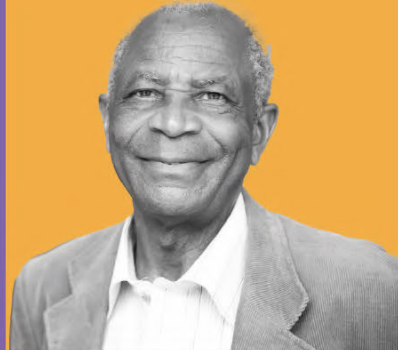




PEACE BY US



HOW-TO GUIDE





Peace by Us

**PEACE BY US:
HOW-TO GUIDE**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	7
About this How-to Guide	8
Grassroots Structures to Prevent Violence	12
<i>Early Warning</i>	
<i>Early Response</i>	
Coordinating a Grassroots Peacebuilding Initiative	26
2. Outreach to Engage New Communities	31
Selecting Communities	34
<i>Criteria for New Communities</i>	
<i>Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Mapping</i>	
<i>Best Practices for Outreach</i>	
<i>Gaining Buy-In</i>	
<i>Managing Expectations</i>	
3. Early Warning-Early Response (EWER)	47
Early Warning	48
<i>The ‘Conflict Chain’</i>	
<i>Examples: Stages of the Conflict Chain</i>	
Setting Up an EWER Process	53
<i>Setting Up an EWER Committee</i>	
<i>EWER Inclusion Checklist</i>	
<i>Roles on the Committee</i>	
<i>Conducting an EWER Meeting</i>	
<i>Reporting</i>	
Early Response	61
<i>Types of Responses</i>	
<i>Choosing a Non-Punitive Response</i>	
<i>Escalating a Case</i>	
<i>Connecting Your EWER Committee</i>	
<i>Choosing a Response</i>	
<i>EWER Decision Tree</i>	
Community Education About EWER	70
<i>Conflict Analysis</i>	
<i>Managing Conflicts</i>	
<i>Practical Steps in EWER</i>	
<i>Staying on Message Through Conflict Analysis</i>	
<i>Formal EWER Structures</i>	

4. Dialogue	81
What Is Dialogue?	83
<i>Types of Dialogue</i>	
<i>Key Elements in Reflective Structured Dialogue</i>	
Choosing a Facilitator	90
Choosing a Topic & Participants	96
Conducting a Dialogue	99
<i>Stage 1: Preparation</i>	
<i>Stage 2: Introducing a Dialogue</i>	
<i>Stage 3: Communication Agreements</i>	
<i>Stage 4: Breaking the Ice</i>	
<i>Stage 5: Conducting a Dialogue</i>	
<i>Stage 6: Finishing a Dialogue</i>	
<i>Stage 7: Debriefing</i>	
<i>Stage 8: Bringing Dialogue into Your Everyday Life</i>	
Training dialogue facilitators	110
<i>Reminders for Facilitators</i>	
Appendix 1: Dialogue Check-List	115
Appendix 2: Preparation Questions	116
Appendix 3: Lessons Learned by Facilitators	117
5. Mental Health & Psychosocial Support	119
Key Concepts in Psycho-Education	122
<i>Mental Health</i>	
<i>Common Reactions To Danger</i>	
<i>What is Trauma?</i>	
<i>Reactions to Trauma</i>	
<i>Types of Trauma</i>	
<i>Psychological Resilience</i>	
Lay Counselling Training	135
<i>The Lay Counsellor's Role</i>	
<i>Psychological First Aid</i>	
<i>Choosing a Lay Counsellor</i>	
<i>Stages in Counselling</i>	
<i>Referrals</i>	
<i>Boundaries</i>	
<i>Burn-Out and Self-Care</i>	
Professional Psychological Interventions	146
<i>Group Therapy</i>	
<i>Expressive Therapies and Mindfulness</i>	

6. Media & Communication for Peace	151
Media Awareness and Fake News	154
<i>What is Fake News?</i>	
<i>Types of Fake News</i>	
<i>Identifying Fake News</i>	
Community-Based Peace Messaging	165
<i>Peaceful Communication</i>	
<i>Crafting Your Message</i>	
<i>Choosing Content</i>	
Radio	177
<i>Making a Program Guide</i>	
<i>Collecting Feedback</i>	
<i>Call-in Radio Program Facilitator's Guide</i>	
Social Media	184
7. Advocacy	187
<i>Engaging Women</i>	
<i>Engaging Youth</i>	
<i>Advocacy with Security Operatives</i>	
<i>Advocacy with Farmers and Herders</i>	
8. Lessons Learned	203

"The way the POI [Protecting Our Communities Initiative] is structured – it's not like somebody alien just comes and does things for you. POI will build your capacity, but you are going to do it yourself... POI goes into the community so that they build their capacity to be able to do it by themselves.

This helps not only in resolving conflict in the community, but it also helps the sustainability of the gains. Because if the project ends, the knowledge is already there. The relationships are already established in the community. So the struggle will continue."

– Community Dialogue Facilitator, Zamfara

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In creating this how-to guide, we wanted to move beyond simply explaining what we had done through our 5-year Protecting Our Communities Initiative (POCI) in Nigeria. We wanted to harvest lessons learned and reflect upon what worked best and what we would change in the future. This guide incorporates insights not only from POCI's final evaluation and most significant change data, but also from new interviews with 29 people who were involved in implementing the project, including community dialogue facilitators, early warning-early response committee members, project leadership within each partner organisation, and expert team members who led each element of the Peace By Us approach.

Each organisation involved in POCI offered crucial guidance and support in creating this guide. We are most grateful to Daniel Colm, consultant for Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, for his remarkable research and writing skills as this guide's lead author. Daniel Colm conducted those 29 interviews with project staff and provided the initial design of content and structure. He synthesised a wealth of information using plain language to describe and assess our approach with an eye towards making it accessible to a broad audience.

Working closely with Daniel Colm was Dr. Jennifer Hall-Witt, who guided the process in her roles as Senior Program Manager and then Executive Director at Karuna Center. Dr. Fatima Akilu, Executive Director of Neem Foundation, brought deep expertise in psychology, countering violent extremism, and peacebuilding to POCI and to the development of the Peace By Us approach that informs this guide. Polly Byers, Karuna Center's former Executive Director, also provided helpful input on an early draft of the manual and served as the Project Director during much of POCI. Ahmad Jumare, Director of Programmes at Neem Foundation, coordinated many of the interviews for



One of the "peace walls" created during POCI, a public mural symbolising the community's commitment to peace

this guide and offered vital thought leadership. Karuna Center consultants Imam Muhammad Sani Isah, Seth Karamage, and Su Flickinger, who worked on POCl from start to finish, added their expertise. Neem Foundation team members ThankGod Ocheho and Joseph Adamu also provided valuable feedback on specific sections of this guide.

Neither the project nor this how-to guide would have been possible without the dedicated leadership, outreach, and local knowledge of the three community-based organisations who co-developed POCl: Dr. Victoria Daaor, Executive Director of Elohim Development Foundation and her team; Sister Rita Schwanzenberger, Executive Director at Hope for the Village Child Foundation and her staff; and Musa Umar, Executive Director at Voluntary Aid Initiative and his team.

We would also like to acknowledge the people who finalised this how-to guide and brought it to life: Adedoyin Betiku, Senior Programme Manager at Neem Foundation, who led the design process, including the PeaceByUs logo, cover design, and brand elements as well as the graphics within the body of the guide; Laura Cyan Anderson, Communications Manager at Karuna Center, who created the final layout of the guide and contributed to the final phases of writing and editing; and Safiyyah Mohammed, Senior IT Officer at Neem Foundation, for creating the PeaceByUs website.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to each person who offered their vital knowledge to this how-to guide through interviews, feedback sessions, and their day-to-day peacebuilding work. Interviews were conducted with the informed consent of participants, and individuals' names have been redacted for privacy and safety, but their insights are irreplaceable. This guide would not exist without the work and continual innovation of everyone: project team members, community members, herder and farmer leadership, local authorities, traditional leaders, government officials, and many others who are pictured and quoted in these pages. They collaborated to make all the gains and learning of POCl possible. We thank them and hope this guide does justice to their work.



1

INTRODUCTION



POCI training-of-trainers in Benue, including community members and members of farmers' and herders' associations



Peace by Us

About this How-to Guide

This How-to Guide offers a roadmap for how communities can address insecurity effectively at the grassroots level. It is based on a 5-year project called the 'Protecting Our Communities' Initiative (POCI) that began in 2019. POCI worked in 18 communities in Benue, Kaduna, and Zamfara States to address conflict, with a focus on non-punitive methods.

The approach that POCI created (which we now call the 'Peace By Us' approach) empowers community members to identify **'Early Warning'** signs of conflict or danger, and to address these issues with a range of **'Early Response'** methods. These methods include the use of **dialogue, problem solving, psychosocial support, advocacy, and media.**

The Peace By Us approach has been highly effective, **helping communities develop tools for managing conflict before it erupts into violence.** This has changed the mentality of many communities, as people have embraced the idea of addressing conflicts peacefully. The initiative has evolved into a network of peacebuilders who continue to work together.

Using the approaches outlined in this how-to guide, POCI has:

- **Empowered community members** to become custodians of their own security
- **Expanded the role of women and youth** in peacebuilding
- Connected communities to governments, organisations, and security agencies, **breaking the 'cycle of isolation'** that allows conflict to continue or get worse
- **Built alliances** between farmers and herders
- **Introduced peaceful dialogue** as a main way to build understanding and trust between groups in conflict
- Promoted knowledge of **mental health and trauma healing**
- **Reduced dangerous stereotypes, fake news and rumours** that spread through the media



Two neighbours embrace at a dialogue in Kaduna. The woman at right, a Christian, lost her family to religious violence, but she now works together with her Muslim neighbours to build peace.

"We are now better at being our brothers' keepers... When we now notice a wrong, we acknowledge that. What goes wrong with one, goes wrong with us all. Whatever troubles your neighbour ends up troubling you too and this is another reason we now have peace of mind."

– Women's group member, Zamfara

The project has also increased connections across many levels of society. For example, thanks to POCl, state chapters of the two largest farmer and herder associations in Nigeria — the All Farmers' Association of Nigeria (AFAN) and Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) — now meet regularly and work together to solve issues.

Communities that participated in POCl now take ownership of their role in addressing security issues, and are more able to **communicate without fear with security agents and government officials.**

THE PEACE BY US APPROACH

POCl began by working with local peacebuilders to identify the most pressing issues on the ground. They then chose communities suitable for the intervention. After a period of outreach to community leaders and traditional rulers, POCl set up **Early Warning-Early Response (EWER) committees** to spot early signs of trouble and respond using **non-punitive approaches**, in six main ways:

- **Problem solving:** Early Warning-Early Response committees engage with community members to resolve issues when they can do so on their own
- **Dialogue:** when an EWER committee cannot easily resolve a conflict, trained dialogue facilitators help people in conflict talking through issues in a peaceful and respectful manner
- **Psychosocial support:** when people affected by violence need to build their resilience in order to better manage conflict, lay counsellors or psychologists help them understand trauma, learn coping mechanisms, and build a support network
- **Outreach and advocacy:** when other stakeholders need to be involved in addressing the root causes of conflicts or in building the networks needed for effective peacebuilding, community members contact traditional leaders, security forces, governments, and farmer-herder groups to seek their support and work together for solutions



A POCl dialogue about conflicts over the use of land

Grassroots Peacebuilding

Working at the most local level to build peace. Community members themselves make the most important decisions and contributions to peace.

Non-Punitive Approaches

'Non-punitive approaches' to conflict involve solving problems in ways that do not include violence or punishing others.

- **Media campaigns:** because fake news can inflame tensions in a conflict, media campaigns on radio and social media can fight against misinformation and broadcast the benefits of peace
- **Report to authorities:** when a serious crime has been committed or violence is imminent, community members need to contact security officials first

ELEVATING THE VOICES OF WOMEN AND YOUTH

POCI has focused on including two important groups: women and youth, whose voices are often left out of peacebuilding efforts, while also working with **traditional and religious leaders** at every stage.

The number of youth and women involved in making key decisions about peacebuilding has increased in the communities. Youth are now able to sit beside elders and voice their opinions. Meanwhile, even in very traditional areas, women have less fear of appearing on radio or taking a visible role in the community, such as participating on an Early Warning-Early Response committee or working as lay counsellors and dialogue facilitators.

Increasing women's involvement took patience and careful persuasion. Some women were hesitant, as were some husbands and traditional leaders. Often, it isn't until after women have been involved in peacebuilding that the community understands how vital they are for peacefully resolving conflicts.



A participant speaks during an EWER training

"We the women, we are the watchers. We watch to notice when issues arise and ensure it is resolved before it escalates. In a household between husband and wife [and between] brothers, disputes can arise so we step in and settle it fast."

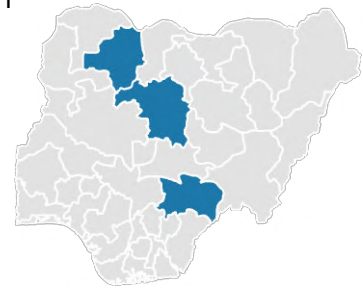
*– Women's group member,
Zamfara*

LIMITS OF THE PEACE BY US APPROACH

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to conflict. Just as problems can be identified in a variety of ways, they can also be addressed in a variety of ways. The Peace By Us approach to community-based Early Warning-Early Response may not work in every place or situation. In highly dangerous environments or when dealing with serious crimes, you might need to take additional action, such as involving the legal system, police, or army. In such cases, other approaches may be needed beyond the methods covered in this how-to guide.

A HISTORY OF POCl

In Nigeria's Northwest and Middle Belt, people face high levels of danger and difficult living conditions on a daily basis. Climate change has altered the routes herders use, leading to conflicts with farmers over land, water, and resources. Communities are often isolated and lack a coordinated security response to problems like banditry, kidnapping, and violent extremism. There are tensions between different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups.



Traditional ways of resolving conflicts are usually managed by community leaders and do not usually involve women and youth. There are few places for meaningful, peaceful dialogue. POCl worked in 18 communities across Benue, Kaduna, and Zamfara States to empower communities to better address these challenges, focusing on non-punitive methods.

POCl was led and implemented by a group of organisations working closely together. **Neem Foundation**, based in Abuja, has been the national lead. Neem Foundation is a leading crisis response organisation committed to promoting the protection and wellbeing of populations and communities living in contexts affected by conflict, violence, and fragility. **Karuna Center for Peacebuilding**, based in Massachusetts, USA, has been the lead international partner. Karuna works with local organisations across the world to bring communities together across their differences and promote values of compassion and dialogue.

During POCl, Karuna and Neem Foundation partnered with three community-based organisations that co-implemented the project in the 18 communities. They plan to continue the peacebuilding work beyond the project's five years of grant funding (2019-2024). **Hope for the Village Child Foundation**, in Kaduna, fosters thriving communities by addressing pressing challenges in health, education, women's development, agriculture, peace, justice, and dignity. **Elohim Development Foundation**, in Benue, empowers vulnerable populations and promotes sustainable development, with a focus on peace and security, health and HIV, education and gender, E-WASH, and agriculture and food security. **Voluntary Aid Initiative**, in Zamfara, was started by young people to create awareness about community participation in conflict resolution, disaster management, health care service delivery, education, empowerment, and human rights.



Community members in front of a 'Peace Wall' created during POCl

Grassroots Structures to Prevent Violence: 'Early Warning - Early Response'

Effective 'Peace By Us' peacebuilding structures must contain both Early Warning and Early Response. It is a good idea to set up an **Early-Warning-Early Response Committee** to help with this task.

Early Warning involves reporting signs of violence or conflict that could get worse in the future. Here are some examples of ways that community members could report an incident:



Generally, communities elect one or two people to handle early warning reports. Often, this is the Early Warning-Early Response committee's **chairman** and **secretary**.

After a problem has been identified, it must be addressed. EWER Committees focus on **de-escalation** of conflicts, using **non-punitive means**. As described earlier, techniques for addressing conflicts in the Peace By Us approach include:



You can choose to use some or all of these responses, depending on your local context and funds. Peacebuilding needs to be adaptable and driven by community members. You might discover other techniques not mentioned in this manual. **However, it is key to include several options as no one response will suit all cases.**

Early Warning



An Early Warning-Early Response committee meeting in Benue

All conflicts have a local dimension — and many large-scale conflicts start at the local level. It is key that community members learn to identify danger signs and report these risks to people who can help solve a problem before it gets more serious.

After you have conducted initial outreach and received permission to conduct peacebuilding activities in a community, you can recruit and **train an Early Warning-Early Response (EWER) Committee**. The committee works to **identify, track** and **resolve** events that could spark future conflict.

Here are some examples of possible warning signs a committee could discuss:

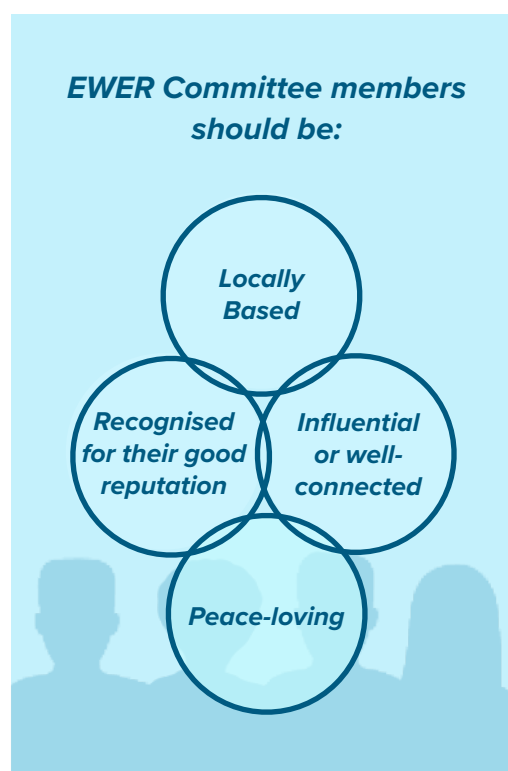
- The movement of bandits on a road at night
- The use of drugs by teenagers
- Dispute between families about land ownership or access to water
- A change in the routes taken by herders that endangers crops
- Tensions between Muslims and Christians in the community
- Problems in neighbouring communities that could spread

A committee should be chosen that **includes members from all parts of the community, such as key figures in women and youth groups, traditional and religious leaders, security personnel, leaders of community organisations, etc.** The committee should have regular meetings – perhaps once or twice a month – but also be able to meet or communicate quickly during emergencies, such as through phone calls or a messaging app (like WhatsApp).

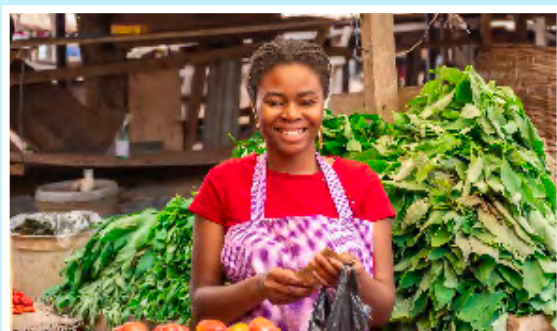
It is important not to rush into choosing an EWER committee. Effective EWER committees are made up of diverse members who bring in a variety of perspectives. Joining the EWER committee should be understood as an act of service to the community. Each member should be someone who is involved in community life and has time to participate fully. It is important to get input from a wide variety of people about who would make good EWER committee members.

It is crucial to consult traditional leaders to make sure they understand the importance of the EWER committee. They should not feel that their role is threatened. Instead, you should work to inform traditional leaders that EWER will lighten their burden of work, by making their community more peaceful.

Traditional leaders can work together with EWER trainers from community-based organisations or other partners, to help choose committee members and distribute the roles.



It is helpful to divide the committee into **reporters** and **responders**.



Reporters could be people like a market saleswoman who talks to many people — or a security guard who watches at the town's edge and sees who comes and goes.



Responders could be community leaders or youth leaders who can advocate for help, security agents who can take action during a crisis, or lay counsellors and dialogue facilitators who can help with communication and solutions.

A key part of Early Warning-Early Response is connecting isolated communities. If possible, try to get your committee in regular contact with **local government, security officials, NGOs** or other **organisations** to broaden their support and connections.

REPORTING TO THE COMMITTEE

When conducting EWER, it is important to have different ways of reporting to the Early Warning-Early Response committee – whether it be in person during the meetings, over the phone, or through verified WhatsApp groups. **At least one reporting method should be anonymous**, such as a postbox or an app that doesn't record names. This helps prevent dangerous situations for community members.

You can elect one or two people to handle the reports and verify that they are true. Often, this is the EWER committee chairman or secretary. You might also receive support from a community-based organisation that specialises in EWER.



The Importance of an Anonymous Option

Consider this example:

Mary knows that her husband has been leaking information to the kidnappers in exchange for money. She doesn't want to damage her relationship or put herself at risk, but she knows that she has to report this case to the Early Warning-Early Response committee for the sake of her community's safety.

How do you think Mary should report her case? What might happen if other people find out that Mary made the report?



An EWER meeting bringing together multiple community EWER committees & stakeholders across an LGA in Zamfara

"The youths of this community became restless due to the suffering brought to them by farmer-herder conflicts, but the presence of this programme brought the elders and youths together for a meeting and they resolved not to go out and fight. Even when they go out to farm and they suspect foul play, they will rush back and inform the community leaders and all the security agencies in time and the plan will be aborted. These are the benefits this programme has brought that the people of this community like and is making them live in peace."

– Early Warning-Early Response Committee member, Benue

Early Response

After you have developed Early Warning reporting and verification systems, it is important to have a few peacebuilding tools or 'structures' that you can use for effective responses, depending on the situation.

Below, you will find some examples of **responses** and **skills** used by POCl community members. How you choose a response will depend on your community's skills, knowledge, culture and experience. For early response, POCl focused on the following:

1. **General Problem Solving**
2. **Dialogue**
3. **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support**
4. **Media & Communication for Peace**
5. **Advocacy**



A practise EWER Committee meeting during an EWER training in Zamfara

Reactive Responses	Proactive Responses
A reactive response is when you notice something that has happened in the community. For example, you might notice that several youths have begun taking drugs and engaging in crime and respond by engaging them in dialogue to understand their motivation.	A proactive response is when you notice that a problem is on the horizon and respond before it starts. For example, you might train communities to identify fake news before the election season begins.

1. PROBLEM SOLVING

Sometimes the EWER committees are able to **solve issues using their own knowledge and connections**. This may include informal mediation between people in conflict. Problem-solving often works best for practical issues that are not based on deep-seated hatreds. For example, a traditional elder can lend his authority and negotiate between people who are having a disagreement about how to fairly share the water from a new well.

While solving issues, EWER Committee members make sure to stick to principles of **neutrality, non-punitive problem solving** and **peaceful communication**.



An EWER meeting in Benue, bringing together stakeholders at the LGA level.

"We learnt of the issue [a conflict between a farmer and some young herders] and it was so severe that they were going to report the case to the king and if it was beyond him, he was willing to take it up with the police. I happened to know [the man who reported the issue] and he led me to the house of the herdsman. We met with their parents, who spoke condemning the wrong behaviour of their children and promised not to send the little ones anymore but send their older ones instead when grazing the cattle going forward.

The farmer too was appeased because the relationship between a farmer and a herder is a special one. They depend on one another. The farmer would need manure for his farm from them, and they would need to graze on his field too. A demarcation was done to resolve this issue and the older ones agreed only to graze the cattle."

–Dialogue facilitator, Zamfara

2. DIALOGUE

When an issue cannot be easily addressed through problem-solving, the EWER Committee may recommend that participants engage in dialogue with a trained Community Dialogue Facilitator — who can help people on different ‘sides’ of the issue to develop mutual understanding.



Dialogue participants celebrate the progress they made mediating conflicts within their women's saving and lending group

In many communities facing conflict, **people often see those**

who are different from them as enemies. Sometimes this is due to differences in religion, culture, or social status (e.g. ‘poor or rich’, ‘farmer, herder or merchant’). There is often no space for deep listening and peaceful conversations with ‘the Enemy’ or ‘the Other.’

Dialogue is useful because it:

- Helps us to understand how the ‘enemy’ sees the situation
- Gives opportunity to speak and be spoken to with respect
- Allows us to see our perceived enemies as humans with stories and emotions
- Lets us understand the deeper reasons for our disagreements
- Allows us to heal some of our pain
- Creates a space where conflicts can be resolved

Dialogues are very effective for strengthening community relationships and developing trust across differences. Therefore, **dialogue is often the best response for conflicts that are fuelled by hatred, stereotypes, hurt emotions, or misunderstandings about the other side’s perspective.** Dialogues can be used to address tensions in a preventative way, or to address conflicts directly. Through dialogue, people become more able to work together to address their issues.

“For us, a typical dialogue has eight participants: two parties, four participants from each group or community that is affected in the crisis. Then two community dialogue facilitators. Depending on the complexity of the issue, it normally takes two hours for a normal dialogue. A dialogue should always have a neutral location that is convenient for both parties.”

– Community Dialogue Facilitator, Benue

In order to make community dialogue possible, POCl provided training and coaching to Community Dialogue Facilitators in the use of **Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD)**. These Community Dialogue Facilitators were selected from within each community, including men and women. The format of RSD means that everyone has an equal chance to speak, regardless of their social status, and it keeps tough conversations on track with a firm structure and clear **communication agreements**.

Communication Agreements

The rules of respectful communication that a dialogue group agrees to follow together. For example, not interrupting others or only speaking from your own perspective, instead of hearsay.



A dialogue with the ground rules, or 'communication agreements', written clearly on paper for all to see

Often, it is helpful to give dialogue facilitators and community members practise in using the dialogue process in easier contexts before moving on to more challenging ones. This practise can build confidence, and help participants work through difficult emotions. For example, facilitators can hold dialogues among women only — or with only farmers, and only herders — before holding dialogues with a mixed group.

RSD prepares participants thoroughly before a dialogue and teaches about **how trauma affects people**. This is useful in communities where many people have chronic stress or where the community is recovering from violence.

"I am a farmer and most of my problems are related to my farm work. We farm alongside our neighbours, and for some time they started farming on my land which I wasn't happy about. When I complained they fought back. We spent so many resources trying to resolve this problem; all to no avail for 3 good years....[Then the project started and the project] summoned both parties, listened to us and made us understand why peaceful dialogue was the best in resolving issues. Now we know better and we now relate peacefully with each other. That is what is the most significant change that has happened to me and we as farmers in the community since the coming of this organisation."

– Youth group member, Benue

3. MENTAL HEALTH & PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Violence and economic hardship can leave ‘scars’ on our communities, with lasting impacts. Often, individuals are unable to engage in peaceful or productive ways until they have addressed and healed from their personal traumas. Therefore, psychosocial support is another important form of early response.

When a community learns about trauma and mental health, people better understand the reasons behind their behaviours and emotions. They also learn that what they are experiencing is a normal response. They will be able to talk freely and without stigma. They can learn basic coping skills, and how to build their resilience.

POCI provided several types of mental health support to communities: individual counselling, group counselling, and expressive therapy.

To make the project sustainable, POCI trained **over 150 lay counsellors**. These are community members who had little to no experience in psychosocial support but who were eager to learn the skills needed to help their communities.



A trained lay counsellor in Zamfara, who is also a midwife, speaks with a community member

Mental Health

Mental health is about understanding that not just our bodies can feel pain: we may also face emotional and mental distress for many natural and understandable reasons. We may be depressed, anxious or have other mental health issues.

Trauma

Sometimes people experience stressful events. These can happen one time – like seeing a shooting – or every day – like feeling afraid when crossing a dangerous road to school. Often, people’s bodies and minds can ‘get stuck’ after an experience like this. It is common for people to feel stressed, angry, sad, or numb long after a danger has passed. This kind of response to stressful events is normal and is called **trauma**.

Trauma healing helps people feel safe, in control, and emotionally stable again after going through difficult events. Trauma healing supports them in processing their feelings, reducing stress from the trauma, and rebuilding trust in themselves and others.

POCI taught these lay counsellors how to respond to a crisis with **‘psychological first aid’**. This means helping people who are in shock or distress after a traumatic event, such as an armed robbery or kidnapping.

Lay counsellors also help build awareness of mental illnesses, teach coping skills, and offer support to affected individuals on how they can strengthen their own resilience and the resilience of communities.

Lay counsellors often need to pass on serious cases of distress or mental illness to professional psychologists. As a result, it is important to set up links with local mental health charities or service providers.

“A couple of days after the lay counsellor training, there was an attack in a very close village to where they were. Some people were hospitalised and others were kidnapped into the bushes. There was a lot of crying in the community.

The lay counsellors decided to go there. They mobilised themselves. They immediately went into the community to see those in the hospital and to also provide psychological first aid to other family members that had their loved ones kidnapped. They sent us pictures to show that they had already sprung into action.”

*– A psychosocial staff member,
Neem Foundation, Kaduna*



A training for lay counsellors, provided by POCI

5. ADVOCACY

Advocacy is an approach which tries to focus on the **deeper reasons behind a conflict**. Instead of focusing on the conflict between groups of individuals, it tends to look at the 'bigger picture'.

Advocacy is about **building relationships with influential figures and networks of people who have the power to make changes in your community**.

Stakeholders to involve in advocacy engagements might include:



Questions to ask before conducting advocacy:

- Who are the powerful figures or groups of people who could help make a change in our community?
- Why do they not normally participate in peacebuilding?
- Do these people know enough about the issue? How can we inform them about it in a respectful manner?
- How can we seek their input and ask for their contribution to peace?

Advocacy is often a proactive response. It aims to create relationships to address issues before they escalate to widespread violence. For example, communities might initiate advocacy engagements with traditional rulers to build support for the participation of women and youth in the community's peacebuilding efforts. Or, once farmers and herders have engaged in dialogue and built a strong relationship, they might start advocacy engagements with elected officials to discuss policy related to their shared needs.

Nonetheless, even in situations of active violence, planned and sensitive advocacy can still bring groups together. For instance, when banditry threatens the safety of drivers, a community can do advocacy with local security or military officials to increase their presence on the road.

Advocacy is a continual process. It is not a single visit or event. There are many reasons why it cannot take place just ‘once’:

Trust	Trust takes a long-time to be developed, and relationships need to be maintained and strengthened over years.
People	In insecure communities, there is often a high turnover of people: • Community members can be displaced • New politicians come to power • Security operatives move in and out • The leadership of associations and organisations change
Issues	The issues on the ground might change. For example, once you have made great progress in farmer-herder conflict, you might notice that gender-based violence is a serious threat to peace.
Priority	Without ongoing engagement from community members, individuals in positions of power could lose focus on the issues that are important to communities.

For effective advocacy, it is key to use figures who have respect and authority in their communities. In an ideal situation, these figures should act as bridges between different communities. For example, POCl collaborated with well-connected religious leaders who were respected and knew how to build peace.

“I have good connections with local and state leaders, as well as Christians and Muslims. I was able to gain the trust of our community leaders because they see me as a Muslim. They see me as a Northerner. I use my knowledge of Islam to tell [reluctant community leaders] that anything progressive and developmental, anything for peace building and conflict prevention, is accepted wholeheartedly by our religion. Islam is not antagonistic to anything that is good. Be it from the West. Be it from the North. Be it from Arabs. Be it from Fulanis. Be it from Igbo, be it from Yoruba. If it is something that can better the level of human beings then Islam will welcome it.

I give them so many instances from the history of Islam, from a practical point of view, and in Nigeria. I tell them that if there are 1 or 2 things that you are not at home with or you are not pleased with, then you can say that, but you can keep number 3 or 4. So you don't have to suspend or reject all the good things brought by the West or brought by America or brought by non-Muslims, because you accept so many good things. I say, *see, you are using aircraft? You are using motor cars. You are using a bicycle, you are using a computer, you are using a telephone. All these, they are from the West. Why didn't you reject them?*”

- Religious leader, Kaduna

Building Bridges Between Farming and Herding Organisations: AFAN & MACBAN

One of POCl's biggest achievements has been the development of close partnerships between leading associations of farmers and of herders — the **All-Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN)** and the **Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN)** — in Benue, Kaduna, and Zamfara states.

By working closely with AFAN and MACBAN, POCl:

- Used dialogue between AFAN and MACBAN leaders to build trust and develop a working relationship—with regular meetings and joint advocacy to advance their collective interests
- Engaged women members of AFAN and MACBAN, first in dialogue and then in joint leadership training for women
- Set up communication channels like WhatsApp groups for AFAN and MACBAN leaders to share warning signals and coordinate joint peacebuilding and advocacy efforts
- Brought AFAN and MACBAN leaders and members to speak on radio shows
- Trained AFAN and MACBAN members, including women and youth, in dialogue facilitation, EWER, peace communications, and lay counselling to build their capacity in the Peace By Us approach to addressing insecurity
- Held three National Conferences on the Management of Farmer-Herder Relations in Nigeria, bringing the two groups together with government and security officials to address farmer-herder conflict



One of the joint efforts: In 2024, AFAN and MACBAN Zamfara state chapters inaugurated a Bi-Annual General Conference for Farmers & Herders in Zamfara State with support from the POCl team

4. MEDIA & COMMUNICATION FOR PEACE

If you have the resources, it is a great idea to use media in your intervention. For instance, POCI set up Facebook and WhatsApp groups to **share success stories, promote peace, spread useful information about mental health, and fight against fake news, rumours, misinformation and disinformation.** POCI has also hosted call-in radio shows where community members could discuss key topics.



A POCI radio show in Benue

Media does not necessarily mean a costly intervention. Social media can be accessed via smartphones, and basic skills can be learned quickly. Training communities to fight against fake news can also be done with few resources.

Through media, you can not only reach your own community, but also inspire neighbouring communities to adopt a peace-loving mindset.

