



# IICBS

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
COMMUNITY BASED SOCIO THERAPY



## Annual Report 2020

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## 1. Introduction

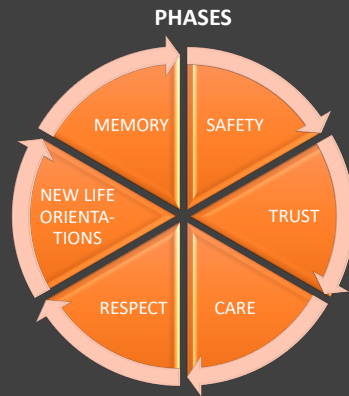
This first Annual Report of the International Institute for Community Based Sociotherapy (IICBS) is published in very unusual circumstances. People all over the world faced the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from the impact it had of people's physical conditions, many lives have been affected in terms of their economic and psychosocial wellbeing. Worldwide psychological distress became widespread among large segments of populations, due to the effects of COVID-19 measures to contain the spread, such as the lockdown, physical distancing, suspension of services, and reduced access to livelihood opportunities and lack education. Faced with many new realities, awareness increased globally about the importance of feeling socially connected for people's mental well-being. The direct effects of the pandemic were compounded by the already existing social tensions in many of the conflict and disaster affected communities in which IICBS aims to work. The pandemic also showed how important it is for community members to have access to psychosocial services close to their homes, something the community-based sociotherapy (CBS) approach can offer.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had its effects on the planned activities of IICBS. The institute has been established with the aim of supporting organizations, institutions and donors in setting up and rolling out community-based sociotherapy projects. Due to the uncertainty and the fact that it was not possible to travel to many parts of the world, gatherings with (potential) partner organizations could not take place and in-person CBS trainings could not be offered. However, in 2020 IICBS invested knowledge exchange by participating in the WHO expert meeting in Geneva on community self-help initiatives and presenting at different symposia. IICBS also worked on organizational development and setting the stage for the network to be established and extended. This annual report will present a brief overview of the activities conducted by IICBS.

IICBS extends its gratitude to all our funders for their financial support and their belief in the relevance of extending community-based sociotherapy to different parts in the world. A special thanks to our partners worldwide for the impactful work they are doing in their respective communities and their dedication to the partnership with IICBS.



## The sociotherapy methodology



### PRINCIPLES

1. Inter-est (Hannah Arendt)
2. Equality
3. Democracy
4. Here and Now
5. Responsibility
6. Participation
7. Learning by Doing

**Different methods and techniques:** Facilitation skills, active listening, relax and refocus, games, energizers, songs, cultural expressions etc.

It is a process of bringing together invited 12-15 participants for a journey of 15 sociotherapy-sessions/once a week - 3 hours per week.

Community-based sociotherapy (CBS) is a psychosocial methodology aiming at restoring and strengthening safety, trust, dignity and social cohesion in societies affected by violent conflicts or natural disasters. CBS is a method that is carried out in groups of 10-15 people who voluntarily participate, facilitated by two trained facilitators. The facilitators, who guide the groups, are selected on the basis of selection criteria. The facilitators originate from the communities where the methodology is applied, therefore they have a profound understanding of the cultural sensitivities in this area. The CBS cycle lasts 15 weeks, during which the group goes through six phases: safety, trust, care, respect, commitment in rule-making and processing emotional memories. The method is based on seven principles that recur throughout the 15 weeks in all exercises and steps that the group makes. The seven principles are: equality, democracy, participation, responsibility, here and now, learning by doing, and inter-est.

The community-based sociotherapy method was developed by Cora Dekker. CBS was implemented in Rwanda for the first time in 2005. Since then, the method has been implemented and evaluated in various regions in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Uganda. The methodology and results are further elaborated in her dissertation that was published (Cora Dekker (2016), *Terugvinden van waardigheid*, Amsterdam).



## 2. Organizational development

### 2.1 Objectives of IICBS

With the increasing interest in CBS worldwide, demand arose for an organization that could act as a knowledge institute, offering support to organizations that implement, or want to implement CBS. To enable this, IICBS was established aiming at building a network and knowledge institute for community-based sociotherapy professionals, and organizations that are interested in implementing community-based sociotherapy using set quality standards.

The institute provides support to organizations worldwide on training of sociotherapy facilitators and trainers, program and project development, contextualization of the approach, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation and research about the effects of CBS. IICBS also serves as a network for knowledge exchange, of which different organizations implementing CBS can become partners. IICBS works according to the quality criteria laid down in the *Handbook Training in Community-based Sociotherapy* of Cora Dekker (2018).

### Aim of community-based sociotherapy

Community-based sociotherapy contributes to the psychosocial wellbeing of people whose lives are affected by conflict, war and/or natural disaster. It facilitates processes of healing, interpersonal reconciliation and social cohesion (psychosocial peacebuilding).

