Integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding: A Critical and Constructive Perspective from the Integrated Field of Psychosocial Peacebuilding

Katrien Hertog

1International Association for Human Values

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a surge in awareness of the importance to integrate Mental Health, Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Peacebuilding (PB). This article examines how the conceptual frameworks and practical implementation experience of psychosocial peacebuilding relate to the current integration efforts of MHPSS and Peacebuilding. It identifies a range of challenges often present in integration efforts, as well as insights, frameworks and experience from the field of psychosocial peacebuilding which could address these. This article proposes to peacebuilding practitioners, policy-makers and donors to put more attention on strengthening integrated approaches that already exist, rather than focusing most attention on merging what is - at the moment - far from integrated. It emphasizes that sustainable integration of integrated approaches into peacebuilding policy, practice and theory, as well as improved impact of integrated peacebuilding work, will be developed from the way we as peacebuilders connect and integrate inside ourselves and our teams.
Integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding: A critical and constructive perspective from the integrated field of psychosocial peacebuilding

Abstract (300 words)

Recent years have seen a surge in awareness of the importance to integrate Mental Health, Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Peacebuilding (PB). In the fields of research, policy and practice, individuals, organisations and institutions from the local to the global level are identifying best practices, developing models, writing frameworks and guidelines, issuing policy statements, collecting data, organising discussions and much more. At the same time, there exists a small and still largely unknown field of psychosocial peacebuilding developed and implemented by a distinct group of researchers and practitioners, propounding an approach that already intrinsically integrates MH, PS and Peacebuilding. This article examines how the conceptual frameworks and practical implementation experience of psychosocial peacebuilding relate to the current integration efforts of MHPSS and Peacebuilding, highlighting some of the tendencies and differences. It identifies a range of challenges often present in integration efforts, as well as insights, frameworks and experience from the field of psychosocial peacebuilding which could address these. In order to reach the aim of integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding, this article wants to propose to peacebuilding practitioners, policy-makers and donors to put more attention and efforts on strengthening and building on integrated approaches that already exist, rather than focusing most attention on inventing or merging what is - at the moment - far from integrated. It emphasizes that sustainable integration of integrated approaches into peacebuilding policy, practice and theory, as well as improved quality and impact of integrated peacebuilding work, will be embedded in and developed from the way we as peacebuilders connect and integrate inside ourselves and our teams.

The article is informed by the active participation of the author in global discussions and working groups on the integration of MHPSS and Peacebuilding and her personal expertise as a scholar and practitioner in psychosocial peacebuilding for more than two decades.

Keywords

MHPSS, Mental Health, Psychosocial Support, Peacebuilding, Psychosocial Peacebuilding, Integrated Peacebuilding, IAHV, International Association for Human Values
The union of optimal health and positive peace

Whether discussing approaches that are already integrated or efforts being undertaken towards such integration, it is important to understand that the ultimate aspirations of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Peacebuilding, as reflected in their more visionary definitions, converge in a unified vision of positive peace with optimal health. Positive peace is defined as a state that builds on wellbeing, positive relationships, peace-supporting systems and conflict resolution mechanisms which enable the prevention of violence. This contrasts with concepts of a negative peace, which is understood as simply the absence of violence. Similarly, optimal health is not just the absence of illness, but ‘a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.’¹ (WHO) Therefore, it could be said that an optimum state of health in its broader understanding correlates very closely with a state of positive peace and vice versa. Deep down both fields are integrated, and this is also easily understood by practitioners working on the ground with people’s lives and realities within a comprehensive framework.

