

Health as a Bridge for Peace

Health as a Bridge for Peace (HBP) is a multidimensional policy and planning framework which supports health workers in delivering health programmes in conflict and post-conflict situations and at the same time contributes to peace-building. It is defined as the integration of peace-building concerns, concepts, principles, strategies and practices into health relief and health sector development.

The Health as a Bridge for Peace concept is rooted in values derived from human rights and humanitarian principles as well as medical ethics. It is supported by the conviction that it is imperative to adopt peace-building strategies to ensure lasting health gains in the context of social instability and complex emergencies.

In achieving the primary goal of health for societies prone to and affected by war, we as health professionals recognize responsibilities to create opportunities for peace.

Health as a Bridge for Peace was formally accepted by the 51st World Health Assembly in May 1998 as a feature of the 'Health for All in the 21st Century' strategy.

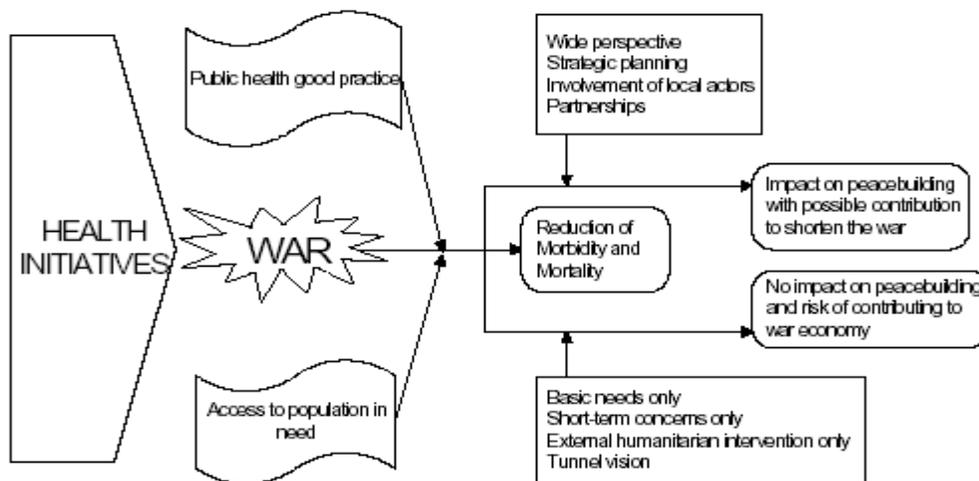
The United Nations Secretary-General, in his October 2000 report on the implementation of the "Brahimi Report", stresses the need for "mobilizing all relevant resources of the United Nations system and other international actors in support of [...] activities so that they contribute to peace".

Why Health as a Bridge for Peace?

Armed conflict is one of the biggest challenges facing humanity and directly and indirectly affects health. Violence is a major source of disease.

War is a major source of disease causing: death and injury, the breakdown of and reduced access to health systems, the increase incidence of communicable diseases, reduced water and sanitation and disease prevention, psychosocial effects, malnutrition, etc.

We need to deliver health in conflict situations. Health can be a neutral meeting point to bring conflicting parties to discuss mutually beneficial interventions. Health workers are ideally placed because of their professional and ethical position within the community.



How is Health as a Bridge for Peace implemented?

Considering WHO's experience in the field (Angola, Mozambique, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR-Macedonia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, etc.), the essence of HBP can be summarized by the work done in a 'technical space' where health personnel from conflicting sides have been producing a joint effort in policy, training and service delivery initiatives.

Examples:

Health Policy

- Adoption by Governments and opposition armed groups of national guidelines and protocols
- Reintegration of demobilized soldiers or minority groups within the national health system
- Elaboration of strategic plans for the health system reform involving all actors in the framework of a post-war reconstruction

Training

- Joint working groups on technical issues such as health information, epidemiology, mental health, physical rehabilitation, health system administration and pharmaceuticals
- Regular contacts between health professional of all communities, through the promotion of multiple cross-community technical conferences, workshops and seminars.
- Exchange activities promoting international links among professionals of different groups

Service Delivery

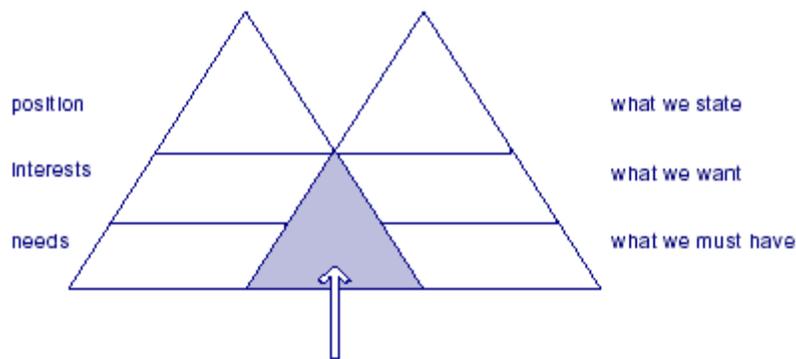
- Humanitarian Cease-Fires (1985 - 2003):
- In different ways (Humanitarian Cease-Fires, Days of Tranquility and Safe-Peace Corridors) opposite sides collaborated in order to carry out important immunization campaigns in the midst of wars in some 19 countries.

Which negotiation process does Health as a Bridge for Peace advocate?

People often negotiate by taking up a negotiating position. They then try to persuade the other person to agree with them or move towards their position. This often encourages power struggles and does not resolve the conflict.

On the other hand, 'mediators' can offer alternatives to positional negotiation.

When we look below the conflict surface, we discover the interest, which people's position represent and the needs which motivate their interests.



Area of common interest and needs. Space for dialogue

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Health as a Bridge for Peace - What can be done?

- Elaborate strategic planning based on a broad political understanding of the conflict, (addressing its root causes), a wide public health approach, a comprehensive perspective of victims and political actors, and a full consideration of Human Rights issues.
- Prevent side effects of humanitarian programs, which can foster dependency of beneficiaries on external aid.
- Involve local capacities for change.
- Create partnerships, with a strong presence of local civil society organizations.
- Develop Health as a Bridge for Peace training for lead staff in war-prone regions.
- Affirm the importance of field experience (bottom-up, instead of top-down approach) in the definitions, (re) adjustment and evaluation of HBP strategies.

And in general,

- Promote Health Policy and Strategy inspired by "Health for All" with a commitment to equity, solidarity and social justice contributing to create conditions for stability, hope and peace.

Adapted from: WHO (2007). *What is Health as a Bridge for Peace*.

http://www.who.int/hac/techguidance/hbp/about_what/en/index.html [Accessed 25 August 2007]