Developing (Evolving) a Manual for Psychosocial Intervention in Liberia

Anu Pillay
medica mondiale Liberia
medica mondiale – who we are

- Feminist organisation since 1993
- Balkans, Afghanistan, DR Congo and Liberia
- Underpinned by feminist values and principles – focus on sustainability and working alongside national women and organisations
Violence against women in Liberia during the war 1989 – 2003

Systematic sexualized violence during the civil war: 70 – 85% of Liberian women were raped, many gang-raped

Torture, kidnapping, slavery, child soldiers

Many widows in Liberia, highest number in the Southeast
Women in post-war Liberia I

- Normalization of violence against women
- Rape one of the most reported crimes in the country
- High level of domestic violence
- Poverty leading to sexual exploitation of women and girls by “Sugar Daddies”, aid workers, peace keepers, etc.
Women in post-war Liberia II

- Child marriages
- Forced marriages
- Teenage pregnancies

and other forms of violence against women
medica mondiale in Liberia

- mmL since 2006 as one of three partners working on a reintegration and recovery project, funded by the German Government.

- Collaborative approach in south east – Infrastructure and Agriculture, Education and Governance and Empowerment of Women through addressing war trauma and sexual and gender based violence
Community Level
- Community volunteers
- Income Generation Groups
- Women support groups embedded in peace communities

County Level
SGBV - Coordination
- Referrals
- Rapid Resonse
- Taskforces/Protection Core Groups

National Level
- Advocacy and Reports
- Renforcing and Support to policy development
- Line Ministries/National Task Force

RRP: Medica Mondiale Liberia
- Holistic, multi-sectorial approach.
- Mainstreaming trauma sensitive, women centered feminist approach.
Why Another Manual for Psychosocial Intervention?

- External – Flood of actors offering counseling after 3 day trainings
- Growing concern from Gender Ministry (Joint Program) about quality of counseling and services
- Proposal to create standardised manual for Liberia
- Internal – Sustainability – how to Increase the capacity of community volunteers, district counselors and psychosocial counselors
Developing the manual

- Plethora of manuals, medica mondiale’s own training manuals – very good material
- Gathered in Salzburg – staff and clinical psychologist in 2010
- Brainstormed contextual, cultural, women friendly, user friendly framework and suitable material
- Included critical module on self reflection and self awareness
6 Modules of the Manual

- Module 1: Self-Reflection & Self-Care
- Module 2: Gender and Violence
- Module 3: Basic Helping Skills
- Module 4: Advanced Helping Skills
- Module 5: Facilitating Change in Communities
- Module 6: Ethics
Training Manual

- 2 Versions – literacy levels
- Training of trainers
- Tested it on 31 community volunteers, 9 District Counselors, 3 psychosocial counselors and 9 technical staff and senior staff – over 1 yr
Western concepts and their usefulness in the Liberian society – psychosocial concept itself is western – and therefore alien.

Self-reflection and self-awareness: most alien yet we persisted with the strong notion that this is a critical piece – empowerment will not work.

Challenged to understand what this resistance means and how to deal with it – raises cultural sensitivity vs imposition.
Dilemmas and Challenges II

- Juxtaposition of traditional African models with the modern Western model of helping:
  - arbitration vs. mediation;
  - advice of the elderly vs. empowerment of the survivor to make her own decisions;
  - focus on the community vs. focus on the individual.
Dilemmas and Challenges III

- social support systems [often regarded as nepotism and corruption by outsiders] vs. performance-based systems

- punitive vs. alternative (restorative, traditional) approaches to justice

  Danger of pouring out the value of African tradition with the misogynistic bath-water
Lessons Learnt

- Some concepts are universal (traumatic responses to war),

- some are culturally specific (self-awareness and self growth as a necessary precondition for healing and constructive change – a western notion?)

- If a concept is too alien, it won’t be useful for achieving change, however concepts can be of immense use to beneficiaries if they make a significant contribution to improving peoples reality (post-traumatic growth, self-care, gender equality).
Conclusions

- It is impossible to respond adequately to sexual violence in post–conflict scenarios with pre–defined standardized instruments which have not been adapted to the beneficiaries’ reality and context.

- This adaptation entails contents, language and didactic methods.

- It is a long process of validation and questioning and continuous learning, unlikely to be achieved in a period of less than a year.
Thank you for your attention