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VOICES OF PEACE BUILDERS AND COMMUNITY- BASED COUNSELORS IN SOUTH SUDAN AND SOMALIA



Case Studies of Peace and Trauma Healing Experiences

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These case studies shine a light on the various aspects of peacebuilding and trauma healing, highlighting the aspirations of peacebuilders, available services, as well as the challenges and approaches to these issues. They also share testimonies that emphasize healing and how crises have affected social cohesion and service availability.

Additionally, the case studies examine the relationship between peacebuilding and trauma healing regarding gender, family care, mental health, and the profound effects of ongoing crises on children and youth, particularly girls. Most significantly, these case studies convey the hardships faced by individuals displaced by war, living as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). They send an important message of hope for the future.

The production of these case studies could not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of a series of consultants and editors.

Case study 1

TRAUMA HEALING: Empowering a Young Refugee Women through Community-Based Counseling

1. Introduction

Established in 1991, Ifo Refugee Camp is the oldest of the five refugee camps in Dadaab, currently accommodating refugees from eleven countries. Since 2010, the population has increased by 35% because of the influx of new arrivals fleeing war and famine in Somalia. The neighboring Ifo 2 camp was established in 2011 to decrease population pressure in Ifo.

In a refugee camp, addressing the mental health and psychosocial needs of affected communities requires innovative and culturally sensitive approaches. One such strategy that AFSC and partners have employed involves the deployment of Community-Based Counselors (CBCs), who are individuals from within the community trained to provide basic mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

This approach capitalizes on the trust, cultural understanding, and social connections that community members already possess, making it a more effective and sustainable method for supporting those impacted by crises. CBCs with backgrounds in psychology or social work are typically locally recruited and supervised by professional Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Officers.

Their compensation mechanisms vary, including financial incentives, in-kind support, and recognition, managed by humanitarian organizations or government agencies depending on the context. Motivated by a shared commitment to community well-being, social responsibility, and personal growth, CBCs play a vital role in bridging gaps in access to traditional mental health services and fostering resilience within affected populations.

2. The Case



Picture 1 - Ubah Farah

Among the women who have found support through the Community-Based Counseling (CBC) program are Ubah Abdullahi Farah and Rahma Omar.

Ubah Abdullahi Farah is a 19-year-old refugee from Somalia. She moved to Kenya with her family in 2015, fleeing the conflict in her hometown. While living in the camp, a Community-Based Counsellor noticed that Ubah seemed constantly sad, had angry outbursts over small things, and often pulled away from group activities.

She also shared with a friend that she was having nightmares about traumatic experiences.

Recognizing these signs, the CBC reached out to her for support. Ubah agreed to participate and started attending counseling sessions that completely changed her life. Through these sessions, she learned vital skills in stress management, self-care, and economic empowerment. She even launched a small business that allows her to support her family.

According to the CBC interview, the counseling program had a significant impact on Ubah. She continues to attend sessions, seeking guidance during tough emotional times. Importantly, Ubah has become a source of inspiration for other young women dealing with similar challenges, encouraging them to seek counseling. Her own journey has empowered her to advocate for the importance of seeking help and visiting the CBC office.

"Counseling transformed my life, helping me manage trauma, gain confidence, and support my family. Now, I inspire others to seek help and believe in their strength to overcome difficult experiences," says Ubah



Picture. 2 - Rahma Omar

Rahma Omar, an 18-year-old from Ifo Camp in Dadaab, is also a beneficiary of the CBC program. She was referred to counseling after a home visit from a Community-Based Counsellor. Rahma struggled with multiple emotional and social issues, being a young mother, recently divorced, and facing threats from her ex-husband's family over custody of her child. Through CBC, she learned about self-care, parenting, and her legal rights, which empowered her to handle her challenging situation. With guidance from the CBC, Rahma reported her case to the police, which ultimately led to her gaining custody of her child.

As for Ubah's thoughts on enhancing the program, she believes it would be even more effective if more women received training, especially in life skills and economic empowerment. She also feels hiring more female Community-Based Counsellors would promote greater engagement among women, particularly those who might be reluctant to open up to male counselors. Furthermore, she emphasizes the need for support groups aimed at young mothers, which can help reduce the stigma and trauma they face.

