

à propos

The KOFF
Peacebuilding
Magazine



The psychosocial approach in peacebuilding

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Can and should we simply blank out our emotions in certain contexts? Key figures from the world of international collaboration and peacebuilding increasingly agree about one thing: at times of social change, the feelings of those affected cannot be ignored. And this is precisely where the psychosocial approach comes in, which is concerned with the emotional sensitivities and social reality of individuals.

This approach is particularly important in conflict situations as few things are as emotionally charged as violent confrontations. Although our partners at federal level and those from the NGO world have been working with the psychosocial approach for a long time now, it has recently come to prominence again and more is being done to exploit its potential. In fact, the psychosocial approach is enjoying a veritable renaissance and taking a wide variety of forms.

The focus of peacebuilding is slowly shifting toward the potential of methods which place “human” aspects at the heart of things. This new awareness of psychosocial structures is feeding into the work done with people’s emotions, and the creativity involved is almost limitless.

Amélie Lustenberger, Editor

focus

We are working with people, not machines



Psychosocial learning community in Honduras 2017. Picture: Fundación Chasquis

The above sentiment was expressed by a participant in the psychosocial learning community in Honduras, by way of justifying the psychosocial focus of its work over many years. In spite of this continuous and successful commitment to the basic work performed, the psychosocial dimension has taken more of a back seat in the peacebuilding process over recent years. The social transformation at the structural, macro level, also referred to as “peace writ large,” was the focus of interest for a long time. Given the tremendous challenges at a global level, the psychosocial approach is receiving more attention again today as people search for innovative approaches.

KOFF, the Swiss platform for peacebuilding, saw the issue re-emerge in connection with the joint learning process regarding the room for maneuver afforded to civil society in Honduras. Together with partner organizations on the ground, KOFF organized the psychosocial learning community for human rights activists in Honduras during the summer of 2017. The significance of the psychosocial approach to the work done in contexts dominated by conflict and violence became clear on three levels previously described and touched upon in the SDC support material:

- a) psychosocial projects
- b) psychosocial organizational principles
- c) the psychosocial approach as a method

The following sets out some of the findings from the psychosocial learning community in

Honduras on these three levels, which will also be relevant to the ongoing work of KOFF.

Psychosocial projects

In Honduras, a great need emerged for people to come to terms, within a protected community, with the day-to-day experiences of violence, death, and impunity. Like in many contexts associated with conflict and violence, the entire population of Honduras is beset by feelings such as anxiety, anger, sadness, and helplessness. These collective experiences make it harder to come up with constructive solutions to conflicts or positive processes for change. A first step in giving people back some sense of agency is to acknowledge and allow space for such feelings. In a video about the learning community in Honduras, one participant describes her experience as follows: “Having had the chance to share my worst experiences in this safe space, the memories still hurt, but no longer feel damaging.” Stopping people seeing themselves as passive victims is one of the core functions of psychosocial work. The participants in Honduras also tried to accentuate the positive, with lots of laughter, playfulness, and dancing involved. Thanks to what we have learned from mindfulness and meditation, we know we become stronger in the areas where we devote our attention. This is why it is crucial, even in difficult situations, to make a conscious effort to enjoy positive moments and feelings without feeling guilty about doing so. “It is the helplessness which makes us ill. Dance is a playful way for us to connect with our positive and transformative potential,” explained a leader of a workshop from Honduras. For peacebuilding purposes, it is vital to exploit this potential more effectively.

Psychosocial organizational principles

The psychosocial approach is also important, in terms of conflict sensitivity and healthy working conditions, when it comes to providing organizational principles. In conflict zones and fragile contexts, having to contend with violence and destruction on a daily basis, the constant threat to one’s own safety, and a social climate of anxiety and mistrust can push workers to breaking point. This in turn can have a negative impact on their health and performance. In such cases, the psychosocial approach can serve as both an analytical tool and a guide on how to act. The learning community in Honduras made it clear, however, that only a context-specific concept of the psychosocial approach is likely to deliver results. Culturally informed notions of health and disease and social norms for dealing with feelings shape how the psychosocial approach is understood and practiced as an organizational principle. In the western hemisphere, findings from the field of neurology and concepts such as mindfulness, meditation, and yoga are gaining greater currency in the world of work. In Honduras, by contrast, the primary resources are the world view and rites of the Maya people and the Biodanza concept as developed in South America.

The psychosocial approach as a method

Another key finding from Honduras for the psychosocial approach within peace work takes us back to what we touched upon at the start. In the words of a participant in the learning community: “People say that Honduras is the most violent country in the world. I personally think the world’s most violent brand of capitalism can be found in Honduras.” His views highlight how essential it always is to analyze psychosocial dynamics in the context of wider political and economic conditions. Poverty, violence, and destruction have structural causes that need to be addressed. It is important therefore to see the psychosocial

approach as a method that can also be used, in a systematic manner, with initiatives to develop the economy or in connection with security sector reforms. The decisive factor here is the transformative and empowering potential of the psychosocial approach. The SDC support material reads as follows: “Therefore empowerment not only means feeling better through understanding one’s own situation, but also through doing something about it and playing a genuine part in the social process – with a realistic prospect of changing prevailing power structures.” The psychosocial approach can give people and communities from various sectors the strength to help shape the complex and long-term processes of social change on the road toward peace and justice.

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[links](#)

- [Gender, Conflict Transformation & the Psychosocial Approach 2006](#)
- [Videos on the psychosocial learning community in Honduras](#)
- [Essential: Civil Society Space for Action in Honduras](#)
- [Envisioning and Pursuing Peace Writ Large](#)

reports

Finding common ground – interview with Irene Bush



Trust and confidence tutorials. Picture: terre des hommes schweiz

terre des hommes schweiz offers training in “solution-oriented approaches”. Its partner organizations also work with the psychosocial approach in the area of peacebuilding. In this interview, Irene Bush explains how people find common ground after a conflict and what effects the psychosocial approach achieves.

How would you describe the psychosocial approach?

The psychosocial approach is all about supporting people who have become incapacitated as a result of traumatic experiences (e.g. conflict situations). This approach is intended to help people act in a responsible way, make smart decisions that contribute to the welfare of individuals and society, assume social responsibility, and establish and foster healthy social relations.

How does the psychosocial approach differ from other strategies?