When creating media campaigns, it is important to involve the people who are most affected. It is key to plan your target audience and brainstorm how the information you are sharing will convince them to embrace peace.

Media can play a significant role in promoting cooperation between different structures of your intervention. For example, during the POCI project, media officers shared the stories from dialogue, psychosocial support, and the EWER committees and acted as a connector: **bringing together community members and sharing messages with the outside world.**

"In Zamfara State there was a [radio] programme about celebrating International Women's Day. At first there was a plan to invite men to talk about this event. But after consultation we invited an all-woman team: one educationalist, one person from the traditional institutions and one from a religious institution. Some extremists were condemning Women's Day and the United Nations. They said it was against Islam. So, it was great that the religious woman who came supported the women and brought verses from the Quran and from the prophetic tradition to support our peacebuilding initiative. They had a very interactive phone-in, and everything went positively."

- Religious leader, Kaduna

Coordinating a Grassroots Peacebuilding Initiative

If your initiative contains several structures, such as EWER, dialogue, psychosocial support and others, it is important that every person and every structure work together to achieve a common goal.

SYNERGY

It is a great idea to include a **synergy document** from the beginning of your project. In the synergy document, you can create a diagram of all the moving parts in your project. That way everyone involved can see where they fit in, and how they work together to contribute to peace.

Over time, the Peace By Us approach adapted to increase the cooperation between different parts of the project — such as inviting dialogue facilitators, lay counsellors, and media officers to attend EWER committee meetings. POCl also cross-trained people in dialogue facilitation, EWER, lay counselling, and peace communications so that people involved in the different parts of early response better understood how it all fit together to better manage conflict and prevent violence.

LEARNING AND ADAPTING TOGETHER

At all stages of the initiative, adaptability is key. It is important to create a culture of listening, learning and changing behaviour in every part of your project. For instance, POCl held regular **debriefing meetings** among the key organisations in the project and amongst the dialogue facilitators, to share learnings and challenges across communities and identify what to do differently in the future.

MAKING THE INITIATIVE LAST LONG-TERM

It is also useful to develop a **sustainability plan** as early as possible. This plan means thinking

Synergy

Working and coordinating together to achieve a common goal

Dynamic membership

When building a community peace program, it's important to set up a system that will last even if people leave. Community members might move away, pass on, or choose not to be involved, so it's helpful to **keep a list of volunteers who can take someone's place when needed**. Regular training sessions can also help keep everyone interested and active in supporting peace.

De-briefing

A meeting to discuss how things are going, to compare experiences, to discuss problems and to learn from each other.

You can take a 'round-robin' format where each person answers the following questions:

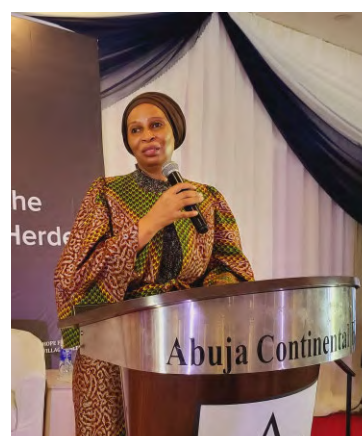
- *what went well this week?*
- *what didn't go well this week?*
- *what do you want to change so you can do better next time?*

about how you can make your project last long-term. If your project is funded, you can consider what you will do after the funding ends, making sure that every community member is motivated and trained to keep going.

In the case of POCI, many of the project's gains at the community level will be sustained by three **community-based organisations** that have been part of the initiative since its first year — **Hope for the Village Child Foundation** in Kaduna, **Voluntary Aid Initiative** in Zamfara, and **Elohim Development Foundation** in Benue. Even though the project funding that started POCI has ended, these organisations are well-equipped to continue supporting community-based early warning and early response systems, leading advocacy efforts, and training others in critical peacebuilding skills.



Executive Directors of community-based organisations speak at POCI's second National Conference on the Management of Farmer-Herder Relations, December 2023. From right: Dr. Victoria Daaor of Elohim Development Foundation; Sr. Rita Schwarzenberger of Hope for the Village Child Foundation; and Mr. Musa Umar of Voluntary Aid Initiative.



Dr. Fatima Akilu, Executive Director of Neem Foundation, delivers opening remarks at the third National Conference on the Management of Farmer-Herder relations.

A NOTE FOR FUNDERS

LOCALISATION AND AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIP

A key part of the Protecting Our Communities Initiative's approach has been to work in close partnership with organisations from the national to the community level. Peacebuilding initiatives are more likely to be effective or sustainable when they are driven by the beneficiaries themselves.

Interventions should be long-term and continue until the communities are the custodians of their own security. The project engaged in constant training and debriefing with POCI's community-based organisation partners, meaning that as the project progressed, more and more tasks were handled at the local level. This 'transfer of capacity' is key for sustainability.

The project helped improve knowledge and skills in the fields of dialogue, psychosocial support and media, while also providing training on grant proposals



Musa Umar, who leads the Voluntary Aid Initiative, participates in a July 2024 Inter-State Dialogue Forum of POCI

and accessing funding streams. **The project did not stop at ‘training’, but rather continually offered refresher training and mentorship.**

Protecting Our Communities made sure to **link community-based organisations with government actors, security operatives and civil society organisations.** This was achieved not just through advocacy visits, but also through intra and inter-state forums. Funders can play a vital role in convening project stakeholders, breaking the isolation experienced by communities and making these horizontal and vertical linkages possible.

Finally, **authentic localisation** is key to the success of any effort to engage grassroots communities in improving civilian security. This involves ensuring that locally-based staff and volunteers are representative of community members, inclusive of women and youth, and familiar with local languages and customs. Local insights and leadership should be given precedence throughout all stages of project planning and implementation.

ADAPTABILITY

At all stages, adaptability is key.

Even if a project involves an outside funding source, it should not follow overly strict timelines and rigid deliverables. Instead, peacebuilding should be as adaptive and flexible as possible, responding to the situation on the ground and the insight of local and national partners.

Extending trust to project partners, and promoting open communication, is essential. There should be constant feedback channels between all partners, through formal

and informal debriefs. Some circumstances — such as wildly fluctuating currency valuations or emerging security challenges — may require frequent adjustments to the budget and workplan, in order to promote the safety of the team and the continuation of project activities.

A key tenet of the Peace By Us approach is to view challenges as opportunities to strengthen adaptability and sustainability. The insecurity of communities participating in POCI has meant that project staff have at times had difficulty reaching community members. However, several years into the project, community members stepped up in those situations to run activities on their own. This was a powerful demonstration of the value of entrusting and empowering community members with the means to safeguard their own security.

"The most significant change that I have noticed is the relationship between farmers and herders in the community. Before the POCI, at the slightest provocation, there would be serious conflict between farmers and herders. But after implementation, the EWER committee through dialogue was able to bring both groups to the dialogue table to discuss the reason for the conflict (killing of cows and burning of farms) and then proffer solutions that would prevent such conflict in the future. What the farmers and herders do now is that, at the beginning of each raining season they come together to discuss the challenges of the previous year and how to prevent such occurrences."

– Staff member, Hope for the Village Child, Kaduna



Lead representatives of organisations, agencies, and institutions present at the third National Conference on the Management of Farmer-Herder Relations in Nigeria, August 2024



Reflective Structured Dialogue in Zamfara

"The most significant change is that I have observed that we are becoming one another's keeper within ourselves. We look out for each other's back to prevent them from harm."

– A women's focus group participant in Benue state

2

OUTREACH TO ENGAGE NEW COMMUNITIES



Members of the POCl project team meet with members of a community



Peace by Us

This chapter shares lessons learned from POCl about how to reach out to communities and gain their trust and support for peace. Outreach is an important step in empowering communities to take charge of their own security.

Outreach

Making the initial contact with a community and seeking their involvement in a peacebuilding project

The **outreach** phase of a project sets the tone for the initiative, helps you choose communities and participants that are a good fit for your peacebuilding program, and starts the relationship building that is key to the success of your program.

Successful outreach involves:

- **Setting the tone:** how you engage in the initial outreach matters as it lays the foundation for future cooperation. The heart of the Peace By Us approach involves empowering community members to take ownership over their own security in collaboration with security officials. **Successful outreach sends the message that the initiative starts with and belongs to community members.**

"In the past we thought it was the government's responsibility to help us in settling or putting an end to this crisis. But with the training of Neem Foundation we were told that we the civilians, too, have a role to play in ending the crisis, not just security personnel. Once we see any warning sign, we report it immediately to the security personnel and if it is something that we can resolve by ourselves, we do that first. This has helped so much in reducing the crisis in our community."

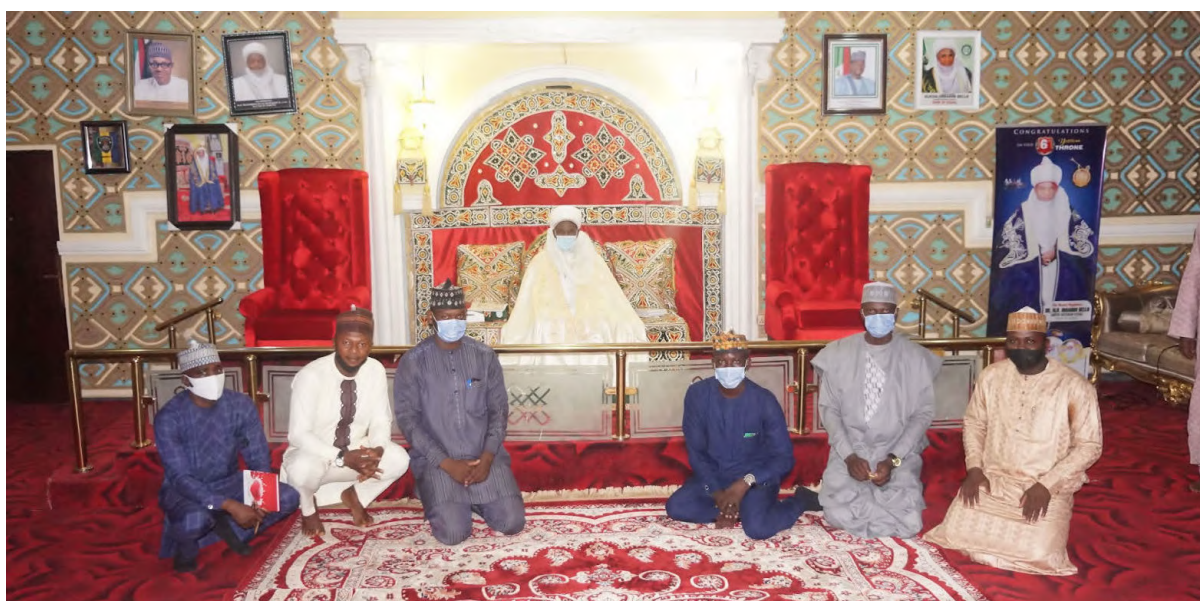
- An EWER focus group participant in Benue state

- **Choosing communities that are a good fit for your peacebuilding program:** effective outreach helps you learn about potential communities and whether they are suitable for your program.
- **Building relationships that are key to the success of your program:** some of the people you talk to as part of the outreach phase of your program will become active participants in the project, serving on the EWER committee or getting trained as dialogue facilitators, lay counsellors, or media advocates. Others have the potential to support or hinder your efforts. Outreach is not just about learning about new communities: it is focused on starting to build the relationships that will help the program succeed.

If you are starting a project in a community that is not your own, the first step is to **select a community** and then **build buy-in** with community members for your initiative. Even if you want to introduce the Peace By Us approach to improving security in your *own* community, it's still important to get approval from community leaders and other key **stakeholders**.

Stakeholders

Individuals or groups that could be involved in or affected by the project, and who have an interest in its success.



A meeting toward the beginning of POCl with the Emir of Gusau

TAKING A TOP-DOWN APPROACH TO OUTREACH

Some countries and societies are hierarchical, so bypassing key authority figures, like traditional rulers or government officials, can be seen as disrespectful and will likely harm your project.

In this case, it is appropriate to take a 'top-down' approach. You can begin by making contact with state and local governments to ensure smooth access to communities. The outreach team for your project should explain to these officials the benefits of your project, including your planned scope and duration. Leaders should understand that the community peacebuilding won't undermine their position or status. Make sure to respectfully seek their opinions on how to implement the project.

Selecting Communities

CRITERIA FOR NEW COMMUNITIES

Before reaching out to potential communities to interest them in the Peace By Us approach to empowering community security, it is helpful to decide on your criteria. What kind of communities do you think would be the best fit for your initiative?

CRITERIA TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING A COMMUNITY



Networks: Start in communities where you or someone you trust already has relationships with security personnel, community leaders, or other key players. Then you can learn about neighbouring communities from this network.



Security: It is important not to endanger the people who are working for peace. If the security situation is too unpredictable or community members are often displaced because of violence, it might be difficult to implement a project there. Similarly, if a community does not have high enough levels of insecurity or conflict, it might be best to focus resources somewhere else.



Suitability: Think about whether a community is ready and motivated to start a peace program and whether it is a good match for the Peace By Us approach. Can you identify a core group of people – maybe 12 to 20 – who are very interested in being active for 1 to 2 years, or even longer?



Accessibility and practical considerations: If you plan to work in more than one location, it's helpful to choose communities that are fairly close to each other. In remote areas, you might want to focus on communities that are near a road and easier to reach, unless you have the time and resources to travel to more distant places.



Avoiding overlap with other peacebuilding programs: Because resources for peacebuilding are limited, it is often best to avoid communities where other NGOs are working on a similar project.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

After you have used your criteria to choose the communities where you want to work, you can start by reaching out to introduce the project and gauge interest. Once you have a sense that the community is interested, it's useful to combine this outreach with a needs assessment and stakeholder mapping.

A **needs assessment** helps you to understand the foundations for peacebuilding that already exist, including the community's challenges and needs, and the kinds of conflicts it experiences most regularly. A needs assessment helps you adjust your project so that it will be more likely to succeed in that specific community.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

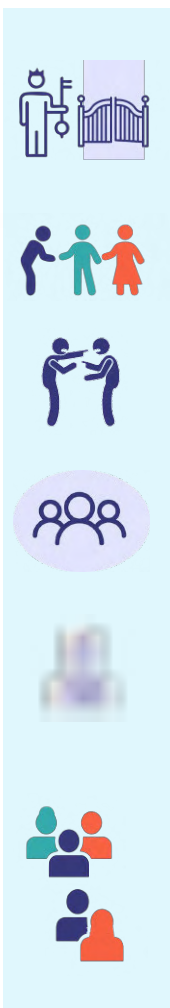
- What kinds of conflicts are happening here?
- What tends to spark those conflicts? Is some of it related to events that have happened in the recent or distant past?
- What is the context in which the conflict occurs? Are there wealth or power imbalances in the community? Competition for power or resources? Societal divisions?
- Who tends to be involved in conflict?
- How have community members been impacted by conflict? What needs are there for mental health services, reconciliation, justice, and community building?
- How are conflicts normally solved? What traditional peacebuilding practices exist?
- What strengths and assets are present in the community that can be built upon?
- Would community-based methods like dialogue or Early Warning-Early Response be useful? Does the community need a Peace By Us-style approach?



At the beginning of POCl, the team held outreach visits with chapters of farmers' and herders' associations (MACBAN and AFAN)

Stakeholder mapping is a process where you identify the key individuals and groups in the community who will be affected by the project. This includes those who might be interested in the project's success and want to participate, as well as those who might have a negative impact on peacebuilding.

Stakeholders should include:



- **Gatekeepers** like local government officials, traditional rulers, tribal heads, and religious leaders who could help build support for the program, provide valuable insights into the community, and connect you with other organisations.
- **Victims of conflict** because they understand where there is an opportunity for change.
- **Perpetrators of conflict** (if you can meet with them safely) to assess their capacity for change.
- **Other local leaders** such as leaders of civil society organisations, women's groups, and youth groups. Because POCl was focused on farmer-herder conflict, we also reached out to leaders of the main farming and herding organisations.
- **Security personnel** who need to be involved in Early Warning and Early Response as the project gets started.
- **Ordinary people** who have influence in their particular circles. Since gatekeepers might suggest people from their own inner circle to join the project, such as family members or friends, it's crucial to involve a diverse group of regular community members. These regular community members should have a wide range of connections. Make sure to include men and women, young and old, people with disabilities, long-term residents as well as those in IDP camps, and people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN LEARNING ABOUT STAKEHOLDERS IN A COMMUNITY:	
Relationships	<i>What are the relationships between different stakeholders in a community like? Do they engage with each other at all? If they do, are they cooperative or in conflict?</i>
Goals and Interests	<i>What do the stakeholders in the community really care about? What are their goals?</i>
Capacities	<i>What kinds of skills, knowledge, and networks do stakeholders have? Are they seen as leaders? Do they have the time and energy to participate in a project?</i>
Influence	<i>How much influence do different stakeholders have? Is it a positive or negative influence? Do people perceive them as 'spoilers'? Which groups are most influenced by these stakeholders' actions?</i>

Stakeholder mapping helps you learn how to work effectively with the many stakeholders in a community. It helps you:

- **Build and manage relationships**
- **Identify diverse participants**
- **Involve community members in decision-making:** By listening to stakeholders and adjusting your program based on what you learn from them, you send them the message that they will have a voice in your program.
- **Understand influence:** Learn who has the most influence in your community and how they could help your project succeed.
- **Identify and engage those perceived as 'spoilers':** Learn who could cause problems in your peacebuilding program – often called 'spoilers' – and learn how best to communicate with them. You may find that with the right approach, people who were initially not supportive of your project become its biggest supporters over time.
- **Identify potential conflicts and prioritise engagement:** Identify tensions between groups and individuals so you can engage those groups early on and address tensions before they erupt into conflict. Once your EWER committee gets started, it will stay focused on this process.

- **Avoid causing harm:** It can be easy to have a negative impact in a community and make problems worse when you do not fully understand a community. Stakeholder mapping, along with the needs assessment, helps you avoid causing harm.

Stakeholders change over time, as do the relationships between them. If you can, try to regularly update your stakeholders' assessment.



An outreach meeting with stakeholders in Benue state at the beginning of POCI

BEST PRACTICES FOR OUTREACH

Below are some key tenets of effective outreach.

➡ ENGAGING A WIDE VARIETY OF PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

At all stages of outreach, and all stages of the project, the following groups should be engaged:

- Women and men
- Youth and elders
- People who practice the main religions in the community
- People from the main ethnic and tribal groups in the community
- People who represent other key groups that are important in the community or for your program
- Representatives of people with disabilities

Outreach needs to continue to include a diverse range of stakeholders so that the EWER committee, community dialogue facilitators, lay counsellors, and media advocates will represent the many groups in a community. This is key for those communities to build trust in the program.



An outreach visit toward the beginning of POCl activities

➔ INVOLVING LOCAL ACTORS

One of the key lessons learned during POCl is the importance of **involving local actors at all stages of the project, including identifying potential communities and initial outreach**. If you are not based near the target communities, engage community-based organisations to help select communities and make first contact.

These community-based organisations can use their intimate knowledge of the local context and their connections to community figures. As such, they are much better placed to gain trust and build relationships than international or national organisations.

By using community-based organisations and people from the region to start your outreach, you can help avoid mistakes such as:

- Not gaining buy-in from the state and local government leaders
- Not gaining the trust of community leaders
- Appearing like a foreigner or outsider
- Using the wrong words or tone
- Leaving out a key group of people
- Misunderstanding the issue
- Introducing things that are not sustainable

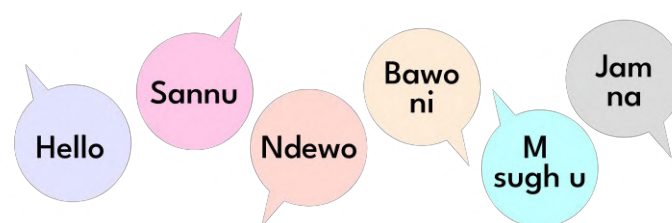
As much as possible, the people who engage in the initial outreach should represent the key demographic groups in the communities where you want to work, such as women and men, youth and elders, and all the main ethnic and tribal groups.

The staff who work at the community-based organisation doing the outreach may not represent all of these groups. To increase the diversity of those doing the outreach, you can bring along additional people who are trusted by the groups you most want to engage.

In POCL, for instance, the project engaged a prominent Imam who was well-known as a peacebuilder. He helped foster cooperation between Christians and Muslims, encouraged Muslim leaders to agree to involve women in the project, and prepared the leaders in the farming and herding organisations to engage with each other.

➡ CONDUCTING OUTREACH IN LOCAL LANGUAGE AND DIALECTS

If the people doing the initial outreach cannot speak the local languages and dialects, it becomes difficult to engage a diverse range of stakeholders. Speaking the local languages also makes it easier for people in the community to trust the project and believe that their voice will be included.



If the people doing the initial outreach cannot speak all of the local languages, then it can be helpful to find local community members who do speak those languages to participate in the outreach.

GAINING BUY-IN

The process of gaining buy-in is important and should fit the cultural context of the communities where you will work.

Buy-In

'Buy-in' means getting stakeholders to not only agree to your project happening in their community, but to fully support and take ownership of it from start to finish. They should believe in and support the goals of lasting peace.

GAINING BUY-IN WITH RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS

After approaching state and local government officials, it is key to reach out to other prominent figures. In the Nigerian context, it is important to start the initial outreach by asking for input from local community heads and religious leaders. If not approached correctly, some leaders may feel disrespected or threatened.

During an outreach visit, you should:

- Respectfully ask for the leaders' input
- Explain how the project works, emphasising that local leaders can play a key role
- Demonstrate how the project intends to complement the leaders' work
- Help them understand why the project needs to engage with all sectors of the community, even beyond the leaders' own friends, family, allies and networks
- Ask them to outline what they see as benefits to building of peace in their community

"In one of the communities, we had two community leaders. But, due to oversight, we didn't know that fact. So, we went to one community leader with an advocacy team and did an assessment, only for us to realise – more than six months down the line after kick starting implementation – that the other community leader was raising concerns about not having been consulted.

We felt bad that we had created the perception that we were one-sided, which was never intentional. We were able to correct that by conducting an advocacy visit to the second community leader and giving him an opportunity to also select people from his domain to serve as members of the Early Warning committee to balance the equation.

From then on, we didn't have any challenges whatsoever with this community leader. In every other community, the community leaders also gave their support because they were our first point of contact. The community leaders illuminated the stakeholders and handed them over to us to train."

– A dialogue facilitator and trainer in Zamfara state

Gaining the trust of community leaders is not done through a single event or a meeting. It takes place over time, as they gradually see the fruits of peace.

Often, community leaders can make valuable contributions to the project that cannot be predicted in advance.

"In one community, the Community Dialogue Facilitators were facing challenges when sourcing topics and finding participants willing to participate in dialogue. Luckily, one of the traditional leaders was very interested in the project, based on what he had been hearing about the impact of POCl. He sent for the Community Dialogue Facilitators and they had an advocacy meeting together. Moving forward, the traditional leader helped find participants in conflict and then sent those topics to the Community Dialogue Facilitators. It was amazing to see the traditional leader make the facilitators the agents for peace in his jurisdiction."

- A dialogue facilitator and trainer in Kaduna state

GAINING BUY-IN FOR INCLUDING WOMEN

In some contexts, it can be difficult to engage women. In this case, outreach needs to proceed carefully:

- Show gatekeepers and community leaders examples of how women have created peace in other communities, including, for example, their vital role in Early Warning and dialogue
- Explain that women have connections to networks that men do not have access to, and that their networks can help identify early warning signs of potential conflict and violence.
- Emphasise that issues which involve women can only be solved with women's input
- Explain how involving women is compatible with the community's religion and customs and, if possible, use a respected religious leader to transmit this message
- In traditional societies, this kind of outreach often needs to first seek the consent of women's husbands and family members. Reach out to husbands individually to address their concerns



During initial outreach to communities, the POCl project team asked community members to identify their needs

"There are a lot of traditional peculiarities that we need to take into account. As a result, we try to sensitise the community through community leaders, so that if the men hear about the training and their wives being involved, they will be more comfortable, seeing a well respected male figure that has endorsed the training. We also tell women that it's fine to tell their husbands and seek permission. We're even willing to support in that process.

Once, there was training and the venue was a hotel, as usual. One of the husbands of one of the women who participated in the training kicked up a massive fuss and almost disrupted the entire engagement because he felt it was inappropriate to bring his wife to a hotel. [This could have been avoided if we had engaged him better in advance through community leaders]."

- A member of the project staff at Neem Foundation



Members of EWER committees from across the POCI strategise together during a women's leadership retreat

Fruits of Success in Women's Engagement and Advocacy

"In some areas of Northwestern Nigeria, women are not allowed to be in the public or even air out or even raise their voices about what concerns them in terms of security. But you would be surprised to see that women in these states where we are implementing the program have actually now been given some skills and the confidence.

In Zamfara, women from farmers' and herders' groups (AFAN & MACBAN), and some other women associations and youth associations, are coming to the radio programs and they are talking, other women are calling in. The government is actually giving them free airtime, because now they have realised that women also are partners in peacebuilding. So, it looks like it has been a lesson to the government and the entire society to know that whatever good is done for the society, women should not be left behind."

- A member of the project team of Karuna Center for Peacebuilding

GAINING BUY-IN FOR INCLUDING YOUTH

Too often, youth are perceived as troublemakers and not involved in peacebuilding. In addition, traditional societies might view youth as too inexperienced or naive to contribute to peacebuilding. They might even fear speaking up in front of elders.



A POCI dialogue among youth

"Previously as youths, we did not care much about what happens in the society. This turned into a major issue. But now the youths have developed a great sense of alertness, they are more knowledgeable about what happens in the environment and have gained knowledge about the fact that violence in itself is not necessary, and that it can be avoided. This is because youths are major stakeholders in peacebuilding and they know that what happens to them can in turn engulf the entire society at large."

- A youth leader in Zamfara state

During outreach you can:

- Show gatekeepers and community leaders examples of how youth have created peace in other communities, including, for example, their role in stopping vigilante justice or promoting understanding between generations
- Explain that involving youth will not damage the authority of traditional leaders or elders, but rather complement their work
- Emphasise that issues which involve youth can only be solved with youth's input

"As a young Muslim woman, I've seen how ethnic divisions can lead to conflict. However, since the youth-led initiative began, I've noticed a significant shift. The youth involvement has promoted peace and understanding among different ethnic groups (Fulani, Gbagyi, Hausa), encouraged interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Our youth group organised a cultural festival, celebrating the diversity of our community. We had traditional dances, music, and food from different ethnic groups. It was amazing to see people from different backgrounds come together, embracing each other's culture. The youth-led initiative has given us a voice and a chance to make a difference. We're breaking down barriers and building bridges, now the youths are more recognised and involved in decision making in our community."

- A woman participant in POCl from Kaduna state

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

It is important to make sure communities understand that a peace project involves long-term hard work and dedication, and that it cannot solve all problems over night.

As a result, it is important to:

- **Keep expectations realistic:** In many communities torn apart by conflict, aid organisations have come in previously. These actors may have made overly optimistic promises. Often, progress does not last after the project has ended and the funding has dried up.

Communities may be reluctant to participate in another project because they do not want to experience more disappointment. Make sure to set realistic expectations at the start of a project so they can build trust.

- **Let communities know that success depends on their efforts:** Identify people with **good character** and **a desire to help others** to take the lead. They should **care deeply about improving the community's security situation**.

Because the Peace By Us approach is based on empowering communities, it is crucial to tell people, from the start, that participation is not a money-making opportunity. Community-based peacebuilding is about **taking ownership of the problem and the solutions**, not benefitting personally from the program.

- **Emphasise that participants need to be neutral and peace-oriented:** From the very beginning, participants should understand the importance of staying politically neutral. They should remain impartial when engaging with conflict parties. A peacebuilding program is not a call to arms. Instead, it focuses on concrete steps based on the situation at hand, such as reporting some incidents to security officials, and responding to others with non-punitive approaches, like dialogue.

A Lesson About Where to Hold Trainings

In POI, the initial plan was to bring Early Warning-Early Response committee members from across each state to a central location for the first EWER training. But then the COVID-19 pandemic started and that was no longer possible. **Instead, the project had local staff lead trainings in each community.** Since they were not yet experts in EWER, they made the trainings more participatory rather than lecture-oriented.

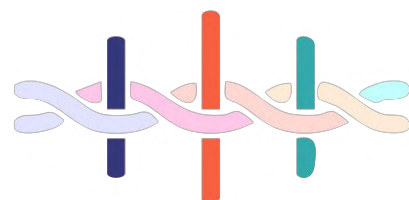
Looking back, they see that this worked out well! Having the first training in the communities, with more of a focus on active participation, sent a powerful positive message about the project's focus on empowering communities.

CONCLUSIONS

Outreach is crucial for the success and sustainability of any community-based initiative. Context is key—some areas require a top-down approach, others might need specific approaches based on religion, culture or ethnicity.

Outreach should be a gradual, step-by-step process that continually connects leaders and stakeholders from the top to the grassroots.

The goal is to ensure community members take ownership and sustain the peacebuilding initiative, regardless of their status or power.



3

EARLY WARNING- EARLY RESPONSE



An EWER Committee meeting in Zamfara state



Peace by Us

Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) is crucial for conflict prevention and mitigation. It consists of two key parts:

Early Warning	<i>Gathering, analysing, and sharing signs of potential conflict.</i>
Early Response	<i>Deciding who, how, and where to act based on the shared information.</i>

It is crucial to have a wide range of early responses tailored to your community, whether it be dialogue, psychosocial support, problem-solving, media campaigns, advocacy, or something else. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for every issue. **Early Warning** and **Early Response** must work hand-in-hand and cannot exist without each other.

Early Warning

The core principle of Early Warning is **identifying potential sources of conflict early on before they escalate into violence.**

Conflict	<i>A conflict is a disagreement between two or more people. It could be because of various reasons, whether a land dispute, a misunderstanding or due to fake news or rumors.</i>
Violence	<i>Violence can be both mental or physical. It is when someone acts to hurt someone else. Most conflict can be dealt with before it becomes violent.</i>



Conflict is inevitable and an ordinary part of life. If managed well, conflict does not have to lead to violence.

Some examples of **Early Warning** include:

- Farmers on the outskirts of town have noticed that herders are beginning to move closer to the village and they worry it could lead to land disputes.
- Youth leaders have noticed that some unemployed young men have got access to light arms and they fear that some youth might be tempted into banditry.
- A community leader has noticed that some clerics are giving speeches criticising other religions, and is concerned this will lead to religious violence.

- Negative rumours about an ethnic group are spreading on WhatsApp and mothers are concerned their sons and daughters will start hating ‘the other side’.

If these cases are reported early, they may be mediated or resolved before things get worse.

THE ‘CONFLICT CHAIN’

Violent conflict does not usually erupt without warning. Most times, conflict lingers beneath the surface, gathering momentum through small but telling signs — until, if left unaddressed, it bursts into violence. This is why it is so important for communities to develop a deep understanding of how conflict builds over time.

Recognising early signs of conflict gives communities a better chance to intervene before harm occurs, and to protect themselves using tools that are peaceful, constructive, and locally owned.



One helpful way to think about conflict in the community is as a chain: a gradual progression through different stages. These range from hidden tensions and emerging warning signs to full-blown violence and its aftermath. Each stage presents its own risks, but also its own opportunities for action.

LATENT TENSIONS

At the earliest stage, what we call latent tensions, **conflict has not yet surfaced, but the warning signs are quietly present.** These might include:

- longstanding grievances
- seasonal tensions (for example, among farmers and herders)
- historical injustices
- externally influenced tensions (for example, during elections)
- social divides that haven’t been fully resolved

For example, you might notice that two ethnic or religious communities no longer attend shared markets or festivals like they once did. There may be no direct hostility, but the relationships are cold, and the silence speaks volumes.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

If latent tensions are not addressed, we may begin to see early warning signs. These are **more visible triggers that suggest tension is beginning to rise.** In many Nigerian communities, for example, this might look like:

- hate speech spreading on social media
- sudden disputes over farmland or water access

- increasing suspicion between different groups
- religious leaders expressing sharp disagreements
- young people organising around grievances

These signs often show that the community is at a crossroads — either issues are addressed now, or they risk worsening. This is a critical phase where violence has not yet broken out, but all the signs suggest it could happen soon.

If these early warnings are ignored, they may give way to signs that the conflict is beginning to escalate. Perhaps local youths begin forming vigilante groups, weapons become more visible, or people talk openly about revenge.

As conflict escalates, it becomes much harder to resolve issues without external support or the involvement of authorities. During the early warning phase, the window for peaceful intervention is closing.

ACTIVE CONFLICT

Once violence begins — what we call active conflict — **the community is in crisis.** This may include:

- physical attacks and/or killings
- verbal attacks or threats that could trigger violence
- destruction of property
- displacement of families

At this point, the priority shifts to protecting lives and preventing the conflict from spreading further. **Local mediation may still play a role, but more formal referral to security forces or humanitarian support is often needed.** (*This is sometimes referred to as “escalating” the case to the authorities.*)

For example, in recent cases in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, active farmer-herder clashes have left communities devastated, with children out of school and entire families on the move.

POST-CONFLICT FRAGILITY

Even when the violence ends, the community enters a fragile period we refer to as post-conflict fragility. At this stage:

- people may be returning home, but the atmosphere remains tense
- trust is low
- those who fled may feel unsafe
- trauma is widespread

If nothing is done to support healing, this stage can quickly lead back to renewed conflict. For example, returnees might face quiet forms of exclusion — being denied land access or kept out of leadership roles — which deepens resentment and sets the stage for future violence.