Rahma

Omar, an 18-

"I believe that training more women in life skills, hiring additional female counselors, and establishing support groups for young mothers are crucial steps to foster greater engagement, reduce stigma, and empower women facing trauma and social challenges," says Rahma Omar, 18-year-old from Ifo Camp in Dadaab

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, these stories highlight the program's success in building resilience and providing crucial support, while also underscoring the need for additional staff and expanded services to serve vulnerable women better. Community-based counseling can play a vital role in empowering young refugee women. Female Community-Based Counsellors are often more approachable for women compared to their male counterparts. By strengthening the CBC team, we could significantly boost the program's ability to assist young women like Rahma and Ubah, leading to a broader and more lasting impact.

1. Introduction

In South Sudan, community revenge is a common occurrence. This often manifests as retaliatory violence between different clans or groups in response to killings, cattle raiding, land disputes, or other grievances. One participant noted that revenge is deeply rooted in a sense of collective responsibility; when one person from a community is wronged, it's viewed as a wrongdoing against everyone. The absence of formal courts, police forces, or unbiased justice systems often drives communities to see revenge as their only form of "justice." Moreover, ongoing conflict, displacement, and loss create lingering anger and distrust, making revenge seem like the only way to address grievances.

2. The Case

Four years ago, Lokiliri Payam—a region in Juba County, Central Equatoria State, South Sudan—was far from peaceful. Two communities that had coexisted turned into bitter enemies. What once was an open area is marked by boundaries, with each community strictly adhering to its territory.

The conflict began with a murder—one youth was killed, and things escalated quickly. Crossing into the rival community's "border" could lead to severe violence, even death. Shared resources and amenities became inaccessible to the opposing group, resulting in limited access to hospitals and schools. Both communities were engulfed in fear, which eroded trust and stalled any prospects for peace.

However, two years ago, these communities started engaging in dialogue, truth-telling sessions, and trauma healing initiatives to address their pain and rebuild trust. Elders, chiefs, and traditional leaders worked together to negotiate compensation (cattle restitution), to prevent further acts of revenge. Thankfully, thanks to the initiatives put forth by AFSC, through ACROSS, things began to turn around. The two organizations trained peacebuilders to lead reconciliation efforts, which included community dialogues, capacity building for selected individuals, and raising awareness about trauma. They even held an annual traditional dance to celebrate their newfound coexistence.

Then, in February 2025, another incident threatened to undo their progress. Youth from one community gathered for a celebration, but a fight broke out among some intoxicated attendees. A peacebuilder who happened to be passing through attempted to break up the altercation but tragically lost his life in chaos. He was from the rival community, and this led to heightened fears of renewed conflict and revenge.

3. Conclusion

Drawing on past experiences, both communities came together to engage in group dialogue, storytelling, and traditional reconciliation practices to share their pain and start to rebuild trust. Today, peace has been restored in Lokiliri Payam, with peacebuilders continuing their work to strengthen community ties. ACROSS, with support from the AFSC, is ramping up training for community leaders, teachers, health professionals, and faith leaders to recognize trauma and support those affected by it.

1. Introduction

Skilling young people in conflict-affected nations such as Somalia goes beyond just creating jobs; it's about fostering peace, stability, and resilience. By equipping the youth with tools to secure livelihoods, resolve disputes peacefully, and take on leadership roles, communities such as Somalia can break the cycle of violence and establish a foundation for sustainable development.

For example, providing education, vocational training, and essential life skills not only helps them earn an income and lessen their reliance on others but also opens up alternative skills and economic avenues, giving them non-violent ways to secure their futures. One respondent pointed out that skill training combined with peace education, dialogue, and teamwork encourages young people from diverse backgrounds to work together.

Being a refugee can be incredibly stressful, and lacking skills makes it even more challenging. This sentiment hits home for Suldana Abdullahi Aden, who lives in Milimo village, New Kismayo.

2. The Case

After returning to Somalia from Kenya, Suldana found herself without any skills, relying heavily on handouts from well-wishers and family to feed and survive. In 2021, she decided to enroll in a tailoring program at the Juba Foundation training center. This center, in collaboration with the AFSC, provides skill-building programs for returning communities.