Integration of MHPSS and Peacebuilding

Since several years a specific global discourse has developed in order to address one of the missing links in peacebuilding, namely the integration of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Peacebuilding (MHPSS). MHPSS is defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on MHPSS in Emergency Settings as a composite term used ‘to describe any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental health conditions’.² This new attention is spearheaded by the awareness in development, peacebuilding and humanitarian settings from the local to the global level that previous practice did not work or even did harm. From the local to the global level, individuals, organisations and institutions are identifying best practices, developing models, writing frameworks and guidelines, issuing policy statements, collecting data, organising discussions and much more on MHPSS and Peacebuilding. They have been instrumental in creating more awareness, knowledge and experience in the field of policy, research and practice. In his July 2020 Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, the UN Secretary General explicitly referred to the need for MHPSS in peacebuilding: ‘The further development of the integration of mental health and psychosocial support into peacebuilding is envisaged with a view to increasing the resilience and agency of people and communities.’ In 2022-2023, UNDP and the International Agency Standing Committee (IASC) developed and published global...
guidelines and knowledge products on the integration of Mental Health, Psychosocial Support and Peacebuilding:

1) UNDP’s report and Guidance Note on integrating MHPSS into peacebuilding (2022)³

2) IASC’s report ‘Integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding: A Mapping and Preliminary Recommendations for Practitioners’ (2023). The report is based on mapping exercises and global consultations and aims to offer a framework for integration, describing the rationale, practitioners’ understandings, commonalities, differences, facilitators and challenges, conceptualisations of integration, specificities for certain subgroups, and examples of best practices from the grassroots and community levels, resulting in a list of recommendations for improved practice.

Recent attention and efforts to more effectively integrate MHPSS and Peacebuilding programming stem from the realisation that an integrated approach would improve outcomes for the interrelated objectives of sustainable peace and wellbeing, and that separation not only undermines outcomes but can also do harm.⁴ As written in the IASC Guidelines, the thinking is that MHPSS and peacebuilding are inherently related and synergistic: ‘Peace cannot take root if conflict-affected people suffer from deep psychological and social impacts of war, armed conflict, and destructive, inter-communal or inter-group conflict (e.g., inter-communal conflict), which can impede peacebuilding and animate ongoing hostilities. Conversely, without peace, there are significant limits on people’s mental health and psychosocial well-being. Fear, insecurity, and ongoing violence impose enormous stresses, damage mental health and psychosocial well-being, and shatter social cohesion and supports such as social relations and networks.’⁵ It is understood and supported by ‘growing evidence ... that more strategic efforts to capitalise upon these intersectoral synergies can create an impact that is significantly greater than what each sector can achieve through siloed efforts.’⁶ While it has been widely acknowledged that traumas and wounds from the past can inhibit peacebuilding and development efforts, there is now also increasingly more awareness and attention for other psychosocial factors involved, such as identity, emotions or narratives, and, in return, for the impact of social conflict and violence on one’s mental and emotional wellbeing.

In general, grassroots organisations have more often implemented approaches that integrate elements of both fields, probably because in their work on the ground the link between psychosocial wellbeing and social peace is very clear. Some grassroots organisations are also using more integrated frameworks to understand life and society and naturally address all levels as intrinsically connected.
On the macro-level, and especially in the West, however, both professional fields have been working largely in silos, having developed their own frameworks, theories, assessments, terminology, methods, staff training and interventions. The MHPSS field had a tendency to focus more on the level of individuals, on mental disorders and treatments based in Western psychology and psychiatry. Peacebuilding, on the other hand, also has a focus on society, context, local practices and works with a broad variety of groups.

Integration efforts focus on intentionally bringing together both fields or components of these. They therefore spam a wide range of topics and initiatives such as: looking at commonalities, differences, integration levels, facilitators and challenges, gaps, priorities, mapping, consultations, raising donors’ awareness, organising co-learning processes, research, and more.