EXAMPLES: STAGES OF THE CONFLICT CHAIN

This table illustrates how conflict can manifest differently across its various stages — **latent tensions**, **early warning signs**, **active conflict**, and **post-conflict fragility**. The examples provided draw from real-life contexts such as farmer-herder crises, religious tensions, and land disputes to help you better identify and understand the markers at each point in the conflict chain.

Conflict Context	Latent Tensions	Early Warning Signs	Active Conflict	Post-Conflict Fragility
Religious Tensions:	- Communities of different faiths avoid joint celebrations - Quiet mistrust due to past violence	- Inflammatory sermons or hate speech surface - Youth groups share sectarian content online	- Violence erupts after provocation - Churches/mosques attacked and people killed	- Returnees feel unsafe - Mutual blame lingers - Religious leaders struggle to restart joint dialogue
Farmer-Herder Crisis:	- Grazing routes quietly contested - Minor disputes unresolved - Resource scarcity increasing	- Cattle graze on disputed farmland - Verbal threats exchanged - Rumours of planned attacks	- Clashes result in killings - Villages burned - People displaced en masse	- No access to original farmland - Displaced families live in fear - Reprisal attacks threaten peace
Land Disputes:	- Historical claims over land persist in family discussions - Low trust in land authorities	- Land surveys are blocked - Court injunctions ignored - Youth begin to patrol claimed areas	- Violence during land development projects - Attacks on surveyors or workers	- Ownership unresolved - Community divided over who to support - Fresh disputes loom
Chieftaincy Disputes:	- Rival lineages spread competing narratives - Loyalty divides remain hidden but strong	- Meetings end in arguments - Installation ceremonies challenged in court	- Clashes during traditional rites - Attacks on kingmakers and properties	- New chief rejected by some - No inclusive cultural events - Grievances resurface each season
Youth Gang Violence:	- Youth feel excluded from decision-making - Rival cliques form in sports fields or street corners	- Fights increase at local events - Gang slogans and threats spread online	Street battles with machetes and firearms during community festivals	- Peace holds temporarily, but groups reorganise - Victims avoid gatherings - Trauma is untreated

EXERCISE: Below are some examples of conflict scenarios. Match each scenario to the correct stage of conflict.

Latent Tensions

Early Warning Sign

A

Active Conflict

Post-Conflict Fragility

- A) Christian and Muslim community members live in separate parts of town and rarely purchase from each others' businesses. Things have not been the same ever since riots occurred in the area 8 years ago.
- B) While traveling, some local youth were allegedly killed by a militia associated with a different ethnic group. Some other local youth have taken revenge by beating members of that ethnic group who live nearby. One of them is critically injured in the hospital.
- C) A group of farmers are threatening to block a passageway that they had kept open by agreement with livestock herders for many years. Earlier this year, a conflict between local farmers and a group of herders had escalated into violence.
- D) A local community member's harvest caught on fire, and he is sure that members of a neighbouring community are to blame. A local youth says that the victim of the fire is now talking to youth in the community, asking if they will help him torch the suspects' houses in revenge.

"Since 2017, there has been unrest and insecurity. We slept in the bushes without any food to eat. We were displaced from our homes. But with the coming of Neem Foundation, we are educated on the early signs to see and watch out for, so that we don't get caught up when violence erupts. The Foundation has taught us how to be observant. We have since returned to our homes."

- An EWER Committee member in Kaduna state

Setting Up an EWER Process

Once the community has learned how to identify early signs of trouble, they need to form **platforms** or **structures** where they can discuss them. Below are three examples of community-based structures:

Community EWER Structures



Whatsapp Groups

WhatsApp or other closed social media group can be created with trusted and reliable “reporters” and “responders”, including local youth leaders, community heads and security personnel.



EWER Committee Meetings

Communities can hold monthly meetings to discuss new warning signs and follow up on ongoing cases



EWER Discussions

Existing groups like women/s groups, religious groups and youth groups can include EWER discussions as part of their regular meetings.

POCI's success lay mainly in its regular EWER committee meetings. This in-person contact created meaningful and sustainable bonds between community members. Other platforms, such as well-monitored WhatsApp groups, acted as compliments to in-person meetings, allowing quick responses in times of crisis.

The following section will focus on describing how to set up an EWER committee at the grassroots level.

SETTING UP AN EWER COMMITTEE

Before you set up an EWER committee, it is key to ask a few questions about the people involved in the conflicts in your community and how best to get them on board.

After you have decided which community members you would like on your EWER committee, it is important to consider whether they are suitable for the job.

It is important not to rush into choosing an EWER committee. Selecting the wrong people can prevent your team from working efficiently.

PEOPLE

- 1) **Observers:** Who are the **observers** in the community who notice what is happening on a day-to-day basis? Who understands the **deeper reasons** behind conflict in our community?
- 2) **Influential figures and responders:** Who are the most **influential people** in our community? Who are the most **powerful responders** for the types of conflict we have in our community?
- 3) **The 'voiceless':** Who is normally **not given a voice** when making important decisions about solving conflicts in our community?

How can we bring all the people above into regular contact with the EWER committee?

Committee members should be:



Before inviting someone to an EWER committee, it is important to ask for the input of the traditional leaders. You can introduce this person, and explain how the EWER committee will work for peace. **Traditional or religious leaders should not feel threatened by the committee.**

Instead, EWER committees should ideally be set up in consultation with **both:**

- a) **Early Warning-Early Response trainers**, such as workers from community-based or national organisations, **and**
- b) **Traditional rulers and community leaders.**

These parties can also play a vital role in dividing the committee into 'reporters' and 'responders', as well as electing people to certain roles, such as chairman or secretary.

USING INFLUENCE WISELY

Respected community figures – such as traditional or religious leaders – can strongly support the success of an EWER Committee. Their backing helps build trust in the process, and their guidance can be important for resolving difficult cases.

However, regular committee meetings usually work best when such leaders delegate a representative instead of attending every meeting themselves. This gives other members more freedom to share ideas openly. The leaders can still be invited as special guests when needed, and should always be kept informed through regular updates.

EWER INCLUSION CHECKLIST

- ☐ **‘Observers’ who notice what is happening around them.** These might be people with a large amount of social connections and conversations every day, such as market salespeople or taxi drivers, or people who have access to security reports.
- ☐ **Influential figures and responders** with many community connections, such as:
 - ☐ Women leaders
 - ☐ Youth leaders
 - ☐ Traditional leaders’ representatives
 - ☐ Informal community leaders
 - ☐ Religious leaders or their representatives
 - ☐ Security operatives
 - ☐ Vigilante leaders
- ☐ **People who don’t normally have a seat at the table**, such as:
 - ☐ Women
 - ☐ Youth
 - ☐ Minority ethnic groups
 - ☐ People with disabilities
- ☐ **Other members of the peace program**, so overall efficiency and ‘synergy’ is improved:
 - ☐ Dialogue Facilitators
 - ☐ Lay Counsellors
 - ☐ Media staff

RIGHT CHOICES

What kind of person do you think is best suited for an EWER committee?

What might go wrong if someone who is not truly peace-loving became a committee member?

ROLES ON THE COMMITTEE

The dynamics of your committee might differ depending on your culture and your community's norms. However, **it is recommended to have the following roles:**

Contact person	This person receives the reports and checks them to make sure they are true. Often, this person is the chairman or the secretary. You might also receive help from the staff of a community-based organisation.
Chairman	This person chairs the meeting. They make sure the timing is followed and that everyone has a chance to speak without interruption. You can have a rotating chairman, using a different person each time, if you think it is important to allow different types of people to experience a leadership role.
Secretary	The secretary writes down the 'minutes' of a meeting: the key things that were discussed, the solutions proposed, and what needs to be followed up on in the next meeting.
Reporters	Reporters are people who have a keen understanding of what is happening on the ground. For example, they could be: ● A market saleswoman with lots of contact with both 'outsiders' and local people ● A security guard who watches traffic movements around the settlement ● A social media influencer ● A youth with many social connections ● A town mayor who receives security reports
Responder	Responders are people who have the power to act quickly. Often, they are respected in the community and can use their authority in certain situations: ● A youth leader ● A security officer ● Religious leaders ● A dialogue facilitator ● A lay counsellor ● A social media influencer

CONDUCTING AN EWER MEETING

EWER meetings are typically held in a neutral place that is acceptable for everyone in the community, such as under a tree, in a central square, or in a town hall.



An EWER Committee meeting in Benue state

GENERALLY, THE MEETINGS FOLLOW THE FOLLOWING STRUCTURE:

- 1) **Welcoming and greeting.** In Africa, EWER meetings often begin with a prayer, but the exact beginning depends on your context.

Chairman: "Welcome everyone! I'd like to thank you all for attending. Let's begin with a prayer."

- 2) **Checking up:** The secretary recaps the cases that were discussed in the previous meeting and follows up with the responders to see how the case is going.

Secretary: "Last time we discussed the case of Mohammad who seems like he was having some family problems because of his mental health issues. We were worried it could escalate to a family crisis. Can we check up and see that he got to see the lay counsellor? Do we need to refer him to dialogue with the family?"

- 3) **Identifying new early warning signs:** the group discusses what new cases in the community could lead to violence.

Reporter: "Recently, there have been lots of reports of social media in the neighbouring communities that there are attacks on farmers. It's harvest season, so everyone is tired from their day's labor, and it's difficult to find enough people to protect the fields at night."

- 4) **Verifying:** the group decides whether they need to ask someone to verify the early warning signs to make sure they are real.

Responder: "Before we think about how to respond, let's check whether these rumours are true. There has been a lot of fake news going about on WhatsApp recently."

- 5) **Deciding on a response:** the group decides what the most appropriate response is for the situation.

Chairman: "While we wait to see whether these rumours are true, let's ask the vigilantes to patrol the fields for the next two nights. We can ask them whether they saw any warning signs, and if necessary we can pass on the news to the police. What do you think about that idea? Should we have a vote?"

- 6) **Thanks and closing:** the meeting is closed by the chairman. In a mixed community, the closing prayer might be said by Muslims, and the opening prayer by Christians, or vice versa.

Chairman: "Thank you all for coming today! Our next meeting will be in one month's time at the same place. The date will be _____ at 6 p.m.. Let's close with a prayer. I ask our Muslim brothers to lead it."

The conversation above is just an example of what people in different roles might say in an EWER meeting. **The exact process you would use depends on your community.**

REPORTING

Once an EWER committee has been set up, it is key to establish some channels of communication so that people can report warning signs before the situation escalates. **This might include urgent reports that need a response outside of the regular meeting times.**

Below are some examples of ways to report a case:



As seen above, depending on the community's resources, reports can be made **a)** in person, **b)** over a special EWER app, **c)** through dialogue facilitators or lay counsellors, **d)** via telephone, or **e)** via online messengers like WhatsApp.

"Five years ago, our community experienced frequent communal clashes, kidnappings, and violent conflicts between farmers and herders. This has made me live in constant fear for my family's safety. Recently, a dispute arose between farmers and herders over grazing rights. EWER volunteers detected the tension and alerted authorities and the authorities immediately responded and that prevented escalation. Now I feel more safe in the community."

- A POCI participant in Kaduna state

Make sure you have established who will be responsible for receiving reports outside of meeting times. Generally, this is the secretary and the chairman of the EWER committee, but you might also want to enlist help from staff at local community-based organisations. **Whatever choice you make, all committee members should be clear about who they should report to.**

The Importance of an Anonymous Option

If possible, try to set up at least one anonymous mechanism for EWER reporting, such as an anonymous phone line. This way people will feel more comfortable talking about situations that affect them or someone they know.

Case study: Esther and Ruth

Esther has found out that her best friend, Ruth, a pharmacist, has been stealing drugs from the local clinic to sell for profit. Esther realises this could lead to medicine shortages, causing conflicts with frustrated patients, or parents discovering their children misusing pills.

How should Esther report her case to the EWER committee without revealing her name? What would happen if people found out that Esther made the report?



An EWER Committee meeting in Kaduna state

Early Response

TYPES OF RESPONSES

Learning how to identify Early Warning signals is only half of the puzzle. It is extremely important to equip the community with various methods of Early Response. Different problems need different approaches. It may also take trying several methods before the conflict starts to de-escalate.

SKILLS-BASED VS. OUTREACH-BASED RESPONSES

Some responses are **skills-based**: drawing on community resources, such as dialogue, lay counselling, or mediation. Other responses are **outreach-based**: drawing on networks on relationships. Examples of each type of response are given below:

Skills-based responses:	Outreach-based responses:
Mediation <i>e.g. inviting a community leader help bring two fighting parties to an agreement</i>	Security apparatus <i>e.g. establishing a good working relationship with local police and vigilantes</i>
Dialogue <i>e.g. a facilitated and structured conversation between farmers and herders</i>	Government <i>e.g. communicating regularly about EWER with local government officials</i>
Psychosocial support <i>e.g. providing lay counselling to someone who was traumatised in an accident</i>	Civil society <i>e.g. connecting farmers' and herders' organisations at forums, communicating with local NGOs</i>
Mixed responses:	
Media <i>e.g. hosting a radio show which invites the leaders of local herders' and farmers' associations to discuss the benefits of dialogue between groups</i>	

Media is an example of a response that can use both community-based skills, while also involving outreach to others. For example, a radio show countering fake news

could be recorded with the help of a local radio station and a community-based organisation, while inviting a variety of guests such as security apparatus and religious leaders from different communities. *This not only promotes peace and counters misinformation; it also strengthens relationships.*

REACTIVE VS. PROACTIVE RESPONSES

A response can be **reactive**, i.e. you notice that something has happened in the community and you try to respond before the crisis gets worse. *For example, noticing that there is a conflict between two farmers over land and deciding to organise a dialogue session.*

A response can also be **proactive**, i.e. noticing that a problem is on the horizon and responding before it starts to show more serious signs. *For example, if you discover that some people are spreading rumours about other religions, you could host a radio show about the importance of religious tolerance. This helps prevent the conflict before it even arises.*

EXERCISE: Proactive and Reactive

*For each of the following scenarios, which one do you think needs a **proactive response** (planning ahead for the future) and which needs a **reactive response** (responding to what has already happened)? What specifically would you do in your community?*

- 1) A boy is bleeding. He claims he was attacked by youth gangs that are committing robberies in the community.

Proactive

Planning ahead for the future

Reactive

Responding quickly to what has already happened

- 2) Every year the soil in the north is getting drier and the herders are being forced further south. One day they will come in contact with farming communities where they don't know the locals or speak the local language.

Proactive

Reactive

Continued on next page

- 3) A group of workers are protesting outside a factory demanding better wages. The crowd is getting angrier and angrier.

Proactive	Reactive

- 4) More and more youth are hearing fake news on social media. There haven't been any conflicts yet, but you feel like they are living in a different reality than their parents.

Proactive	Reactive

CHOOSING A NON-PUNITIVE RESPONSE

For community-based Early-Warning-Early Response, non-punitive responses are preferred. They are best suited for situations where the conflict hasn't escalated into violence yet.



Choosing an appropriate response depends on your community's skills, preferences and culture. Nonetheless, below are some examples of when each approach might work best.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue is often best when it seems that individual community members do not see eye to eye and fail to understand each other's perspectives. Examples might include:

- Family disputes
- A long-term argument about how to share resources from a well
- Disagreements between people of different religions
- Misunderstandings between people of different ethnic groups
- Lack of positive contact between local farmers and herders

Although dialogue doesn't directly aim to solve problems or mediate between conflicting parties, it often leads to solutions afterward. This happens as participants develop a shared understanding and move past feelings of hatred or hostility.

Dialogue also often results in people volunteering to repair some of the harm they have done and to resolve the conflict between them.

Taking responsibility and repairing harm

In some cases, a person who has done wrong might acknowledge their guilt and offer to provide a service to their victim, e.g. helping them to harvest their crops.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

EWER committee members can often help solve issues by collaborating with local stakeholders and community members. Examples might include:

- A community member reports a lack of security officials in the community at night. The EWER committee collaborates with local stakeholders to strengthen the community watch.
- Tensions between Muslims and Christians seem to be increasing in the community after religious conflict erupts in a nearby town. The EWER committee meets with local religious leaders to create a joint plan to strengthen their unity, including community activities that involve people from both faiths.
- Explaining the consequences of bad behaviour to individuals before it escalates.
- A local store is selling alcohol to underage youth and this is causing problems in the community. The EWER committee approaches the owner of the store to explain the problem and he agrees to stop selling alcohol to underage youth.



An EWER Committee meeting in Benue state

MEDIA

Media responses are particularly effective for **proactive** responses i.e. educating people about a problem that is on the horizon and could develop into violence. Examples include:

- A radio show informing people about countering fake news before the election season begins
- A social media post which explains the harm that gender-based violence is causing in communities and where to report cases of domestic violence
- A video that shows how different ethnic groups are able to work together on an art project

ADVOCACY

Advocacy is also often a **proactive** response. It seeks to build relationships with key players, such as government officials, receiving their input and highlighting some peace-related issues. It often includes sensitisation and also aims to solve some underlying issues that are causing the conflict. Examples include:

- Paying a visit to the local government to encourage funding for local peace commissions
- Organising meetings to discuss the importance of including women in peacebuilding
- Bringing together farmers and herders at forums

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Psychosocial support is particularly useful when it becomes clear that a conflict is driven by someone's mental health issues, trauma or emotional pain. Examples include:

- Helping someone who is 'acting out' after losing a family member in a bandits' attack or after a clash between farmers and herders
- Providing family counselling to a couple who are arguing regularly after being displaced
- Assisting a youth who has become withdrawn and doesn't talk to his classmates or family members

"We used to keep quiet because we thought if you raise the alarm you will be implicated. Neem Foundation came and told us that if you see something you should say something. As a result, when we see and talk we avert the tragedy that would have been. When we see a youth doing something bad, we approach him and tell him the consequences of what he is doing to the community in the near future".

– An EWER Committee member in Benue

ESCALATING A CASE

Non-punitive, community-led responses to conflict, such as dialogue or advocacy, are most suitable for:

- Intervening
- Building trust between community members
- Healing psychological wounds

Non-punitive responses may not be suitable in situations where someone's life or property is in immediate danger or when a major law has been broken.

In these cases, you can draw on the relationships you have built with security operatives or government officials by **escalating** the report of an incident.

Escalating a Case

Noticing that someone's life or property is in immediate danger or that a severe crime has been committed and reporting the situation to security authorities, such as the police. These authorities may use force to counter this serious risk.

CONNECTING YOUR EWER COMMITTEE

EWER networks should be well-connected to influential community figures (such as traditional, religious and youth leaders), **security personnel**, and **government officials**. Otherwise, the community will not be able to respond quickly to serious cases of violence.

Once contact has been set-up with influential figures, **multi-directional feedback channels** need to be established. This means that community members not only send their messages ‘up’ to government or security officials, but authority figures also communicate messages back ‘down’ to the communities, and between each other.



CHOOSING A RESPONSE

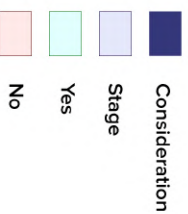
At every stage of conflict, the EWER Committee plays a vital role by coordinating locally led responses and helping the community to be safer and more resilient.

The flowchart on the next page gives some *examples* of responses that are appropriate at each conflict stage: **latent tensions**, **early warning signs**, **active conflict**, and **post-conflict fragility**.

This flowchart also includes a more specific stage in the conflict chain: an **escalation indicator**. An escalation indicator is a particularly urgent early warning sign that shows that the conflict may quickly escalate into violence. In such cases, the EWER Committee needs to take urgent action to prevent active conflict from erupting.

Escalation Indicator

An early warning sign that means that violence could erupt soon



Is there an early sign of conflict or tension?



- Passively monitor and document community dynamics
- Conduct regular check-ins with community leaders
- Stay alert for emerging patterns or subtle shifts



What stage of conflict does this represent

Latent Tension

Subtle issues like mistrust, lack of interaction, exclusion, or unresolved grievances

Q: Are relationships quietly strained (e.g., groups no longer mix, shared spaces abandoned)?

- Continue community education on peace values
- Identify and empower early warning champions (e.g., youth, women)

Early Warning Sign

Visible signs like disputes, hate speech, or group mobilization

Q: Are hate speech, grievances, or small disputes emerging?

- Reassess: Is conflict hidden or suppressed?
- Strengthen peace messaging and maintain platforms for open dialogue
- Consider community risk mapping

Escalation Indicator

Signs that violence may erupt soon: revenge talk, weapons, tension at gatherings

Q: Are vigilante groups forming, or are weapons visible?

- Reinforce preventive strategies: dialogue, rumor tracking, bystander intervention
- Train youth leaders on early response to hate speech or rumors

Active Conflict

Physical violence has begun (displacement, attacks, killings, etc.)

Q: Are lives or property in immediate danger?

- No (e.g., tension but no violence yet):
- Use high-level mediation or advocacy to avoid escalation
- Engage trusted authorities or conflict professionals immediately

Post-Conflict Fragility

After violence ends, community remains tense, divided, or traumatized

Q: Are returnees being excluded, or is trauma left unaddressed?

- Confirm through quiet community check-ins
- Continue support and observation; fragility may still exist under the surface

- Conduct community trust-building activities
- Use dialogue circles, interfaith events, or shared economic projects
- Hold listening sessions to surface hidden grievances
- Provide external support if needed (trainings, mediation)

- Use early mediation or conflict transformation tools
- Engage local leaders, youth groups, or religious institutions
- Launch community awareness efforts

- Implement urgent community-based interventions
- Notify authorities or peace committees
- Refer individuals to mental health or psychosocial support
- Consider launching a media campaign to de-escalate

- Report immediately to security forces or emergency responders
- Focus on safety, humanitarian needs, and de-escalation
- Refer affected people to trauma-informed services

- Provide trauma healing, lay counseling, or safe spaces for dialogue
- Advocate for re-integration policies and equitable access to resources
- Monitor for early signs of conflict relapse

Cross-Cutting Questions at All Stages

Q: Is this a misunderstanding among small groups?



Use direct dialogue or mediation



Check for larger drivers (e.g structural inequality, politics)

Q: Is someone in mental distress?



Refer to mental health support or lay counseling



Still provide mental health literacy in peace activities

Q: Is misinformation or fake news involved?



Launch media literacy campaigns or counter-narratives



Promote trusted communication and community-owned information platforms

Q: Does the community have the skills to respond?



Encourage community-led solutions



Refer to external facilitators or training providers

At any stage of conflict, an EWER committee can lead a variety of non-punitive responses — including dialogue, problem-solving, psychosocial support, media, and/or advocacy. The committee may also **escalate the case** to authorities. Each situation requires its own thoughtful response strategy, based on local knowledge.

EXERCISE: Response Strategies

1. Imagine a scenario: Imagine there is a conflict brewing that could lead to violence, so your community is identifying early signs of trouble.

This conflict could involve youth violence and gangs; political conflict based on claims of election fraud; conflict between different ethnic groups; or another conflict common in your community.

2. List three possible signs of tension or trouble that you might see in relation to the conflict scenario that you imagine:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

3. For one of the three signs you listed above, write down what stage of conflict that sign may represent. **Then, list some ideas you have for specific responses.** You can refer to the flowchart on the previous page for guidance.

Sign of trouble:

Stage of conflict:

Specific ideas for responses:

You may notice that **each community-based response tool can be useful at many different points in the conflict chain.** For example, dialogue is very useful for addressing latent tensions, and dialogue can also be an important part of the response to early warning signs or post-conflict fragility.

Community Education About EWER

Before setting up an EWER committee, it is a good idea to conduct some community training about the basic concepts of EWER. This section contains some materials which could be useful for this goal.

Remember, education about Early Warning-Early Response is a **process**. Community members might need refresher training or you may need to conduct advocacy to remind people of the importance of some principles. It is best to include professional EWER trainers.

The importance of continual learning

"There was a traditional leader in the community who would say, 'oh, we know these things now. There's no need for us to keep talking about it'. And I would reply, 'no, it's important. Let's just get to know that this is the most important part of the project. We need everyone to have it at the back of their mind what Early Warning, Early Response is.'

One day he went to pay a visit to one of his fellow traditional rulers. And on his way back, he noticed two young men. They were just by the roadside with their bikes. They were struggling with a young boy of six years old to put him on a bike, and the traditional ruler noticed that this wasn't normal. Why are they putting him on a bike and covering his mouth?

He could sense immediately that it was a kidnap issue. He caught the attention of some young boys that were sitting around. He told them to go after those men going ahead. And since he was a chief, and was wearing his traditional attire and all the beads, they recognised him as the traditional ruler. Immediately they took their bike and went after the kidnappers. The kidnappers dropped the boy.

After that, the traditional leader came back and gave his testimony on how important it is to always talk about the early warning signals. He is a traditional ruler and also a member of the EWER. He then arranged for the stakeholders to pay a courtesy visit and advocacy visit to the IDP camp heads (there were a lot of kidnappings of IDP children) to tell them about early warning signs. He also asked the parents to be conscious of their environment and their children".

- A representative from Elohim Development Foundation in Benue

CONFLICT ANALYSIS

Conflict analysis

Conflict analysis is figuring out what causes a conflict, who is involved, and how the conflict develops over time, in order to find ways to deal with it.

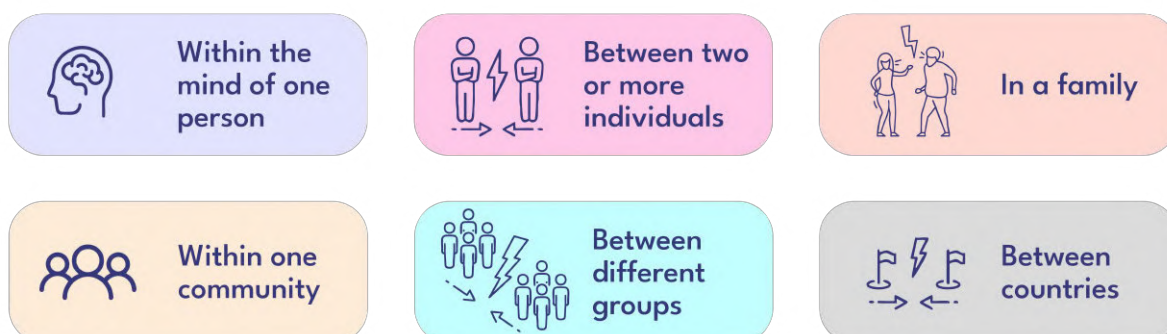
In order to gain a clear picture of what is happening on the ground, it is useful to gather EWER members together to discuss some common sources of violence in the community, and brainstorm ways to deal with them.

Identifying the conflict

- What kinds of conflicts are the most common in our community?
- Who tends to be involved in these conflicts?
- How often do these conflicts escalate to violence? Why?
- What are the reasons for this conflict? What do we know? What don't we know?

A conflict is a disagreement or lack of harmony. It is part of life and not always a bad thing. If managed well, a conflict can lead people to understand each other better. Often discussing a conflict 'clears the air' and allows people to work together to find solutions.

A conflict can take place



Understanding the reasons behind a conflict is a complicated process. It could take years of dialogue or investigation to understand every factor behind a conflict. Initial conflict analysis will only give you an idea of what *might* be the reason.

Below are some different reasons for conflict:

Stereotypes and prejudice	<i>People might view the outside group as 'bad people' who do things to hurt them. Often, this is because of a lack of information or contact. Stereotypes can also be due to miseducation where people have been taught the wrong information in schools or growing up.</i>
Limited resources	<i>People might be fighting over resources. For example, there might be only one field but two farmers who want to use it.</i>
Fake news or rumors	<i>People might get the wrong information about someone else, often due to rumors or fake news online.</i>
Miscommunication	<i>Often information gets lost along the way, sometimes because you are translating between languages, and at other times because it is misheard or misunderstood.</i>
Differences in values	<i>Sometimes religious beliefs and values are different. Conflict can occur when someone tries to force their beliefs onto someone else.</i>
Bad intentions	<i>In a small minority of cases, someone might think that in order for them to 'win' someone else has to lose. These 'bad intentions' are often linked to power struggles.</i>



During a training for new EWER committee members, experienced members demonstrate how to run monthly EWER meetings

EXERCISE: Below are some stories about conflicts. Match each story to the correct term for the reason behind the conflict.

Stereotypes and prejudice

Limited resources

Fake news or rumours

A

Miscommunication

Value conflicts

Bad intentions

- A) After a robbery, a woman is going through a mental health crisis. She sometimes shakes and talks to herself to calm herself down. A rumour spreads online that she is practicing witchcraft. Someone vandalises her house.
- B) A shop owner has been making a profit and has enough money to survive and provide for his family, but he is jealous that his neighbour's store is making more money. He decides to use fake accounts to leave negative online reviews for his neighbour's store.
- C) Two farmers in a village need water for their crops. There is only one well and it isn't enough to supply both farms. They become enemies.
- D) A son asks his mother to stop comparing him to other children. The mother thinks her son is insolent and accuses him of calling her a bad mother.
- E) A large group of outsiders arrives on the outskirts of a community. They don't interact much with local people and it's not clear why they have come. They gain the reputation as 'troublemakers' and are blamed for crimes in the community. One day some youths set the outsiders' tents on fire.
- F) A religious leader is annoyed at the 'immodest' clothes some women in his community are wearing. He lectures and scolds them. The women stop attending his church.

FAKE NEWS

Nowadays, more and more fake news is spreading online. Fake videos or misleading texts often spread much quicker than real news because they tap into our emotions: when people are angry, they are much more likely to share or comment on a story!

As a result, before we share or comment on something online, it is important to ask two main questions:

- **What is the source?**

Is this website or post reliable? Can I find another page that confirms what this page says? If not, there is a high chance that it is fake news.

- **What is the purpose?**

Does this text or video seem like it was made to spread hate or make people angry? If so, there is a high chance that it is fake news.

For more about how to train your community members to counter fake news, please see *Chapter 6: Media*.

EXERCISE: Think of one fake news story that has been circling in your community recently.

- 1) What was the story about?
- 2) How could you tell that the story wasn't true?
- 3) Who was hurt by this story?



EWER Committee members from across two Zamfara local government areas attend a training, including about fake news

MANAGING CONFLICTS

After you have analysed the common conflicts in your community and some reasons behind them, it is time to think about how conflict should be addressed. You might ask the following questions:

MANAGING CONFLICTS

- How do we usually solve conflicts in our community?
- Is the method we use for solving conflicts now effective or not?
- What other methods could be effective for solving conflicts?

It is important to understand that **conflict is not necessarily bad**. In fact, avoiding conflict can make issues much worse.

EWER training can help community members to better manage conflict, even in their personal lives:

"In our last training we were taught how to handle conflicts. We were taught that having a conflict is not a crime. It's when it goes to violence [that it's bad]. That has improved my life personally, because before now, I was the kind of person who didn't argue back. So, when somebody offended me, I would just walk away quietly and then go back home and be very angry within myself. I wouldn't want to tell the person 'this thing you did to me, I didn't like it'. But during the course of our training, we were told that conflict is a normal thing. You can peacefully tell somebody that they did something you didn't like."

– An EWER Committee member in Benue state

Often, communities suffer because their conflict resolution methods are based on punishment. This can create cycles of violence and revenge. It is important for EWER committees to have non-punitive sources of solving problems.

Non-punitive methods

Addressing conflicts without violence or punishment

“Previously, when an issue was brought before us, we adopted the ‘fire brigade approach’ and we began to beat the culprit, asking him to say the truth immediately. But now we’ve been taught appropriate ways of resolving conflict. We listen to both parties and find a better way to resolve the issue. No more beating and quarrelling.”

– An EWER Committee member in Kaduna state

Benefits of non-punitive responses include:

- Rebuilding trust within the community
- Allowing the person who has done wrong a chance to seek forgiveness and repair the damage done
- Stopping anger and resentment from building in the community
- Solving the conflict in the community, without needing help from outsiders
- Focusing on the deeper reasons behind the conflict, instead of jumping to punishment
- It can be much quicker and easier than the legal system

EXERCISE: Recently, it was discovered that some young boys were grazing their cattle late at night, destroying a farmer’s crops.

- 1) How would your community traditionally handle this situation?
- 2) What would happen if you punished the boys harshly?
- 3) What might happen if you choose to dialogue with the boys and their parents instead?

As mentioned in the “choosing a response” section above, non-punitive community responses used frequently in POCI included **dialogue**, **psychosocial support**, and **media campaigns** to fight fake news or stereotypes.

Despite non-punitive approaches being the best way forward in many cases, it is important to understand that not all cases can be addressed in this way. **In the case of serious and violent crimes, it is best to contact police and seek justice.**

PRACTICAL STEPS IN EWER

The following section contains some examples of how an EWER committee might work in a community-based program, like POCI.

Example 1: Community-led EWER case

- **Step 1: Reporting a threat**

A reporter notices that there is an urgent case of a suicidal youth in the community, who might hurt himself or others. The reporter immediately notifies the EWER WhatsApp group.

- **Step 2: Initial Response**

Within minutes, the case is passed on by a responder to a lay counsellor who meets with the young man that evening.

- **Step 3: Community Monitoring**

During the EWER committee meeting the next week, the committee checks up on the case. They hear the young man is having family issues and request a dialogue.

- **Step 4: Follow-Up**

A month later, the EWER committee discusses the case and the results of the dialogue and lay counsellor support. They decide whether the issue has been solved or whether the young man needs more support.

"The youths of the community were very angry about how the power holding were operating with their services. There would be no lights for 3 to 4 days and the following day they would bring huge bills for the community members to pay. This continued for a very, very long time. The youths got angry and they wanted to protest and the protest wasn't a peaceful one. One of our members of the Early Warning committee, a youth leader, was there with them when they were making the plans to go and attack the workers of the power company. He Immediately informed us about the situation.