Unlike other strategies, the psychosocial approach takes account of the fact that each person is individual and has their own story. However, it also takes into consideration the fact that no one stands alone. Each individual’s story is experienced collectively. I am who I am because I live in this period, in this community, and in this country. It is therefore a holistic perspective. The psychosocial approach gives people a new lease of life and helps them find their way out of resignation through small steps. They experience self-efficacy by changing something on a small scale.

So the psychosocial approach is a holistic one – even if it’s used with individuals?

Yes, because it considers humanity as a whole. A community, for example, comprises various different people with various different connections. Changes and sub processes always concern every level of society. If we want to change something, we have to look at people as well as the society and region in which they live.

terre des hommes schweiz wants to rebuild social relations using the psychosocial approach. Can you give an example?

An example is a project in El Salvador, which involves holding workshops with young people. Certain young people suddenly could no longer take part in the meetings as their parents did not like them talking to young people whose families had been part of the other side during the conflict. It then became clear to us that we had to include the whole family in the dialog. By doing so, we were able to show them that the conversations are not about finding a guilty party, determining who is right and who is wrong, but are rather about discussing what has been experienced and what caused it. Generally speaking, it is about understanding the present and the past so that we can plan for the future. We use all manner of different methods from the psychosocial approach to realize this.

The aim of these methods is to trigger inner change among participants. What effect does this inner change have on their actions?

Cali in Colombia is a region struggling with very high levels of violence. Together with our partner organization, we therefore work with young people involved in criminal gangs. In individual or group meetings, the young people discuss what they have already experienced and the suffering they have imposed on others. This is followed by a redemption and reconciliation process, which involves the young people meeting the former victims and reconciling, provided that the victims agree to it.

We have seen how the psychosocial approach improves social relations. What effect does it have on conflict situations?

It is often difficult to find common ground in conflicts. We try to do this by breaking the silence, which has a positive effect on conflict situations. Young people in particular often know very little about conflicts. However, if nobody talks about it, then the events of a conflict cannot be worked through either. We minimize the risk of another conflict outbreak by creating space for people to establish trustful connections in a playful or artistic way (painting, music, theater), which results in respectful exchange about the past. People who have lived through a war are often traumatized, which passes down to the next generation. This creates a society that does not talk about problems and which is shaped by apathy and aggression – a circle of violence that we want to break. The psychosocial approach teaches people that there are alternatives to violence. People who often resort to violence are usually helpless because they cannot express themselves in other ways. Through psychosocial approaches, they learn to express their feelings and grieve. Group processes allow them to experience that they are not alone with their own fate. Conversations about traumatic experiences helps them to overcome self-isolation and blockades.

You talked about common ground. Could you tell us exactly what is meant by that?

Common ground does not mean that the parties must share the same opinion, but rather that they listen to and value the experiences of the other party. Empathy is key.

Can the processing work not pose dangers too? Could such a procedure possibly open old wounds and refuel conflict?

The willingness of participants is crucial to avoid this happening. No one is forced to work through it. Clear rules and an experienced guide are also necessary. A clear start and end to the process are also important, as it also allows people to shut the door on the past and plan a future.

You said that peoples' willingness is an important element. Is this willingness mostly present?

Yes, I think so. We mainly work with young people in difficult communities, where we are met with great approval.

terre des hommes schweiz measures the results of this project. What kind of evaluation is this?

We define a goal and then look at the result. Our evaluation team surveys the young people who have taken part in the psychosocial training and compares their responses with those from young people who have not completed any training. The evaluation delivered very gratifying results: Young people who have taken part in a course on «solution-oriented approaches» are more active and more involved in the community. They put in more effort at school, are less apathetic, and have better communication skills. They also have more general knowledge. The evaluation also showed that the young people start with changing themselves and then increasingly share their knowledge and ability with their surroundings.

[terre des hommes schweiz](#)

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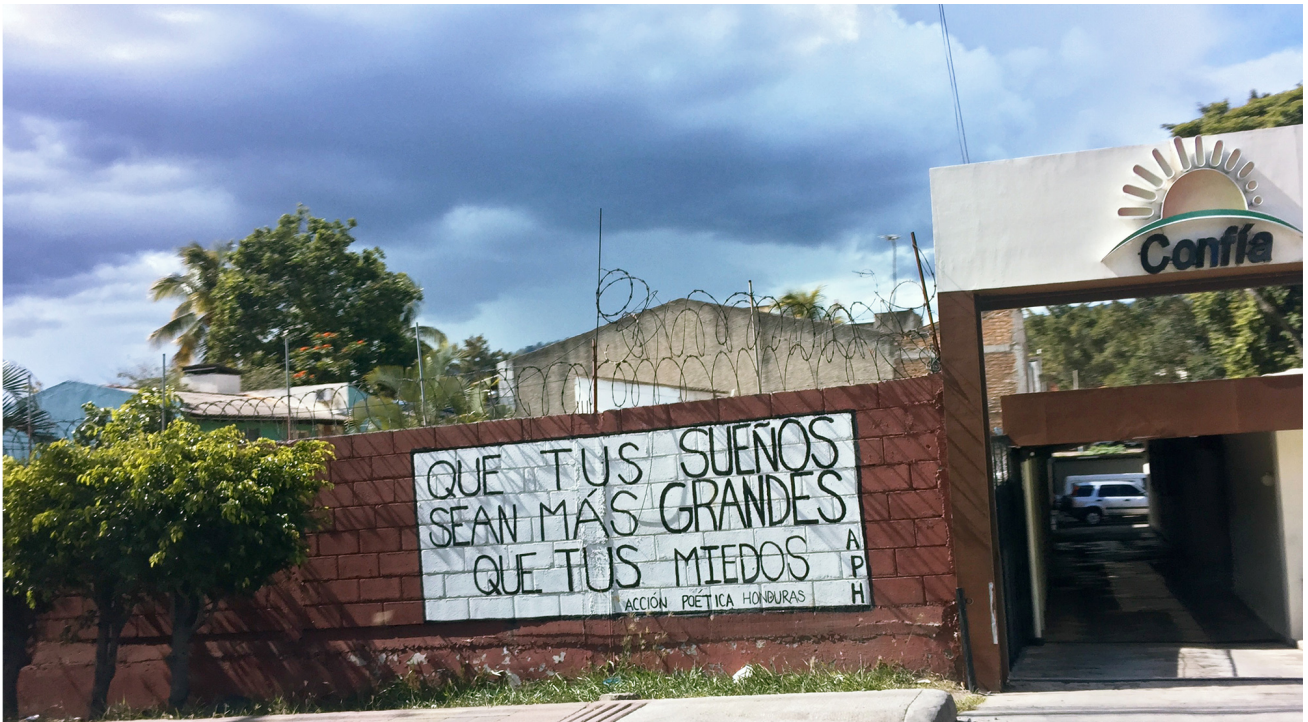
[links](#)