The current spectrum of integration of MHPSS and Peacebuilding programming ranges from total separation, to occasional ad hoc inclusion or inclusion as an addendum, complementary integration in a rather parallel fashion, and fully integrated approaches. In the discussions on integration, comparatively little attention is paid to already integrated approaches and their models, concepts, methodologies, wisdom and practicality. Instead, the overwhelming focus remains on how to integrate not yet integrated ways of working. Presentations, working seminars, policy statements and reports mention the importance of learning from grassroots organisations and from what already exists, but the knowledge and experience of individuals and organisations already implementing integrated approaches is still poorly acknowledged, presented and used. One example of such intrinsically integrated approach is psychosocial peacebuilding, explained below.

**Psychosocial Peacebuilding**

Though the number of articles and books published explicitly on psychosocial peacebuilding is still limited, this approach has been implemented since decades around the world. The description, definitions and concepts described below are based on the author’s research, personal experience and insights, and her professional work with the International Association for Human Values (IAHV) since more than two decades. IAHV offers an innovative and comprehensive psychosocial approach to peacebuilding, effectively transforming the mindsets, attitudes, wellbeing and behaviour of individuals and communities engaged in or affected by conflict and violence. Its methods to release acute, episodic and chronic stresses have benefited millions of people in 150 countries over the last 30 years, and have been successfully integrated in trauma relief, disaster responses, education, health, prisoner rehabilitation and other sectors. Providing an effective link between inner and outer peace
through a profoundly human centred approach, it offers a model to scale up personal transformation to peacebuilding impact.9

Psychosocial Peacebuilding is an approach to peacebuilding which integrates the full range of psychosocial factors at every stage, level and sector of peacebuilding. It includes taking into consideration
1) how psychosocial factors can influence conflict and peacebuilding dynamics positively and negatively, and
2) how psychosocial factors themselves are impacted positively or negatively by conflict and peace dynamics

Figure 1: Overview of Bio-Psycho-Social factors in Peacebuilding
In Psychosocial Peacebuilding, a psychosocial lens is applied:

1) at all stages of peacebuilding processes: prevention, open conflict, rehabilitation and reconstruction

2) at all levels of peacebuilding: individual, family – relationships, community – grassroots, national, global

3) in all sectors of peacebuilding, such as: security, terrorism and violent extremism; justice, restorative justice, human rights; politics; social cohesion, social capital;
education; economy, development and livelihood; wellbeing, healthcare; climate change

4) throughout the project cycle: analysis and assessment; project design; project implementation; monitoring, evaluation and learning; capacity building; advocacy and policy development

This approach stems from the understanding that at all stages, levels and sectors of peacebuilding it is human beings who shape, undergo, experience and respond to the dynamics of conflict and violence around them. As human beings we have our mindsets, attitudes, states of mental and physical wellbeing, emotions, traumas and wounds, behavioural patterns, sense of identities, perceptions, cognitive thinking patterns, values, expectations, desires, assumptions, motivations, intentions, concerns, taboos, principles, norms, beliefs, loyalties, worldviews and memories, and more. With these complex sets of internal dynamics, we are affecting and being affected by what happens around us.

Psychosocial Peacebuilding is an approach to peacebuilding that puts the human being back at the centre of peacebuilding. It effectively addresses psychosocial consequences of conflict and violence and strengthens psychosocial resources for peacebuilding. Thus, it engages with deep core driving factors of conflict, violence and peace: transforming aggression, depression, trauma, division and greed, and strengthening wellbeing, agency, hope, connectedness and humanness. The resulting transformation is profound and sustainable. Working at these deeply human levels, psychosocial peacebuilding strengthens a strong psychosocial foundation in individuals and communities that is the cornerstone and driving force for effective structural and systemic change, and for sustainable peace.

Psychosocial Peacebuilding is mostly practiced by grassroots organisations who have direct and daily experience on the ground of the interconnectedness of wellbeing, mental health, psychosocial factors, violence and peacebuilding. Accordingly, they developed an integrated approach to sustainable peacebuilding and community wellbeing that includes psychosocial support, individual and social empowerment, mental health support, trust-building, and that also addresses driving factors of conflict and violence in politics, justice and human rights, livelihood and economy, security, education, climate and more.