The EWER members swung into action straight away. We paid an advocacy visit to the power company. We told them to leave their office for now for their safety. We also talked with them about how these policies were not good, how they're being rude to users, they should really change for the better. We also paid an advocacy visit to the local committee chairman. We told him about this situation. We talked to the youth about the most appropriate way to handle such situations. We told them that violence is not good and they should embrace peace. When you protest, at times you lose lives and properties. They were able to understand and agree with us."

- An EWER Committee member in Benue state

Example 2: Bandits near a farm

A farmer notices armed men near the village and suspects they might be bandits.

- **Step 1: Reporting the Threat**

The farmer quickly sends a message to the community's EWER WhatsApp group, describing in detail what he saw.

- **Step 2: Initial Response**

A responder in the EWER group confirms the sighting with others nearby. The group alerts local vigilantes and security agents. The vigilantes and local community members patrol the area while they wait for government security agents to arrive.

- **Step 3: Community Monitoring**

At the next week's EWER meeting, the group reviews the situation. They learn the bandits left when they saw the community on alert. They decide to increase patrols and improve communication with neighbouring villages.

- **Step 4: Follow-Up**

A month later, the EWER group finds that the extra patrols have kept the area safe. They close the case for now, but make sure to keep the reporters in regular contact with responders via WhatsApp and committee meetings.

"There was an instance where the paramount leader was kidnapped, apparently by herders. The youths were aggrieved. There were agitations to the extent that there was an attempt to attack nearby herders. We succeeded in stopping the youth from taking the law into their hands, by communicating with them as soon as we saw the early warning signs. Later on, with the help of the security agencies and other intelligence, the leader regained his freedom. There had been stereotyping between the Hausa community and the neighbouring Fulani communities, so we engaged our youths and the Fulani communities. We invited them to collaborate with the dialogue component. Then we took our time to facilitate dialogue and create understanding among the warring parties.

- An EWER Committee member in Kaduna state

EXERCISE: Think of an example of an EWER case that could happen in your community and be managed by the community responders. How might each step look?

- Step 1: Reporting the Threat
- Step 2: Initial Response
- Step 3: Community Monitoring
- Step 4: Follow-Up

STAYING ON MESSAGE THROUGH CONFLICT ANALYSIS

In the “**conflict analysis**” section, the following questions were suggested as helpful prompts for conducting training with the EWER committee.

IDENTIFYING THE CONFLICT

- What kinds of conflicts are the most common in our community?
- Who tends to be involved in these conflicts?
- How often do these conflicts escalate to violence?
- What are the reasons for this conflict? What do we know? What don't we know? How do we usually solve conflicts in our community?

During EWER committee meetings, these questions may be asked again. They can help make sure that the ‘early warning’ signs do not correspond to something outside of your intervention.

For example, if the community is primarily focused on resolving farmer-herder conflicts and prefers to allocate its resources to that issue rather than family disputes, revisiting conflict analysis helps members prioritise the most urgent concerns.

However, situations can shift over time. During an EWER meeting, a group conflict analysis may show that the focus needs to shift from one conflict to another.

FORMAL EWER STRUCTURES

This manual has focused on community-based EWER systems. However, if resources are available, it's a good idea to strengthen these systems with the help of local organisations or the government who can set up **formal EWER structures**. This helps ensure that EWER can continue long-term.



Hotlines

NGOs or community-based organisations can set up hotlines or app reporting systems. They can verify cases, triage responses, and follow up as necessary.



Government-backed EWER Committee Meetings

The local or regional government can fund meetings between community leaders, officials, and security apparatus.



Forums

Forums can be conducted within a state or between states, bringing together key figures for discussion.

If possible, carry out **advocacy visits** to local government officials before, during and after your community-based EWER program. This will ensure that community structures gain necessary support and continue long-term.

CONCLUSIONS

An effective and inclusive EWER Committee lies at the heart of the *Peace By Us* approach. By listening to voices from across the community, the committee can spot potential problems early and respond in ways that stop tensions from escalating into violence.

EWER Committees coordinate a variety of non-punitive responses — such as problem-solving, dialogue, media campaigns, advocacy, and mental health support — while also referring certain cases to the appropriate authorities when necessary. In doing so, they become a vital driver of community security, resilience, and lasting peace.

4

DIALOGUE



Community dialogue facilitators leading a dialogue in Zamfara state



Peace by Us



Participants embrace after a dialogue

Dialogue as an “Early Response”

POCI found that dialogue was an especially effective response to early warning signs, especially ones that are based in misunderstanding or stereotypes between individuals or groups of people, such as family disputes or tensions between farmers and herders.

Reflective Structured Dialogue, in particular, has been the keystone of the POCI Early Response approach. Dialogue is generally free, and as a result, it can solve problems effectively before escalating to expensive court proceedings or more involved negotiations with rulers.

“In the past, whenever there were disputes between brothers, they would end up in the court or at the police station. Or sometimes they would report to the chief. When reporting to the chief, you need to bring goats, chickens or other gifts. When I came aboard as a dialogue facilitator, I started to help solve people’s issues without asking them for anything in return. Now the community members have confidence in us and they keep coming to us and reporting issues to us.”

– A community dialogue facilitator in Benue state

What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is a type of peaceful communication. There are many forms of dialogue in the peacebuilding and conflict resolution field, but facilitators who were trained through POCI use Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD). This style involves **mutual respect, deep listening** and an **open attitude**. **Participants talk from their heart without judging** those they are talking with.

Unlike debate, dialogue is **stories-based** – participants talk about their own life, not what they have heard in the media or via rumours. They speak for themselves and let others speak for themselves. During dialogue, instead of challenging someone's 'opinion', participants listen with genuine curiosity and ask clarifying questions to better understand their fellow human's concerns, beliefs and experience.

The goal of this dialogue's approach is not immediately to 'fix' an issue, but to restore mutual understanding and trust. When relationships are rebuilt, problems are often solved in due time.

Dialogue 	Debate 
Helps to understand where the other person is coming from	Aims to 'defeat' your opponent
Promotes speaking from the heart about one's own experience	Uses any argument possible to 'win' and devalue the other person
Promotes listening carefully without interrupting others	Involves listening only to find problems in the opponent's argument. Interrupting.
Encourages an open-minded and non-judgemental spirit. Involves asking questions with genuine curiosity.	Encourages close-mindedness and jumping to assumptions

Dialogue is based on understanding that assumptions about the ‘other’ are dangerous. Often, people think of the ‘enemy’ as a bad person who is deliberately trying to hurt them. But through dialogue one can learn the reasons behind others’ beliefs and concerns. Most of the time, through dialogue, dialogue participants discover that their ‘enemy’ is more complicated than they thought. **Often both parties are not bad people, but rather the victims of a bad situation.**

Changing Perspectives: Moving Past ‘Punishment’

“I used to think I can quench trouble with trouble. When one of ours was killed, I used to think the best way is to also kill a herdsman. But after several dialogue meetings, I felt relieved with a better way of life and approach to problems.

In the next community to us, a fellow farmer encroached on my piece of land. I took a cutlass to go fight, but then my husband reminded me of the dialogue meetings we have been having all along. So we took the matter to our chief and it ended in peace.”

– A participant in a women’s focus group discussion, Benue state

Dialogue often brings together people from very different backgrounds – they may have different religions, ethnicities or political beliefs. Dialogue occurs after thorough **preparation**: when all parties are ready. Participants come to dialogue of their own will. They should not be dragged into dialogues they are not interested in and not prepared for.

Often, dialogue can help re-humanise people who are seen as ‘perpetrators’ or ‘evil’. Therefore, it encourages a society of forgiveness and redemption.

Changing Perspectives: Moving Past ‘Victims vs. Perpetrators’

“This program helped in our personal lives. I used to think that if anybody commits a crime they should punish the person brutally. After the victim assistance training, now I know that even if a person commits crime and he is wounded in the process, you will need to first treat the person until the wounds are completely healed and he is okay. Then you can seek other means for him not to return back to the old lifestyle.”

– An EWER Committee member in Benue state



Participants in a dialogue in Zamfara sit equally in a circle

"I have had my share of disagreements with farmers from the Tiv ethnic group, who are mostly Christians. However, through Neem Foundation's dialogue sessions, we've learned to understand and respect each other's differences.

For instance, during the last Ramadan, our Christian neighbours joined us for Iftar, breaking the fast together. It was a beautiful display of unity and solidarity. Similarly, when the Tiv community celebrated their traditional festival, we Fulani herders were invited and actively participated.

These small gestures have fostered a sense of belonging and reduced tensions. We no longer view each other through the lens of ethnicity or religion. The project has helped us recognise our shared humanity and common goals. Now, when conflicts arise, we resolve them through dialogue and mutual understanding, rather than resorting to violence."

– A herder in Benue state

TYPES OF DIALOGUE

REFLECTIVE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

There are many different ‘styles’ of dialogue. Protecting Our Communities’ facilitators follow ‘**Reflective Structured Dialogue**’ (RSD), an approach to dialogue developed by the U.S.-based organisation [Essential Partners](#). This format involves specific training:

- RSD emphasises the importance of **preparing participants** ahead of time, so that they can build trust with the facilitator and ‘own the process’.
- Participants agree on **communication agreements** about how to interact during the dialogue session.
- The dialogue takes the format of **rounds of questions** which try to ‘get at the heart of the matter’, with participants having some time to reflect before answering. Questions are prepared before the dialogue takes place and are asked in a structured manner.
- Each participant is given **equal speaking time**.
- Reflective Structured Dialogues tend to have **6-8 participants with 2 dialogue co-facilitators**.
- Dialogues generally last **90 minutes to 3 hours**.

You can find more information about this type of dialogue at whatisessential.org.

INTRA-GROUP AND INTERGROUP DIALOGUES

Often, it is helpful to give dialogue facilitators and community members practice in using the dialogue process in easier contexts before moving on to more challenging ones. This practice can build confidence, and help participants work through difficult emotions. For example, facilitators can hold dialogues among women only — or with only farmers, and only herders — before holding dialogues with a mixed group.

A Successful Intergroup Dialogue

"I have witnessed how dialogue can reduce ethnic tensions. For years, the Fulani and Gbagyi communities had been at odds over grazing, with persistent tensions often boiling into violent clashes. However, since the introduction of regular dialogue sessions, I noticed a significant change. The sessions, facilitated by community leaders and local authorities, brought together individuals from both ethnic groups to share their experiences and perspectives. As people began to listen to and understand each other, misconceptions began to fade... The dialogue sessions have helped us break down barriers and build bridges. We're no longer enemies, but neighbours and friends."

- A participant in a women's focus group discussion, Kaduna state

Intragroup Dialogue

*A dialogue between members of the **same group**, such as a group of women, or a group of herders.*

Intergroup Dialogue

*A dialogue between two **different groups**, such as between farmers and herders, or between Christians and Muslims*



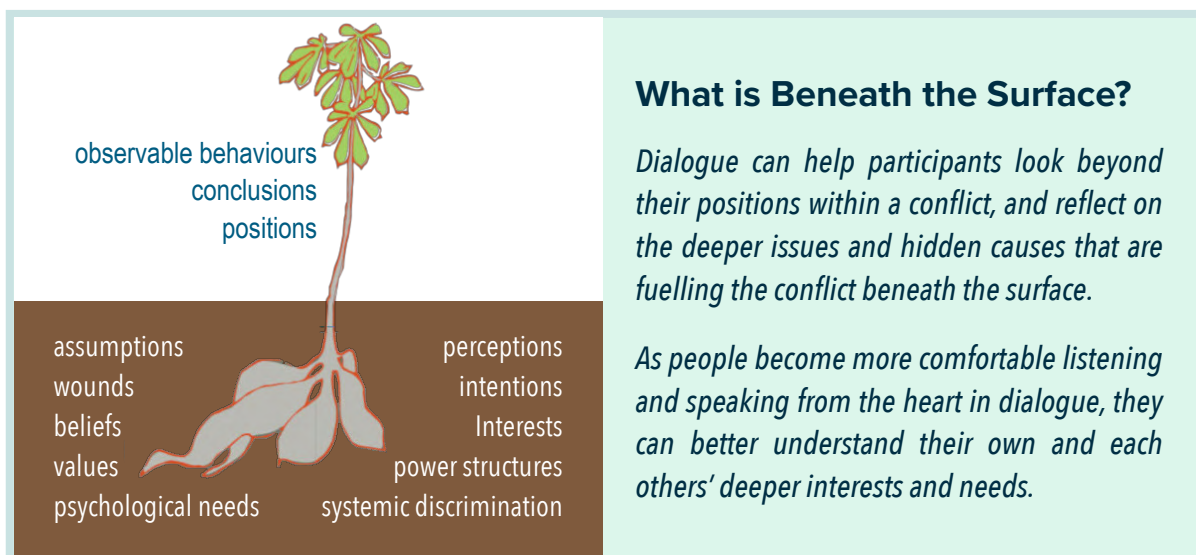
Farmers' and herders' association members and community dialogue facilitators together at a POCl refresher training in reflective structured dialogue

KEY ELEMENTS IN REFLECTIVE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

Here are some of the key elements that a successful dialogue should involve:

Trust-building and preparation	<i>It is important to build trust with the facilitator(s) and between parties. A good way to do this is through a one-to-one preparation meeting with every participant before the dialogue. The facilitator can ask participants about what they want to achieve from the dialogue, and learn more about what is troubling them.</i> <i>At the beginning of the dialogue, participants can build trust with one another by discussing open, non-offensive questions. For example, "what led you to accept the invitation today?" or "can you tell me something about yourself that would surprise me?"</i>
Co-creation	<i>Co-creation involves the participants and the facilitator(s) working together with the dialogue participants to agree on 'communication agreements'. These might include speaking from one's own experience and avoiding interruptions and accusations. Co-creation also involves agreeing on a neutral place to hold the dialogue.</i>
Addressing the deeper reasons for the conflict	<i>After some initial questions to break the ice, the facilitator should work together with the participants to make sure they are getting at the deeper reason behind the conflict and not just discussing the surface.</i>

(Continued on next page)



(Continued from previous page)

Compassionate listening	<i>Participants in a dialogue need to keep an open mind. They should try to leave behind their judgments from the outside world and listen with an open heart to the others' stories.</i>
Resilience	<i>Participants continue to listen carefully even if they hear something that is distressing. The facilitator(s) might choose to work together with the participants before a dialogue to learn more about their difficulties and discuss some coping mechanisms.</i>
Fairness	<i>During a dialogue no one person takes the position of a 'leader' and no one person dominates the conversation. Participants sit in a circle and share time evenly.</i>
Speaking from the heart	<i>When we speak from the heart, we tell our stories and discuss our emotions. Instead of trying to argue about facts, rumors or things we have heard, dialogue participants talk about their own personal experience.</i>



Participants in a dialogue in Benue

Choosing a Facilitator

A facilitator is a **well-trained, fair** and **neutral** person who makes sure that a dialogue goes smoothly.

In POCl's case, facilitators are selected from target communities by community leaders in collaboration with the partner organisations. They are chosen based on their track record for promoting coexistence and inclusiveness in their communities. Usually, facilitators are trained and mentored over a period of one year.



Before the dialogue, facilitators play a role in preparing participants . Facilitators explain some of the key principles of dialogue and find out how the participant would be most comfortable sharing their feelings and viewpoints.

During the dialogue, the facilitator guides the participants to 'go deep' in their questions and conversation. The facilitator helps check that everyone follows the rules and controls the timing to make sure that all participants have an equal opportunity to speak.

It is not the role of the facilitator to solve the conflict: they simply help a heart-felt conversation take place. However, after the dialogue they may help the parties set up a time and a place to negotiate a solution.

INTEGRITY AND IMPARTIALITY

A facilitator should be **a person with integrity** who knows how to be **impartial** or **multi-partial**.

<i>Impartial</i>	<i>Not taking anyone's side in a dialogue</i>
<i>Multi-partial</i>	<i>Empathising with every participant while still keeping the timing and other conditions fair</i>

When a dialogue facilitator enters the room, they should leave their personal beliefs behind and try as much as possible to be neutral but compassionate. For the community to truly believe the facilitator is neutral, it helps if they have a reputation for being a person with integrity. This means they are known in their community as a **kind, honest, fair and helpful person**.

In places with deep divisions, such as a community recovering from an inter-ethnic war, it may be too difficult for people to see a single facilitator as neutral. In these cases, it's better to have two facilitators, one from each 'side' of the conflict.



POCI selected Community Dialogue Facilitators from within each community, with equal representation of men and women.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

The dialogue facilitator will often hear difficult or disturbing stories. As a result, they should have strong **emotional resilience**. It is very important that the dialogue facilitator can control their emotions and avoid outbursts, as these could affect the participants. The focus of the dialogue should be on the participants, not the facilitator.

The dialogue facilitator models the behaviours they want the participants to have. **They are calm and listen with respect**. If they do something wrong, such as breaking a communication agreement, they humbly apologise and correct their behaviour.

If a dialogue is upsetting or traumatising for the facilitator, the dialogue facilitator can engage in self-care or seek help from others after the session.

Self-care

Checking in with your body and mind to make sure you are okay, and then taking action to improve your physical and mental state. This includes simple acts like making sure your sleep and nutrition are correct, as well as more complicated things like addressing emotions after a difficult dialogue session.

SELF-REFLECTION AND COMMITMENT TO PEACE

A dialogue facilitator should be **self-reflective** and **committed to peace**.

The work of a dialogue facilitator is equal parts rewarding and challenging. A facilitator needs to truly believe in peace. Part of this means that they can fight against their own stereotypes and prejudices. The facilitator's behaviour should model peace. For example, they might have friends from the 'other side' or attend joint religious events.

A dialogue facilitator should set a good example by using less judgemental, more neutral phrases when speaking with participants.

Judgemental phrasing ❌	More neutral phrasing ✅
“Farmers always retaliate against the wrong people”	“There have been a few cases where herders are attacked in revenge for things they did not do”
“Those Fulanis are hurting our communities”	“Some herders have been involved in conflicts recently”
“It seems she can’t stand those people”	“It seems when [specific person] and [specific person] did this, it led to [specific person] feeling hurt.”

HUMILITY

The dialogue facilitator is not a leader in the usual sense. As a result, they should be humble people.

It is not the facilitator’s job to command or to tell people what to do. Dialogue is not solutions-orientated, it is about understanding other peoples’ perspectives and building relationships. The participants may choose to find a solution after the dialogue, but it is not the facilitator’s job to tell them what the best path forward is.



Community members who resolved their conflict with the aid of a community dialogue facilitator

CROSS-COMMUNITY APPROVAL

Ideally, the dialogue facilitator should have **approval across the community**. Where possible, they should bridge religious and ethnic divides.

"[Nowadays] you'll see both Christians and Muslims sitting together. During some of the dialogue sessions relationships were built back. Participants said that the person sitting beside him became his enemy because of the crisis, but now we see them sitting and talking peacefully together."

- A dialogue facilitator in Kaduna

"Last year, the Muslim entered the community and went house to house to help our friends the Christians to celebrate the Christmas, the Muslim entered houses and were given food behind the primary school and all the Muslims went to celebrate the Christmas. Honestly, this is the most important change that we have seen, since I gained wisdom. I had never seen this happened with my own eyes, honestly this is a big change."

-- A participant in a women's focus group discussion, Kaduna state

Sometimes, dialogue can feel threatening to those with power. For example, in some communities, traditional leaders might feel their authority is damaged because dialogue handles conflicts more effectively. As a result, during the outreach stage, leaders can help select who will become a facilitator.

After this, facilitators should continue to build trust and explain how their contribution strengthens the leaders' work. **This way, traditional leaders can see facilitators as helpful allies in solving problems, not as rivals.**

"We faced an issue in the community where the traditional rulers were feeling threatened. When you lodge a case at the palace, you are required to take a goat, you take drinks, you take some money. But then these dialogue facilitators, they don't take anything. And their method is very effective. It took some effort for the traditional rulers to stop seeing the facilitators as competition. Now they refer cases that are too difficult for them to handle to the dialogue facilitators."

- A staff member in the POCl project team

COOPERATING WITH OTHER PEACEBUILDERS

Dialogue should work hand in hand with other peace structures.

If you are creating a larger peace project, it is a good idea to ‘synergise’ between dialogue and other elements. For example, you may choose to train dialogue facilitators to become lay counsellors so that they can bring a better awareness of trauma healing and mental health to their work. You may also choose to train some Early Warning-Early Response committee members as dialogue facilitators. This helps to connect the parts of the project and make sure that everyone is on the same page.



Participants in a POCl dialogue forum including communities in Benue state

Choosing a Topic & Participants



Fruits of a successful dialogue in Kaduna

There are many ways to choose a suitable topic for dialogue. At the beginning stage, it might be useful for the dialogue facilitators to conduct **conflict analysis**. This could involve:

- tracking which issues are the most hotly discussed on local social media or radio
- attending community gatherings, town halls, or Early Warning Early Response meetings
- attending advocacy engagements and meetings with traditional rulers and community groups

Conflict Analysis

Conflict analysis is figuring out what causes a conflict, who is involved, and how the conflict develops over time, in order to find ways to deal with it.

The topic for dialogue might be a **pro-active response**. This means deciding to intervene before an issue becomes serious, such as discussing ways to reduce the tensions before an upcoming election. The topic can also be a **response to an ongoing conflict**, such as a land dispute between farmers.

Dialogue facilitators can work together with people in the community to help source participants.

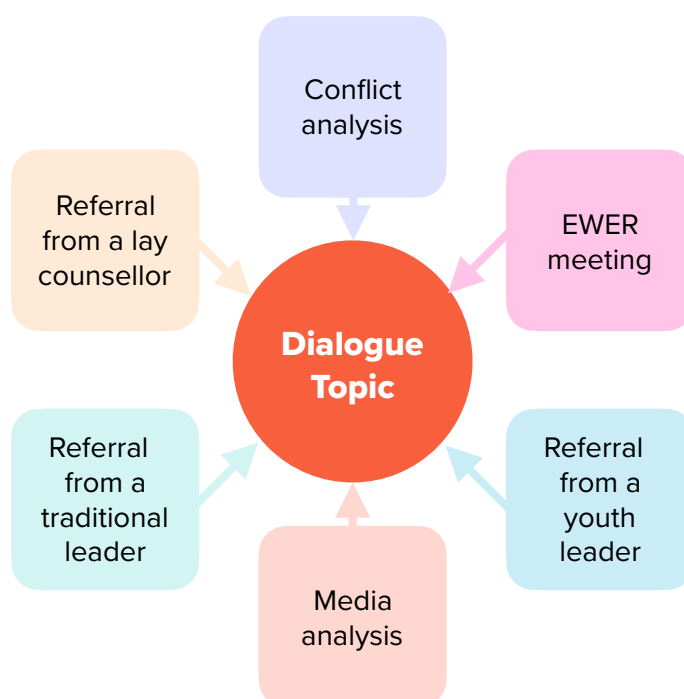
For example, if the most pressing issue is drug abuse among youths, the dialogue convener may discuss with youth leaders and the Early Warning-Early Response committee.

Together they might invite:

- Two youths engaged in drug use
- Two family members of those youths
- One traditional leader and one youth leader

If dialogue is part of a larger peace intervention, different structures should learn to communicate with each other and inform the dialogue topics. For example, a lay counsellor could refer a client with family issues to dialogue, or vice versa.

Here are some examples of where the idea for a dialogue topic might come from:



To encourage open conversation, the phrasing of the dialogue topic should be **open** and **non-offensive**.

"I have an instance where a newlywed bride recognised that her husband was involved in stealing. She understood that it's a delicate issue. She didn't go to her parents. She didn't go to her friends. She went directly to the community dialogue facilitator, reported this issue and sought her advice. And from there, they organised a dialogue between the husband, his wife, a friend, and some traditional, religious leaders. They used an indirect topic. They understood if they just directly accused him of stealing, he wouldn't agree. Instead, they discussed the contribution of youth in reducing crime. Because of the safe space that dialogue provides, everybody became open to discourse. He himself opened up that he was involved sometimes in these stealing and this is why and they talked about how to stop this stealing in the community."

- A staff member in the POCl project team

Remember, **the dialogue facilitator and the dialogue convener are not always the same person**. If your community structures are working well, the dialogue facilitator might work mainly from **referrals**.

Dialogue convener	<i>The person who decides that a dialogue is needed and invites the participants to meet with the facilitator</i>
Dialogue facilitator	<i>The person who ensures the process goes smoothly, by first preparing the participants and then conducting the dialogue in a fair manner</i>
Referral	<i>When someone in the community (e.g. a counsellor or a traditional leader) brings an issue to the dialogue facilitator</i>

"The traditional head has been able to associate diverse groups. As soon as we hear of rumours or other happenings, he will call the different groups to come to dialogue [with the dialogue facilitators]. The groups comprise both the Christian and Muslim associations. These groups will investigate "the said rumours" and proffer a solution if found to be true. E.g. we might find out that some of the youths could be fighting either Christian or Muslim and when we come, we will investigate what the cause is and resolve it amicably."

- A youth participant in POI in Kaduna



Community members celebrate the resolution of a land dispute in Benue state

Conducting a Dialogue

STAGE 1: PREPARATION

The preparation for a dialogue can sometimes be as important as the dialogue itself. Ideally, the dialogue facilitator meets one on one with each participant. During this meeting they can:

a) Introduce themselves to the participant and discuss their role as a neutral third party

"Hello. My name is _____. You might know me from _____. My responsibility as a dialogue facilitator is to make sure people can talk together peacefully and without judgment. I will try my best to be a neutral party that everyone can trust."

This conversation might take some time. In divided communities, people may not naturally trust a facilitator from the 'other side'. The facilitator might need to gently convince their participant that they will leave aside their personal identity and be a neutral and unbiased facilitator. They can also emphasise that the process of dialogue is so effective that it can work even when the facilitators are from one 'side' of the divide.

b) Assure the participant that they are important and their perspective and opinion matters

"We really value your time and contribution. That's why we're making an effort to prepare everyone for the dialogue. Feel free to raise any concerns at any time. I want to make sure you are comfortable and can talk freely."

c) Discuss what dialogue is and how it is different from argument or debate

"You might already know that dialogue is a peaceful form of communication. It is very different from a debate or argument. Instead of fighting back against the other person, we listen carefully and calmly. We try our best to understand their story and their emotions. When we talk, we also take our turn to speak from our heart, telling only our own story..."

d) Explain that dialogue helps us to understand others, but it is not a ‘panacea’ which solves all problems

“The goal of dialogue is to listen to each other with care and share perspectives. Perhaps after the dialogue, you might come to an agreement together, but we shouldn’t expect to fix all problems overnight. People have deep reasons for their behaviour and sometimes solutions take a long time.”

e) Ask the participant about their expectations of the dialogue and what they would like to achieve through the conversation

“What is the thing that is worrying you or concerning you most about this dialogue? What do you hope happens through dialogue?”

f) Give the participant some information about psychological well-being

This might include explaining how strong emotions or trauma ‘hijack’ the brain and stop us from thinking rationally. Facilitators might give some tips on being resilient during dialogue, and explain how the participant can receive help if they become upset during or after the dialogue.

“People go into very different modes when they are calm and when they feel threatened. When you are calm, you might think more rationally. You think carefully about the reasons behind something. But if you are panicked or distressed, you might freeze, or want to run away or fight. You might find it hard to listen or understand the other person’s perspective. That’s why it is so important during dialogue to try to keep our emotional strength and remain calm when listening.”

g) Brainstorm a suitable venue for the dialogue

“Where would you feel comfortable having this dialogue? Where do you think the other parties might feel comfortable? Could you suggest a place that is good for everyone?”

If the participants have not already agreed on a venue, the facilitator can ask them which place would be:

- Safe
- Neutral
- Convenient for everyone

This might be the shade under a tree in a shared village space, the home of a friendly leader, or maybe a place of worship they both attend.



Participants in POCl meet for dialogue under a Neem tree

h) Discuss which communication agreements the participant feels comfortable with

Communication agreements are the guidelines the dialogue group sets for how they will speak to one another. While these will be confirmed again at the start of the session, it's important to receive participants' input during the preparation stage, so that the structure of the dialogue does not come as a surprise.

"One important communication agreement used during dialogue is listening carefully without interrupting the other party. Do you feel comfortable with that agreement? Do you have any other suggestions?"

STAGE 2: INTRODUCING A DIALOGUE

Now that all the participants have been convened in one room and are sitting equally in a circle format, the facilitator(s) should greet and welcome everyone.

In some cultures, it is customary to start with a prayer. If you have members from several religions together in one room, you can agree upon a prayer that is acceptable by both parties. Alternatively, in a mixed Christian-Muslim group, the dialogue could open with a prayer led by Muslims and finish with a prayer led by Christians, or vice versa. You might also choose to begin with a few minutes of silence for reflection and meditation.

"Welcome everyone! I'm very happy you all decided to join today. All of you have probably had a different experience with [name of the issue]. Today we are going to speak openly about our own experience and our views. Sometimes you might hear something upsetting or difficult, but try your best to listen to each other with resilience. By listening deeply and with compassion, we can learn a lot about each other."

STAGE 3: COMMUNICATION AGREEMENTS

After you have introduced the dialogue, it is important to check up on **communication agreements**. Participants might have already contributed to these agreements during preparation, but it is key to read them out once more. The facilitator should ask if participants would like to make changes.

"After listening to all the communication agreements, do you have any other agreements you would like to add? Would you like to propose changes to any existing agreements?"

After any additions or clarifications are made, all participants are asked to endorse the agreements. They are then pinned on a wall, where everyone can refer to them during the dialogue.



Participants consulting the communication agreements at a dialogue session in Benue

Below are some proposed communication agreements which can be adopted at the beginning of a dialogue.

Attitude	Fairness	Confidentiality
1. We will not criticise other participants or try to convince them	4. We will 'pass' if we are not ready to speak, but we will be offered another opportunity to speak at the end of a round	7. After the dialogue we will not share the names or details of the event in a way that identifies people. The only exception is if you have received permission from that person to share the information outside the dialogue venue.
2. We will speak from the heart , about our own experiences	5. We will share the time evenly or roughly evenly	
3. We will listen with resilience when we hear something that is hard to hear	6. We will not interrupt the speaker unless we cannot hear them	

"Anytime there is a dispute between different clans, as a facilitator I am always there to stand or mediate. We all sit together on a round table and allow everybody to speak out their mind. Whenever we sit, we have seven rules governing us. Before we commence any meeting, we usually read out these seven rules and ask them if they see that there are any of the rules that should be taken out; or if they see that the rule will hinder the discussion or the peace process. So far, the seven rules that we have are always on the table. Nobody has questioned any of the rules and nothing has been taken out. This goes to show that the seven rules are of help. When we sit on the roundtables, we don't oppress anybody. We allow everybody to express their innermost concerns."

- A community dialogue facilitator in Benue state

Communication Agreements

RSD avoids calling communication agreements 'ground rules' because, once participants agree to them, everyone in the room shares the responsibility to follow and remind each other if someone 'slips up'.

Ground Rules

In contrast, the term 'rules' seems to put the responsibility solely on the facilitator to enforce and punish violations.

NOTE:

For a more exhaustive list of questions that facilitators can ask participants during dialogue, see [Appendix 2: Preparation Questions](#) at the end of this chapter.

STAGE 4: BREAKING THE ICE

After the communication agreements have been adopted, it is time to **break the ice**. The facilitator can ask an open-ended question and allow the participants to go around in a circle, giving each equal time. The introductions should be short. 1 minute speaking time is suggested.

"Let's go around by saying our name and _____. [The facilitator chooses one option from below]

1. Something which led you to accept the invitation to join this dialogue
2. Something you hope to experience or learn during the dialogue
3. Something unexpected about you that you would like the other group members to know"

STAGE 5: CONDUCTING A DIALOGUE

There are different techniques for conducting a dialogue. Reflective Structured Dialogues follow a 'question' format, where the participants go around one by one, answering a question for the same amount of time. When the time ends, **the facilitator allows the participant to finish their sentence, but not their whole story**.

Sometimes, the facilitator may choose to pass around a timer to the participants, allowing them to keep time for the person next to them. This way everyone feels part of the process. It reminds us of our collective responsibility in following and enforcing the communication agreements.

Participants should be given some time to think before they answer their question. If they are not ready to answer, they can 'pass'. They can then be given an opportunity to answer again once the 'round' has finished.

After around 3 rounds of pre-prepared questions, facilitators generally follow up with a round where participants can freely pose questions to each other.

FRAMING QUESTIONS

Below are some rules to follow to make sure that the questions asked during the dialogue enhance the conversation (*opening windows*), instead of causing damage (*slamming doors*).



Acceptable questions (“Window-opening” questions)



Open-ended questions:

Can you share your perspective on ____?

How did ____ affect you?

Can you tell me more about how you have changed since ____?



Clarifying questions:

Can you explain what you meant when you said...?



Reflective questions:

How do you think ____ has made you change over time?

How do you think ____ will evolve in the future?



Problematic questions (“Door-slamming” questions)



Accusatory or judgemental questions:

Why did you say that?

Why do you believe in that kind of thing?

Why is it so hard to change?



Yes or no questions:

Do you support this politician?

Do you think it was fair that he stole?



Leading or rhetorical questions:

Don't you think that's a bad idea?

You're trying to grab more land, aren't you?

We all know ____ is dangerous, right?

STAGE 6: FINISHING A DIALOGUE

As the dialogue comes to an end, the facilitator can ask one or two final questions for quick responses:

"Now that the dialogue is coming to an end, are there any steps that you would like to take together?"

"What moments during this dialogue helped you or others feel connected or understood?"

"What lessons do you think you will take away from this dialogue?"

"Is there anything you would like to add so this dialogue comes to a satisfying end?"

Depending on the culture and the participants, you can choose to conclude the dialogue with a prayer, or a minute of silence and meditation.