- [Living and Surviving In a Multiply Wounded Country](#)
- [Psychische und soziale Unterstützung \(German\)](#)

reports

Individual context within conflict-sensitive

program management at the SDC



Obstacles to development on a psychosocial level. Picture: Inana Göbel-Bösch

For over 10 years, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has been combining its work on gender-based violence with the psychosocial approach. Conflict transformation, and particularly the prevention of violence, can only really work if the individual and their environment are incorporated into the process, and that includes their own particular experience and context. The SDC has many years' experience of this from its work in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nepal.

And given that its agents are having to work in increasingly difficult contexts, the SDC too is now beginning to realize, based on its collective experience, that psychosocial work must form an integral part of development programs. In fragile and difficult contexts characterized by violence, any obstacles to development can be identified and overcome and projects can deliver more sustainable results if due account is taken of the personal and family backgrounds of target groups. This widening of contextual analysis to incorporate the psychosocial dimension is important across all sectors. The country program for Honduras is launching a program to incorporate the psychosocial approach. This is because analysis has revealed how essential it is – particularly with “productive” projects involving things like cocoa farming – that programs incorporate some analysis of the situations of individuals and families, their anxieties, and their history if goals are to be achieved and projects are to succeed.

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reports

Breaking the spirals of violence through a culture of peace – An integral approach



Police in Honduras, 2015. Picture: Brücke · Le pont

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” – Preamble of UNESCO Constitution, 1946

The violence in Central America can be traced back to historic power struggles and the consequences of the resulting civil war. The present-day threat that organized crime (particularly gangs of youths, also known as “maras”) poses to the civilian population impacts all areas of everyday life. The increasingly difficult security situation and lack of trust in one another hinders economic development and jeopardizes civic engagement. For development organization Brücke · Le pont, the problems with violence are also a major risk factor for the work in the area.

Brücke · Le pont therefore supports disadvantaged people in Latin America (and Africa) with

its “Work in dignity” program. The program follows an integrated approach that combines the strategic focus of “strengthening professional skills”, “income generation”, and “working rights”. The “institutional strengthening of partner organizations” and the “human rights and gender approach” are also included as cross-cutting themes. Based on the context outlined above, the transversal subject of “violence prevention and conflict resolution” is added throughout the whole program in Central America. Modules on this so-called Cultura de Paz (culture of peace) concept are therefore an integral part of all vocational training courses with young people and of the process of informing factory and home workers about their labor rights.

Using participatory methods and tools, the modules communicate values and attitudes: Respect, equality, tolerance, solidarity, diversity, etc., through which the participants learn to reject violence and prevent conflicts. They get to know their rights, learn how to deal with conflicts in a creative way, and, where necessary, how to make use of professional legal or psychological assistance. Traumatic experiences are worked through in self-help groups. Young people form committees and hold peace campaigns at schools and in problematic quarters. The acquired knowledge and renewed ability to act builds self confidence and trust in fellow citizens. Solutions and ways out of the spirals of violence are becoming more tangible for the participants. This is especially apparent if, for example, young people are developing suggestions to prevent violence and negotiate them with the local authorities.

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[links](#)

- [Cultura de Paz concept \(in German\)](#)
- [Program in Central America \(in German\)](#)
- [Post on Cultura de Paz \(in German\)](#)
- [«Work in dignity» program \(in German\)](#)

reports

Improving resilience among human rights activists



A symbolic act of the "Madres de Soacha" in front of the Palace of Justice in Bucaramanga, Santander 2011. Picture: PBI Colombia

The violence in Colombia shows no signs of abating. According to the UN, at least 105 human rights activists were murdered during 2017. Peace Brigades International (PBI) is trying to empower activists through psychosocial support.

The kind of socio-political violence that is taking place in Colombia can have various psychological, physical, and social effects. It has a tendency (quite deliberately in some cases) to fracture the ties that bind society and individual people together. This occurs at different levels: within families and communities or even social movements and organizations. The individual effects of constant threats and attacks can include anxiety, nightmares, paranoia, feelings of guilt, physical problems, or even depression, to name but a few. This significantly undermines participation in social and political life – and therefore the work of human rights activists. Women are often particularly badly affected as they have to deal with the combined pressures of family life, a job, and their (sometimes voluntary) human rights work. In many cases, they are also responsible for cushioning the emotional trauma experienced by family and community members due to constant threats and attacks and for bearing the negative economic consequences of stigmatization. Their commitment also breaks down the stereotypes surrounding certain roles. They experience additional stress due to feelings of guilt toward their family, particularly if they and the women's wider social circle do not understand them.

This can lead to aggression, burnout, isolation, or general mistrust among those affected. At a social level, such patterns of behavior are followed by stigmatization, polarization of society, changes in the value system, or even exclusion from the political system.

These countless forms of psychological and physical consequences are so worrying because they undermine interpersonal relationships. Research and experience from mental health work show that good relationships with other people play a decisive role in promoting our psychological resilience, not only at an individual level, but also at a

community level across several generations. For this reason, the psychosocial support given to human rights activists features a collective dimension too. This includes clarifying the political situation and developing the necessary legal expertise in terms of the human rights violations suffered. It can be helpful to organize activities aimed at breaking through the sense of impunity and the silence surrounding human rights violations as well as activities designed to revive traditions and cultural habits. This boosts individual people's self-confidence and sense of dignity on the one hand, while strengthening relationships between organizations on the other. The latter are endeavoring to change the power structures associated with economic, social, and political exclusion, which only tend to increase violence.

Therapeutic work with victims of violence is aimed at framing personal suffering in the broader context of a collective phenomenon. This way, those affected realize they are not alone with their problems and their situation, but are part of a specific context associated with a political objective. This in turn helps them regain control of their lives and see themselves as possible actors in their own healing process against a backdrop of collective hope and social change.

