East and Southern Africa MHPSS Community of Practice Meeting

13th & 14th February 2019, Nairobi
Executive Summary
Purpose

The East and Southern Africa MHPSS Community of Practice (ESA MHPSS COP) was established at a meeting held in Nairobi Kenya on the 13th and 14th of February 2019 by a group of practitioners, researchers and policymakers interested in improving learning and exchange in the MHPSS sector in the region.

The ESA MHPSS COP is a member-led regional collaborative whose purpose is to create a forum to

a) contextuallyize global standards and interventions,
b) strengthen the coordination of MHPSS action across regional and national levels, and
c) promote innovation, research and good practice in MHPSS.

Membership to the ESA MHPSS COP is open to individuals and organizations. It seeks to build alliances between colleagues, existing networks and collectives, and to facilitate working partnerships with collaborating organizations. It has an active Community of Practice group on MHPSS.net, which can be accessed for key resources, upcoming events, jobs information, and for making connections to others in the region.

This document outlines the key elements of the ESA MHPSS COP and provides a summary of the discussion pertaining to these decisions.

Principles:

The following principles were seen as important factors to enable a culture of learning and exchange at the ESA MHPSS COP. They are intended to guide its operationalization.

- Function as a knowledge hub
- Local identity and representation enabled by
  - Regional leadership
  - Community involvement and engagement
  - Steered by field experiences and priorities
- Relevance to members and sector
- Collective responsibility, benefits and resource mobilization
- Engenders trust amongst members through
  - Shared vision and specific common objectives
  - Sensitivity to political and cultural contexts
  - Effective durable solutions
  - Continuity of people and organizations
  - Shared terminology and vocabulary
- Fosters learning from practice through
  - Reflective practice
  - Provision of safe space

Strategic Focus Areas

The ESA MHPSS COP identified a number of focus areas that should fall within the mandate of the group. Members who are interested in a specific topic could leverage the knowledge and collaborative support of the members to raise the resources and engage in delivery through a coalition of members or singly. Emerging knowledge, insights and lessons learnt from these and any other initiatives could be shared amongst the group. Members could
also register their interest in these areas for updates from colleagues or initiate working groups to work together in any one area.

The ESA MHPSS COP would not become a provider of services in these areas, instead functioning through its membership to undertake initiatives in the identified focus areas. These focus areas are intended to add value to the sector and improve the quality, appropriateness and effectiveness of services at the ground level.

The identified focus areas are:

- Innovation and Research
- Collaboration and Networking
- Information and Knowledge sharing
- MHPSS advocacy and human rights
- Capacity building and technical support
- Resource mobilization/fundraising
- Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms in MHPSS
- Bridge development and humanitarian sectors
- Coordination (qualified as *supporting* coordination of MHPSS action by members across region)

**Structure:**

It was decided that the ESA MHPSS COP would be made up of membership of individuals and representatives from organizations, including state and non-state organizations. This was seen as useful in order to reflect the reality of leadership and service delivery in different countries of the East and Southern African region.

The structure of the organization would an umbrella body of all members, with sub-regional focal points for East Africa and Southern Africa, and country-level members who may wish to collaborate on initiatives of their choice.

Leadership will be rotated amongst the members. This ensures that the initiative is member-led and -owned. However, it was also decided that representatives from government agencies should not hold the leadership position, due to the sensitivities around supporting initiatives in the different countries at national level. Representatives from regional bodies however were seen as suitable to hold positions of leadership.

It was suggested that the some focus areas might be better suited to the different structural levels, as is seen in the diagram below.
**Membership: Persons and Organizations**

The ESA MHPSS COP is open to all members, either in their individual professional capacity or as organizational representatives, whether from state or non-state entities, with an interest in learning about and contributing to the improvement of MHPSS services in the region.

Three issues were highlighted in relation to members: high turnover of members who are organizational representatives, loss of institutional memory and interruptions to institutional continuity. It was recognized that individuals within organizations might find it difficult to engage in the COP without organizational buy-in. Continuity might be addressed by having organizations nominate people and by having a role for organizations to be involved in the COP.

Membership is open to:
- Experts
- Field practitioners
- Academics
- Front-line staff
- Volunteers
- Policy makers
- Donors
- Representatives from organizations
- Representatives from collaborating groups: these involve: INGOS, UN agencies, NGOS, CBOS, Faith-based organizations, Civil society groups (e.g. peacekeepers)

**Resourcing**

It was agreed that the ESA MHPSS COP would raise funds for its own functioning and operation as well as on behalf of collaborating members who may wish to initiate a project in relation to any of the focus areas at regional, sub-regional, national or local levels.

Key decisions relating to resourcing are that:
- Funds are needed for coordinators and other human resources, infrastructure, and working groups.
The time period for funds would depend on the activities.
Collaborating partners (such as research institutions, universities, independent organizations)
As the COP grows, it would be good practice for members to include it in their strategy for sustainable funding. For example, linking objectives and activities to the UNDAF/CPRE reporting to the SDGs
Include M&E impact aspects to the purpose and practices of the COP for the aspect of advocating to partners
In the short-term, necessary to seek voluntary support from individuals and organizations

Contact details of point persons:
- Jonas Kambale, TPO-DRC (kambalo.jonas@gmail.com)
- Morris Tayebwa, EAC-Tanzania (mtayebwa@eachq.org)
- Carmel Gaillard, REPSSI (carmel.gaillard@repssi.org)
- Marcio Gagliato, MHPSS.net (marcio@mhpss.net)
- Maleeka Salih, MHPSS.net (maleeka@mhpss.net)
**Key Actions/Tasks:**

The COP took the following decisions with regards to the key tasks to establishing the operational aspect of the groups.

**Immediate next steps**
- Create group on MHPSS.net
- Documents need to be uploaded to the group: collection of existing reports and publications on research, policies, documents, stories, and good practices in the ESA region
- Draft a push invitation for all potential participants
- Identify key and focal point persons: regional (REPSSI for now), East Africa, Southern Africa
- REPSSI and MHPSS.net as point person for ESA COP for short period of time

**Short-term plans**
- Develop and share a TOR for this group
- ALL members should create a profile on MHPSS.net
- Creating a bigger network i.e. inviting other practitioners to join
- Identify schedule/timeline for next steps- agree on these & disseminate
- Develop a calendar of events where the group members are updated to upcoming events
- An online survey of preferred purpose statements and assess willingness to take on voluntary role for short period of time
- Webinars – end-Feb & end-April
- Next meeting – online, end-April to finalize purpose and TOR and determine next steps

**6-month activity plan**
- Continue pushing email invitation to COP group assembled for contacts and recommendations (with the link, to register), request for country level and regional contacts (snowball technique), and share online links with reference groups and push to key organizations through newsletters and mail-outs
- Ensure that there are push notifications and ongoing communications on emails
- List of key invitees (individuals/organizations/entities), maybe moving towards at least one focal point for each country
- Conduct webinars every 2 months
- How do we begin the conversation for contextualization and localization of MHPSS activities?
  - Analytical study/situational analysis on MHPSS in EAC/SADC
  - Regional forum of duty bearers (in) of MHPSS
- Engage with governments and donors, so that they can appreciate where MHPSS stands and see how different stakeholders relate to the sector