Juba Foundation Training Centre

The center offers training in various fields, including plumbing, electrical work, tailoring, and computer skills, as well as beauty and salon services. Armed with knowledge, a tailoring certificate, and a sewing machine, Suldana set out to transform her life and that of her family.

You might think that's where her story ends, but it's just the beginning. Suldana opened her shop to the wider community, offering short-term tailoring courses for those interested. They say charity begins at home, and her children have also picked up tailoring skills thanks to their mother.



Suldana Abdullahi Aden at her tailoring shop

During her training, Suldana also learned conflict resolution, dialogue, and mediation techniques. She has actively utilized these skills to promote peace and harmony in Milimo village.

Now, with her tailoring skills, she no longer depends on others for survival; she generates her income and feels a sense of happiness and fulfillment from her work.

Case study 4

PEACE BUILDING: EMPOWERING THE WOMEN FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN SOMALIA

1.Introduction

Women's empowerment in countries affected by conflict goes beyond just achieving gender equality; it also plays a vital role in peacebuilding and recovery efforts. When women are part of the conversation, peace processes tend to be more enduring, communities bounce back more quickly, and societies become stronger. Research indicates that peace agreements that involve women are 35% more likely to endure for at least 15 years. A great example of this can be seen in Liberia. During the country's civil war from 1999 to 2003, thousands of Christian and Muslim women came together to advocate for peace. They organized nonviolent protests, such as sit-ins and peaceful marches, which ultimately pressured Charles Taylor and rebel leaders into signing a peace agreement in 2003. Thanks to their efforts, Liberia has maintained peace and even made history by electing Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

It's crucial to understand that women's recovery, empowerment, and active participation in peacebuilding is an ongoing journey rather than **a one-time event**. This process is all about providing women with the skills, resources, confidence, and opportunities they need to take charge of their lives and make meaningful contributions to their families, communities, and society at large.

2.The Case



Amujima Lazarus is one example of a woman who has navigated this transformative process.

She lives in Mundri, West Equatoria. Back in 2005, Amujima found herself caught in the crossfire between Sudan and the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF), which used to be known as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The SPLA originally started as a guerrilla movement opposing the Sudanese government.

At that time, Amujima was out in the forest gathering firewood when a stray bullet hit her in the leg. For three long years, she struggled to walk without assistance, and the physical pain was compounded by the trauma she experienced without any help to ease her suffering.

Then, years later, she was listening to Amadi FM, a local community radio station. During a talk show focused



on trauma healing, which was organized by the Sudan Evangelical Mission (SEM), she heard about a women's support group that SEM had set up. Realizing this could be a source of the support she desperately needed, she made it a point to track them down and eventually joined the group, known as **Kadrakado Aruboya Women Support Group**.

So far, apart from getting the much-needed psychological support from the group, Amujima has also been empowered through livelihoods, skills training, and access to start-up finance.

She is now able to fend for her four children courtesy of the support received from the **Kadrakado Aruboya Women Support Group**. The women in the group have a savings scheme, which most of them use to start or run a business. They have also been supported by the AFSC, which provided them with bedsheets that they later decorated and sold to members of their community.

In the group, Amujima and other women meet regularly to share their traumatic experiences, challenges they face in day-to-day life, and available opportunities to better their lives.

Case study 5

PEACE BUILDING: A PEACE BUILDER AND COMMUNITY ELDER IN SOUTH SUDAN

1. Introduction

In areas affected by conflict, such as South Sudan, peacebuilders are crucial for preventing violence, rebuilding trust, and ensuring long-lasting stability. These peacebuilders can be local leaders, NGOs, government bodies, women's groups, faith leaders, youth activists, DPO leaders, or international organizations. Globally, there are inspiring stories that highlight the positive impact of peacebuilders. Take **Somalia**, for example, where clan elders, women, and youth groups frequently step in to mediate local disputes over land and resources. In **Rwanda**, community-led Gacaca Courts were set up to address genocide-related crimes, allowing locals to confront past atrocities, encourage truth-telling, and promote reconciliation. Meanwhile, in **South Sudan**, inter-communal Peace Dialogues have seen local chiefs and women's peace networks facilitate discussions among rival pastoralist communities such as the Dinka, Nuer, and Murle. These dialogues have contributed to temporary halts in cattle raids and encouraged coexistence.