Psychosocial Peacebuilding has also been at the core of the knowledge, experience and theories of very prominent peacebuilding scholars and practitioners, such as John Paul Lederach and Marc Gopin,
who have brought emotions, relationships, culture and mindsets to the core of peacebuilding. Similarly, the discipline of Peace Psychology, which places human psychology at the center of violence prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, has developed understandings, concepts and expertise related to different aspects of psychosocial peacebuilding. Also the surge in interest in locally-led and traditional peacebuilding practice as well as developments in the fields of peace education, human security, restorative justice and neuroscience have increased awareness and knowledge about important, contextual and relevant psychosocial factors for peacebuilding.

This being said, research, conceptualisation and a solid evidence base for psychosocial peacebuilding still seem to be lagging behind the experience and knowledge available on the ground.

**The relation of PSPB to integration efforts: Tendencies, differences, challenges and opportunities**

Below we will look into some tendencies and differences between Psychosocial Peacebuilding and the Integration frameworks and efforts. We will focus on mainstream trends and tendencies in both fields, acknowledging that the fields of PSPB and Integration, as well as individuals and organisations working in these, are far from homogeneous and there are meaningful exceptions to the main tendencies described here below.

1) In a way, Psychosocial Peacebuilding is both related and unrelated to the newly developing paradigm of Integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding. It is related in the sense that it covers mental health, wellbeing, psychosocial support and peacebuilding. However, it is unrelated in the sense that it transcends the discussion to integrate both fields, since Psychosocial Peacebuilding is an approach that is intrinsically integrated to begin with.

2) The approach of Psychosocial Peacebuilding transcends the ‘mere’ integration of MHPSS and PB. PSPB works with people’s minds and mindsets in general, not just with mental health issues, and integrates a wide range of psychosocial factors (see figure 1), not just those related to psychosocial support. More than providing mainstream mental health or psychosocial support, PSPB works with the whole of the human being and its full potential. It works in a paradigm of optimal, holistic health and positive peace, rather than one limited to mental wellbeing. When it comes to mental health, integration discussions focus a lot on trauma as an obstacle to peacebuilding and mention mental illness as a threat to peace. However, cases
where mental illnesses lead to violence are rare and may not constitute the main threat to social peace. Focusing on trauma and the wounds of conflict, integration efforts seem to focus mostly on deficiency rather than empowerment and strengthening of existing peacebuilding potential. PSPB instead focuses on optimal mental wellbeing as a cornerstone and resource for peace, the lack of which undermines the peace potential. PSPB strengthens peacebuilding potential and creates maximum possible excellence at every stage of a peacebuilding process, including prevention.

3) Many of the discussions on the Integration of MHPSS in Peacebuilding focus on post-conflict recovery, while PSPB consistently focuses on all stages of peacebuilding processes, from prevention to rehabilitation, aiming to facilitate optimal peacebuilding potential at every stage and level. PSPB works on a continuum and on different layers of peacebuilding, violence prevention, conflict and violence. Throughout, it lays a strong, healthy psychosocial foundation on all sides of the conflict for sustainable peacebuilding.

4) The integrated field of PSPB does not face several of the challenges that are often mentioned as an obstacle to integration and mutual understanding between MHPSS and Peacebuilding:

- The reported traditional disconnect between the different respective focus on micro-level individualised action (MHPSS) and macro-level group efforts (Peacebuilding), or on the individual versus the collective. The IASC report even goes so far as to say: ‘Neither sector [MHPSS and peacebuilding] has succeeded in achieving this bridging [of micro- and the macro-levels] by single sector efforts’ (p48)

The core of psychosocial peacebuilding is the inherent recognition of the mutual interaction between micro and macro levels and internal and external factors. Already integrated approaches have successfully bridged these conceptual barriers. For example, through IAHV and Art of Living initiatives peace agreements have been signed between authorities and non-state armed groups after having worked intensely on personal transformation, grievances, structural violence issues and trust. PSPB recognizes that just as individuals make up a society, individual mindsets and attitudes create the social climate. ‘Sometimes we lose sight of a simple truth about systems: They are made up of people. If most collective impact efforts fall short of supporting people to change in fundamentally consciousness-altering ways, then, the system they are a part of will not significantly change either’.
- **The distinct and highly specialised terminology in both fields and poor interdisciplinary understanding**
  PSPB uses less specialised jargon and more accessible psychosocial methods rooted in people’s lives which are more easily understandable for target groups and practitioners in both fields.