For this reason, the psychosocial support offered by PBI has a twin objective: firstly to help human rights activists cope better with the heavy emotional impact of the security risk they have faced for years, and secondly to boost their capacity to defend human rights as a result. In future, PBI would like to offer this kind of support in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras too.

[Peace Brigades International](#)

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reports

Listening to children in the midst of conflict



Julienne Mouala. Picture: Conciliation Resources

Julienne Mouala first learnt about child psychology when she started working as a young teacher at a school in Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR). Taking time to listen to every child in her class, she tried to uncover the stories, thoughts and worries of each pupil.

As conflict between the country's armed factions intensified, Julienne decided to dedicated herself to protecting the children who had lost their parents and arrived in Bangui unaccompanied.

She now works as a Psychosocial Advisor at Femmes Hommes Action Plus (FHAP), a non-governmental organisation working for the protection of vulnerable children and women. International peacebuilding organisation, Conciliation Resources has been working in close collaboration with FHAP since 2012.

For Julienne, the psychosocial work with children is a crucial element in the country's path to peace and stability:

"These children have witnessed many bad things. Their parents were killed in front of their eyes. Their mothers have been raped in their presence. How can they forget? Children are imitators. They have seen people with guns. They have seen the anti-Balaka (armed group) with their machetes."

Since the beginning of the conflict, she often sees children make guns out of wood and pretend to be armed rebels:

"This is really dangerous. If we are not careful, these children will be future rebels."

To address these issues, Julienne helped to establish child-friendly spaces in Bangui's internally displaced person sites. In these spaces, Julienne and her colleagues from FHAP do not only show children how they can play in a non-violent way, but most importantly

create space for them to talk about their experiences.

Today, Bangui is mostly calm, though this relative peace remains fragile. Many of Bangui's inhabitants still feel the consequences of the violence and experience traumatic stress. However, with the help of Julienne and FHAP, some of the children are now able to go back to school and play with other children.

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[links](#)

- [Conciliation Resources](#)

reports

Trauma processing and psychosocial rehabilitation – peace through talking?



Collective trauma processing in Guatemala through mural paintings. Picture: Franz Kernjak, ZFD/GIZ

A society cannot rebuild following violent conflict unless it comes to terms with the past. Both individual and collective traumas have a role to play here. And this is the philosophy adopted in the field of psychosocial work for the past 18 years by the Zivile Friedensdienst (Civil Peace Service – ZFD), which is part of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation – GIZ). From the outset, the program has featured approaches such as promoting dialog and “dealing with the past” as well as trauma work and the psychosocial rehabilitation of victims of violence.

Currently, ten professionals deployed by the ZFD are working with the psychosocial approach in various post-conflict countries and advising NGOs, university departments, and advisory centers. In Guatemala, for example, a professional from the ZFD is helping the organization known as ECAP (Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial) develop innovative advisory and therapy methods for victims of sexual violence. These methods include creating “murales” (murals). In Cambodia, a colleague from the master’s program for Clinical Psychology at the Department of Psychology of the Royal University of Phnom Penh is providing advice on university-level training for trauma therapists. In Burundi, the ZFD is supporting the professionalization of a network responsible, in the current political crisis, for delivering and coordinating psychosocial care in rural areas.

The psychosocial approach enables people to understand the specific context of the conflict in question, encourages them to deal with the past, and provides ways of tying things in with the existing resources of those affected. The ZFD professionals adopt a participatory take on this work, try to “stick to basics”, and pick up on existing local approaches to trauma processing. It is hoped that coming to terms with the traumatic past or present, from either a victim’s or perpetrator’s perspective, will help people develop ways of living together without violence. The ZFD projects use various methods such as therapeutic play, dialog forums, discussion groups, and life skills training courses or resource-based exercises like mindfulness and meditation.

Years of being confronted with the suffering of those affected by war and violence can leave its mark on people. With this in mind, and in keeping with the principle of “caring for the helper”, the ZFD is also increasingly offering psychosocial support to employees.

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reports

Psychosocial conflict analysis tool



Solidarity group in India. Picture: Action de Carême / Fastenopfer

Land disputes, civil wars, corruption and the struggle for human rights characterize the contexts in which civil society evolves in many southern countries. The conflict analysis tools devised by NGOs who support the development of these countries rarely take account of the significance of a conflict for individuals who live through it. However, our experience shows clearly that conflicts have an impact on our emotional life and are likely to cause genuine psychological problems. The way in which people respond to these problems influences their ability to engage with processes of empowerment. What distinguishes the psychosocial approach is the connection it makes between personal experience and social context and its concentration on people's emotions.

The tool developed by Action de Carême/Fastenopfer (the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund), in collaboration with Professor of Psychology David Becker, is unique in taking these dimensions into account, using three key concepts:

- Threat – fear: threats from population groups in a conflict situation give rise to feelings of fear in an individual. If the fear becomes chronic, it can lead to feelings of powerlessness and despair.
- Destruction – trauma: the loss of loved ones or a home can push a person's feeling of powerlessness to the limit. Such experiences go beyond what they are able to cope with and may make later empowerment initiatives more difficult.
- Loss – mourning: an essential part of conflict transformation work is that people should engage with their losses. Some losses (of loved ones, friends, trust or a job, for example) cannot be made good and must become the subject of a mourning process.

Through this tool, Action de Carême/Fastenopfer accords these processes an important role within conflict management: emotions are recognized, voiced and taken into account in order to identify elements that allow the conflict to be transformed.

[Carême / Fastenopfer](#)

Valérie Lange

reports

Bosnia and Herzegovina: from trauma work to reconciliation



Trauma work and reconciliation with women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Picture: Vive Žene

For IAMANEH Switzerland and our local partner organizations, the psychosocial approach is central to the work done with women and girls affected by violence. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic tensions can still be felt everywhere – even though the war finished 20 years ago – and the fragmentation of society is being promoted and cemented by nationalistic and separatist policies.