STAGE 7: DEBRIEFING

If you have the time and resources, it is useful to 'debrief' after the dialogue session. The facilitator may choose to meet again one-to-one with the dialogue participants and thank them for their time. The facilitator can also ask for feedback about how to improve their work.

The facilitator might also 'follow up' by asking the participants whether they want to meet again. Sometimes, the participants spontaneously negotiate a solution to their conflict at the end of a dialogue session. If necessary, the facilitator can help them agree on a time and a place to check in again.

The dialogue facilitator might write brief reports to send to other elements of the peacebuilding project to increase communication. With consent, dialogue participants might choose to go on camera or share a written account of their story in order to testify the benefits of peaceful communication to a wider audience.

STAGE 8: BRINGING DIALOGUE INTO YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE

Dialogue is not just an act, it is a process. As a result, many of the lessons learnt during dialogue can be brought into other spaces in life.

Communities may choose to use some of the principles of peaceful communication in a larger setting, like a town hall or a church gathering. This might include using **communication agreements**.

Traditional rulers may also choose to use these principles when solving cases:

"We used to take sides without fully hearing or knowing the truth. As a traditional ruler I used to take sides to favour some people, but after training I know that peace should dominate anywhere you enter.

I have become wise and helpful to my community. When I go to a place now I must listen to both sides before I can apportion blame to anyone. I don't just stand and conclude blaming one person until I hear from both sides and settle a case."

- A traditional ruler in Benue state

Likewise, peaceful communication can be used informally to mediate between families and friends.

"We implement some parts of dialogue even in our families, even between our friends. For example, how to frame questions and how to answer questions. In dialogue you have door-slaming questions, and you have the idea of window opening-questions. There are also questions that are negative and questions that are positive. You learn how to handle these questions. People implement this knowledge in their day-to-day, as well as during meetings, trainings or radio programs."

- A dialogue trainer

If you are working with partners, dialogue can be used to resolve issues within the organisation. This not only improves efficiency, it also helps transform the staff into 'peacebuilders'.

"Within the office, conflict resolution skills and strategies have greatly improved due to the Reflective Structured Dialogue that we use in the communities. We also use it in solving problems in the organisation. It has gone a long way to help reduce levels of conflict.

Before now, we would issue email 'warnings', to staff, and those 'warnings' would go on their file. But now we take the opportunity to dialogue with staff to find out why they are not meeting their targets, to understand if there's a challenge, and then we work with them to resolve those challenges. It has been a better strategy than just using the hammer every time someone does not meet up to a timeline.

Sometimes, through dialogue, you find out that the person has really genuine reasons why they are not able to meet a timeline: maybe they came back late from the field or had no power supply. So when we dialogue, we realise, okay, we can give you some more time. In the end, it is a better way than impersonal emails back and forth. You don't really get to know the person's challenges that way."

- A leader in a community-based organisation



A refresher training in reflective structured dialogue in Benue state

Training Dialogue Facilitators

It is a great idea to train several dedicated **Community Dialogue Facilitators** who live within the communities and can respond quickly to Early Warning signs. The power of dialogue can be hard to explain, and people usually understand it best after they have experienced it themselves. As a result, it is recommended to start with a professional dialogue facilitator to lead the first training and dialogues in your community.

Community Dialogue Facilitator

Someone who lives within the community and has received training in deep listening and providing a space for people to exchange their perspectives.

Below are some important tips and key principles for Community Dialogue Facilitators to keep in mind as they take on this role.

It's crucial to provide regular follow-up training to refresh dialogue facilitators' knowledge, as these skills take time to master.

REMINDERS FOR FACILITATORS

1. TRY TO DEEPLY UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES AT HAND

There are many ways to address an issue, and dialogue is not always the best option. Facilitators need a deep understanding of the issue at hand to determine if dialogue is appropriate.

Training in **conflict analysis** can help facilitators identify the types of conflicts in a community and which ones can be resolved through dialogue.

During preparation, facilitators should meet individually with each participant and listen to their concerns. This understanding will help the facilitator keep the topics on track, make sure the dialogue is 'going deep', and support participants in seeing each other's perspectives.

2. 'EMPTY YOUR BASKET'

Dialogue facilitators need to be truly transformed into peacebuilders before they can help others. Trainers often use the metaphor of 'emptying your basket'. This means setting aside your personal identity, stereotypes, and biases so you can fully take on the role of a neutral facilitator. It also means staying emotionally grounded and impartial even when hearing difficult stories.



'Emptying your basket' means being neutral while facilitating dialogues and staying grounded when the conversation may bring out community memories or traumas.

The Community Dialogue Facilitator should be seen by community members as a respected and neutral party. If the facilitator is seen as having an allegiance to one ethnic group, one religion or one type of people, trust will not be built and the dialogue may fail.

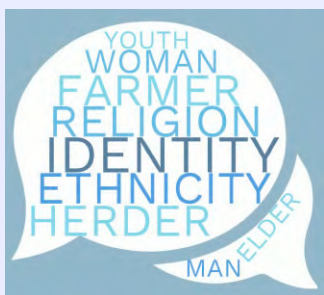
"Dialogue is effective because of neutrality. I've been in dialogues where the participants said 'it's like you are using magic'. Before they came, they had their biases. They prepared their defences. They'd been at the police station, they'd been to court. So when they come in for dialogue, they had their walls up, but then they come and find themselves speaking the truth instead. Because it's one question for everyone, and the question doesn't probe into specifics, it doesn't interrogate. The questions are very straightforward, open ended questions where they allow the participants to speak their mind. The other person who perhaps felt they were the only victim, now starts seeing this other fellow from the story as also a victim. And then empathy is generated in the room and at the end of it, the people that were hostile before begin to ask questions like, 'okay, so now that we are all victims, what do we do?'"

- A dialogue facilitator and trainer in Benue state

3. AVOID LABELS, STEREOTYPES, AND BLACK-AND-WHITE THINKING

Dialogue facilitators should not think of their dialogue participants as 'wrongdoers' versus 'victims'. When sourcing participants for a dialogue, the facilitators should instead ask themselves "who are all the parties involved in this conflict?"

During the dialogue, the facilitator should **show respect to all sides and avoid placing blame on one person**. It is crucial to **avoid stereotyping others** – this means not making assumptions about how they think, act or behave, and not attaching labels like 'misguided', 'correct' or 'difficult'.



EXERCISE: Your Identities

Imagine an 'outsider' is meeting you for the first time. What 'labels' do they think they would use for you? How could you emphasise your role as a facilitator rather than your 'labels'?

EXERCISE: Stereotypes

Look at the table below. Do you think any of the words in the table below apply to you as a dialogue facilitator? Could they be applied to any group of people you know?

<i>I am... We are...</i>	<i>You are... They are...</i>
Right	Wrong
Good	Bad
Wise	Foolish/Stupid
Virtuous	Evil
Caring	Cold
Generous	Selfish
Reasonable	Irrational
Supported by facts	Ignorant
Open and honest	Devious and cunning
Deserving of success	Deserving of failure

FOLLOW-UP: Stereotypes

Fighting stereotypes and ‘emptying your basket’ as a facilitator often starts with your own sense of identity. **If you believe you are right, wise, and deserving of success, or that another person is wrong, stupid, or deserving of failure, then you are probably not in the right state of mind to facilitate dialogues.**

Learning how to stop stereotyping can be a lifelong process, because stereotypes are so common in the world around us. As you become skilled at avoiding stereotypes of yourself and those around you, you can help dialogue participants also shift towards not stereotyping and labelling others.

4. LISTEN TO GET TO THE 'HEART OF THE MATTER'

The core of dialogue is **deep listening**. This is not a skill that can be learned quickly and it needs to be continually practiced. Ideally, a dialogue facilitator should be a model of deep, respectful listening from whom participants can draw inspiration. Deep listening allows the facilitator to guide the participants to ask thoughtful questions that help **uncover the heart of the matter**, rather than letting the conversation turn into blame or arguments about facts or small details.

5. BE PATIENT AND EMBRACE THE PROCESS

The role of the dialogue facilitator is not to 'solve' an issue, but to provide a space where participants can hear each other. If the facilitator tries to intervene as a problem solver, they will lose their key status as a neutral party.

When participants engage in dialogue, they will often come to a solution by themselves, sometimes after the session. We should not skip the process of listening for the sake of finding a quick solution.

A dialogue facilitator is **not** a judge.

Dialogue Facilitator	Judge
✓ Embraces the process and listens carefully	✗ Has limited time to listen to a case
✓ Accepts unfinished outcomes and ambiguity	✗ Searches for quick solutions and final decisions
✓ Focuses on rebuilding relationships	✗ Tries to decide who is wrong and right
✓ Follows up	✗ Makes a ruling and is done with the case

Ultimately, dialogue cannot fix all problems overnight. **Building trust and healing emotional wounds might take years**. Instead of pushing for quick solutions, facilitators should be okay with uncertainty and unfinished outcomes. Facilitators should be patient and allow the process to unfold naturally.

6. REMAIN HUMBLE

The dialogue facilitator needs to remember that their role is to support others in communicating, not to be the centre of attention. They should not dominate the conversation.

Even though facilitators might earn a lot of respect and admiration after working in their community, it's important for them to stay humble and avoid challenging traditional or community leaders.

CONCLUSIONS

Dialogue has been an extremely effective method for bringing people together and building back relationships that are failing. Often, it has been a great alternative to harsh punishments as it gives people a chance to reform their behaviour and understand the consequences of their actions. Dialogue also helps to resolve conflicts without requiring a financial incentive.

Dialogue facilitators model humble behaviour such as impartiality, deep listening and remaining curious about the world around them. They help promote values of peace in their communities.

More useful tips for dialogue facilitators can be found in the appendixes on the following pages.



Community dialogue facilitators in Kaduna state facilitate a conversation

Appendix 1: Dialogue Check-List

To help communities have constructive conversations, we use these tools:

- ☐ Invite participants with diverse perspective on the issue
- ☐ Prepare the participants before the dialogue or mediation
- ☐ Establish Communication Agreements and make sure everyone feels empowered to help the group stick to these agreements
- ☐ Create a safe environment for people to speak
- ☐ Ask, don't tell: help others come up with the answer themselves
- ☐ Ask questions to learn or clarify, not to challenge
- ☐ Use go-rounds (where each person can speak uninterrupted, so all are heard)
- ☐ Set an equal length of time for all speakers
- ☐ Have speakers pause before and after speaking
- ☐ Encourage people when things go right
- ☐ Be aware of the effects of trauma
- ☐ Remind people of (faith) teachings about coexistence
- ☐ Support people's understanding by clarifying, reflecting and summarising what was said
- ☐ Close the conversation respectfully
- ☐ Follow up afterwards to check how the relationship between participants is evolving

Appendix 2: Preparation Questions

Below is a more extensive list of questions a facilitator might ask when preparing participants.

1. What attracts you to participating in this dialogue?
2. What could happen in, or as a result of this dialogue, that would leave you feeling pleased that you participated?
3. What could happen during, or as a result of this dialogue, that would leave you regretting your participation?
4. If you have discussed similar issues previously, what helped to promote a constructive conversation? What didn't?
5. What personal strengths or qualities do you bring that could help the dialogic be worthwhile?
6. What strengths or qualities will help you stay present if you hear things you disagree with?
7. What questions are most important to you to discuss?
8. What questions would you want to ask to learn and understand more about those whose views differ from yours?
9. What questions do you hope others will ask you to learn and understand more about you?
10. Is there anything that you'd want me to know to help you get the most out of this dialogue?
11. Do you have any advice for the facilitators about what they should be most careful about in designing and facilitating the dialogue?
12. If you were to hear something challenging, what could you do to re-ground yourself? What would you hope for from the facilitator?

Appendix 3: Lessons Learned by Facilitators

A lot has been learned through the process of dialogue in POCI's communities. The table below shows some of these lessons.

Lesson learned	Value gained	What is done to achieve this?
People are more invested in an activity when they are clear about its purpose.	Clarity of purpose	• Early invitations • Individual preparations • Communication agreements
People are more likely to participate constructively when they are not attacked, demonised or judged.	Safety	• Communication agreements • Go-rounds • Encourage speaking from personal experience
Sharing personal stories promotes concern, caring, complexity and compassion. Stereotyping and demonising are reduced.	Re-humanisation	• Share stories/narratives • Ask genuine questions
When people are curious about themselves and others, they interact more constructively than when they speak from certainty.	Curiosity	• Check assumptions • Encourage open-mindedness • Ask genuine questions
People relate better, learn more and take in new information when they listen carefully and attentively to each other.	Learning and Understanding	• Preparation • Go-rounds • Encourage listening to understand the other
When people speak from the heart, they feel more connected	Speaking from the heart	• Speak from personal experience • Speak about certainties and uncertainties • Speak in ways that invite others to open up, not shut down
Equal respect for everyone enhances trust and collaboration.	Fairness	• Communication Agreements • Go-rounds
When people consider different perspectives, new ideas emerge and build on one another.	Openness	• "Opening questions" • Move from certainty to openness
Including everyone who is affected enriches the conversation.	Inclusion	• Avoid stereotypes • Encourage mutual respect • Not judging • Invitations

"In the past, whenever there were disputes between brothers, they would end up in the court or at the police station. Or sometimes they would report to the chief. When reporting to the chief, you need to bring goats, chickens or other gifts. When I came aboard as a dialogue facilitator, I started to help solve people's issues without asking them for anything in return. Now the community members have confidence in us and they keep coming to us and reporting issues to us."

– A community dialogue facilitator in Benue state



During a training in Reflective Structured Dialogue, facilitators practice preparing participants for dialogue

5

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT



Participants in expressive therapy, as part of a psychosocial support programme



Peace by Us

Psychosocial support is a key part of any peace initiative. Often, people in conflict zones are traumatised by the difficult circumstances they face in their day-to-day life. Their brains and bodies are ‘stuck’ in emotions like fear, anxiety or anger. This makes it very hard for communities to come together to build peace. Conflict often leads to people viewing their enemies in black-and-white terms as ‘those people’ or ‘the ones who hurt us’. Dangerous thought patterns and behaviours continue to reinforce each other, and cycles of violence and revenge grow stronger.

As a result, it is crucial to address the psychological pain of communities as well as individuals. **Often, it is only when people begin to heal from their own wounds that they become open to peace.**

Psychosocial Support as an “Early Response”

*Sometimes, people are not ready to begin dialogue or other aspects of a peace initiative because they are coping with very difficult emotions and experiences. People who live through violence and fear are often affected by **psychological trauma**, which is a normal response to such stressful events. In these situations, providing mental health first aid can be an important first step toward peace in a community. Psychosocial support can stabilise individuals and groups of people who have gone through a difficult time. It can reduce their stress and address their trauma, so that they feel less of an impulse to seek revenge or self-harm and can instead participate in the process of rebuilding their peaceful lives.*

People with training in psychosocial support, such as lay counsellors, should be included as active members of the Early Warning-Early Response committee.

There are various ways to approach psychosocial support in a peacebuilding programme:

Through **psycho-education**, communities can gain a basic understanding of mental health, trauma and psychological resilience. They gain the knowledge to dispel harmful stereotypes and stigmas, such as the belief that being temporarily overwhelmed by an emotion means that someone is ‘crazy’, ‘broken’ or ‘possessed’. Community members learn where to go for help and how to understand early warning signs of distress in their own bodies and minds.

Training lay counsellors makes sure that there are people living within the communities who can respond immediately during a crisis. These counsellors can offer basic psychological first aid to people who have faced a dangerous or life-threatening situation. They can also lend a listening ear on a day-to-day basis.

Through **professional psychological interventions** such as **group trauma healing therapies**, people can learn to break free from dangerous patterns. Instead of fearing the ‘Other’ side or resorting to aggression, they approach differences with curiosity. Instead of feeling powerless, they discover and harness their own resilience.



Psychosocial interventions often have a ripple effect. When one person is healed or educated, it influences others around them. Soon, the whole community becomes both more self-aware, united and willing to embrace peace. However, it's important to note that **psychosocial support always requires the input of experts:**

- Psycho-education should only be provided by those with professional training in psychology.
- Lay counsellors should be trained by qualified counsellors.
- Therapies and trauma-healing approaches should only be provided by professional therapists.

This chapter will cover some basic concepts of mental health, but it remains crucial to **always consult experts to implement any psychosocial support programme.**

Key Concepts in Psycho-education

MENTAL HEALTH



A group counselling session in Kaduna

Mental health	<i>Mental health is about understanding that not just our bodies can feel pain: we may also face emotional and mental distress for many natural and understandable reasons. It is possible to develop chronic conditions or mental illness. Some common examples include <u>post-traumatic stress disorder</u>, <u>depression</u>, <u>anxiety</u> and <u>schizophrenia</u>.</i>
Depression	<i>Feeling sad, losing interest, or feeling no pleasure for a long period of time.</i>
Anxiety disorder	<i>Feeling worried or nervous over a long timeframe, sometimes without a 'logical' reason.</i>
Post-traumatic stress disorder	<i>A condition where people find it hard to get over difficult events in the past. They might be frequently anxious, irritable or depressed, or they might experience nightmares or flashbacks.</i>
Schizophrenia	<i>A condition where someone finds it hard to tell what is real or not, perhaps even seeing or hearing things that other people do not.</i>

EXERCISE: When was the last time you or someone you knew had a mental health difficulty? What help did they receive?

Sometimes, communities lack understanding about ‘mental health’. When someone is overwhelmed by emotions or behaving in a ‘strange’ way, the people around them may jump to conclusions. They may blame the victim of a mental health condition, labelling them as ‘crazy’, ‘possessed’ or ‘dangerous’. On the other side, people might not take a mental health issue seriously – they may not refer the individual to the proper support. This type of thinking is plagued by **stereotypes** and **stigmas**.

Stereotype	<i>A belief about a person or a group of people that is too simple or even false. For example, believing that everyone in another ethnic group is ‘cunning’ or ‘evil’. In the context of mental health, some people might have the stereotype that someone with anxiety is too unstable for the workplace, when in fact many people with anxiety are hard workers.</i>
Stigma	<i>A feeling of shame that is difficult to shake off. In the context of mental health, people might think that men should be strong and shouldn’t go see a therapist if they are experiencing depression.</i>

EXERCISE: Below are some examples of thinking with stereotypes and stigmas, alongside thinking with mental health awareness. As a group or individual exercise, you can fill in the table with your own scenarios and explanations.

Situation	Thinking with stereotypes and stigmas	Thinking with mental health awareness
Mary has been crying a lot recently and is withdrawn. She finds it hard to get out of bed and doesn’t seem to enjoy anything.	Probably Mary isn’t trying hard enough to improve her life. She is lazy.	Mary might be suffering from depression. Maybe it was triggered by a difficult event in her life, such as her recent miscarriage. She should see a therapist.

(Continued on next page)

John is making up things that aren't true and saying he sees strange shadows that other people don't notice.	He is losing his mind or being possessed.	John is having some problems testing reality. It could be temporary and pass with time, but it is best to see a psychiatrist to figure out what the cause of the issue is.
Obi constantly loses his temper.	This is just his personal issue. He must have been born like that and it's difficult to help him change.	In the society we live in there is constant danger because of banditry. It's understandable for someone to feel irritable or on edge. Perhaps he can join the local group therapy sessions.
Amina can't sleep at night and often gets distressed during the day when she suddenly remembers her past.		
<i>Create your own situation</i>		
<i>Create your own situation</i>		

Although having an understanding of mental health allows us to avoid stereotypes or stigmas, it is important to understand that community members are not qualified to make diagnoses. **If there is any concern about someone's mental health, a diagnosis should be made by a therapist.**

It is also important to note that even if you use the language of **mental health** or **mental illness**, it does not mean that everything is simply a personal issue. In a society where there is constant danger, mental health issues are not only very common, they are **a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.**

COMMON REACTIONS TO DANGER

In communities that are exposed to insecurity, it is crucial to have an understanding of common reactions to danger. A threat can be 'real', such as encountering a bandit with a gun or a speeding car, or 'imagined' like mistaking a rock for a wild animal or being reminded of someone who previously caused harm. Regardless of whether the threat is 'imagined' or not, the physical and mental effects are real.

Flight	<i>Running away from the danger</i>
Fight	<i>Fighting against the danger</i>
Freeze	<i>Freezing - staying still and unnoticed - in response to danger</i>



Sometimes, the mind or nervous system might get stuck in a reaction that isn't appropriate for the situation at hand. People might feel 'frozen' long after the danger has passed, or they might jump to 'fight' against someone who doesn't actually plan to hurt them. Similarly, people may sometimes feel distant from their own body and sensations long after they are in a safe place.

Dissociation	<i>When a person feels very overwhelmed, they may 'dissociate' so that they do not feel the pain as strongly. They might feel like they are fully or partially 'leaving' their body or the present moment. Sometimes people describe the feeling as experiencing life 'through glass'.</i>
---------------------	--

WHAT IS TRAUMA?



*"Trauma is the response to any event that shatters your safe world so that it's no longer a place of refuge. Trauma is more than a state of crisis. It is a **normal reaction to abnormal events** that overwhelm a person's ability to adapt to life – where you feel powerless."*

- Dr. H. Norman Wright

EXERCISE: When you think of the word 'trauma' what springs to mind? Can you think of a story you heard about someone who was 'traumatised'?

Sometimes people experience stressful events. These can happen one time – like seeing a shooting – or every day – like feeling afraid when crossing a dangerous road to school. Often, bodies and minds can get stuck. People may often feel stressed, sad or numb long after a danger has passed. In more severe cases, people might experience nightmares or flashbacks that 'throw them back' into the distressing moment.

Trauma education equips communities with the ability to explain what is happening to them after a difficult event. Sometimes, even the knowledge that there is a reason behind intense emotions or experiences can go a long way in reducing pain.

"Education has really reduced the stigma people have about mental health. People now know that some things are caused by trauma and how people deal with trauma differs and the coping mechanisms of everyone is different, they also know how they can help people in their communities deal with such mental distress. They say 'unknown to us, we've been going through a lot and we've been acting this way because of certain problems'. Sometimes, they acknowledge the psychological effect of the problems for the first time."

- A psychological support team member in POCI

REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

EXERCISE: Mary recently experienced an extremely stressful event – bandits came and raided her home. Despite losing a lot of money and property, she is now recovered and happy. Her friend, Clare, didn't lose anything from the bandits – in fact, they skipped her house – but she is now suffering from anxiety and memory loss. Why do you think their reactions are so different?

There are many different reactions to a traumatic experience. Below are some common symptoms. Trauma sufferers might experience different symptoms at different stages and at different intensities. For example, they might experience numbness immediately after the event, and sleeplessness and anxiety a few months later. Later, they may begin to have flashbacks, depression and dissociation.

Flashbacks	Forgetfulness or memory loss	Panic
Nightmares	lost of interest in everyday life	Numbness and emotional blunting
Intense emotions such as fear, sadness, anger or guilt	Heart palpitations	Poor sleep
Dissociation	Poor concentration	Feeling agitated
Alcohol or substance abuse	Withdrawing from social contact	Having suicidal thoughts

Everyone processes events in their own way. For example, during a robbery, everyone involved will likely feel intense fear. After the event, some people can ‘discharge’ (calm down) and realise they are safe. Afterwards, they can talk about what happened with friends and family without reliving the fear. Others might struggle to cope with the event, feeling the same fear even months or years later when they discuss the robbery. Trauma is less about the event itself and more about how people’s minds and bodies respond. **It is important to note that having a traumatic response to an event is not a sign of weakness and can happen to anyone.**

Trigger

A trigger is something that reminds someone of a traumatic event, bringing back some of the same intense emotions. It could be a sound, a smell, a word or a person. If you are working with someone with trauma, it is often a good idea to be delicate in your word choice and ask permission before discussing certain subjects.

EXERCISE: Not all highly stressful situations lead to a traumatic response in all people. However, some situations are very likely to result in some level of trauma. Here are some examples below. Complete the list with 5 more potential causes of trauma.

- Long-term bullying
- The death of a loved one
- Getting in a car accident
- Experiencing abuse from a parent
- Going through a severe illness
-
-
-
-
-

Ademu's Story

The following text is based on a true story which was turned into a community drama during the POCl programme. It shows an example of different elements of a peace programme working together to try to help someone recover from a traumatic experience.

An insurgency struck Ademu's community and left it in ruins. Ademu lost everything he had. His wife's brother was killed, and his wife and her father were taken hostage. While Ademu waited for their return, he heard that his father-in-law had died in the insurgents' camp. The weight of all this loss was unbearable. Ademu started walking aimlessly up and down the road, talking to himself. His friends would cry out his name, but Ademu never paid attention. Soon, rumours started to spread around the community that Ademu was 'running mad' and becoming dangerous.

One day a close friend passed Ademu on the street and noticed he wasn't responding to him. He ran to the community leader's palace and raised the alarm. The community leader called upon Ademu's father to learn more about what had happened. The father reluctantly admitted that his family life was tense recently: *"Ademu has been getting more and more difficult. One day I even hit him because I can't handle how rude he's becoming!"*

After hearing the case, the Community Leader summoned the Early Warning Early Response committee and explained all that he knew. The members brainstormed ways they could respond and finally decided they should bring Ademu and his father together for dialogue. However, throughout the dialogue, meeting Ademu was distant and confused, barely responding. The father talked and talked, but it was as if Ademu couldn't hear him. It was clear dialogue wasn't going to work.

Realising they needed a different approach, the Community Leader followed up with the dialogue officer and the EWER members. They decided that a mental health intervention was necessary. They called on the community lay counsellor. After learning about what had happened and how severe Ademu's symptoms were, the lay counsellor understood that the case was beyond her capacity. She referred Ademu to a professional psychologist. After working together over weeks and months, and even involving Ademu's father in group therapy, things began to change. Ademu realised that he was safe and began to leave the hurt of the past behind.

(Continued on next page)

Ademu bounced back to his regular self. His friends and father were amazed by his transformation. Meanwhile, a media officer on the peace programme worked to spread awareness about mental health in the community. He set up a local radio show with some psychologists and the community leader where they talked about trauma and what kind of reactions it can lead to. Many people listened and came to understand that trauma doesn't mean that someone is 'crazy' or 'mad' or 'possessed'. People started to treat people with mental health issues, like Ademu, more kindly.

At the end of her sessions with Ademu, the psychologist met with the community leader. She showed her gratitude to him for entrusting Ademu into her care. She acknowledged how far the community had come: instead of casting someone like Ademu aside, they had embraced him, offering support and understanding. As a result, the entire community emerged stronger and more united.

Trauma healing

Trauma healing helps people feel safe, in control, and emotionally stable again after going through difficult events. It supports them in processing their feelings, reducing stress from the trauma, and rebuilding trust in themselves and others.



POCI lay counsellors participate in a three-day workshop to further improve their skill in supporting people affected by trauma

TYPES OF TRAUMA



A training discussing the topic of historical trauma

There are various types of trauma.

Acute trauma	<i>The response to a single event in a limited time frame, for example, a man who witnesses his house destroyed during a war.</i>
Chronic trauma	<i>A traumatic event that continues over a long period of time. For example, after someone loses their home they might live for a long time in the terrible conditions of a refugee camp.</i>
Complex trauma	<i>Experiencing many traumatic events from an early age, often without the proper support of a family member. For example, a child who goes hungry, witnesses banditry on several occasions and does not receive adequate care from his parents.</i>
Historical trauma	<i>Sometimes groups of people experience violence, discrimination or other poor conditions over generations. The effect builds up and the stress can be passed onto the next generation. Sometimes, a whole society can experience trauma to one degree or another.</i>
Vicarious trauma	<i>Even if you do not experience a traumatic event yourself, you can be affected by the stories of others, especially if you care deeply about them. A mother might experience trauma after hearing her child was abused, or a lay counsellor may be traumatised by constantly hearing stories about farmer-herder violence in her community.</i>

EXERCISE: Below are some stories. Match each story to the correct definition.

Acute trauma **Chronic** trauma **Complex** trauma

Historical trauma **Vicarious** trauma

A

- A) “I am Zacchariah. I am a reporter for the Early Warning-Early Response Committee and recently the youths have been telling me about their drug use. Some of them said they had overdosed and even lost friends. I can’t stop thinking about how much danger they are in.”
- B) “I am Kwame. Last year the bandits came and destroyed our village. We lost everything, including all our crops. We had to move to another place, but the people there don’t speak our language. We feel like outsiders. My kids get bullied at school and I can’t find a job.”
- C) “I am Ngozi. Last year, I was in a car accident. The crash was loud and terrifying. I broke my leg and felt intense pain. Ever since, I get scared whenever I hear loud noises or see fast cars.”
- D) “I am Amina. I’m only twenty years old, but I know my people suffered during the Nigerian Civil War. Many lost their homes and families. This trauma has been passed down, and even now, my community struggles with the memories of violence.”
- E) “I am Olumide. I was left alone a lot when I was a child, and I didn’t learn to speak until much older than other kids. I was bullied at school for my speech issues. When I reported the bullying to my teachers, they either laughed at me or ignored me.”

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

Psychological resilience

Having coping mechanisms to handle tough times. Recovering from psychological wounds and preparing for the future.

It is easy to feel powerless in the face of an overwhelming situation. The overall goal of any psychosocial or mental health intervention should be to improve the community's level of psychological resilience. Instead of just addressing a current crisis, it is key to plan ahead to the future.

In dangerous environments, it is not a question of if there will be another crisis, but when. As a result, it is important to equip communities with **cop**ing mechanisms and **pl**atforms so that they can recover quickly from future crises.



A training for lay counsellors, provided by POCl

Below are some coping mechanisms that you can teach your communities, with the help of professional practitioner:

- **Understanding Mental Health:** Sharing knowledge about trauma and mental health so that community members can better explain and manage their emotions.
- **Regulating Emotions:** Using breathing exercises or 'grounding' techniques to manage and calm emotions.
- **Building social support:** Setting up support groups for people with issues, so that they can rebuild their sense of community. Alongside this, you can encourage people to ask for help from friends, family and friends, understanding that mental health issues cannot be solved alone.
- **Mindfulness:** Dedicating yourself fully to the present moment: noticing what is happening around you and in your body, and tracking how it makes you feel. You can use this technique to track early warning signs of stress. During POCl,

(Continued on next page)

mindfulness was also combined with creative tasks, such as basket-weaving and mural painting, which help people stay present in the moment.

- **Reframing thoughts:** Tracking your thoughts and analysing whether they are reasonable. Learning to counter the negative thoughts in your head with realistic or positive alternatives e.g. 'I am damaged now and will never be the same again after the attack' can become 'The attack was damaging and has changed me as a person, but I can gradually recover'.
- **Returning to daily routines:** finding structure in the day after a traumatic event and returning to simple everyday tasks, like cooking or going for walks at a certain hour.
- **Exercise:** engaging in physical activity can reduce tension, release endorphins and improve mood.

Below are some **platforms and resources** which might help build psychological resilience in a community:

- Lay counsellors
- Support groups
- Support hotlines
- Education programmes
- Community connections to therapists or psychosocial support organisations

Breathing Exercise

The following breath exercise can be useful for some people. However, if the person is feeling too overwhelmed from trauma, you can switch to another approach.

1. **Inhale** deeply for **4 seconds**
2. **Hold** your breath for **7 seconds**
3. **Exhale** slowly for **8 seconds**
4. **Repeat** several times

Grounding Exercise: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

Notice and slowly name out loud:

- **5 things** you can **see**
- **4 things** you can **touch**
- **3 things** you can **hear**
- **2 things** you can **smell**
- **1 thing** you can **taste**

Lay Counselling Training



A lay counselling session in Benue

This section focuses on some key points that should be covered in lay counselling training. It provides a general overview of the role and suggests some sample exercises to be used during training. However, it is key to remember that **lay counsellors should always be trained by a professional.**

THE LAY COUNSELLOR'S ROLE

EXERCISE: What do you imagine a lay counsellor does on a day to day basis? How is a lay counsellor different from a therapist?

Lay counselling is a **form of counselling or support done by those who do not have formal training as a professional counsellor or therapist.** Some of their daily tasks might include:

- Listening to community members who are going through a difficult time
- Providing support and reassurance
- Sharing some basic facts about mental health and trauma
- Guiding people on where they can access professional help
- Providing basic **'psychological first aid'**

When conducting their role, there are **five main principles** a counsellor should follow:

1) Non-Professional Status	<i>The counsellor needs to be aware of their non-professional status. They do not have a psychology degree or a counselling license. As a result, they should pass on complex or difficult cases to professional psychologists or therapists.</i>
2) Confidentiality	<i>The counsellor needs to keep all information that the individual tells them secret. They should not even tell their family or friends. The only case where confidentiality can be broken is if the counsellor believes the person might hurt themselves or someone else.</i>
3) Empathy and Active Listening	<i>The counsellor listens actively to the individual and shows empathy. They try their best to understand the individual's emotions, thoughts and worries without judging them.</i>
4) Non-Directive Approach	<i>The counsellor should never tell the individual what to do. Instead, they can ask questions to guide them to find their own solution.</i>
5) Respect	<i>The counsellor respects the individual's choices and thoughts. They do not pressure them to behave a certain way.</i>

All these principles are part of the **‘Do No Harm’ approach**. Counsellors must always remember that the individuals they support are in vulnerable situations. They should not do anything that could make that person’s situation worse. If a counsellor pushes their own opinions on the individual, it could ‘boomerang’ back on them and lead to unforeseen events.



A lay counsellor provides support to a woman in Zamfara

EXERCISE: Look at the scenarios below. Is the counsellor breaking any Do No Harm principles? If so, which?