- **Targeting challenges, whereby it is broadly understood that the focus of MHPSS is on people with mental health problems**
  PSPB strengthens mental wellbeing of all people on a wide scale from mental disturbance towards optimal mental functioning and excellence.

- **The stigma related to mental health problems**
  The inclusive community approach of PSPB significantly reduces the risk of people feeling stigmatized and of them not engaging with community initiatives around peace and wellbeing.

- **Caution against a ‘one size fits all’- approach and lots of attention for context and need to adapt.** The IASC report presents 5 country studies, concluding that the contextual diversity of the country case studies cautions against using a ‘one size fits all’ approach. (p4)
  This is certainly valid on one level, but at another level there is something beyond context that is similar and unites. For example, IAHV has effectively worked in 4 out of these 5 case study countries through one, very similar approach, which is deeply human and as such universal and applicable across contexts. Contextual adaptation in IAHV implementation is present at a surface level, but not fundamental for its efficacy.

- **Consideration that the integration of MHPSS and peacebuilding cannot be achieved overnight**
  The long-term focus of integration efforts seems to overlook the fact that every day integrated approaches are already being implemented on the ground. Moreover, the need for them is urgent and widespread given the scale of distress, violence, war and trauma present in the world today, and they should not be unnecessarily postponed.

- **Integration discussions mention the need for bi-directional integration of Peacebuilding into MHPSS and MHPSS into Peacebuilding.** The first focus seems largely limited to looking at the societal factors that affect MHPSS, such as conflict, strife, social cohesion, violence, trust, dialogue, truth-telling, etc.
PSPB applies a broader perspective, not just considering the impact of social factors on one’s mental health but considering the impact of these on one’s whole internal state as well as their constant mutual interaction in a comprehensive way.

- **Concerns about peacebuilding having a political focus versus the neutral stance and impartial duty of MHPSS work in relation to different conflict groups.**

  From a deep understanding of human nature across conflict lines and rooted in universal human values, PSPB, just like humanitarian organisations, works with everyone on all sides of conflict.

- **There is mentioning of the scarcity of materials for operationalizing the linkage of the two areas, the need for knowledge of the other sector, and for theories and conceptual frameworks that embody the importance of both MHPSS and peacebuilding.**

  PSPB is rooted in already integrated conceptual frameworks which could be used and applied immediately.

5) Integration discussions rightly emphasize the crucial importance of staff training in order to facilitate integrated approaches. However, the focus seems to be on training staff in stress resilience, trauma-relief and methods of preserving empathy. PSPB, on the other hand, trains staff to develop their full potential as a peacebuilder. From the understanding that peacebuilders are not separate from the context in which they work and that as human beings they are equally subjected to interactive psychosocial dynamics, PSPB works with peacebuilders in a fully integrated way. PSPB also builds their knowledge and capacity to effectively design and implement fully integrated psychosocial peacebuilding programs.

6) PSPB does not normally engage with cases of mental illness which require specialist treatment, as MHPSS services do. Empowering people affected by conflict, violence, stress and trauma with tools to improve and strengthen their own wellbeing, however, could free human and financial resources to invest more in specialized treatment needed for severe mental disorders.