This is why our partner organization Vive Žene is applying a community-based psychosocial approach in eastern Bosnia as part of its work with both Bosnian returnees and the Bosnian-Serbian population currently in situ. This community-based psychosocial approach relies on collective processing of trauma and sadness. Affected communities draw heavily on their own resources and abilities, try and come to terms with the past, and therefore contribute to the collective process of healing and reconciliation. Drawing on its long experience of violence-related work and therapy for war trauma, and building on approaches from various experts, Vive Žene has developed its own method for working with ethnically mixed groups. The first step with this method is to build the basis for trust between population groups. The next phase is one of joint group work, with the main focus

on getting to know the “other side.” Those taking part should understand their day-to-day situation and the challenges they face. Only then are traumatic experiences discussed together and processed using things like Gestalt therapy techniques. This method includes, for example, painting pictures of what has been experienced, followed by a joint discussion of the imagery people have chosen to use and what it might mean. The last step is about further strengthening and deepening personal relationships between members of the different population groups.

Picking up on so-called “connectors” and “dividers”, i.e. those elements that connect or divide population groups, is central to the entire process. Particularly with the work done with women’s groups, things like domestic violence and the lowly status of women present common problems that unite women across ethnic divides. Participation in these groups not only therefore strengthens relationships between population groups, but also empowers the women involved and gives them the courage to improve their position within their own community and insist on their rights.

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[links](#)

- [IAMANEH Switzerland](#)
- [Vive Žene \(Bosnian\)](#)

reports

Fragile contexts: interpersonal contact is the key



Social therapy in Rwanda. Picture: Eirene Suisse

Fragile contexts have become something of a specialism in terms of Swiss development collaborations. And this is why interpersonal aspects and the psychosocial approach are becoming increasingly important to specialists deployed in the regions concerned.

Fragile contexts represent some of the biggest obstacles in the fight against poverty and the peacebuilding process. This is the background to a study conducted by Unité in Rwanda and the Kivu region (Democratic Republic of Congo), which is concerned with the impact, risks, and opportunities for personnel deployed in fragile contexts.

There is of no standard definition of fragile contexts. Internationally, there is a recognition that countries whose state institutions are weak or unstable and whose populations are suffering as a result of severe poverty, violence, corruption, or political arbitrariness are to be classed as fragile. The study expands this concept by including the specific psychological and emotional factors which exist in fragile societies. Feelings of inferiority, victimization, and a lack of individual prospects are the forces which drive conflicts. In order to bring local communities together and mobilize them, dialog is absolutely essential. And this is where civil society organizations play a decisive role.

First and foremost, the organizations surveyed in the study do not need to borrow concepts from the global North as regards their peace and reconciliation work. They generally have a reasonable mastery of these already. The added value they see in collaboration with Swiss organizations is particularly associated with the interpersonal and cultural side of things.

In crisis contexts, there tends to be a climate of mutual mistrust and a tangible lack of relationships based on trust. This kind of context is evident not just within relationships between different groups or institutions, but also within their own structures. International specialists, who are not involved in local tensions, open up new options and create networks. And inspiration, a boost to the self-esteem of local workers, and a culture of planning and structures are just some of the important contributions these people make in

the work they do with others.

Intercultural and interpersonal collaborations improve the human capital of individual people within their environment. They create space for emotional needs. And this is a prerequisite for better interpersonal relationships. In fragile contexts, psychological and emotional factors are particularly important. They have a significant influence on the situation. Psychosocial approaches are therefore very important in terms of transforming a conflict.

The study formulates further proposals for various measures, including, for example, how to work with the diaspora. The main finding of the study is that technical collaboration cannot be the only primary consideration. Deployments of personnel are all about direct contact between people.

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[links](#)

- [Quelle coopération par échange de personnes pour la paix dans les contextes fragiles ? \(in French\)](#)

reports

Victims of violence in Algeria – restoring inner peace and social order



A woman receives psychological support at the CAP in Sidi Moussa. Picture: cfd

In the 1990s, Algeria was beset by a bloody war between Islamists and the state. Thousands of people died and some 20,000 disappeared. The number of women raped is unknown, although it is thought to be considerable. A large proportion of the population witnessed massacres, were injured, and/or were living under constant threat of attack. In 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika became President. His proposed solution for dealing with the past is known as “national reconciliation”. The related laws allow for a blanket amnesty both for the state’s armed security forces and for Islamists, all of whom were guilty of violating international law and human rights. But the violence of the 1990s has left its mark on people. The structure of many families and the gender distribution of certain duties and tasks have changed. Many relationships between family members were destroyed, with communication breaking down as well.

The “Association pour l’Aide Psychologique, la Recherche et la Formation” (Association for Psychological Assistance, Research, and Education – SARP) – an umbrella organization of psychologists – conducted a study in the province of Sidi Moussa. It found that cases of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety are widespread. As a consequence, it built an interdisciplinary center for psychological, social, and legal support (Centre d’aide psychologique – CAP) for the victims of terrorism. cfd has been supporting the CAP and its work since 2005.

The aim of the project is to restore inner peace and social order. This is why such extensive help is being provided to victims of violence in Sidi Moussa, with all its political and social problems. The CAP offers psychological, social, and legal support to individual people and groups. The main emphasis is on the psychosocial approach. This means that consultation or therapy sessions make a connection between the psychological and social aspects of daily reality, with clients and patients trying to overcome the consequences of the trauma they have endured. It is all about people’s state of mind and what they are thinking and feeling inside in relation to their environment. Together, an attempt is made to process the individual and social dimensions of the destruction caused by violent conflict. Many people

in Sidi Moussa have withdrawn from society and built a wall of silence around themselves – because they have not had a chance to process their traumatic experiences. This is why it can be helpful to work in groups. Patients can see they are not alone with their loss and sadness.

In addition, a Swiss psychologist has been working with Algerian psychologists at SARP since 2011 on the method known as “theme-centered interaction” or TCI, also acting as their supervisor. This approach is all about building independence and autonomy in relation to others: each person is an agent in their own right and must decide for themselves what is important in life and what they can change for themselves. Patients become stronger as a result of the process itself. They “experience” empowerment and are ready for reintegration into society. The method is mainly applied during group work, although it is also suitable for individual therapy.

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[links](#)

- [cfd-Projekte in Algerien \(in German\)](#)

reports

Preventing extremism: An exchange between generations



Participants of the first workshop module delivered to youth in Osh, during Training of Trainers, 2018.

Picture: Helvetas

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation is implementing a new project for the prevention of violent, particularly religious extremism in South Kyrgyzstan. The combination of peace-education and psychosocial methods with local governance strategies make for an innovative approach.