- A) After hearing Fatima's story, the lay counsellor concludes that she could benefit from strengthening her faith. She suggests Fatima join a women's group at the mosque.
- B) John shares with the lay counsellor that he has been feeling extremely stressed at work. The lay counsellor asks him to repeat several times because he can't hear him.
- C) After hearing an upsetting story about abuse from an individual, the lay counsellor feels upset. She confides in her husband about everything she was told.
- D) On hearing that Kwaghfan is finding it difficult to get up out of bed in the morning, has lost interest in eating and cries frequently, the lay counsellor tells him that he has depression.
- E) Angela tells the lay counsellor that she was bullied for her 'crooked' teeth as a child and as a result, she still doesn't smile today. The lay counsellor tells her she shouldn't be so worried about unimportant things.

EXERCISE: What might be some of the negative consequences of breaking Do No Harm principles?

CASE STUDY: Amina trusted her counsellor and shared everything about her difficult relationship with her husband, Musa, who had been cheating on her. Feeling overwhelmed by the story, the counsellor decided to confide in her best friend. She wasn't aware that her best friend was actually Musa's sister (Amina's sister-in-law). Even though the counsellor didn't mention Amina's name, the community was small and so Musa's sister was able to guess who the story was about. She confronted Amina in the market, accusing her of spreading lies. Soon after, the two families became enemies. The situation escalated to the point where some family members got in a physical fight.

Question: *What could have been done to prevent this situation escalating?*

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID



One of the key functions of a lay counsellor is providing **psychological first aid**. This means responding to a crisis situation before professionals are able to reach the scene. For example, if a group of bandits attack a community and kidnap a child, a lay counsellor can provide support to the mother while awaiting the arrival of the police.

During or immediately after a crisis situation, a lay counsellor might:

- **Keep the victim safe** while awaiting the arrival of professionals. This might include small acts of service like bringing the victim water, or taking them to shelter.
- **Provide a non-judgemental listening ear.** Often, being able to discuss the event after it has just happened can help reduce the 'stun' effect.
- **Comfort the victim** and explain that what happened is not their fault.
- **Help the victim realise that they are safe.** This could be through describing and focusing on the safe surroundings.
- **Refer the victim to someone who can provide better support**, such as a therapist or a psychiatrist.
- **Connect the victim** to trusted family or friends who can offer additional support.

EXERCISE: What kind of crisis situations might require **psychological first aid**?



A lay counsellor (left) provides support to a community member

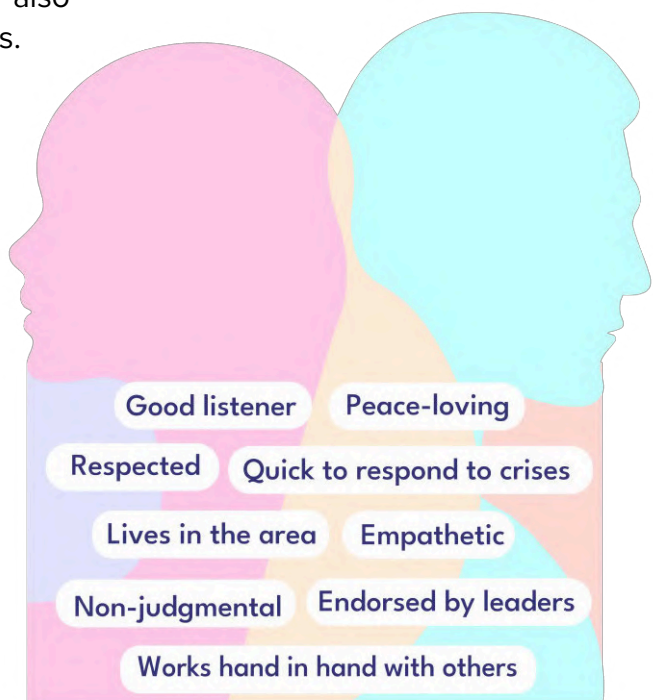
CHOOSING A LAY COUNSELLOR

In the context of the POCl project, lay counsellors were selected from within the communities they serve. This approach ensures that the individuals chosen are familiar with the local dynamics and are more likely to be trusted by community members.

A suitable lay counsellor should be a **well-respected** and **peace-promoting** individual who is capable of **responding promptly and compassionately to emergencies**. Especially in rural or hard-to-reach areas where access to professional services may be delayed, lay counsellors can serve as the first point of contact, offering immediate emotional support and helping to bridge the gap until specialised help is available.

When choosing a lay counsellor, it is also important to consider personality traits. They should have a **good reputation** as an **empathetic** and **kind** person. They should be known for being a **good listener** who **does not judge others**.

In an integrated peace programme, the lay counsellor should be **well-connected in the community**. They might be a member of the Early Warning-Early Response committee or serve as a dialogue facilitator. Community leaders are also great candidates for lay counsellors because they are often trusted and experienced in listening to community members' concerns.



"Many of our counsellors are leaders, they include youth leaders, women leaders, religious leaders. Traditionally, these people are already doing a lot of counselling without even having the skills or the knowledge about mental health. They have been providing this service, but they didn't even know that it was called counselling. So the skills we provide for them is an additional advantage to enhance their capacity."

– A lay counsellor trainer

STAGES IN COUNSELLING

Not all interactions between a counsellor and an individual who needs support follow a strict structure. Sometimes, there may be only one meeting, especially in the case of psychological first aid. Nonetheless, in the case where a counsellor meets with an individual several times, they may follow the following stages.

- 1) BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP:** In this stage the counsellor explains their role to the individual and builds some trust.

"As a lay counsellor, my role is to listen to your concerns and offer support. I can help you talk through your feelings and find ways to manage your problems. If needed, I can also connect you with other professionals who can provide help. It is important to know that I am here to support you, not to judge you or to tell you what to do. If it's okay with you, I'd like you to tell me what is concerning you today."

Sometimes, a lay counsellor may need to terminate a relationship at any early stage. They might discover they have a **conflict of interest** or feel they are not able to provide the right service. In this case, they could refer the individual to another lay counsellor or to a professional.

Conflict of interest

Something that could get in the way of the counsellor doing their job well. For example, it might be hard to be non-judgemental if the person is a family member or if they remind you of a person or situation you find triggering.

EXERCISE: Can you think of a conflict of interest that could come up if you were working as a lay counsellor?

- 2) PRE-ASSESSMENT:** In this stage the counsellor asks questions to collect information about their life situation and the reason they are seeking counselling. They try to determine the individual's level of stress and whether the case needs urgent care from a professional.

"What brought you here today?"

"How are you feeling about the current situation?"

"Have you experienced a similar issue in the past? How did you deal with it then?"

- 3) GOAL SETTING:** The counsellor consults with the person to see what they would like to change and how they imagine a better future.

"What would you like to achieve through counselling?"

"How do you see a better future for yourself?"

"What changes would make a big difference in your life?"

"What are some small steps we can start with to reach your goals?"

The counsellor can make note of some short-term or long-term goals and check progress. Nonetheless, the counsellor's main priority is to be in the moment with the individual. They should not force progress.

- 4) COUNSELLING INTERVENTION:** The counsellor talks with the individual about their issues, provides support, and asks questions that could lead them to find their own solutions.

"Last time you told me about _____. How are you feeling about that today?"

"What has changed in your life recently?"

"How have you been reacting to _____? Is it different from before?"

"What little things have you been appreciating in your life?"

- 5) EVALUATION, TERMINATION OR REFERRAL:** The counsellor determines whether the individual has improved. If they are satisfied, they can decide to end the relationship. If the case is beyond the capacity of the counsellor, they can **refer** the individual to someone else.

"How have you changed since we began our counselling sessions?"

"Are you satisfied with the progress you've made?"

"Now that you've progressed so much, do you think you still need counselling or is there any other service you would like me to connect you with?"

REFERRALS

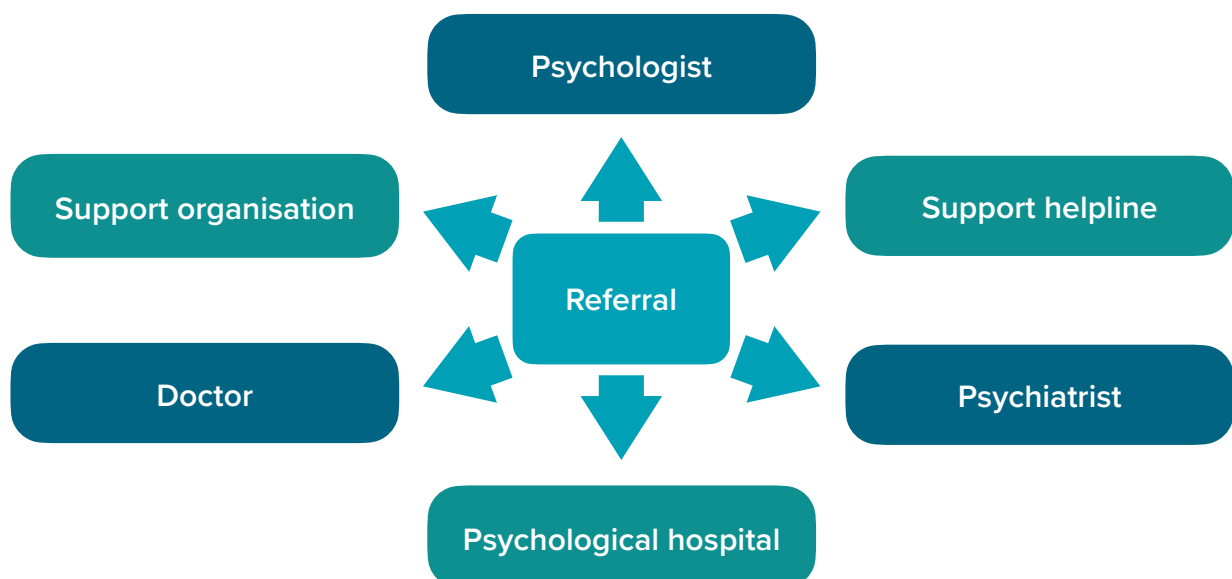
Sometimes, a lay counsellor may not be the best fit for addressing a person's situation. A professional may be better suited, such as a psychologist or a psychotherapist. A lay counsellor needs to know **their limitations** and know when to **refer** cases to someone else.

THE LAY COUNSELOR CANNOT



A counsellor should not take on the role of a doctor or psychiatrist, such as providing a diagnosis or recommending medication. Severe cases, like chronic depression or psychosis (seeing or hearing things that aren't there), should be referred to a professional. Counsellors should also work only during their designated hours. Going over-time can be damaging both for the counsellor and the person they are supporting.

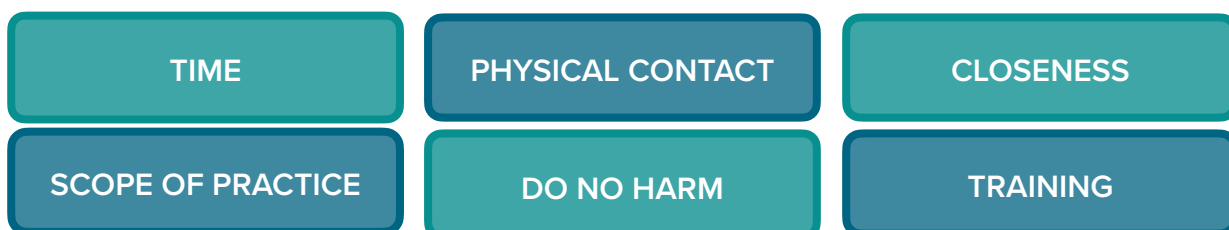
If you are training lay counsellors, it is important to connect them to a network of psychological support staff. You may introduce them in person to certain professionals and provide a list of phone numbers and contact details. You should offer some basic training about which places are appropriate for which types of cases.



BOUNDARIES

Lay counsellors should be trained to respect their own **personal and working boundaries**. This will help reduce burnout and fatigue. This task is especially important in small communities, as lay counsellors need to separate their friendships and family relationships from their working role.

Key boundaries include:



- **Time:** Lay counsellors should stick to their working hours and not let individuals contact them about their problems outside of scheduled sessions or real emergencies.
- **Physical contact:** Lay counsellors should only allow the level of touch that they feel comfortable with. This is often limited to a handshake, but may vary depending on the culture of the community.
- **Closeness:** Lay counsellors should avoid sharing too much about their personal lives with the people they counsel. The relationship should remain professional and not become a friendship.
- **Scope of Practice:** The lay counsellor should not provide services that are beyond their abilities and resources.
- **Do No Harm:** If the lay counsellor feels that the relationship is causing harm to either themselves or the individual, they should reconsider their approach.
- **Training:** The lay counsellor should refer the individual to a professional if they feel a case goes past what they have been trained to help with.

ROLE PLAY: Imagine that an individual has broken one of the boundaries above. What should the lay counsellor do or say in that situation?

BURN-OUT AND SELF-CARE

Self-care

Checking in with your body and mind to make sure you are okay, and then taking action to improve your physical and mental state. This includes simple acts like making sure your sleep and nutrition are correct, as well as more complicated things like addressing emotions after a difficult counselling session.

Even if all the boundaries are respected, lay counsellors may still feel overwhelmed. The task of being empathetic to others in difficult situations can be very draining.

Lay counsellors should be trained to **listen to their bodies and emotions**. When necessary, they should engage in self-care. This helps prevent **burn-out** and **compassion fatigue**.

Burn-out

Feeling exhausted and losing motivation after working hard.

Compassion fatigue

A state of physical or emotional exhaustion from caring for others, leaving you unable to continue providing good care.

EXERCISE: After spending a long time in the community listening to difficult stories, one of the counsellors said she felt like a mineral drink that had been shaken. What do you think she meant?



"This field activity brings a lot of stress to me. You tend to sit and listen to people's stories. Sometimes when they're even talking, you see them crying, and then you go back with that picture in your mind. When you are about to sleep, you'll be like 'how is this person doing at the moment?' You feel you're not doing enough.... You might even get empathy fatigued and exhausted about something where you can't do anything.

"You have to learn to release your stress gradually, through self-care. If you don't, you'll be like a cola bottle that's shaken up. You'll explode."

– A lay counsellor in POCI

Self-care varies person by person: what works for one person might not work for everyone. It is important to check in with your mind or body, and decide what feels right for you.

EXERCISE: List three activities that you could do to help release stress gradually if you work in an environment where you often hear traumatic stories or work with distressed people:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

"The other day one of the Neem staff came to our office to give us some support about trauma. It happened after our office had experienced a robbery. Now, none of us were in the office at the time, apart from the security guard. But everybody said they had felt afraid to come to the office in the morning after the robbery and that they counted the time before they could leave. The staff member spoke to us about reconfiguring our thoughts. It really did a marvellous thing for the staff. It was a revelation that how many of them were really, really affected by that robbery. But I also found out as I listened that it was only a culmination of trauma they had been carrying from other things over their life. So, if the people who are involved in a peace project don't have their own trauma healing, it really hinders their work."

– A staff member at Hope for the Village Child Foundation

Examples of self-care:

- Deep breathing or grounding exercises, prayer or meditation
- Taking some time off to relax
- Involving yourself in a creative or physical activity that requires lots of attention, like drawing, dance or weaving
- Spending time in nature
- Engaging in a fun community activity or sports match

REWARDS AND CHALLENGES: Name three challenges or difficult moments about taking on the job as a lay counsellor. What are three rewards or positive experiences a lay counsellor can have?

Professional Psychological Interventions

Lay counsellor training empowers communities to respond to crises quickly. However, **lay counsellors cannot resolve the deep trauma which exists in communities who have faced insecurity over generations**. When possible, inviting a professional organisation for intervention is a good idea.

At the individual level, professional organisations can offer:

- Talk therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- Body-based therapies, such as mindfulness

At the community level, professional organisations might offer:

- Group therapy
- Community dialogue
- Expressive therapies, such as basket weaving or painting. These can be tied in with mindfulness to allow individuals to focus on the process, not the result.
- Support groups, such as women's or youth groups
- Trauma-healing workshops

Whatever approach is chosen, it is important to think about **consistency** and **sustainability**. Short-term interventions can cause more harm than good. Ideally, a psychological intervention should leave behind some roots in the community. This might include training of trainers, such as the training of lay counsellors during POCl.



A group counselling session led by professionals from Neem Foundation as part of POCl

GROUP THERAPY

The POCl project included group counselling with individuals affected by trauma. Lay counsellors led these group therapy sessions with supervision and guidance from professional psychologists. The groups were designed to bring together people who had faced similar difficulties. For example, women who suffered from gender-based violence underwent therapy together.

To make people more comfortable sharing, individuals were also asked if they would prefer a group with only women or with people from a similar age group.

One of the key benefits of group therapy is that individuals can learn to support each other and rebuild a sense of community.

Nafisa's Story

One night, bandits attacked Nafisa's settlement, forcing her to flee to another community. In the chaos, they took Nafisa's son, and she never saw him again. After that night, Nafisa found it hard to sleep: in the dark she was haunted by the same sounds she had heard during the attack.

When Nafisa joined the group therapy session, she wasn't able to speak up about her experience. Hearing others tell similar stories made her break down in tears and tremble.

The group therapist knew that she could only visit the community every once and a while, and so she encouraged the other women in the group to take special care of Nafisa. They agreed to try their best to make her smile or laugh every day.

At the end of the group therapy sessions, Nafisa was transformed. Before the intervention, she was living among strangers and she hadn't belonged in a long time. Now she joked that she was the 'baby' of the group. She was deeply grateful for the love and care that the community had shown her.

EXPRESSIVE THERAPIES AND MINDFULNESS

When working with traumatised communities, expressive therapy can be an effective tool, especially when combined with mindfulness. For example, during POCI communities engaged in a weaving activity. They were provided straws and given basic craft-making training. They were then asked to create anything they liked: under one condition, they needed to pay full attention to what they were doing.

This kind of mindfulness is particularly effective for victims of trauma who may have unpleasant or triggering sensations in their body. As the focus is on an exterior, creative task, community members can appreciate the safeness that comes with being fully absorbed in the moment.

Mindfulness

Paying full attention to what is happening in the present moment: sounds, smells, sensations. Taking the mind back to the present moment every time it wanders off into thoughts of the past or the future. If you feel comfortable, you can also notice what is going on in your own body: your breath, your sensations, and your emotions.



Basket weaving as a form of expressive therapy in POCI

Examples of creative community tasks that incorporate mindfulness might include:

- Painting a peace mural
- Community gardening
- Pottery or other crafts

A key part of these tasks is also the community bonding that comes from sharing a safe space with others.

Weaving

POCI used weaving as an expressive therapy, led by a professional who brought supplies for community members to use. Professional guidance can be important when facilitating group discussions about mental health.

- Bring together a small group of community members.
- Teach them the basic skills of weaving if they're not familiar already.
- Tell them they won't be graded on their performance, but they will be asked questions afterwards about what they noticed during the process of weaving.
- Provide them with straws and weaving tools.
- Depending on time, you can supervise community members or ask them to take their work home.
- When the group comes back together, invite community members to show and explain their work. Ask them to describe in detail what sensations and feelings they felt while making their work.

Here are some possible responses. What do you think these responses tell you about the speakers?

- A) "My eyes hurt and my hands got stiff because of old age, but I kept going and finally finished my basket. Each time I got distracted or felt pain, I breathed in and returned to the task."
- B) "I was so absorbed in what I was doing I stopped noticing everything around me, apart from my hands and the mat I was making. I didn't even notice the sounds of the cars outside."
- C) "I finished my chores around the house before I started, because I didn't want anything to distract me. It was still very hard. I gave up on making a basket, and I now I have a hand fan that works pretty well."

CONCLUSIONS

Psychological trauma is a normal response to stressful life events, and there are many different feelings and symptoms that people can have. If people do not receive care and support to deal with their trauma, difficult feelings may continue to cause them pain and can also create obstacles for peace in the community.

There are ways to help people recover from the effects of trauma. Mental health professionals can provide support and education, as well as training for lay counsellors. **As community members learn more about trauma and how to support each other, the positive effects can spread and help clear the way for peace.**



A workshop in Zamfara about the roles and responsibilities of lay mental health counsellors

6

MEDIA & COMMUNICATION FOR PEACE



A POCl call-in radio show in Kaduna



Peace by Us

Depending on your time, resources and skills, there are many ways to use the power of the media to promote peace in your community. Studies show that public facing peace programs are more likely to succeed. When your community hears about the benefits of peace, it helps establish a 'new normal'. Meanwhile, other communities might hear about your work through social media or radio, inspiring them to embrace peace.

Media as an “Early Response”

Media can respond to early warning signs of conflict.

In a proactive way, media can address issues before they turn into conflict or violence. For example, a local radio show could talk about how climate change might affect relationships between farmers and herders in the community.

In a responsive way, media can help stop rumors and false information. For instance, social media can be used to disprove a story claiming that farmers are purposely attacking herders.

It is key that Early Warning-Early Response committee members receive some media training, especially in the field of spotting and stopping fake news.



POCI radio show in Benue state

‘Catching’ peace

“Peace is more than just right here, right now. Peace is like a movement that moves out into the society. When people catch peace, it can make an impact in the whole society. We hear programs and we hear social media day after day about killings and kidnappings and violence this and violence that, but when we can start spreading messages of peace and cooperation it changes the whole mentality.”

– A representative of Hope for the Village Child Foundation, Kaduna state

This chapter will discuss two approaches: training communities in **media awareness** and **identifying fake news**, and **community-based peace messaging**.

Media awareness training involves teaching communities some basic facts about identifying fake news and stopping the spread of misinformation. This way community members are empowered to navigate social media, radio and other sources. They are less likely to fall victim to messages that are designed to fuel conflict or violence.

Community-based peace messaging involves using **radio, social media**, and other forms of communication to spread positive messages about the benefit of peace. This approach may be more effective with the support of a community-based organisation or a broader peace program. Nonetheless, simple pictures and messages, shared through platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook, can also be effective.

FIRST REACTIONS TO PEACE

Often, violence becomes such a normal part of everyday life that people don’t realise that there is another way to live. Here are some statements that you might hear after sharing your message of peace:

- “We didn’t know this was possible!”
- “I thought things would always stay the same! Isn’t it just human nature to fight?”
- “I can’t believe those two enemies are working together.”
- “There must be something else behind this program. I don’t trust it.”
- “Aren’t they bad people? Why are you sitting together?”

Exercise: what other reactions do you think people from other communities might have when they hear about your peace program? Why do you think they react this way? What could you say in response? Look at the table below. Do you think any of the words in the table below apply to you as a dialogue facilitator? Could they be applied to any group of people you know?

Media Awareness and Fake News

With the high amount of fake news circulating across the world and fuelling conflict, it is a good idea to conduct media awareness training in communities so that people can learn to **separate truth from fiction** and **stop hate from spreading**.

When choosing who to invite to this kind of training, it is especially important to include influential figures in your community, such as the leaders of both ‘offline’ and ‘online’ spaces.



It is a good idea to invite a media expert, such as a journalist or someone from a non-governmental organisation, to lead this training. They may be more qualified to answer the community's questions. However, even if you can't arrange for a professional trainer, the exercises and examples below can still be helpful for community-led training sessions.

WHAT IS FAKE NEWS?

EXERCISE: What springs to mind when you hear the word ‘fake news’? Can you give an example? Have you ever been a victim of fake news?

Nowadays, fake news is spreading like wildfire in online spaces, such as WhatsApp and Facebook. For example, in Nigeria, messages which incite hatred between Christians and Muslims, farmers and herders, or ethnic groups are very common.

Fake stories often circulate much quicker than positive or neutral stories because they tap into negative emotions. Unfortunately, when experiencing anger or fear, people tend to think less logically. This often leads to users quickly sharing or commenting on a story without reflecting first.

CASE STUDY: ANTI-HERDER FAKE NEWS

In 2019 a news article was widely shared across social media under the title “South east will boil any moment from now because of their stubbornness”. In the article it was claimed that a leader of the Miyetti Allah herders’ association was urging for war against people from the south of Nigeria: “Since [the south-easterners] are claiming to be stubborn, and had refused to give them their lands in peace, it will be taken by force and entire south east will be raided and taken over by the herdsman”.

The statement was quickly found to be **totally false**. Nonetheless, it had spread widely across the internet and contributed to bad relations between farmers and herders.

Question: If you had encountered this news story, would you have been able to tell it is fake? How would you know?

Fake News

A false story that appears to be true, spread on the internet or communication platforms, usually created to change people’s views or actions.

EXERCISE: In your opinion, where is fake news most often started? On traditional media, like radio or TV, or over social media? Why?

TYPES OF FAKE NEWS

There are different types of fake news. It is important to know **which type** of fake news you are dealing with as it will help you decide on an appropriate response.

DISINFORMATION:

Disinformation is **fake** news that is deliberately **created to hurt others**. Often it is political in nature and designed to influence people's beliefs and actions.

Example: During the 2017 presidential elections, a fake version of the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* was created, with a false article saying candidate Emmanuel Macron was being funded by Saudi Arabia.

MISINFORMATION:

Misinformation is sharing **false** information but with **no harm meant**. Often this is a genuine mistake.

Example: During the 2016 US presidential elections, a tweet about a 'rigged' voting machine in Philadelphia was shared more than 11,000 times. It later turned out that the voter had made a mistake and failed to follow the instructions on the voting machine.

MAL-INFORMATION:

Mal-information is sharing **true** information **to cause harm**.

Example: It is common to hack or 'leak' someone's emails or photos to expose them for crimes or mistakes they made.

NOTE: While **mal-information is not fake news**, it can still be harmful. Often, there is a better way to reveal the truth without hurting others.

EXERCISE: Below are five scenarios of a rumour spreading. Match them to the right definition.

Disinformation <i>Deliberately spreading false and harmful news</i>	Misinformation <i>Spreading false news without wanting to harm someone</i>	Mal-information <i>Spreading true news to harm someone</i>
		A

- A) Martha suspected her neighbour's son was doing drugs. She caught him on camera and circulated the pictures on WhatsApp.
- B) Emmanuel had never learned about mental health before. When he heard of cases of people starting to act 'weird' in the community after a bandits' attack, he wrote a post on Facebook saying witchcraft must be spreading.
- C) Umar didn't like that outsiders had come to his community as refugees, so he made up rumours that they were committing crimes.
- D) Esther was running for mayor. In order to damage her opponent's reputation, she spread a rumour that he was abusing his wife.
- E) Hannah heard strange noises outside her window at night. She thought it was cattle on her field. She wrote in the local EWER WhatsApp group that herders were night grazing without permission. Later it turned out to be false.

EXERCISE: Imagine you have a community peacebuilding program which uses **a)** dialogue, **b)** media campaigns, **c)** mediation through the community elders, and **d)** lay counselling. *How would you respond to the following situation?*

Amina wrote a post from an anonymous Facebook account in a community news group. In it, she claimed that she saw people stuffing fake votes in the voter box at the election for the local mayor. Attached was a blurry photo that seemed to confirm the situation.

For the following three scenarios that could explain this event, imagine how you would respond through your community peacebuilding program:

Scenario 1 — Possible misinformation: After getting into a car crash last year, Amina has mental health issues combined with poor eyesight. Sometimes she convinces herself of stories that aren't true. The photo is fake, but she believed it was true.

How would you respond?

Scenario 2 — Possible disinformation: Amina hates the winning party. She thinks they are trying to destroy the country. She made up the rumour to try to get the election recounted so her party could win. The photo is fake.

How would you respond?

Scenario 3 — Possible mal-information: Amina hates the 'winning' party. She deliberately snuck into the voting room to watch how they counted the votes. Then she shared the true story of them stuffing the ballots. The photo is real.

How would you respond?

QUESTION: Which of these scenarios is not strictly fake news?

QUESTION: Which of these scenarios is the most difficult to solve?

IDENTIFYING FAKE NEWS

This section will share three short-hand techniques to help you identify whether a story is false:

- 1) **Source & Purpose**
- 2) **S.H.E.E.P**
- 3) **Who, what, where, why, when?**

Choose the approach to identifying fake news that is the easiest to remember or the most convenient.

After the community members have practiced critically engaging with news stories over a few weeks or months, using any of these techniques, they will develop good habits and instincts which will make it easy to naturally ‘sniff out’ fake stories.

METHOD ONE: SOURCE & PURPOSE

If you encounter a news story, you should always ask yourself **two simple questions** to determine whether it is true or false:



- **What is the source?**
 - ▶ *Is this website or post reliable? Can I find another page that confirms what this page says? If not, there is a high chance that it is fake news.*
- **What is the purpose?**
 - ▶ *Does this text or video seem like it was made to spread hate or make people angry? If so, there is a high chance that it is fake news.*

Whenever you are sharing a story from others, particularly during a peace program, you should be even more careful. After all, sharing a fake story could damage your community reputation and cause people to stop trusting the value of peace.

METHOD TWO: S.H.E.E.P.

A more detailed technique to determine fake news is called the 'SHEEP' approach. It involves looking at five different elements when deciding whether a story is true or false:

- **SOURCE**

- ▶ *Look at what lies beneath. Check the about page of a website or account, look at any account info and search for names or usernames.*

- **HISTORY**

- ▶ *Does this source have an agenda? Find out what subjects it regularly covers or if it promoted only one perspective.*

- **EVIDENCE**

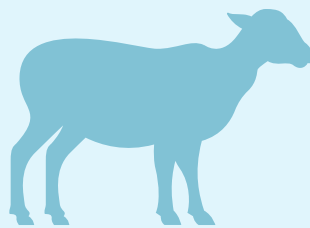
- ▶ *Explore the details of a claim or meme and find out if it is backed up by reliable evidence from elsewhere.*

- **EMOTION**

- ▶ *Does the source rely on emotion to make a point? Check for sensational, inflammatory and divisive language.*

- **PICTURES**

- ▶ *Pictures paint a thousand words. Identify what message an image is portraying and whether the source is using images to get attention.*



Think SHEEP before you share

Below is an example of using each letter to determine that a story is probably fake:

On a local Facebook page, you find a story that is going viral. Apparently, a neighbouring community has been digging tunnels near shared wells so that they can redirect the water for their own use! The post mentions that they are from another ethnic group and calls them 'sneaky' and 'despicable'. Under the post you find many comments from angry users in your own community. One says "what's the point in trying to make peace with this kind of people?" Attached to the Facebook post is an image of someone digging at night.

SOURCE	<i>You check the guidelines of the Facebook group and realise that the moderator never intervenes. They let people write whatever story they want and there is no fact checking.</i>
HISTORY	<i>You realise the user who wrote the post has written a few posts in the group before. The majority of them are all criticising people from other ethnic groups!</i>
EVIDENCE	<i>You try to find information about this incident somewhere else, but it isn't mentioned on the local news, which is normally a reliable source. The story hasn't been reported to your EWER committee, and no-one you know has seen someone digging at night.</i>
EMOTION	<i>The language used in the post seems like it was designed to get people angry and spread hate. If it was a simple, factual story, it probably wouldn't use words like 'despicable' or 'sneaky'.</i>
PICTURES	<i>The image isn't very clear and it could have been taken anywhere. You decide to do a 'reverse google search' and find the image coming up on Facebook pages in Uganda! Your community is in Nigeria!</i>

NOTE: a story does not have to have all 5 letters in the word 'S.H.E.E.P.' to be fake. **One or two letters are often enough** to make a source unreliable!

EXERCISE: In the story below, decide which letters of the word S.H.E.E.P. suggest that the story is fake news. Tick off the boxes that correspond. One has been done for you.

☐ **SOURCE** ☐ **HISTORY** ☐ **EVIDENCE** ☐ **EMOTION** ☒ **PICTURES**

An organisation from America has been helping to distribute [MPox](#) vaccines in your community. In a WhatsApp group you see a link to a site that seems official. You open it and discover a story about how many young people are getting sick from the vaccine: violent vomit attacks, dizziness and even ‘brain damage’.

The article suggests that international organisations are giving ‘faulty vaccines’ because they ‘don’t care about our country, they just want to pretend to do something’. The article includes a picture of a ten year old boy lying on the ground, foam coming out of his mouth. The photo is difficult to look at, and seems designed to make the reader upset. You try to find other articles on the website, but find the links are broken.

METHOD THREE: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY, WHEN?

Another approach for checking whether a story is true or false is asking ‘WH’ questions:

WH

- **WHO** made it?
- **WHAT** is the source?
- **WHERE** did it come from?
- **WHY** are you sharing this?
- **WHEN** was it published?

If any of the answers to these questions are suspicious, there is a good chance that the story is fake.

EXERCISE: You see a news story about a little boy who was kidnapped by another ethnic group. The kidnappers didn't know his gender and treated him like a girl while they kept him hostage for four months. The story is being circulated on WhatsApp with the caption 'Can't believe they humiliated this little boy!' The story makes you angry and you reach to share it, but you also think it 'feels fake'. Which of the answers to the following questions prove it is not reliable? **You can select more than one answer.**

- ☐ **WHO?** The post was forwarded by your neighbour, but you can't tell who shared it first.
- ☐ **WHAT?** The source is an official-looking news website. The other stories on there seem reliable.
- ☐ **WHERE?** The story was forwarded on a community WhatsApp group. You can't trace back to the first sharer.
- ☐ **WHY?** You want to share it because you are outraged at the kidnapping. You also are in shock that they could think the boy was a girl!
- ☐ **WHEN?** When clicking through on the official news website, you realise the story was published around 3 years ago.

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

Even though emotional or manipulative language is often a sign that a story could be fake, sometimes the story is still true, even if it is presented in a very negative way.

When deciding if a story is fake, it's important to check your own biases:

- *Do I think this story is fake just because it makes me uncomfortable?*
- *Do I think this story is fake just because I don't like the way it's written?*
- *Do I think this story is fake just because it makes me or my community look bad?*

If your only reason for thinking a story is fake is because it brings up negative emotions, it might be worth checking again. Instead of saying the story is 'untrue,' it's better to explain that the story uses hurtful language or spreads harmful stereotypes.