**The case of the UNDP global guidance note**
It is important and laudable that a global representative organization as UNDP has supported the process of issuing a global Guidance Note. The Guidance Note starts with a convincing and well written section on why MHPSS and Peacebuilding should be more integrated. The remaining parts of the Guidance Note and Data Report, however, are rather poor from a peacebuilding perspective. Neither of these 'knowledge products' are embedded in a comprehensive peacebuilding framework. When a Guidance Note on integrating MHPSS in Peacebuilding is developed at such a global level as UNDP, one would expect a comprehensive peacebuilding framework, including all its basic components, providing the basis for such Guidance Note, as well as an overview of how MHPSS can be integrated consistently into this framework. The authors mention at some point that there is no globally agreed peacebuilding framework. However, there is certainly ample literature and experience in the field of peacebuilding theory and practice to be able to use a framework that encompasses all crucial and agreed upon components of peacebuilding.

The Data Report was not meant as an academic study, but the fact that its Literature Review does not include any books is certainly a big gap, both in relevance and content. There is no reference in the bibliography to some of the major peacebuilding scholars and practitioners who have worked on these topics, even several decades back. The selection of information in the Data Report seems rather ad hoc, superficial and partial. The entry points are more a list of options rather than a solid framework. There is an unpacking of MHPSS terms, but not of the basic peacebuilding terms and concepts. Illustrative of the knowledge gaps is also that the principles that have emerged from the consultancy process and are put forward as global guidance are mostly repetitive of what is already largely known and practiced in the peacebuilding field. 'Do no harm', M&E, contextualisation, sustainability, networking, local ownership, etc are all basic principles of peacebuilding. They contain little original addition or guidance specifically related to MHPSS in peacebuilding. For many peacebuilding scholars and practitioners, the Guidance Note, despite its importance, may therefore be a rather vague and general document, which is neither very practical nor original.

**Way forward: Strengthen what is**

Psychosocial peacebuilding approaches already embody, conceptually and practically, the aim of integration efforts of MHPSS and Peacebuilding, intrinsically addressing some of the challenges these efforts face. This article wants to propose to practitioners, policy-makers and donors involved in MHPSS and Peacebuilding to put more attention and efforts on strengthening and building on what already exists and what is already integrated, rather than focusing most of the intention on inventing
something new or merging what is - at the moment - far from integrated. Bringing the currently extremely separated ends of both MHPSS and Peacebuilding fields together, bridging cultures, methodologies, approaches, strategies, staff training, and more, may be a long-term endeavor. On the shorter term, highlighting, strengthening, sharing and supporting already integrated or closely collaborative approaches, with their shared understanding and range of good practices, may yield much faster and better results. Given the scale of war and displacement in the world today, increasing climate change related stresses and conflict, the use of specific violence targeted to destroy the lives of citizens and communities, the rise in mental health issues globally and other related global challenges, it is important to identify and deploy effective, scalable psychosocial peacebuilding approaches sooner rather than later.

Elements of or comprehensive approaches to psychosocial peacebuilding have been practiced by grassroots organisations, have been at the core of the work of some of the prominent peacebuilding scholars and practitioners, and have been part since several decades of conflict transformation, creating cultures of peace, restorative justice, trauma-relief, peace education and peace psychology, to name just a few peacebuilding subfields. As also illustrated by the case of the UNDP Global Guidance Note, it seems that researchers and policy-makers involved in integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding are not always aware about the already existing expertise, including in the various fields of peacebuilding. Even in 2020 Huser mentioned that ‘those doing inter-disciplinary research widely agree that effective integration is not yet being practiced in a meaningful manner’.  

While speakers and reports speak about the importance of acknowledging and supporting the ‘extensive, highly promising work on integrating MHPSS and peacebuilding by grassroots organisations’\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^3\), it still seems that much more use could be made of already integrated approaches in the respective discussions, reports and guidelines. For example, conceptual frameworks put forward in these are not always the most integrated, comprehensive ones available.

