some of what is happening in our societies in order to make informed and not "wounded" decisions about the social ills and repetitive cycles of violence that face our society. Working with past trauma and its manifestations in the present calls for a variety of multi-systemic forms of holistic mental health and psychosocial support interventions, depending on the extent and severity of the psychological impacts of the trauma. A person's socio-political-economic-cultural environment not only affects their mental health but also shapes the mental health and psychosocial support intervention that is most suitable for the challenges that they face. This approach extends beyond the one-on-one therapeutic model used in traditional psychology, considering the relationship between the individual and the collective by incorporating a community-based view of healing. It also avoids one-size-fits-all interventions, relying instead on context-specific engagements. This is particularly important in countries undertaking peace building processes, which deal with the societal legacies of past abuses and the historical, cultural, political and other specificities that shape them. These contexts are often marked by distinct historical injustices and forms of socioeconomic exclusion, which exacerbate the triggers and effects of trauma among marginalized populations affected by violence. They therefore require a nuanced understanding of the mental health effects of such legacies, which are also greatly influenced by cultural beliefs related to mental health.

The main focus of continental and national transitional justice and peacebuilding strategies has been on justice-focused targets, inter alia, security sector reform, restoring core government functions etc. Few state-sanctioned or continental agency-driven transitional justice or peacebuilding policies and programmes have specifically targeted issues such as individual, family, and community healing and/or psychosocial interventions, which are vital in providing a foundation for durable peace. The few that have targeted such issues, have fallen drastically short of their objectives. This has been due largely to the lack of proper understanding of the impacts of trauma as a driver of violence and barrier to peace building, and the significant under-budgeting of time and resources required to work effectively on this issue.

The psychosocial needs of marginalized and vulnerable groupings within a post-conflict society remain largely unaddressed, impeding the potential for creating safer, more inclusive and cohesive communities. This is often due to a combination of the stigma around issues of mental health and the discrimination that people with impaired mental health often face from their systems such as family, community or even members of the larger society, as well as a lack of knowledge on this topic within various societies, in particular the global south. There is therefore a great need for increased psychoeducation and advocacy on and for mental health; trauma healing and the psychological and social impacts of violence more broadly to take place.

It is a necessary shift that is occurring within the mental health and psychosocial support and peace building fields whereby we are increasing the attention that is being paid to the family and communities as a whole. While individual therapy is a crucial part of the healing process for individuals that have suffered a trauma, we cannot neglect the impact that this has on the child/children, families and communities as a whole.

We need to work in a systemic; holistic; multidisciplinary manner in order to create change, for example working with educational institutions, which for many children and youth are often experienced as a refuge from violence and trauma, and this system needs to be strengthened.

A focus also needs to be placed on the historically rooted authoritarian socio-political structures and attitudes that characterize societies living with the legacy of war and/or conflict and which are perpetuated in the post-conflict context. Linked to this is an often toxic sense of masculine identity which is centered around patriarchal beliefs of violence as a means to achieve safety and lack of expression of emotional pain, another key driver of violence in post-conflict settings. Unless psychosocial transformation is an integral part of post conflict reconstruction and development this problem will persist as violent conflict fragments societies and weakens the social fabric that governs relationships and the capacity for recovery. The natural ties, rules and bonds between people and within communities that strengthen coping and resilience are destroyed. Restoring the social fabric that binds and supports people within their own communities is essential for those who have experienced serious traumatic events. This contributes to active citizenship in helping rebuild their communities and countries. These factors require a shift in transitional justice and peacebuilding approaches to incorporate a psychosocial perspective if a durable peace is to be cultivated. Individual psychosocial healing, when linked to collective healing, quickly repositions members' motivations towards helping others within and outside the group. Increasing engagement gradually raises members' political consciousness of their victimization issue(s) within a broader oppressive context and ignites their desire to be activists for the group, and for the cause of "breaking the silence." In order to have the greatest, most sustainable impact on the largest number of marginalized survivors/victims in a context of limited specialized referral resources, a community intervention approach must be prioritized. Such an approach focuses on psychosocial victim empowerment and building communities that contribute to preventing reoccurrence of conflict and are supportive of healing for victims within the community.

Finally, the role of Learning, Monitoring & Evaluation (LM&E) processes during the implementation of a contextualized community model for social cohesion are crucial to developing viable knowledge for violence reduction and prevention. This is not just for affected communities, but also for various levels of government responsible for developing effective, sustainable approaches

to violence prevention, i.e., moving from reactive to preventive security and peacebuilding strategies, policies and programming. It is crucial to support national capacities at institutional and community levels in order to ensure the sustainability of interventions within the long-term.

Section 4: Conclusion

Adopting a trauma informed and MHPSS lens to peace building is key for building sustainable peace. In order to stop the cycles of violence from perpetuating we also need to adopt a holistic and multi-systemic approach to healing trauma that works from a policy level all the way down to an individual level, with an emphasis on healing collective trauma at a community and family level. We need to engage in peace building approaches, that through addressing the impact of cross-generational and collective trauma as well as individual trauma, creates societies that act as peace carriers rather than trauma carriers.