EXERCISE: Asya came upon a text in the neighbouring community's EWER WhatsApp group that said that her village is 'infested with hardcore bandits' and 'too dangerous for outsiders to go'.

Because she loves her home village, Asya's first reaction is anger: she reaches to write a message calling the group admin a liar in the chat. She decides to stop herself before sending the message. Instead, she leaves the admin a private voice message explaining that he should use more careful language to avoid hurting people's feelings.

Do you think her response was correct? Why or why not?



A POCl workshop to enhance communication skills for peacebuilding

Community-based Peace Messaging

PEACEFUL COMMUNICATION

Media is a powerful tool for promoting peace in communities.

You might choose to partner with a local community-based organisation or NGO that has access to radio shows, cameras, and microphone equipment. However, if you don't have access to professional equipment, a smartphone and an internet connection can be enough to share stories on social media. You can also spread stories in person through methods such as **community based dramas**.

Benefits of sharing peace messages over media include:

1) SHOWING THAT PEACE IS POSSIBLE

Often, people get so used to conflict and violence that they do not think peace is possible. By sharing the inspiring stories of others, you create moments that inspire and touch people. It is easy to argue against facts and numbers, but it hard to deny someone else's story.

Peace Is Possible

For years, farmers and herders in Kajuru had no platform to discuss conflict prevention before the farming season. However, since 2021, the Early Warning Early Response (EWER) committee had been organising annual sensitisation meetings to promote peaceful coexistence.

A major success was recorded in May 2024 when both farmers and herders voiced concerns about their key assets—land and cattle. A specific dispute involved a farmer who blocked grazing routes near the local river preventing herders from accessing them. Through the EWER committee's intervention, a solution was reached: the farmer agreed to open the passage on the condition that a protective barrier be built behind his farmland. The herders accepted and completed the construction, leading to a peaceful resolution that both parties were satisfied with.

2) BREAKING STEREOTYPES

Sometimes, conflict can cause people to view their ‘enemies’ as outsiders who are motivated by bad intentions. When you share the stories of the ‘other side’, it becomes clear that they are often good people who are struggling with a bad situation or misinformation. People are much more likely to work together for peace if they understand the other side.

Stereotype

A belief about a person or a group of people that is too simple or even false. For example, believing that everyone in another ethnic group is ‘cunning’ or ‘evil’.

Breaking Stereotypes

For over a decade, tensions grew between the Hausa and Fulani communities in Kanoma. The Hausa believed that local Fulani were aiding foreign bandits from Mali and Libya, leading to distrust and fear.

In 2021, the EWER committee stepped in, launching advocacy efforts and community dialogues to address these perceptions. Sensitisation activities helped change the narrative, highlighting that local Fulani were also victims of banditry, not just perpetrators. As a result, relations between the Hausa and Fulani communities improved significantly, fostering greater peace in Kanoma and surrounding villages.

3) SPILLOVER EFFECT

When you share how well a peace program is working in your community, it can often influence others to set up a similar approach.

POCI used local radio shows and social media. Although the radio shows were targeted to reach a small area, often neighbouring communities participated in ‘call-ins’. They learned about many peace-related topics such as the fight against gender-based violence, the importance of breaking down stereotypes between herders and farmers, and Early Warning-Early Response.

When possible, POCI was glad to invite representatives from those neighbouring communities to come and participate in training activities. This way key skills like dialogue, mental health knowledge and awareness of fake news were able to spread further than before.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at someone because of their gender. It includes physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Gender-based violence can happen to anyone, but it often affects women and girls the most. Examples include violence in the home, genital mutilation, sexual harassment, or forced marriages.

Spillover Effect

Before the 2023 elections, the local early warning committee, led by youth leaders, took proactive steps to prevent election violence. They conducted door-to-door campaigns and used loudspeakers to reach the elderly and people with disabilities. Their message emphasised peaceful elections and educated the community on the voting process.

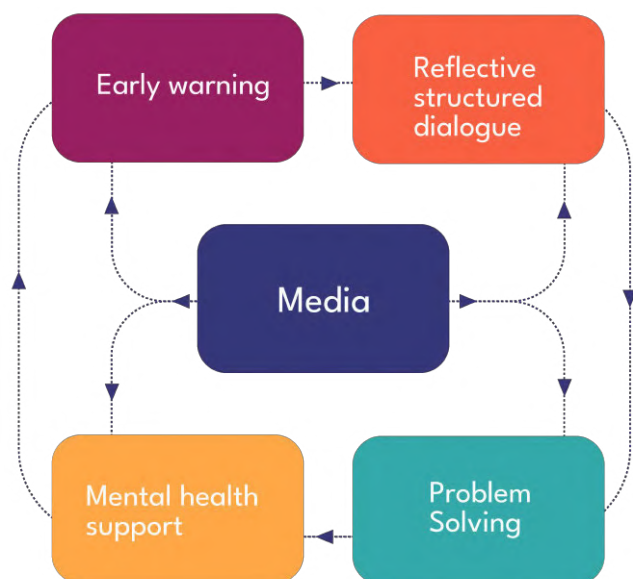
This approach led to a violence-free election in Kajuru and also helped prevent post-election violence in nearby villages, as tensions from larger towns did not spread to the area.

4) PROMOTING SYNERGY

If your peace program has many components, **the media can serve as a key connector that brings everyone together.**

Media offers a chance for different team members to communicate with each other. For instance, a radio program might involve dialogue trainers, community leaders and an EWER committee member discussing an important issue together.

Secondly, using media helps ensure everyone in the peace program stays aligned. It provides an opportunity for everyone to not only share their story, but also to be reminded of the program's structure and goals.



5) BUILDING CONNECTIONS

When you bring people together to share their stories on the radio or discuss peace-related topics over social media, you help **create a network of peacebuilders**.

POCI has been very strategic in selecting participants for radio shows and social media campaigns. Influential figures like religious leaders from different communities, security personnel, and women's leaders are often invited to discuss peace together. Without these media events, many of them might never have met. In areas with high levels of conflict and violence, the future can be unpredictable, so drawing on a network of peacebuilders is a useful strategy.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

No matter what method you choose — whether it be a community-based drama show about old enemies finding a compromise through dialogue, a social media campaign about fighting fake news, or a radio call-in show about women's rights — **it is important to think carefully about how you craft your message**.

Below are some things to consider:

➔ USING THE LOCAL LANGUAGE

Stories should be told in the local language. This way everyone can express exactly how they feel. It also makes sure that people know that your peace program is grassroots: from the community and by the community! This helps build trust and faith in peace.

If necessary, you can add subtitles or translations in the government's official language.

POCI often made content in local languages, such as Hausa and Tiv, with subtitles in English (Nigeria's official language).

➔ TARGETING THE RIGHT AUDIENCE

Before crafting a message, ask yourself:

- Who needs to hear this message?
- How do they normally receive information?
- Who needs to share their voice that normally doesn't get a chance?
- How do we get the right people to participate?

Sometimes, you might need to find creative solutions to reach out to people. This might include:

- Contacting social media influencers who can help share your posts and draw in your target audience
- Bringing a radio to a town square or a public place so that people can listen together
- Allowing for free call-ins to radio shows or calling back people who don't have enough credit
- Using leaders' voices to gain people's trust, e.g. inviting a female Islamic scholar to encourage women to participate in a radio call-in show

Example from POCI: Engaging Herders

"[Because of anti-grazing laws in our state] herders can sometimes be hard to reach. On one radio show we invited the chairman of the herders and the treasurer, who is a woman, from the farmers. Many herders called that day. They said things like "if the farmers would not encroach on cattle routes, the herders would desist from night grazing". You know, they are doing night grazing and sometimes they send small boys on the edge. We got a lot of recommendations from them: even one of them even told us that right now he was calling from the bush. It was a great success."

– A POCI Media Officer



A POCI radio talk show in Zamfara state featuring representatives from associations of herders and of farmers

Example from POCI: Engaging Women

In traditional societies, you may need to take a gradual approach to engaging women. You might begin with asking them to participate in telling their story on social media without showing their face on camera. Gradually, over time the willingness to participate should increase. One way to increase engagement is to use influential women leaders to convince others of the need to share their story.

"From day one, you host a whole radio show for two hours. You give one good hour to people to call in, but you won't hear a single lady call. It has been disheartening and a challenge.

Luckily, people have started realising that our voices need to be heard. Our state is very religious. So we bring women religious leaders and let them talk to their fellow women.

The same goes for social media. We have to bring influential people, especially women, and let them talk to their fellow ladies. *"I am married also. So why can't you talk? It is not prohibited in Islam. So why can't you talk? This is our program. This is our project. So we have to own it."*

- A POCI Media Officer

➔ LETTING PEOPLE SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

It is key to make sure that people speak for themselves. For example, if you are making a radio show or social media video about a given topic, you could think about who is directly affected by that topic and invite them to participate. **It is best to "talk with" people by inviting them as speakers, and it is important to avoid "talking about" a group of people who are not in the room.** For example:

- In a conversation about women's issues, it is important to include women as speakers (instead of having men talk *about* women)
- When talking about a dispute between Christians and Muslims, it is important to have both Christian and Muslim speakers (instead of presenting only one side)
- Similarly, when discussing a farmer-herder conflict, it is important to include both herders and farmers as speakers

Letting people speak for themselves not only increases understanding and stops stereotyping, it also makes sure no-one feels left out or discriminated against.

"In Zamfara State there was a program about celebrating International Women's Day. At first there was a plan to invite men to talk about this event. But after consultation we invited an all-woman team: one educationalist, one person from the traditional institutions and one from a religious institution. Some extremists were condemning Women's Day and the United Nations. They said it was against Islam. So, it was great that the religious woman who came supported the women and brought verses from the Koran and from the prophetic tradition to support our peacebuilding initiative. They had a very interactive phone-in, and everything went positively."

- A religious leader

→ STORYTELLING

In areas affected by conflict, people are often bombarded by fake news and stories designed to rile people up. Knowing that people are more likely to share a post if they feel angry or afraid, bad actors tend to use emotional language to draw in viewers. If your posts are dry or use only formal language, they may not attract a large audience. As a result, it is a good idea to counter anger and fear with other emotions. One way to do this is to tell moving stories of someone who has survived difficult times or transformed their life. Ideally, stories should be:

- **Relatable:** sharing a situation that other people in the community are likely to go through;
- **Real:** based on real events;
- **Moving:** telling a story of overcoming difficult or transformation;
- **Structured:** have a clear beginning, middle and end.

Media messages need to use language that shows that you genuinely believe in peace. An important part of this is avoiding negative stereotypes that make it seem like one group of people are 'bad'.



A success story shared on POCI's Facebook page using a video interview format

➔ USING THE RIGHT TONE

It is extremely important to use language that does not offend or hurt others. This means avoiding overly emotional words. It is also key to avoid spreading stereotypes or creating a feeling of ‘us vs them’. If language is hurtful, stereotypical or divisive it will likely backfire and worsen, not help solve the conflict.

Try filling in the following table to identify what is wrong with the language the radio presenter uses.

Sentence:	What is wrong with the language here?	How can the language be improved?
“In our next program we will bring in some of those farmers to talk more about what land belongs to who.”	It uses an ‘us vs them’ mentality. It divides us from ‘those farmers’.	“In our next program we will bring in some farmers from our community to discuss the boundary issues.”
“Let’s talk about how young men are always getting in trouble doing drugs and crime.”	It sounds like it is stereotyping all young men. It uses overly emotional language, such as ‘always getting into trouble’.	“Let’s discuss the challenges that some young men are facing, including drugs and crime.”
“The elders know best so we’ve invited them to explain the reasons behind the herders’ despicable behaviour.”	<i>Your answer</i>	<i>Your answer</i>
“Outsiders have been coming into our community because they want to live as well as our people.”	<i>Your answer</i>	<i>Your answer</i>

CHOOSING CONTENT

When working with radio or social media, it is important to have a **schedule**. For example, you might choose to host a 2-hour radio call-in show once a month, or post on social media three times a week.

Having a regular schedule makes it easier to keep a consistent audience, as people will know when and where to find your content. This regularity also helps your audience share your radio show or social media page with their family and friends, who are more likely to trust recent and up-to-date information.

When choosing topics for your radio show or social media, you can take both **proactive** and **reactive** approaches.

PROACTIVE APPROACH:

Planning ahead and selecting a new topic that you believe could inspire the community to support peace.

For example:

- Launching a campaign to educate people about trauma and mental health, and how these issues impact peacebuilding.
- Sharing stories on the importance of fighting fake news before election season begins.
- Using radio to teach people how to set up Early Warning-Early Response committees.
- Marking international events, such as International Women's Day, by inviting experts to a radio show to discuss how these events relate to peacebuilding.

RESPONSIVE APPROACH:

Taking requests from community members and closely following the news to make sure the stories you share correspond to what is happening now.

This could include:

- **Tracking popular issues on local social media or radio:** For instance, you might see that many people in community Facebook groups are discussing how drug use leads to family violence. In response, you could create a radio call-in show with health experts, a family counsellor, and individuals who have recovered from drug addiction.
- **Sourcing topics from your peace program:** You can appoint a 'media officer' to attend different parts of the peace program, such as dialogue sessions, EWER meetings, or lay counselling training. These officers can then explain the benefits of peace to community members and ask for permission to share their stories.
- **Responding to requests:** It's important to keep communication channels open with the community. For example, you can provide a phone number or WhatsApp contact after a radio show. You can also use the message inbox on Facebook, TikTok, or other platforms to respond to topic requests. When using social media to respond, make sure the person requesting a topic is really a community member, as messages may come from people far away or from fake accounts.
- **Community forums:** If possible, attend community forums like town hall meetings or Early Warning-Early Response meetings to gather topic ideas. If you set up an Early Warning-Early Response committee yourself, consider including a media officer from the start. Launching a campaign to educate people about trauma and mental health, and how these issues impact peacebuilding.

CONSENT

When inviting a guest on to a radio show or using their image or voice for a social media post, it is key to gain full consent. This means explaining:

- ➔ **What** exactly is being shared? Is it audio, a full-face video or a blurred video?
- ➔ **Where** will it be shared? Is it going on social media or radio? Who is the audience?
- ➔ **Why** is it being used? How exactly will the contribution help spread peace in the community?

The contributor has the right to **agree or decline** at **any point** and to **any part** of the program or social media post. Participants should never feel forced to share their stories.



A POCl radio show in Zamfara state

Case Study: Community Dramas

Community drama performances can be another powerful tool for outreach and learning about peacebuilding processes. In addition to using radio and social media, POCl created scripts for community dramas. These dramas told stories that were relevant to communities, and highlighted important messages for peace. Community members rehearsed and performed the dramas and each performance included a discussion with the audience about what they learned from the play.

For example, the POCl drama 'A Tale of Hauwa the Orphan' tells the story of the character Hauwa and her two younger brothers, who were orphaned after a violent attack on their hometown. The play includes the family's mental health struggles and their efforts to rebuild their lives as they experience bullying, exploitation, and emotional trauma while living as internally displaced persons (IDPs). At the climax of the play, the people who had been causing harm to Hauwa and her brothers take responsibility for their actions and apologise, leading to reconciliation.

The play highlighted some of the peacebuilding structures in POCl, including the importance of psychosocial support and the possibility of reconciliation. The drama was integrated into dialogue training workshops and International Day of Peace activities, and a [video of the play](#) was adapted, edited, and shared over social media.



A community drama performance in Kaduna state, Nigeria

Radio

In the communities that participated in POCl, radio is the most popular way for people to get information. Not everyone has a smartphone to access social media, but radio can be listened to at home, in cars, or in a group in public places. Many people are used to having the radio on all day while they go about their activities. It's important to understand the culture of the community you're working in and choose the best media to reach the most people.

POCl worked with local radio stations to ensure the broadcasts only targeted the community and nearby areas. The radio hosts were local people who knew the conflict dynamics well and presented the shows in local languages.

OUTREACH

Given that many radio shows are profit-motivated, it can be hard to persuade radio stations to come on board.

The best start is to conduct outreach to local radio stations, perhaps using traditional rulers or community figures to explain that peacebuilding is an essential topic that matters for all community members and could therefore draw in a large audience.

After that, you can agree upon a regular slot for a call-in radio show. Even once a month could make a difference.



A POCl radio show in Benue state

MAKING A PROGRAM GUIDE

When conducting a radio program, it is key to have a **program guide**. This is useful because it:

- Explains the goals and content of the program, making sure that people don't go off topic during the show
- Gives a structure to come back to if there are pauses, emergencies or awkward moments
- Makes sure that the presenters and guests in program knows in advance and are better prepared to speak
- Below is an example of how you might structure a radio show according to a guide. The guide should be **passed out to all radio guests well in advance**.

The guests' input should be sought in a meeting before drawing up the program guide, so that the guests can help structure the radio program guide to make sure no key topics are missed and no-one is excluded.



The radio show host and guest speakers have their program guides on hand during this POCI radio show in Karuna state

Program Guide: Sample Format	
SECTION 1: TOPIC OF DISCUSSION	<i>Here you can write what you would like to get out of the conversation. What kind of message would you like to spread and to whom?</i>
SECTION 2: GUESTS	<i>Here you can list the names of the guests and their contact details. You can also include the details of back-up guests.</i>
SECTION 3: OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM	<i>Here you can briefly explain to all the guests what the purpose of the show is and what its intended outcome is.</i>
SECTION 4: GUIDING QUESTIONS TO BE DISCUSSED	<i>Here you can use some content points so that the conversation follows an order and doesn't get taken too far off track.</i> Question 1: Question 2: Question 3: Question 4: Question 5: Question 6: Question 7: Question 8:
SECTION 5: TIMINGS AND STRUCTURE	<i>Here you can propose some time limits for each question or segment.</i> <i>For example:</i> Hour One: <i>Introduction: around 10 minutes</i> <i>Question 1-3: around 15 minutes</i> <i>Question 4-6: around 15 minutes</i> <i>Question 7-8: around 20 minutes</i> Hour Two: <i>Call in and feedback session: around 45 minutes</i> <i>Wrap up and final panel discussion: around 15 minutes</i>

COLLECTING FEEDBACK

In order to be successful, a radio intervention needs to collect feedback to improve the process. You can do this by:

- **Receiving input from callers** during call-in sessions
- **Having debrief sessions with guests** after each show and asking what they felt went well and what could be improved. This can also serve to check in with their emotional state after they have discussed difficult topics.
- **Conducting surveys among community members** to find out whether they listened and what they thought of the show

You can measure the success of your peace messaging on radio by:

- Counting the number of callers and whether key target groups, such as women or youth, are well represented
- Measuring listening numbers and listening locations
- Checking if your radio show is mentioned on other stations or on social media
- Measuring whether nearby communities also begin peacebuilding activities



A POCL radio show in Benue state with the topic of 'Sustaining and Enhancing Peacebuilding in Our Communities.'

CALL-IN RADIO PROGRAM FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Call-in radio programs allow community members and the general public to join peacebuilding conversations that matter to them. These programs provide learning opportunities and act as a way to gather feedback from the communities. Listener responses help us understand if the program is having the intended impact on the audience. Feedback also helps improve the quality and content of future broadcasts. Common feedback methods include on-air and off-air call-ins, text messages, email, and social media.

This guide offers tips for hosts and call screeners on how to manage listener feedback and ensure people's voices are heard accurately.

PRE-AIRTIME PREPARATIONS

- **Decide on the Topic to be Discussed:** Before going on air, it is important to be aware that people usually have a lot to say and the conversation might go off track if not managed well. Make sure to decide on the issue to be discussed and clearly outline what you want to achieve with the day's conversation.
- **Know your Audience:** Be knowledgeable of your target audience and what works best for them. For example, what time of the day will be most suitable for the target population to listen to the radio? Are there words/topics that might be too sensitive in that culture?
- **Have a Backup in case things go wrong:** It is important to have a backup plan in place to avoid "Dead Air". This could be a stand-in guest, a pre-recorded session or any other engaging activity. A back-up is key as a) phone lines might go down, b) the technology might fail c) the guest might not show up or d) there might not be any callers e) an other emergency might occur.

WHEN YOU ARE ON-AIR

- **Listeners First:** From start to finish, you should make sure your audience feels welcomed and appreciated. Your listeners should feel like they are the priority and should want to participate in the conversation. During phone-in radio shows, ***the audience is the show.***
- **Be Clear About the Topic and How Listeners Can Contribute:** Listeners need to clearly understand the topic of the day and what kind of comments or answers are expected from them. The host should introduce the show's focus and clearly state the questions for listeners to answer. These questions should be repeated

throughout the program. While open-ended questions (rather than ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions) are usually better for encouraging participation, the host should guide callers to make sure their responses stay on topic.

- **Spell out the rules of participating in the conversation:** Just before the phone lines are open for calls, hosts should make known the rules with a friendly but firm approach. Some of these may include;
 - ✓ Start by identifying yourself by your first name and the Local Government or community where you are calling from.
 - ✓ Avoiding hate speech, profane words, and cursing.
 - ✓ No allegations, especially ones without evidence.
 - ✓ Keep calls down to one for each person to give others the opportunity to participate.
 - ✓ Stay away from the radio set during calls.

The rules should be repeated at intervals during the show for new listeners/callers.

- **First Call, First Impression:** In phone-in radio shows, first impressions are key. The way the first call is handled sets the tone for the entire program. A well-handled first call encourages more follow-up calls, while a poorly managed one may lead to fewer contributions from listeners
- **Listen Actively:** Call-in sessions are an opportunity to hear the comments and answers of community members. During the call-in, the callers should do more of the talking while the host/facilitator leads the conversation. Only after the callers’ comments have been clearly communicated should further feedback be asked by the host.
- **Keep a Time Check:** The host or some other support staff should keep track of the time allowed for each call to ensure that they are of equal length. This keeps the process fair.
- **Finishing Up!:** End each call in a manner that makes both the current caller and other listeners feel valued. They should want to be part of the show again! Make statements like, “Thanks for calling, **[Insert First Name]**. We’re looking forward to another engaging call with you next time.” Or, “I hope you will call some other time”.

It is common practice to restate the focus for the day and the phone numbers through which listeners can call in after each call.

OTHER TIPS FOR HANDLING CALLS

- **When the Caller is Abusive or has used profane words or conflict-insensitive language:** Instead of hanging up or responding harshly, calmly explain that the call will end because swear words, inappropriate or violent language was used. Politely let them know that time will now be given to the next caller on the list.
- **When the call might be politically sensitive:** It is important to be neutral when politically sensitive statements are being made. Balance the conversation by inviting other callers that are of a different opinion to join in a peaceful manner.
- **When the conversation is one-sided:** To add variety to a conversation, it is sometimes necessary for the host to take a perspective that is opposite the caller's, especially when the listeners are 'only hearing one side of the story'.
- **When it's the Caller's first time:** Appreciate him or her for participating. Summarise what the person has said as this reassures them that they have been heard and their voice matters. You may end the conversation with statements like "we hope you call next time".

By sharing quotes from presenters and callers on social media after each radio show, the POCI media team further highlighted and encouraged participation in the shows.



Social Media

When conducting a social media campaign, it is key to notice which apps or websites are most commonly used by your community members. In order to do this, you can conduct a survey among community members.



Once you have set up a social media page, make sure to:

- **Accompany stories or written posts with engaging images** that are neatly designed, easy to understand, well-angled and, if possible, show the people directly involved in the issue
- **Follow a regular posting schedule** so that followers can get used your content
- Avoid using stereotypical or violent language
- **Monitor the comment section** and delete or respond to any comments which spread hatred or misinformation

You can amplify the success of your message on social media by:

- **Knowing who is the 'target audience'** and getting their input to help craft the message
- **Networking with social media leaders** or influencers who repost your content

Social media and radio programs worked hand in hand during POCI. The media team used social media to promote upcoming radio programs (left). Then, after the radio show, the POCI team used social media to share videos, quotes, and pictures from the show.

This helped reinforce the project's messages and was a good source of fresh content. It also highlighted and encouraged participants.

Protecting our Community Initiative
★ Favorites · September 17, 2024 · 🌐

Join the **Protecting our Community Initiative (POCI)** Radio Show on Gold City 105.5 FM Gusau by 9:00 am – 11:00 am Friday, 20th September 2024.

The topic of discussion is "BREAKING THE SILENCE: ENDING THE STIGMA AROUND SUICIDE AND MENTAL HEALTH."

Listen online via 📶 www.goldcityfm Gusau.com

POCI RADIO

POCI RADIO TALK SHOW

BREAKING THE SILENCE: ENDING THE STIGMA AROUND SUICIDE AND MENTAL HEALTH.

20TH SEPT 2024 | 9AM - 11AM

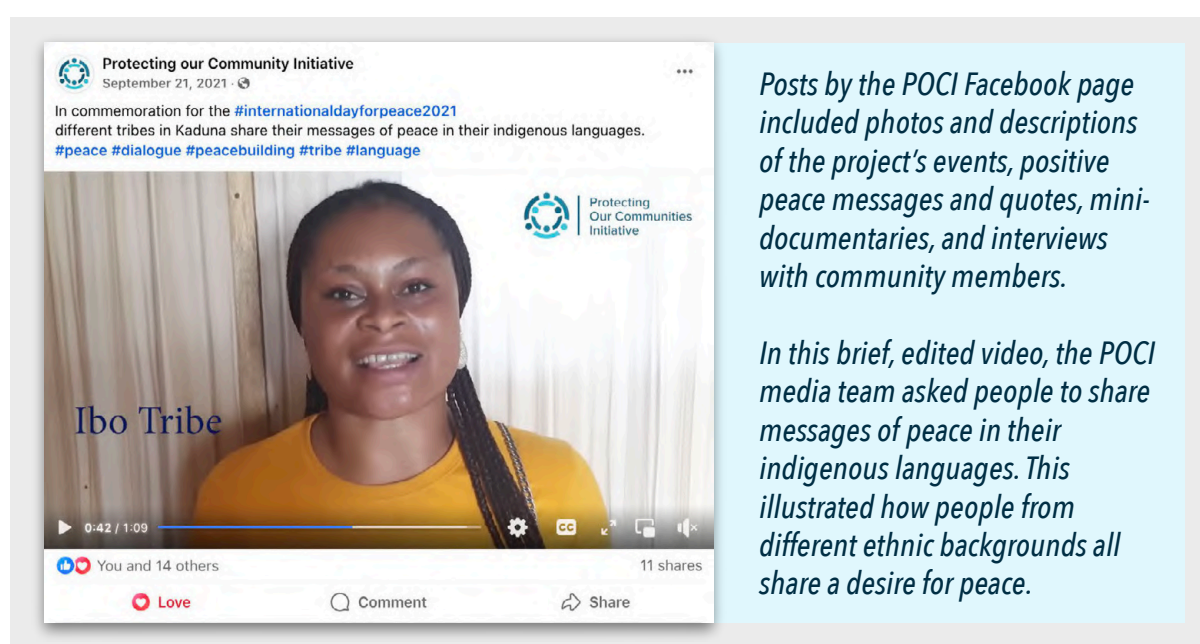
GUEST SPEAKERS

With representatives from Neem Foundation and the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities

- **Responding to positive or peaceful comments** and thanking users for their contributions

You can measure success by:

- Tracking how many people have seen your message, on platforms such as Facebook analytics
- Asking community members in person whether they have seen or been changed by your content
- Tracking reshares and likes
- Receiving feedback from comment sections
- Checking the location of viewers to see whether your page is mainly used by community members or outsiders



CONCLUSIONS

Media education and outreach are powerful tools for a peacebuilding program. By understanding how media stories and posts can inflame conflict, community members can take steps to counter those negative influences and **stop the spread of harmful rumours and stereotypes**.

What is more, media strategies can educate the public about your initiative and **share stories that show how peace is possible**. Radio programs and social media campaigns can lift up the voices of people who may have been left out of peace and security conversations, such as women or youth, and share inspiring examples of success and positive change that increase public support and belief in peace efforts.



A POCl radio show about the role of women in building sustainable peace

7

ADVOCACY



A panel discussion at POCI's 2024 National Conference on the Management of Farmer-Herder Relations in Nigeria



Peace by Us

Advocacy

Advocacy focuses on the deeper, **root causes** of conflict rather than just individual disputes. It works by **building connections with influential people and networks** who can drive change in the community.



Participants in POCI hold an advocacy visit with the Agom of Kufana Chiefdom, Kaduna State

ADVOCACY AS AN EARLY RESPONSE

Advocacy is a form of Early Response as it allows you to focus on the deeper causes behind an issue and work on a larger scale.

For example, Early Warning-Early Response committee members might decide to:

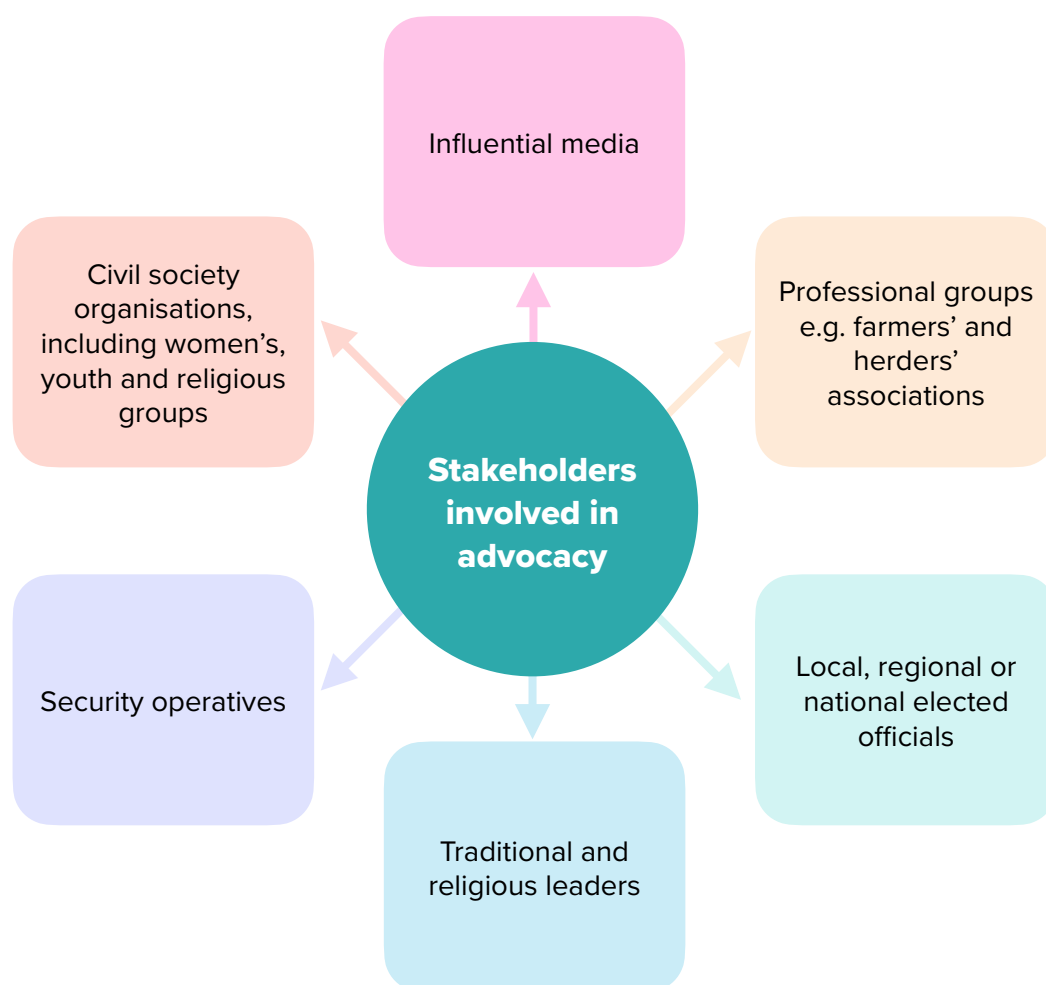
- Invite local and regional security officials to a forum where they can learn about the success of non-punitive approaches to conflict, such as dialogue and EWER.
- Build connections with farmers' and herders' groups with the goal of building a relationship between them so they can address challenges together.
- Develop relationships with government officials and advocate for local government EWER committees that can coordinate with community-based EWER efforts for more effective violence prevention and response.
- Organising cultural events that highlight the importance of incorporating women and youth in peacebuilding

Before conducting advocacy, it is crucial to understand the core of the issue and who are the influential figures and networks who can help make a change.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE CONDUCTING ADVOCACY

- Who are the powerful figures or groups of people who could help make a change in our community?
- Why do they not normally participate in peacebuilding?
- Do these people know enough about the issue? How can we inform them about it in a respectful manner?
- How can we seek their input and ask for their contribution to peace?

Depending on your context, you can target different groups or individuals for advocacy. These might include:



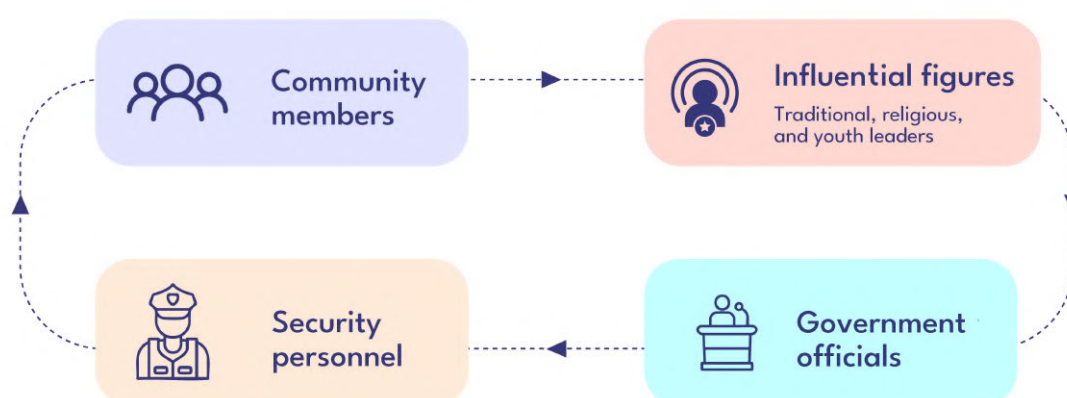
Advocacy can take many forms. It could be:

- A visit to a traditional leader or government official
- An invitation to a forum or dialogue
- An awareness or media campaign to inform certain groups about issues involving vulnerable groups, such as gender-based violence

After reaching out to stakeholders, it's important to set up **feedback channels** for ongoing communication. For example, representatives from community groups could hold regular visits with government officials, share what they learn with the community, and gather feedback to give the officials. Or, security personnel could share reports at local EWER Committee meetings and invite community feedback.