Much remains to be done to translate verbal support into concrete leverage of the vast experience, evidence and knowledge that already exists. Illustratively, over the years of its involvement in the discussions on integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding, IAHV has not yet received any concrete support from the governments, agencies and organisations advocating integrated approaches, despite its 20+ years of experience in psychosocial peacebuilding, its accumulated knowledge and evidence base. Despite IAHV taking active part in the consultations for the development of the UNDP and IASC Guidelines, there is still little mentioning of existing integrated conceptual frameworks and the
attention for already integrated approaches such as psychosocial peacebuilding is little compared to the attention on how to integrate not yet integrated ways of working.

While advocating for engagement of the vast knowledge and experience of grassroots organisations, however, it is important to equally support and invest in good impact measurement methods and practice. The integration of MHPSS and Peacebuilding is becoming the latest hot topic and, as with all ‘fashionable topics’ in the peacebuilding field, may well develop into the next ‘cross-cutting’ good practice, following earlier trends such as gender-, trauma- and conflict-sensitivity. Many organisations may be claiming to do MHPSS/Peacebuilding integrated projects, but few may be equipped with the knowledge, expertise and effective methods to do so in a positive, impactful way. While identifying and developing M&E for integrated approaches, it is important to ensure that the data collection methods are culturally applicable, simple enough, and well designed to measure intended changes on both micro- and macro-levels. One of the most challenging aspects of impact measurement may be the attribution question to understand which changes on the individual level correlate to changes at the social level and vice versa.

**Last but not least: Integrating inside**

Strengthening the peacebuilding field and increasing its impact through integrated MHPSS / Peacebuilding work requires 1) rigorous impact research of existing and new methodologies and approaches, 2) a solid evidence-base for increased awareness raising among policy-makers and donors, as well as 3) much more widespread training of peacebuilding students and practitioners, amongst others. In IAHV’s philosophy and experience, psychosocial peacebuilding or integrated approaches will have a deeper and more sustained impact if they are integrated internally in ourselves as peacebuilders, our teams, our target groups, and our way of practicing and designing programs. The way we as peacebuilders connect and integrate inside ourselves will affect the quality and impact of our integrated peacebuilding work in the world. Already now, integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding is predominantly talked about and discussed as an external exercise. As with any cross-cutting topic, there is a risk that, despite its importance, integrated projects become reduced to a technical exercise or a tick-the-box practice due to lack of understanding or training. When it is truly integrated on all levels by all actors engaged in peacebuilding, we will really be able to speak about ‘the art and soul of building peace.’
Notes

2 IASC (2007: 1).
3 UNDP (2022).
4 IASC, (2023: 8).
5 IASC (2023: 11).
6 Huser (2020:4).
7 See for example related publications in the Springer Peace Psychology Book Series, the Journal of Peace Psychology, Intervention Journal, and others. There are many publications that deal with psychosocial factors in peacebuilding, but most of them 1) highlight only selected aspects of psychosocial peacebuilding, such as trauma, forgiveness, trust, reconciliation, local wisdom, inner peace, traditional practices, relationships, resilience, neuroscience, etc.; 2) collect descriptive case studies within a limited framework, such as restorative justice, mindfulness, or specific countries and contexts; 3) or describe practical approaches without broader applicability. To my knowledge, there is no scholarly or practitioner’s publication offering a comprehensive, practical framework and guide to psychosocial peacebuilding.
8 The International Association for Human Values (IAHV) is a largely volunteer based, non-profit, nongovernmental organisation (NGO) established in 1997 in Geneva and with around 25 branches worldwide. Its mission is to build a sustainable and inclusive peace by promoting the development of human values in both the individual and societies on a global scale. [www.iahv-peace.org](http://www.iahv-peace.org)
10 See, for example, Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology.
12 Huser (2020:8).
13 IASC (2023: 46).

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Author:

Dr. Katrien Hertog

Director Peacebuilding Programs

International Association for Human Values

Katrien.hertog@iahv.org

www.iahv-peace.org