2. The Case



In all these success stories, there are women leaders, religious figures, clan elders, and individuals with disabilities who dedicate themselves to ensuring that peace prevails. Among them is **Olben Isaac**, a peacebuilder from Mundri in West Equatoria, South Sudan, who is a person with disability.

Olben's disability started after he was bitten by a sand fly in Khartoum, Sudan, in 1999 while working with the Red Cross. Although sand fly bites aren't usually disabling, they can lead to Leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease that can result in severe disabilities.

As a consequence of the bite, his leg became swollen and eventually deformed, which took a significant toll on his physical and mental health.

The fear of not being able to walk or work led him to struggle with negative thoughts. However, he later gained knowledge in trauma healing and peace building, thanks to the training he received from the Sudan Evangelical Mission through the AFSC. Since then, he has made it his mission to help his family and community resolve conflicts.

Olben travels from door to door in his mobility cart, doing his best to assist as many people as he can to resolve conflicts. His dedication is commendable. He also regularly attends weekly meetings convened by fellow peacebuilders to discuss challenges and share experiences from their work in Mundri. Known as a community elder, he seizes every opportunity to spread the message of peace during gatherings within his community, which has proven effective in his advocacy.

"Disability does not define my ability to serve; I am committed to peace, healing, and inspiring my community to overcome conflict and build a harmonious future together," says Olben Isaac.

Case study 6

Trauma Healing in s Conflict-Affected Dtate: The Role of Community-Based Counsellors in Referral Pathways

1. Introduction:

When it comes to humanitarian situations, tackling the mental health and psychosocial needs of affected communities calls for innovative and culturally aware strategies. One practical approach is deploying Community-Based Counselors (CBCs). These are local individuals trained by organizations such as the AFSC to offer essential mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

The approach of using Community-Based Counselors leverages the trust, cultural insights, and social bonds that community members already have, making it a more effective and sustainable way to help those affected by crises. Typically, CBCs have backgrounds in psychology or social work, and they are locally recruited and supervised by professional Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Officers.

The way CBCs are compensated varies; they might receive financial incentives, in-kind support, or recognition, all managed by humanitarian organizations or government bodies based on the specific context. Driven by a shared commitment to their community's well-being and a sense of social responsibility, CBCs play an essential role in connecting people to traditional mental health services and helping to foster resilience among those affected.

2. The Case

The AFSC commissioned documentation, which included videos, podcasts, and case studies, of their programs on peacebuilding and trauma healing in Somalia. This case study arose from a field visit to Dagahaley Refugee Camp on June 25th, 2025. The trip from Dadaab to Dagahaley took about 30 minutes, covering 16 kilometers of tough terrain. During this visit, the Refugee Consortium (RCK) Project Officer and a CBC gathered some community members for interviews.



Hodan (*name concealed*), is a 36-year-old woman living in Dagahaley Camp who fled Somalia in 2011 due to ongoing conflict, shared her deeply moving story after signing the consent form. As a widow raising two children, aged 12 and 11, she faced immense trauma after a horrific incident involving one of her daughters.

One evening, after completing her daily chores, Hodan saw two men approaching her 12-year-old girl.

Trusting these acquaintances, she returned inside the house to prepare dinner. Suddenly, she heard her daughter scream. Rushing outside, she found one of the men had sexually assaulted her child. She bravely intervened, scaring the men away into the nearby bushes, but not before her daughter was severely harmed. What followed were months filled with depression and trauma, made worse by her struggles to seek justice for her daughter.

Her attempts to get justice for her daughter led her to the community's traditional Maslaha court, where after deliberations, the men were acquitted. This judgment compounded the stigma and emotional distress for both Hodan and her daughters, as they faced discrimination and harsh judgment from their community. Living in the same locality was a constant reminder of the tragedy, with others laughing at her daughter and avoiding them. Despite wanting to move away, they had no other options. In her determination to protect her daughter from further bullying, Hodan saw no choice but to take her out of the camp.