The group is used as a therapeutic medium to establish:

- Safe environment for discussion and participation
- Trust building
- Peer support structures and building relationships
- Increase of problem solving capacity within the social fabric
- The discovery of meaningful perspectives again



### 2.2 IICBS' vision, mission and strategies

The **vision** of the organization is that people whose lives have been disrupted by war, violence, natural disasters, or other daily stress factors have the ability to live their lives in peace and to have meaningful relationships in their social environment.

The **mission** of the organization is to contribute to the psychosocial well-being of people living in areas that are disrupted by humanitarian crises, by providing access to community-based

sociotherapy: a methodology based on group dynamics that strengthens and restores feelings of safety, trust, and dignity and contributes to social cohesion in the community.

As a centre of expertise, IICBS tries to reach its objectives through the following strategies:

- Developing and promoting quality standards and organizational systems based on the philosophy of CBS.
- Facilitating access to a database of training manuals, CBS guidelines, research reports and other relevant documentation.
- Facilitate a network and database of CBS professionals.
- Facilitate training for trainers and facilitators in facilitating the CBS method.
- Supporting partners worldwide in project design, fundraising, implementation, monitoring & evaluation of CBS projects and research.

### 2.3 Organizational development activities in 2020

Multiple activities were conducted in 2020 to contribute to IICBS' organizational development and the establishment of the IICBS network:

#### Network related activities:

- IICBS developed a network structure and has set the criteria for membership that will be of mutual benefit.
- The terms of references for the technical committee members of IICBS was drafted.
- Organizations implementing community-based sociotherapy were formally invited to become a partner in the network and have a representative in the technical committee.
- Different fundraising activities were undertaken to contribute to new sociotherapy projects in different parts of the world.
- Being part of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) group moderated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

#### Content related activities

- An outline was developed for the adaptation and improvement of the existing implementation guidance.
- Input was shared for a potential workshop with partners to enhance and harmonize quality standards for the implementation of CBS.
- A newsletter was developed and shared with potential partners.



### 3. Knowledge exchange

IICBS participated at multiple fora, presenting about the implementation community-based sociotherapy in different contexts. The overall goal was to exchange knowledge and expertise with other organizations and academicians working in, or studying, (post-)conflict or disaster affected areas. An overview of the different symposia is presented in this chapter.

#### 3.1 WHO Expert meeting on Community Self-Help to Strengthen Social Cohesion and Coping Among Conflict Affected Populations

IICBS was invited to an expert meeting organized by the WHO which took place on 2-3 March 2020 at Geneva, WHO headquarters. It was attended by 27 people from 13 different countries. Participants were practitioners and experts in community healing dialogues and were selected based on their expertise in community-based MHPSS. Next to the Community Based Sociotherapy approach, representatives of the Healing Dialogues, Social Reconnection Groups, Living Peace and the LINCSS approach were present. The expert meeting was on community self-help approaches that meet the aims of strengthening social cohesion and coping and emphasize the importance of working collaboratively with community members, facilitating them to be the experts of their recovery.

The objectives of the meeting were: 1) Share expertise, 2) Explore the core components required to strengthen social relationships within communities, 3) Seek consultation on the next steps for WHO's role in supporting community self-help approaches and manual development. IICBS had an opportunity to present about the community-based sociotherapy approach in partnership with Community-Based Sociotherapy Rwanda (CBS Rwanda). It was a fruitful meeting as it led to an understanding of how "core components" and processes of community approaches are required to strengthen social cohesion and coping. Participants also shared ideas for the future steps, and potential WHO involvement.