Extremism is a matter of utmost urgency in South Kyrgyzstan. In the last few years, over 500 young people from South Kyrgyzstan have traveled to Syria to support IS. Helvetas conducted research about the reasons and correlations, concluding that, as well as widespread poverty and youth unemployment, the fact that there is hardly any communication between boys and adults is a particular reason why poor young people are driven to extremism. This gulf between generations is largely explained by the fact that their society has a pronounced hierarchy. Young people are not allowed to contradict an older person. Communication is limited to older members of society telling the younger members what to do. The young men therefore lack role models and adults that can support them in an advisory capacity.

Our project addresses this point: on the one hand, we empower young people to present their opinion to adults in a respectful way. Our training courses offer a testbed of people of the same age with various social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, allowing them to experience inclusion in an environment shaped by diversity. We also train adults in solution-oriented coaching, participation, and the rights of young people. They are trained to support young people in their community and serve as ambassadors for young people in the adult world. Young people and adults also meet up for a few days in a communication camp, where they learn from one another and break down prejudices. In local-level working groups they then organize:

- a) collaborative small projects to prevent extremism and
- b) exchange platforms in their communities, involving all manner of different stakeholders.

The platforms are organized jointly by the local government and our partner organizations.

Through this preparatory training, young people discuss their own identity, their visions for the future, cultural diversity, inclusion, and cooperation and communication. The adults learn how to become more empathic, to listen actively, embody inclusion and participation in real life, and work with young people in a solution-oriented way. Together, they spur on change in their community. The working groups maintain and strengthen this cooperation at home, laying the groundwork for the sustainability of these changes.

The psychosocial aspect is key in this work, as all issues that Helvetas covers with young people and adults are directly related to the push-and-pull factors of extremism. We support young people to find their way out of isolation, stigmatization, disorientation, and discrimination through this work. They are able to build their self-worth, get a better idea of what they want and are capable of in life, open up to others, and experience acceptance beyond cultural and social boundaries. They also learn how they can actively participate in their own society and can be both heard and valued. Helvetas is convinced that this approach offers young people real prospects.

Helvetas

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reports

Mediation: learning from experiments



Picture: ae-Centre

Muzafer Sherif developed a famous experiment in the 1950s. This involves splitting youngsters into two groups to create a kind of intragroup arrangement. Each group is given a name and a flag and develops hierarchies and norms. In the next phase of intergroup competition, they play competitive games, are explicitly compared with each other, and exposed to conflicts of interest. Animosities develop during this period. During the third phases, the children take part in communal activities like eating together. The experiment reveals that this contact alone does not help reduce prejudices. This can only be done through active collaboration in the pursuit of common (broadly achievable) goals.

At the start of the 1980s, Deschamps and Brown developed this theory further. They found that animosities between groups with a common goal only abate if the groups assume different roles in the pursuit of the goal. If roles are similar, characteristics tend to be ignored and animosities tend to worsen. Also, Worchel (1986) maintains that it is really important for collaboration to deliver success in order to dispel negative attitudes. Failure risks further deterioration in relationships.

In terms of mediation within group conflicts, the following recommendations emerge:

- Clients of mediators should get involved in joint activities rather than negotiations alone. Purely contact-based approaches are not enough to dispel prejudices.
- Parties should not limit themselves to negotiating solutions, but should actively implement these too in accordance with their individual identities, roles, and networks.
- The goals set should be highly achievable. Failure not only perpetuates conflict but also exacerbates it.

Trials are required to determine whether these experiments are equally valid across different cultures. Based on our experience, they have proven themselves in northern Africa.

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[links](#)

- [Muzafer Sherif: The Robbers Cave Experiment: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation](#)
- [Jean-Claude Deschamps and Rupert Brown: Superordinate goals and intergroup conflict](#)
- [Stephen Worchel: Psychology of Intergroup Relations](#)

reports

Soft justice for all three levels of peace



Wall paint. Picture: Christophe Barbey

A three-level theoretical framework to define peace:

- An individual peace, within the human person.
- Social peace, relationships between people and social groups.
- Political peace, ethical values, political infrastructures and accountability of actors and institutions in charge of peace and security.

At each level, there is a psychosocial dimension. The individual creates and lives his definition of peace. Social relations, through education, prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes, create the basic conditions for peace. The political framework provides the fundamental and legal values, the necessary infrastructure. The guarantee and progress of peace go through three stages:

- Teaching peace through education and personal development. It is a Sustainable Development Goal (n° 4.7 and 4A1).
- Conflict prevention is now the priority of the United Nations. The forms it will take and its effectiveness will emerge in the coming years.
- To overcome conflictuality and its violent degeneration, it is necessary to disarm conflicts and to ensure their peaceful management.

International law requires States to settle their disputes peacefully (UN Charter, Article 2 § 3). Should individuals and social groups do the same?

Mediation and peaceful conflict management techniques build the capacity of individuals and of social groups to understand and handle, to overcome and prevent conflicts.

APRED has studied the question of a right of access to peaceful settlement of disputes. Correlatively, do States and the international community have an obligation to promote and provide infrastructures for peaceful settlements? Our work shows that in international law as in Swiss law, the bases needed therefore are laid. Much remains to be done to generalize

it.

APRED

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links

- [Right of access to mediation](#)
- [Sustainable development goals n. 4, targets 7 and A1](#)

reports

Further information on the psychosocial approach

In action between home and abroad

The December 2017 issue of the Review of the Swiss contributions to international peace operations in cooperation with the DDPS, FDFA, FDF is dedicated to the topic of “deployments abroad”. It highlights, among other things, the kinds of personal challenges facing people who go to work in another country for peacebuilding purposes.

[In action between home and abroad](#)

Contact person: Barbara Schedler Fischer, EDA

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Feeling For the Game: How Emotions Shape Listening in Peacebuilding Partnerships

International actors tend to be poor listeners when it comes to their local peacebuilding partners. Not enough attention is paid to the feelings of people on the ground. And

international helpers often blank out their own feelings too, which makes it even harder for them to do justice to the needs of people on the ground. The following article talks about why this is the case and how you can become a better listener:

[Feeling For the Game: How Emotions Shape Listening in Peacebuilding Partnerships](#)

Contact person: Pernilla Johansson
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Emotional Dynamics in Conflict and Conflict Transformation

This report proposes a structured approach to emotions in conflict situations that is tailored to the context. This is why more attention should be paid to positive emotions and their impact too.