"Thanks to community support and counseling, my daughter and I found hope, healing, and the strength to rebuild our lives after experiencing unimaginable trauma. These interventions gave us the courage to move forward and regain our dignity," Hodan, a 36-year-old woman living in Dagahaley Camp.

With support from Community-Based Counselors (CBCs), Hodan eventually reported the incident to the police, which resulted in an assessment, medical care, and a referral to the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK) for psychosocial support. Participating in group therapy helped the young girl regain her strength, rebuild her confidence, and ultimately rejoin other girls in attending school.

Hodan attributes the daughter's recovery to the mental health support she received from RCK and expressed a strong desire for greater community awareness and engagement. She stressed that without such interventions, her daughter might have been pushed to consider self-harm.

3. Conclusion:

Gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, is a sensitive topic in many Somali communities. Unfortunately, many victims are left to suffer in silence due to the stigma attached to their experiences. The reality is that numerous cases of sexual violence in the Somali community go unreported.

Community-based counseling can powerfully empower refugee girls and women. The counsellors offer life skills training and economic empowerment that can lead to lasting positive change. Female Community-Based Counselors are particularly important for fostering open conversations and trust with clients, especially women.

Support groups for young mothers can also play a vital role in reducing stigma and addressing trauma. To ensure the lasting success of these initiatives, ongoing training and capacity-building for CBCs are essential.

Case study 7

TRAUMA HEALING: A FUTURE AFTER GRIEVING THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT

1. Introduction

Losing a parent unexpectedly in a conflict-affected place such as Somalia is incredibly challenging, mainly due to the instability, insecurity, and lack of support available. In such environments, traditional mourning practices can be disrupted, making it hard to hold proper funerals or even have all the loved ones present. Many children and young people not only find themselves orphaned but also stripped of protection, stability, and educational opportunities. On top of that, their grief as refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) is compounded by the continuous pressures of war, poverty, and the struggle to get by.

In Somalia and Dabaab, AFSC has been focusing on trauma healing to help both individuals and communities recover from the deep psychological, emotional, and social scars inflicted by violence, war, displacement, and ongoing conflict. The organization understands that conflict doesn't just destroy buildings; it can leave lasting marks on people's minds and their relationships, disrupting the very fabric of society.

2.The Case

Take Roman Mohammed Hassan, for instance. She's a 16-year-old girl and the oldest in a family of three who recently returned to Kismayo, Somalia, after spending much of her life in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. Sadly, her father, who was the main provider and emotional support for the family, passed away unexpectedly in March due to an illness. This loss, combined with the challenges of readjusting to life back home, has taken a serious toll on Roman's mental health.

Shortly after arriving in Kismayo and staying with her aunt, Roman started attending a local school, but she quickly began skipping classes. A community-based counselor (CBC) became aware of her situation and connected her with Khadija, the community counselor. During the assessment, it was clear that Roman was isolating herself, struggling with intrusive memories and recurring nightmares about her father's death, and experiencing significant mood swings—clear indications of someone facing trauma.

Khadija accepted Roman's case and began providing counseling along with psychosocial support (PSS) sessions. After two months, Roman started to show positive changes. She began to open up, sharing bits about her day and gradually accepting the reality of her father's passing, attributing it to fate. She even expressed a desire to enroll at Juba Foundations to train as a hair dresser, hoping that with this skill, she could help support her siblings and provide for her family. She has since completed her course and opened a salon in the city center.

"Through counseling and support, I found the strength to heal, accept my father's passing, and pursue my dreams, hoping to support my family and rebuild my future," says Roman Mohammed Hassan, a 16-year-old girl in Kismayo.



Roman Mohammed (L) during her interview. With her is Khadija (R), the counsellor at Juba Foundation.

3. Conclusion

Experiencing the sudden loss of a parent due to conflict is incredibly painful, but the Somali community has demonstrated an impressive strength by holding onto their faith, relying on family and clan connections, and establishing both formal and informal spaces for healing and remembrance. This resilience is evident in Roman Mohammed Hassan, a cheerful and expressive girl who looks forward to the future. She believes, "The future is indeed possible."