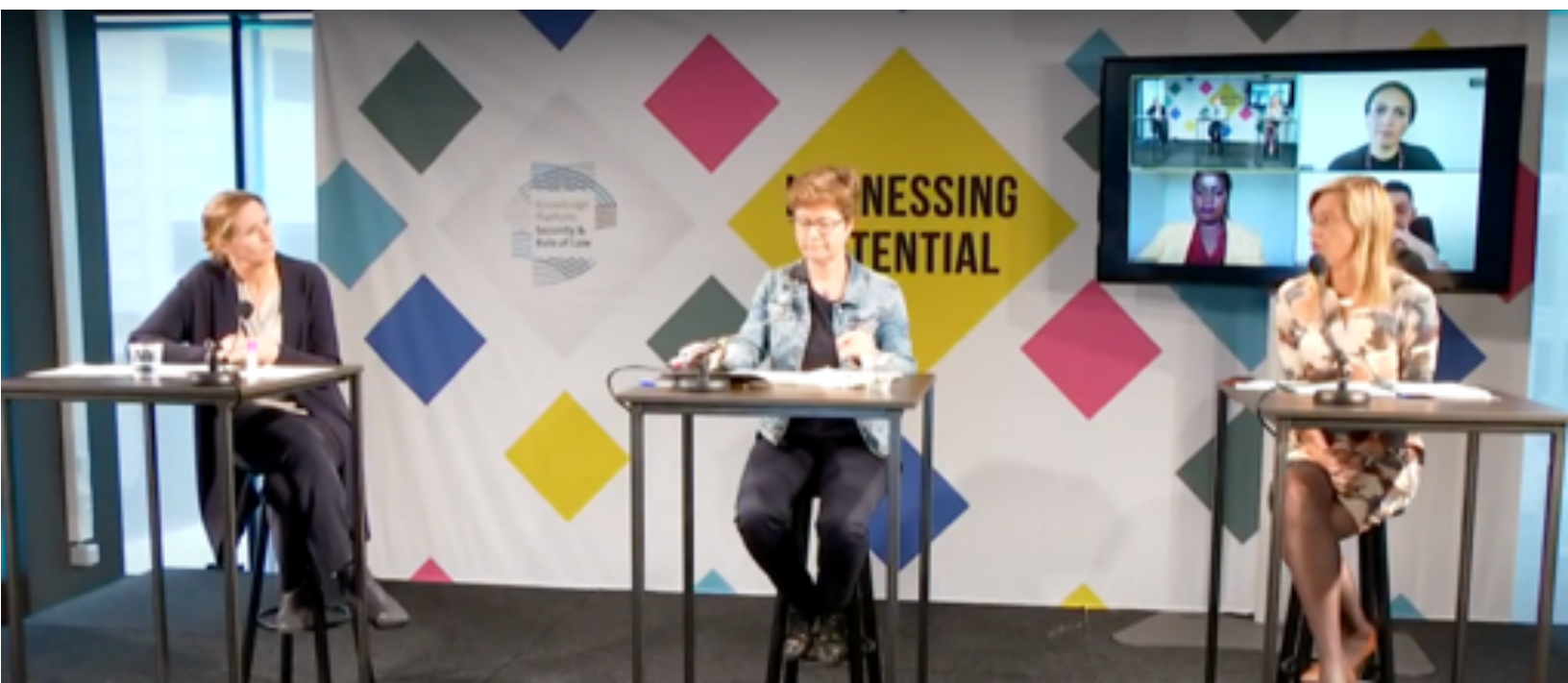


### 3.2 Seminar Africa Study Center

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, IICBS presented in partnership with CBS Rwanda at a Seminar organized by the Africa Study Center in Leiden: "Healing in the wake of mass violence: Grassroots realities of intergenerational continuity and transformation in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo". In this seminar representatives of IICBS and CBS Rwanda reflected on their experiences rooted in the daily realities of grassroots intervention with conflict-affected communities in Rwanda and the DRC. In both countries, programs of community-based sociotherapy are being implemented in communities (and in Rwanda also in refugees camps and prisons) in order to facilitate processes of individual and social healing intersected with peacebuilding from below. Among others, the following themes were presented and discussed with the audience: parent-child communication on past violence and its aftermath, (ethnic) identity questions among youth, living with parents who committed mass atrocities, the family as the smallest unit in society to be taken into account in peacebuilding programs, grassroots advocacy and peace dialogues.

### 3.3 Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law Conference

In October 2020, [the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law](#) (KPSRL) organized a two-day online Annual Conference. The title of the conference was Harnessing Potential, referring to the goal of mobilizing around promising ideas, new approaches, and catalytic innovations. The conference brought together representatives from national and international governments, policy organs, think-tanks, journalists, INGO practitioners, activists, diplomats, and field researchers from around the globe. IICBS prepared a presentation in collaboration with CBS Rwanda, ZOA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and Mercy Corps on the link between peacebuilding and MHPSS. We presented how addressing mental health and psychosocial wellbeing as part of peacebuilding efforts is essential to build and sustain peace. The full presentation can be watched [here](#).





## 4. Conclusion

The year 2020 was characterized by the COVID-19 pandemic and its related consequences which impacted lives of people all over the world, including the psychosocial wellbeing. However, while the demand for mental health and psychosocial support services is worldwide increasing, the pandemic actually disrupted or even halted the provision of these services. An approach like community-based sociotherapy could actually support in addressing the psychosocial distress that people have to cope with, since it is relatively cost-effective and accessible at community level. As IICBS we have therefore become even more committed to put efforts in extending the CBS approach to the many communities that could benefit. While in the coming year, much attention will be paid to further setting up the organizational structure and generating awareness of the existence of the institute and CBS method among organizations and donors working in crisis areas, we are also very dedicated to start some projects among communities in need. To achieve this, in this coming year we will pay attention to information sharing on our website, social media and building up a large network in the field of psychosocial assistance in crisis areas. But most importantly, we aim at establishing and strengthening our partnership with organizations that are implementing CBS. Because we believe that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