[Emotional Dynamics in Conflict and Conflict Transformation](#)

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Film – Beats of the Antonov

The very making of a film may constitute a psychosocial method. At the same time, a film can also help depict a conflict and be integrated into the peacebuilding process. The film “Beats of the Antonov” is a good example of a film that does more than just tell the story of a war. It reveals the people behind the war and how they develop resilience through music and discussion.

[Beats of the Antonov Trailer](#)

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[links](#)

- [In action between home and abroad](#)

- [Feeling For the Game: How Emotions Shape Listening in Peacebuilding Partnerships](#)
 - [Emotional Dynamics in Conflict and Conflict Transformation](#)
 - [Beats of the Antonov](#)
-

in depth

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda: A cross-country perspective

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda witnessed some of the greatest human disasters since the end of the Second World War. In the aftermath of these horrors, peace and peacebuilding moved into the focus of international attention. Many voices point towards macro structural factors to establish a stable peace and claim that economic and political success will fix the fractures within societies. Others state that economic growth is not sufficient for national reconciliation but that there need to be efforts to overcome the trauma of the war on an individual level. Such a process to establish not only political peace but peace among victims and perpetrators would need to take the psychosocial damages caused by conflicts into consideration. Otherwise, grievances and prejudices would reign within societies and increase the risk for future conflicts. The following two summarized articles highlight the importance of the psychosocial approach in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda. Two relatively small countries where psychosocial methods are particularly important, since victims and perpetrators live next door.

The acknowledgement that peace enters a society not only on macro levels but needs to bridge as well micro societal problems is pointed out in Hart and Colo's article on "Psychosocial peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina: approaches to relational and social change". Therein the authors present cases of attempted psychosocial reconciliation. Those peacebuilding projects aimed to take the whole of person and whole of community approach in order to trigger a transformational change. The relationships of the people during the conflict changed from one of mutual friendship to one of uncertainty and fear of the "other". Since allegiances became more fixed towards one's own ethnic and religious groups, change can not only come from imposed institutional reforms but from a bottom up reconciliation. The objective of the projects was therefore to reestablish the relationship between groups by bringing them together and letting them tell their story to each other. This psychological storytelling allows to move from pain, anger and fear to an awareness of their deepest mutual interests and needs. Such a psychosocial peacebuilding process provides an insight into the integration of tangible and intangible elements found in post war and ongoing conflict situations and helps to come up with theories of change.

This important element is also described in the article "psychosocial interventions, peacebuilding and development in Rwanda" by Lambourne and Gitau. The authors criticize a solely state centered approach and bring forward a peacebuilding alternative, which

focuses more on individual levels like psychosocial services. This individual and community based capacity building strategy aims to promote resilience and social cohesion. The objective is to bring a society together again on an interpersonal level, something which institutional reformism is ignoring. Social, political and economic change in Rwanda has not been sufficiently grounded in deep psychological transformation required for sustainable peace. The Rwandan case illustrates the importance of a holistic micro-level approach to provide social services that address psychological and emotional needs in addition to the needs for food and security. Thus, drawing from the Rwandan case we need to introduce psychosocial interventions as integral parts of peace building models and apply them to other post-conflict contexts as well.

We can therefore conclude that the divide between ethnic communities are reminders of the impact of war and the enduring effects of post war traumata. Storytelling and psychological assisted exchange can bring about empathy and sympathy among the different groups. The relationships between perpetrator and victims become clearer and an understanding is spread that not the whole group is responsible for certain acts of war but individuals. Lessons from Rwanda and from Bosnia and Herzegovina can be applied in other contexts where ethnic divisions have led to large scale violence. Psychosocial interventions can provide direction for potential joint social action. However, such an approach needs not only people with knowledge and skills of the field, but also individuals and social groups committed to partnerships of change with those, that have been directly involved in the conflict.

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Communications

[links](#)

- [Psychosocial peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina: approaches to relational and social change](#)
- [Psychosocial Interventions, Peacebuilding and Development in Rwanda \(restricted access\)](#)

news

swisspeace / KOFF



View on the old town Jerusalem, Israel 2014. Picture: Andrey Krav

CAS in Religion & Conflict

Religiously motivated acts of violence have become a media staple. But religions have also emerged as peacebuilding institutions throughout history. The CAS in Religion and Conflict gives you an opportunity to reflect on this ambivalence with experts from academia and professionals employed in more practical roles.

- Learn about specific methods of conflict analysis and deal with the issue of the roles played by religiously motivated actors in conflict zones.
- Acquire in-depth knowledge of various world religions and develop an overview of commonly used religious concepts and terminology.
- Understand how religions are used as a discourse, value system, or tradition in ways which promote both peace and conflict.
- Investigate conflicts with a religious dimension based on case studies.
- Learn how multi-faith Switzerland deals with the opportunities and challenges associated with the issue of religions.
- Become part of a network that takes a critical look at questions associated with religions and conflict.

The course is held in Basel between April and December.

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links

- [Further information about this course \(in German\)](#)
- [Registration period up to March 31, 2018](#)

news

KOFF member organizations

Rethinking Peace at the Basel Peace Forum 2018

The second edition of the Basel Peace Forum took place on 14 and 15 January 2018 in the Basel Museum of Art and the Conference Centre Basel. Its aim was to inspire new and unconventional ideas for peacebuilding, connecting carefully selected leading personalities and decision-makers from business, diplomacy, academia, and civil society.

During the two days, the forum assembled more than 160 participants from more than 20 countries, working in seven different sectors. Amongst them were Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Daniel Högsta; UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng; Chief of Political Affairs at the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Robert Dann; as well as Syrian architect and author, Marwa Al-Sabouni.

The forum was centered around four innovation forums that elaborated on the nexus between artificial intelligence and peace; architecture, urban planning and peace; health, migration and peace; as well as extractive industries, risk and peace. In the subsequent workshops, those forums led to fruitful discussions and concrete ideas for future action paths that will be published on the Basel Peace Forum website shortly.

Besides key notes and speeches by leading experts in the field of peacebuilding, the forum consisted of interactive pavilions, which invited visitors to discuss topics such as emotions in peacebuilding, arts in peacebuilding, sports in peacebuilding, new technologies in peacebuilding as well as nuclear disarmament. It also gave plenty of room for networking, artistic performances and even a meditation session.