Feedback channels allow community members to share their concerns with government, civil society organisations, or security officials, while those in authority also send messages back to the community, and between each other.

Feedback Channels



Inclusive Engagement

Inclusive engagement means actively involving people or groups in peacebuilding, especially those who don't usually have a voice. POCl particularly focused on women and youth, and took opportunities to empower them to advocate for their own issues during forums, as well as meetings with government and security officials.

A key part of advocacy is working to include groups that are often left out of peacebuilding. POCl focused especially on two such groups: women and youth, who due to the traditional and religious nature of north-west Nigeria often did not have a seat at the table.

After working to include these two groups, POCl then continually worked to strengthen their voices through advocacy engagement on key issues concerning each group, such as ending gender-based violence or maintaining peace during national protests.

ENGAGING WOMEN

When women are fully included in peacebuilding, the positive impacts are multiplied throughout the community. When the perspectives and activities of women are valued, this means that more potential conflicts or threats can be identified at an early stage, conflict analysis can be more thorough, and more resolutions become possible.

Some advocacy strategies used to increase women's engagement in traditional communities included:

- **Bringing onboard women leaders** as role models to inspire and influence their communities
- **Encouraging religious leaders**, including women, to cite verses from the Koran or the Bible to counter false beliefs about women's roles
- **Setting quotas for peace-building activities** to make sure that 50% of all contributors are women – if a space could not be filled by women, participants were warned it would be left empty.
- **Including women staff** on peacebuilding and training activities, so the project mirrors the people it wants to involve
- **Approaching husbands and their wives together** to talk about the value of women in peacebuilding and asking permission from both sides to engage in peace activities;
- **Giving free airtime to women** on radio shows who could not afford to call in otherwise
- **Organising women's only forums and spaces** where they can speak comfortably and openly about women's issues



A POCI advocacy visit with the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Welfare in Benue State

"We're facing challenges with the traditional roles women play in society. You have to be very deliberate about engagement. For instance, if you ask a farmers' group to participate in a workshop on dialogue, involving men and women, they tend to show up with all men. So, now we say that we have a dedicated slot for five women. If we have five men, then we have five space for women. And if we can't get the five women, then we'll have to leave their slots empty. After we took that approach we found that – magically – female leaders started to appear.

Usually, it's only after they've had some level of engagement in the same room as the women that men see the value of women.

We encouraged the wives of the farmers and the wives of the herders to sit in one room and have a discussion. Almost instantly, you saw an understanding that transcended things like language, culture and religion. All the women from both sides have had a story of trauma. They all had a story of violence. They all had a story of conflict. They all had the same shared feelings, some grievances against the other group. So, it was almost like we were looking in a mirror. The women even agreed to go on video together to speak about peace, farmers and nomadic tribes and the importance of women being involved in peace talks in the community. And the men also gained a point of reflection."

– A member of the Neem Foundation POCl project team

ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S ISSUES

Just as women's contributions benefit the whole community, **many 'women's issues' are also peacebuilding issues that affect the whole community.**

For example, **gender-based violence is a community security issue**, not just a women's issue. Violence against women and girls causes serious harm and can also be an early warning sign. Sometimes, It is by witnessing or experiencing gender-based violence that youth first learn violent behaviours. **Peace in the family is connected with peace in the community.**

Women's involvement in peacebuilding is very important, and the issues affecting women have an affect on the whole community. POCl advocated for women's rights in a variety of ways:

- Featuring topics such as education of the girl child and gender-based violence within radio shows and social media
- Supporting women's leadership and inclusion throughout the project
- Working with well-respected men, such as religious leaders, to sensitise others about women's equality
- Taking conflicts involving women in the community seriously
- Connecting with other groups and government ministries working on women's issues
- Engaging communities in events such as International Women's Day

Successful Women-Led Advocacy



The Women's Leadership Retreat in Abuja, Nigeria in March 2024, brought together grassroots women peace leaders, farmer and herder representatives, and community organisations. Participants shared challenges they face, such as societal barriers and self-imposed limits, and worked on solutions to unite women across ethnic and religious divides.

They gained skills in communication and leadership, while discussing key themes like stopping sexual harassment and building resilience. They also shared stories about women's contributions to peacebuilding. The retreat sparked many ideas for sustaining peacebuilding work. For example, herder women at the forum decided to form a new cooperative organisation.

One community dialogue facilitator told a story about how women united to resolve a land dispute between two communities. She first led a series of dialogues between traditional leaders and religious leaders from the two communities, as well as dialogues between the women, but it wasn't leading to a resolution. Finally, the women from both towns decided to tell their husbands that they were leaving to go live with relatives until the dispute was finished, and that turned out to be a powerful incentive and the conflict was soon resolved.

ENGAGING YOUTH

In the communities POCI has worked in, elders are deeply respected and have the most important role in community decisions. As a result, youth were often left out. **Below are some strategies the project used to engage youth and empower them to advocate for their own concerns:**

1. ENGAGING YOUTH LEADERS

POCI identified and approached youth leaders, asking for their contribution to peace. These youth leaders then encouraged other youth to come on board, whilst also acting as role models.

Engaging young people was often challenging in communities where youth didn't see themselves as "leaders". Efforts were needed to break stereotypes and show that youth could be at the forefront of peacebuilding.

"This program has changed a lot of things, in the sense that before if you are around 30, 35 and 40 years, they cannot make you a traditional head. They see you as a child. But now the head of the youth is a young man. And on the youth, they are not only involved but in fact they are now the decision makers as we speak."

– A participant in POCI in Kaduna state

2. CONDUCTING ADVOCACY TO TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND ELDERS

In many communities, advocacy had to be conducted to elders to underline that youth have a valuable contribution to peace. In many people's eyes youth are the 'troublemakers' at the heart of conflict, so advocacy had to be conducted to demonstrate the youth's ability to be equally good peacemakers.

"Having youth work in the same space with that of the elders is usually difficult because they feel the way they reason is different from the way the elders may think, or the elders feel that they wouldn't be comfortable having youth. But we do a lot of work to explain that everyone's voice is important. We have continuous training where we discuss how important it is having youths on board. We talk about how some of the conflicts are being caused by youth, and can only be addressed by youth."

– A staff member of Elohim Development Foundation in Benue state



Even during the challenging times of the covid-19 pandemic, POCl continued to reach out to traditional leaders, security officials and farmer-herder associations to discuss their contribution to peacebuilding

3. ORGANISING YOUTH-FOCUSED PLATFORMS FOR PEACE

After youth have signed up to play a role in peacebuilding, there need to be platforms for them to meet and collaborate. Examples during POCl included:

- Youth mentoring schemes
- Youth forums on peacebuilding and EWER
- Youth engagement in cross-community cultural events

"As a young Muslim woman, I've seen how ethnic divisions can lead to conflict. However, since the youth-led initiative began, I've noticed a significant shift. The youth involvement has promoted peace and understanding among different ethnic groups (Fulani, Gbagyi, Hausa), encouraged interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

Our youth group organised a cultural festival, celebrating the diversity of our community. We had traditional dances, music, and food from different ethnic groups. It was amazing to see people from different backgrounds come together, embracing each other's culture.

The youth-led initiative has given us a voice and a chance to make a difference. We're breaking down barriers and building bridges, now the youths are more recognised and involved in decision making in our community."

- A youth participant in POCl from Kaduna

"Our community experienced one of the most serious inter-religious, inter-tribal crises. It left people displaced and even created a barrier between the two major religions. The Christians lived at the outskirts of the town, and the Muslims inside. Even the market wasn't being shared....But since the advent of POCl in 2019, we have seen that over the years people are beginning to understand and stick with one another. This is now a place where people celebrate festive periods together. Christians and Muslims come together. **Most especially the youths are now engaged: they are the driving force when crisis occurs, but also when peace occurs.** You will see that during the Eid celebration we have had pictures of where Christians come to the Muslim community to celebrate with them and also during the Easter or Christmas period the Muslims reciprocate in that kind gesture.

They've even had a youth forum with all the relevant stakeholders, including security forces, to showcase how they are trying to make peace with each other. There was a novelty football match between the Muslims and the Christians in that community, which is an affirmation of the fact that the youth are willing to accept changes."

– A dialogue facilitator and trainer in POCl, Kaduna state

4. YOUTH EDUCATION

Through EWER training, youth learnt to identify and report early warning signs that may not be noticed by other community members.

"In the past, there used to be a high level of incidents where young people, whenever they feel aggravated, whenever they feel inferior, they usually take the law in their hands and just met out jungle justice to anybody who they perceived as an offender. But now with, with heavy sensitisation, whenever there is an incident in the community, the higher probability is for the young people to just pause and try to get the facts and then try to follow up channels to address, to either register their grievances with the persons responsible whether with the traditional rulers or in the legal setting."

– A community dialogue facilitator in POCl, Zamfara state

5. BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN SECURITY AND YOUTH

In some instances, there is a stereotype by security operatives that youth are troublemakers. Likewise, some youth may believe that the security operatives are there to persecute them, rather than to protect them. As a result, it is key to conduct advocacy to build bridges between these two groups.

"On the issue of peace and even security, we youth also participate in decision-making. We've become familiar with each other, and now we do everything equally. Before, when we saw security forces, we didn't even like them; we took them as too strict. But now, we share information, and we support each other. They follow us and raise awareness, and they involve us more."

– A youth participant in POCI in Kaduna state



A POCI advocacy visit with security personnel in Zamfara state

ADVOCACY WITH SECURITY OPERATIVES



Participants in POCI hold an advocacy visit with security personnel in Zamfara state

The support of security agencies such as police can make a huge difference in the success of peacebuilding efforts. However, building these relationships is not always easy at the start. In areas where there is a lot of crime and violence, there may be barriers to trust. For example:

- Community members may fear security forces or be reluctant to cooperate with them
- Security personnel may perceive some groups in the community as potential perpetrators or sympathisers with criminals
- Community members may feel like police have not provided them with enough protection

Through advocacy visits, you can help police and other security officials understand how your peacebuilding efforts will work with them to improve security. This can begin a process of building trust between security officials and community members.

Once you have explained your project to security representatives and gained their buy-in, it is a good idea to invite them to participate in EWER committee meetings. This can be a great opportunity to improve cooperation for community security through mutual information-sharing and listening.

Over time, through EWER committee meetings and continued advocacy visits, your project can build good working relationships with security forces. This has several benefits:

- **Security operatives could learn how every group in the community contributes to peace and security** — including youth, women, and marginalised ethnicities. This can break stereotypes about who is responsible for violence or crime.
- **Non-punitive conflict resolution can reduce the burden on security forces.** Sometimes, during POCl, police even referred petty cases to community dialogue facilitators. This allowed the security forces to focus more time on larger security problems.

Building Broader EWER Networks

Over the years, POCl greatly improved trust and communication between security operatives and community members. As a result, the project team was able to work with security officials and government offices to expand their EWER networks.

In Benue state, for example, the project team worked with two local government areas (LGAs) to create EWER teams that are now part of the LGA administrations. These LGA-level EWER teams include representatives of the POCl community EWER committees as well as civil defence officials, police, counter-terrorism officials, and traditional rulers.

This has created more direct communication between high-level security operatives and community members. They hope to improve the rapid response to needs identified by the communities.

ADVOCACY WITH FARMERS AND HERDERS

One of POCl's biggest achievements was bringing the **All-Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN)** and the **Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN)** together. These two organisations—one of farmers and the other of herders—were able to find common ground and promote peace during times of deadly conflict between the farmers and herders that they represent.

"Before the POC intervention, our relationship with herders was unstable because their cattle often encroached on our farms, destroying crops. But through the training we received, our approach to conflict resolution changed. We now have a joint platform where farmers and herders discuss and plan before every harvest season. This ensures that both our interests are protected."

– Chairman of a chapter of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria in Zamfara

Through continual advocacy with AFAN and MACBAN, POCl accomplished many joint undertakings. The project:

- Facilitated communication between farmers and herders, establishing **Reflective Structured Dialogue** as a key method for addressing disputes and tensions
- Held three annual **National Conferences on the Management of Farmer-Herder Relations**, bringing the two groups together with government and security officials to create joint action plans.
- Set up **communication channels like WhatsApp groups** to share warning signals among farmers' and herders' associations.
- Organised **joint AFAN & MACBAN radio shows** in Kaduna and Zamfara.
- Formed **youth groups** with members from both AFAN and MACBAN.
- Established **local security committees made up of farmers and herders**.
- Inspired **many more collaborations** between farmers' and herders' associations at the local and state level

The bridges built between these two organisations are a great example of advocacy, because:

- Their relationship helps address 'root' causes of the conflict which are much deeper than community conflicts. For example,
- Together their power to influence government and security actors' power is much stronger
- Their example has inspired others to believe in peace



Statewide leaders of AFAN (left) and MACBAN (right) present together at POCI's 2023 National Conference, co-hosted with the Nigerian federal government's Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution and the Office of Strategic Preparedness and Resilience

CONCLUSIONS

Through advocacy, we can look beyond individual disputes or incidents and focus on the bigger picture. This is an ongoing process of reaching out to diverse stakeholders, decision-makers, and influential figures and getting them to support your peace goals. Gaining this support can lead to improved policies and systems for managing conflict and can help prevent violence at earlier stages in the conflict chain. Often, the advocacy process builds upon earlier outreach. Media campaigns can also be an important part of advocacy, promoting goals and messages of a peace initiative.

In order to understand and respond to the causes of conflict, it is important that all the different groups who are affected by the issue have a voice in the process and that they can speak directly with officials and decision-makers. **Advocacy creates helpful 'feedback channels' that put stakeholders in communication with each other and can give voice to people who have been left out of decision-making processes.** These feedback channels might include community meetings, outreach to community groups or organisations, visits with influential leaders or government officials, coordination over WhatsApp groups, and/or forums to gather stakeholders together.



An advocacy meeting with POCI project stakeholders in Kaduna state



POCI project team members in front of a community Peace Wall created during the initiative

8

LESSONS LEARNED



A feedback discussion with members of the POCl project team and community dialogue facilitators toward the close of the project



Peace by Us

Lessons Learned from POCI

The Protecting Our Communities Initiative (POCI) developed and implemented what we now call the “**Peace By Us**” approach in 18 communities across three Nigerian states between 2019 and 2024. We hope the lessons below are useful for anyone who wants to build upon this work: community-based organisations, national and international institutions, or peacebuilding funders.

1. IT TAKES YEARS—NOT MONTHS—FOR COMMUNITY-BASED PEACEBUILDING TO TAKE ROOT

POCI was first planned as a two-year project, but funding was extended to a total of five years. We noticed in the evaluation data that a critical shift happened in years three through five: community members began to take full ownership of local peacebuilding systems. They began to feel a sense of their own agency and responsibility to make a difference in preventing violence. No longer just beneficiaries of the project, they saw themselves as agents leading local initiatives to improve community security, even after the funding ended.

In addition, after four years of serving as community dialogue facilitators or volunteering in other roles on the early warning-early response committees, many



A "Peace Ambassador" who gained experience through POCI shares EWER skills with community members at another site

participants were ready to begin training new communities. After POCl ended, those community members became “Peace Ambassadors” who were supported by a new project. In that role, they trained and supported new communities in their area in the Peace By Us approach.

When there is time and funding to build a strong foundation for peacebuilding to be led by community members, then it can be sustained—with local capacity to bring the model to nearby communities at low cost.

2. THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME MAY BE NEW PROCESSES

During the final evaluation of POCl, it became clear that one of the project’s most important innovations was to establish new peacebuilding roles and structures at the community level. POCl provided ongoing training and mentorship to new EWER Committee members, Community Dialogue Facilitators, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Lay Counsellors in each community. As they coordinated with each other, these roles created powerful new systems for preventing violent conflict, for supporting collaborative problem-solving, and for healing from the trauma of violence.

These new peacebuilding roles and processes also created clear pathways for women, youth, and marginalised groups to make vital contributions to peace and security processes. Ensuring that these groups were included in all facets of the work—and then supporting processes that helped them find their voice on the EWER committees—helped men and elders see their value as peacebuilders. One of the striking outcomes of the project was a significant increase in women and youth participants reporting that they had a much greater role in local decision-making.

3. COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS WERE CENTRAL TO POCl’S SUCCESS

Three community-based organisations (CBOs)—one in each region—were core members of the POCl project team, working alongside the national and international partners. While the national and international partners brought technical expertise, CBOs understood local conflict dynamics and how peacebuilding methods would work in the local context. These CBOs had long-standing relationships in their communities and had built trust through years of consistent work. However, they were new to many of POCl’s peacebuilding strategies.

The POCl team learned that strengthening CBOs also strengthens long-term peacebuilding. Unlike project-based field staff, a CBO's staff and networks stay in communities after a project ends. Over five years, POCl gradually transferred more responsibility to CBOs because they would be best able to support communities in an ongoing way.

POCl increased CBOs' own capacity to manage peacebuilding projects. Besides training in EWER, dialogue, psychosocial support, and media, POC also helped CBOs strengthen organisational structures and policies and learn more about how to manage grant proposals and find funding. Through forums and other platforms, the project also helped the CBOs build connections with other organisations, such as farmer's and herder's associations, security agencies, and state ministries and peace commissions. Over time, the CBOs built a regional reputation as effective peacebuilding organisations.

Initially, the POCl team did not fully appreciate the key role that CBOs could play. Consulting with CBOs to select Early Warning–Early Response (EWER) Committee members, for example, could have helped avoid problems where participants were chosen because of political dynamics or social status because the CBOs had deeper knowledge of local community dynamics than the project's national or international partners. Involving them in stakeholder outreach from the start would have helped the process run more smoothly so that participants were widely trusted in the community and selected based on their commitment to peace.

We recommend working in partnership with at least one community-based organisation from the earliest possible stage of any peace project.

4. ENGAGING A WIDE RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS MADE THE PROJECT STRONGER

Early and careful outreach helped more people feel that the POCl project belonged to them, which made activities more effective throughout the communities. The team's approach to stakeholder mapping and needs assessments helped build genuine inclusion from the beginning. The project engaged not only traditional leaders, but also women, youth, people with disabilities, and different ethnic groups. The team also reached out to potential 'spoilers', such as men who were hesitant about women's leadership, to discuss their concerns and seek their buy-in for the project.

Stakeholder engagement was not a phase; it continued throughout the project. As trust grew, security officials began referring disputes to dialogue facilitators and working with EWER Committees to respond to serious incidents. Traditional leaders became strong supporters of POCl and helped resolve difficult conflicts. As people from different walks of life became more engaged with the project, they were able to build trust with each other by working side by side.

5. THINK OF PEACEBUILDING AS RELATIONSHIPS IN AN ONGOING PROCESS—NOT JUST A ‘PROJECT’



Leaders of farmers' and herders' associations laugh together during an inter-state dialogue forum in POCI's fourth year

Peace-making is a practice that has to become part of people's mindset and daily life. Even though POCI was only funded for a specific period of time, the team approached the work as an ongoing process of building trust and connection, and supporting community members as they developed peacebuilding skills.

If a peace intervention is a 'project' that is focused too strictly on goals and timelines, communities may feel used. They may think, 'they only want to measure their success and then leave,' or 'they don't care about me, they just want to solve the issue quickly'. The heart of peacebuilding is building lasting relationships, based on respect. These relationships need to be tended to and maintained.

Relationships built on trust are more valuable in responding to insecurity or conflict than planned activities could ever be. The POCI team sought to foster relationships that could last beyond POCI itself. For example, farmers' and herders' association members who met through POCI dialogues began to cooperate in their agricultural practices and attend each others' holiday celebrations. Similarly, relationships between EWER Committees, CBOs, security actors, and local and state government actors led to an expansion of EWER practices in the project region.

Focusing on peacebuilding as a process, rather than a project, also means being flexible as the needs of the community change. Rigid project plans can expose people to unnecessary risk during unexpected challenges.

In these moments, the POCl team focused on the core peacebuilding goals and re-strategised how to best achieve them. For example, when insecurity made travel unsafe, the team held smaller trainings across more locations, provided more remote support for local teams, and expanded radio programming to keep communities engaged if some activities had to pause.

Project-Based	Process-Based
Top-down	Bottom-up
Focused on a short timeline	Sustainable
Worrying about meeting exact deadlines	Keeping peacebuilding goals, but not forcing strict deadlines
Sticking to rigid plans	Adapting to what is happening on the ground
Ticking off targets	Following up and debriefing after each ‘peace event’ — including ongoing dialogue sessions and lay counseling meetings

6. CONTINUOUS DEBRIEFING AND FEEDBACK STRENGTHENED THE WORK

POCl tried to support a culture of dialogue, reflection, and follow-up at all levels of the project. This helped ensure the project responded to local needs in a timely way, in addition to formal monitoring and evaluation. To make sure the project responded to local needs, POCl engaged in regular and consistent feedback sessions with people working at the community level. This included:

- Debrief sessions after peacebuilding activities such as dialogues or counselling sessions
- Coordinating meetings between CBOs and the national and international partners
- Reflection sessions during public forums and in meetings with other organisations, such as youth groups and farmers’ and herders’ associations

Although debrief sessions can seem like a tiresome task at first, they were essential in POCI. They created a space for reflection, improvement, knowledge-sharing, and continuity throughout all of the project's changes, including staffing changes. This allowed the project to adapt well to new challenges.

Debriefing	Holding a meeting after any peacebuilding event, such as dialogue or psychosocial support, or at regular times throughout a project to ask: • What is going well? • What needs to be improved? • What action can we take next time to improve the process? • What other feedback do the participants have?
Follow-Up	Checking up to see that everyone involved is still onboard with peace. Making sure any outstanding issues are being addressed.



Community Dialogue Facilitators in Benue participate in a debrief session and contribute to strategic planning

"Something that really stood out is the availability of Karuna Center [the project's international partner, which received and then redistributed the project funds] and their willingness to listen and re-strategise. It's not very common on other projects. In other projects once the budget has been signed and your template has been developed, come rain, come sunshine, you have to go through with what we've agreed on. Well, it's been a bit different with this POCI project. We've had several times where we'll go back to the drawing board to say 'this is not working. Can we tweak it a bit to make it work?' And it has made working quite easy. The pressure is reduced.

POCI is very, very adaptable. We have shared that with some partners already. We've told them how this approach has helped our work and shared the story so that they can adapt to that same style of engaging with their partners. Karuna is very interested in our growth as an organisation. They are always thinking about the next step to help us grow. We appreciate that."

– A community based organisation active in POCI

7. SYNERGY BETWEEN PROJECT COMPONENTS IMPROVED IMPACT

POCI showed that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to conflict. Training communities in only one response—such as dialogue—will not address every situation. Instead, POCI created a “toolkit” of different ways to address conflict and insecurity—through dialogue, counselling sessions, media, sensitisation and advocacy visits, meetings with stakeholders, targeted problem-solving with the involved parties, or even traditional methods like negotiations led by elders.

At the start of POCI, these components were not well-coordinated at the community level. Over time, the project improved this ‘synergy’, which:



- Clarifies shared goals among everyone in the project—whether they are a Community Dialogue Facilitator, media officer, or lay counsellor
- Improves communication between different peacebuilders in the project, creating a longer-term network of relationships
- Strengthens the project by sharing learnings across different components
- Increases collaboration and teamwork, creating a feeling of togetherness in the community

Synergy

Working and coordinating together to achieve a common goal

Examples of how POCI increased synergy between its project components include:

- Including dialogue facilitators and lay counsellors in EWER Committees
- “Cross-training” across programme components; for example, training CDFs in the basics of MHPSS, and teaching EWER Committee members basic dialogue facilitation
- Bringing community members together for radio programmes and social media content across the different components
- Holding debriefs after most peacebuilding activities

8. MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT WAS UNDER-RESOURCED—BUT ESSENTIAL

Due to limited resources, POCl could not always put mental health support at the forefront of the project. Throughout the project, we became increasingly aware that trauma awareness and healing are key to building peace. Communities impacted by insecurity greatly valued this kind of support. The demand for lay counselling, expressive therapy, and other psychosocial and mental health supports outpaced POCl's capacity to fund such vital activities.

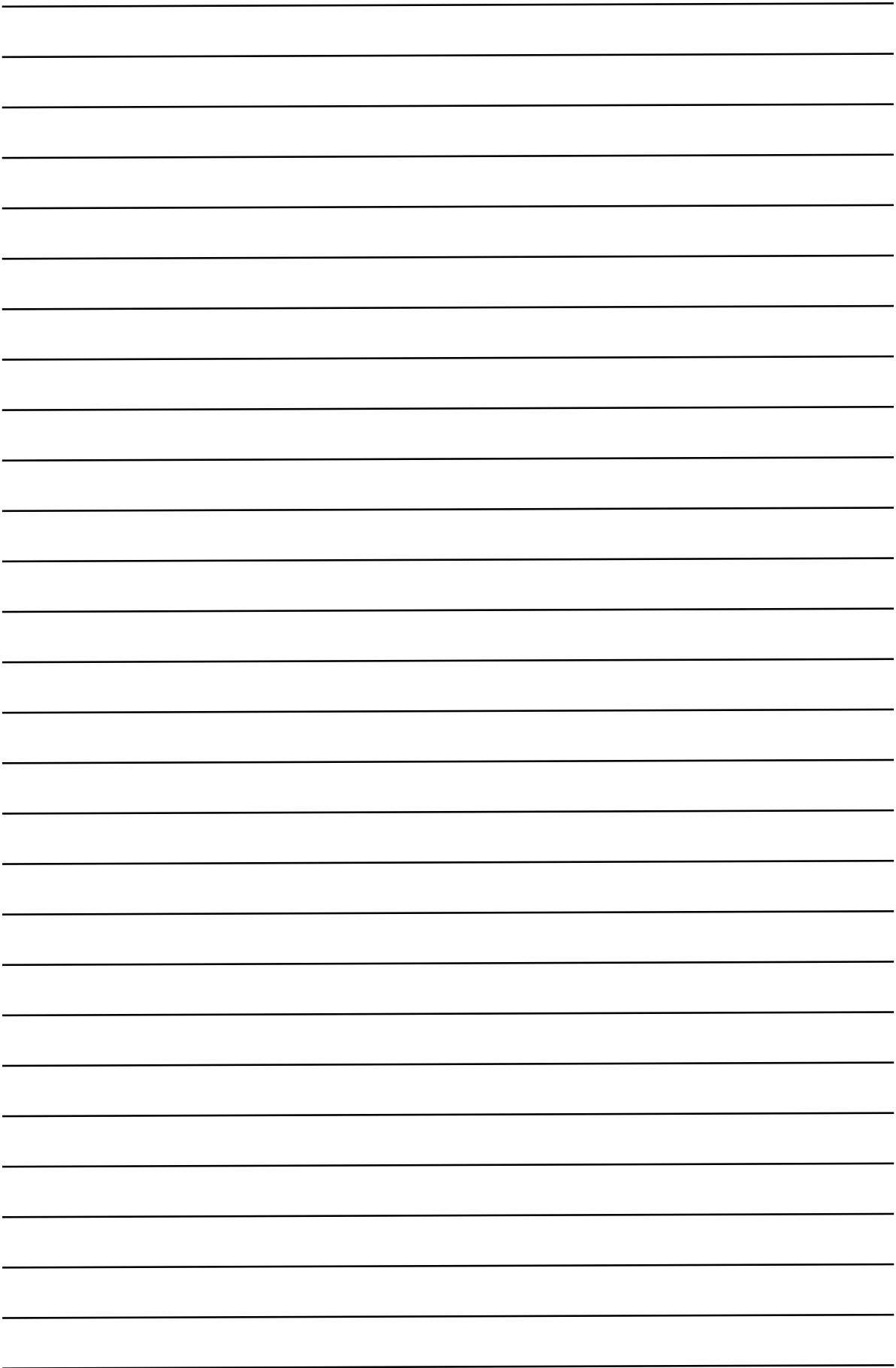
People living with trauma or daily hardship may also struggle to engage in peacebuilding. They may feel stuck in shock, anger, or helplessness. For community members' well-being, and to support their capacity to participate, we strongly recommend including lay counselling or mental health support as a key pillar in any peacebuilding project.

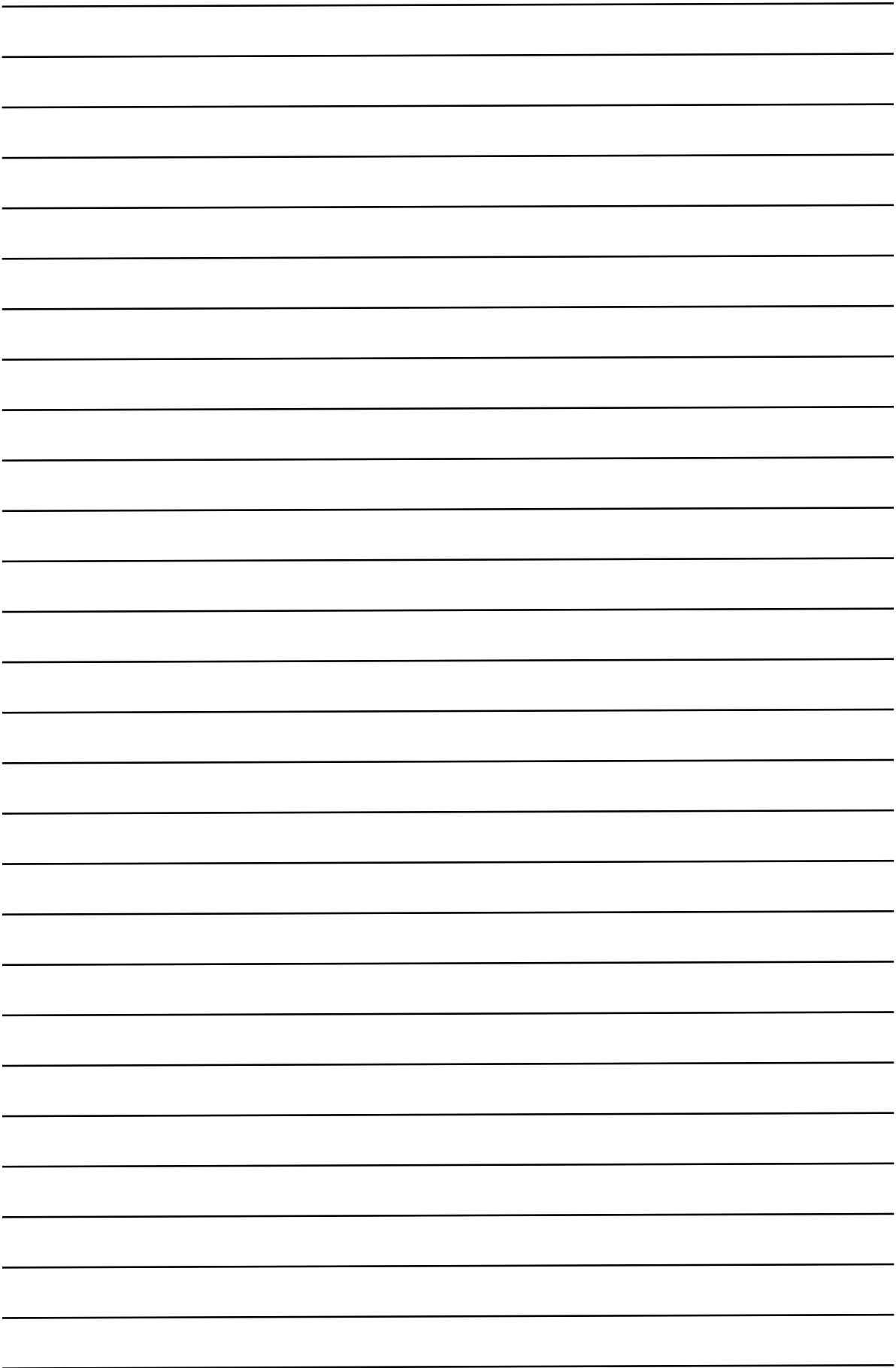
Conclusions

The Peace By Us model has had a transformative impact in communities—reducing violence, rebuilding trust between so-called enemies, and empowering women and youth to take a greater role in peacebuilding and community life. We made this how-to guide because we want these tools for peace to be accessible to anyone.

Peacebuilding is a long-term process, but even in the most challenging situations, you can make a difference. This guide offers a flexible framework that can be adapted to different communities, cultures, and contexts. Although the model was developed through POCl, it is already being adapted elsewhere. We hope you will do the same, while staying true to core principles of the Peace By Us approach: compassion, inclusion, mutual respect, collaboration, reflection, and continual learning.

Whether you are working for peace in one community or across a whole region, we hope this guide inspires you to continue your efforts and join us in a learning process. Often, it is not until looking back later that we can realise what a difference we have made. Above all, we hope readers take away our most critical lesson learned: that when communities are empowered with the right skills and knowledge, they can build and sustain peace.







PEACE BY US



peacebyus.org