Moreover, the Basel Peace Forum was accompanied by two side events, the premier of the movie «Taste of Cement» that witnesses the life of Syrian refugees working on construction sites in Beirut as well as a lecture by Syrian writer Hamed Abboud, who read from his book «Der Tod backt einen Geburtstagskuchen».

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[links](#)

Roundtable: Investing in peace and prevention in the face of violent extremism

Following the 'Regional Conversations' held in Dakar (2016 and 2017), N'Djamena (2017), New York (2017) and Yaoundé (2017) on the theme 'Investing in peace and the prevention of violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara region', Interpeace (Geneva), the International Peace Institute (IPI, New York), the United Nations Office of West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS, Dakar) and Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) organized a roundtable meeting on January 25, 2018 to discuss the conclusions and recommendations of these Conversations. The Conversations initiative, which aims to create and maintain a better understanding of the complexity of violent extremism in the region and the perception of it among those directly affected by it, is above all a means of sharing and stimulating practical initiatives in the field to promote alternatives to violent extremism. By sharing some of these experiences, it is hoped that the roundtable meeting in Geneva will promote and strengthen a practical approach to violent extremism.

[Interpeace](#)

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[links](#)

- [Reflet – Table ronde: Investir dans la paix et la prévention face à l'extrémisme violent \(in French\)](#)
- [PDF Reflet – Table Ronde \(in French\)](#)

Sustaining Peace: Partnerships for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

On 8 December, QUNO cosponsored an event on sustaining peace coordinated in partnership with the President of the United Nations General Assembly's Office, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), the UN Foundation, Global Compact, and New York University's Center for International Cooperation. The discussion focused on the topics of conflict prevention and partnerships for sustaining peace, and featured experts from civil society, academia, members of the private sector, and UN colleagues. In the first panel, participants focused particularly on how different actors can best contribute to the preventive aspects of building long-term sustainable peace. The second panel, respecting the critical role of inclusivity and partnerships that were mentioned in the first panel, focused on how to build such partnerships for peace. This half-day event was

one of many avenues that will be taken to contribute towards developments ahead of the High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, which will be held in 2018. QUNO looks forward to continuing to support such efforts, with a particular focus on the need for inclusive, partnership based peacebuilding approaches.

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links

- [Quaker United Nations Office](#)
- [Video of the conference](#)

calendar

Upcoming events

February 28 to March 28, 2018

Zurich, Switzerland

[Rojava – The Women's Spring: VERNISSAGE with female Kurdish activists](#)

With civil war raging all around, a revolutionary project is taking shape in northern Syria. Women and men are building a democratic federation where people from different religions can live together in peace and women are heavily involved in shaping society. This touring exhibition is open daily to visitors from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at Kirche Offener St. Jakob.

[More information \(in German\)](#)

March 5, 2018

Basel, Switzerland

[Interreligious specialist conference: gender roles in different religions](#)

What girls should do and boys should not is passed down in many cultures and frequently legitimized with reference to holy texts. How should society, schools, and the world of work deal with gender roles informed by religion? This and other fascinating issues will be dealt with at the specialist conference.

[More information \(in German\)](#)

March 9 to October 31, 2018

Geneva, Switzerland

[Special exhibition by the Swiss Red Cross: Destination Croix-Rouge is visiting Geneva](#)

Fancy going on a journey? To distant lands where the Swiss Red Cross is active? Where it

helps people protect themselves from catastrophes? The “Destination Croix-Rouge” (Around the world with the Red Cross) exhibition, to be held at the Maison du futur in Geneva, invites you to take such a journey. A fascinating adventure with in-depth insights into the work done by the Swiss Red Cross.

[More information \(in German\)](#)

June 6 to 8, 2018

Basel, Switzerland

[Conflict Sensitivity Training](#)

This course run by swisspeace helps people understand the concept of conflict sensitivity and the related objectives. It provides practical tools for using conflict sensitivity in strategic and operational aspects of development programs.

[More information](#)

[Registration up to March 31, 2018](#)

June 25 to 29, 2018

Basel, Switzerland

[Summer School: Colombia's Path to Peace](#)

Colombia has been beset by decades of conflict. In 2016, the parties involved came together to reach a historic peace agreement. In this summer school, you will learn more about this fascinating country and have a chance to discuss various future scenarios.

[More information](#)

[Registration up to April 15, 2018](#)

June 28, 2018

Caux, Switzerland

[Caux Forum 2018](#)

With its conferences, training courses, and dialog sessions, the annual Caux Forum is intended to inspire, educate, and bring together individuals, groups, and organizations with a view to building a just, peaceful, and forward-looking world.

[More information](#)

September 2018 to August 2019

Basel, Switzerland

[Certificate of Advanced Studies \(CAS\) in Civilian Peacebuilding Essentials](#)

This course will teach you about the challenges facing mediators during peace negotiations and efforts to promote dialog. You will also be trained to develop your own negotiation and mediation skills.

[More information](#)

[Registration up to June 30, 2018](#)

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Read à propos: www.swisspeace.ch/apropos

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KOFF

Die Schweizer Plattform für Friedensförderung
La plateforme suisse de promotion de la paix
The Swiss platform for peacebuilding

KOFF is a dialogue and exchange platform facilitated by swisspeace. It is jointly supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the following Swiss NGOs which are members of the platform:

ae-Centre	HEKS	Schweizerischer Katholischer
Alliance Sud	HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation	Frauenbund
APRED	IAMANEH Schweiz	Society for Threatened Peoples
artasfoundation	Interpeace	Switzerland
Baha'i	Lucerne Initiative for Peace and	Solidar Switzerland
Brücke · Le pont	Security (LIPS)	SOS Children's Villages
Caritas Switzerland	medico international schweiz	Stiftung für Integrale
Caux – Initiatives of Change	MIR Switzerland	Friedensförderung
Foundation	mission 21	Swiss Academy for Development
cfd	miva – transporte l'aide	Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund
DCAF	Peace Brigades International	Swiss Peace Council
Eirene Suisse	Schweiz	Swiss Red Cross
Fondation Hirondelle	Peace Nexus Foundation	Swiss Refugee Council
Grains of Peace	Peace Watch Switzerland	SWISSAID
Green Cross Switzerland	PeaceWomen Across the Globe	Terre des Femmes Switzerland
Group for a Switzerland without an	Pestalozzi Children's Foundation	terre des hommes schweiz
Army	Quaker United Nations Office	Verein Palmyrah
		Women for Peace Switzerland