

PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING SERIES

# Psychosocial Care and Support Mainstreaming Guidelines

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**Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children**

REPSSI (the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative) is a leading African psychosocial support organisation. REPSSI's vision is that all communities and families nurture, protect and empower their children and youth. In thirteen countries of East and Southern Africa, REPSSI partners with governments, development partners, international organisations and NGOs to provide programmes that strengthen communities' and families' competencies to promote the psychosocial wellbeing of their children and youth.

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# Foreword

**REPSSI** is a regional non-governmental organisation (NGO) working with partners to promote psychosocial support (PSS) for children and youth within their families and communities in East and Southern Africa. REPSSI was established in 2001 and commenced operations in 2002. In 2005 REPSSI was registered as a regional NGO, based in South Africa and with subregional offices in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania.

One of the lessons that REPSSI has learnt is that PSS should not be an independent aspect of service provision with its own vertical and independent programming. This approach is difficult to sustain and does not maximise the benefits that children and youth receive. REPSSI has therefore adopted the mainstreaming approach in order to maximise the number of children and youth who are reached with PSS services, and to ensure that PSS is provided as an ongoing part of all services rather than as a once-off event. Mainstreaming PSS also ensures that Orphans and Vulnerable Children/Youth (OVCY) programming becomes more holistic, sustainable and embraces the voices and concerns of children and youth.

It is hoped that REPSSI partners and other stakeholders working to improve the wellbeing of children and youth will find these mainstreaming guidelines useful.

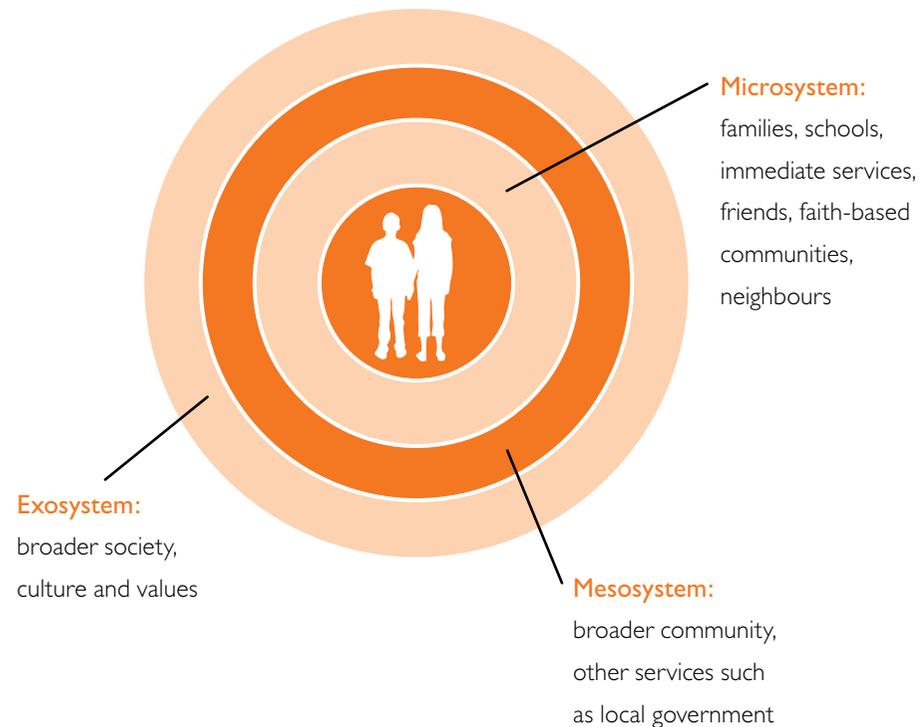
The guidelines are not “cast in stone” but an aid in starting the mainstreaming process.



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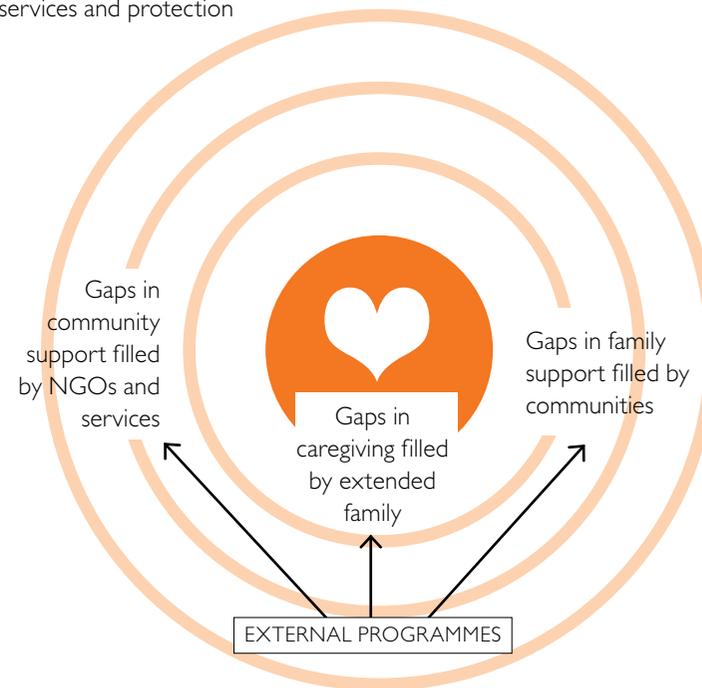
# Introduction

According to the ecological model, first expounded by Bronfenbrenner, child development results from interactions between the child and a series of systems that surround the child. These systems are: the Microsystem which is comprised of families, schools and other immediate services, friends, faith-based communities and immediate neighbours; the Exosystem comprised of the broader community and services such as those provided by local government; and the Macrosystem which is their broader society, culture and values over time. In the model the historical time and place of an individual, the timing of transitions and events occurring during his/her life and historical events are all important in determining a person's life course. The ecological system may be depicted as in the diagram below:



The ecological system can also be described as circles of care – the family, community, government services, broader government programmes and the general socio-political and socio-economic environment. Under normal circumstances, the interaction between children and their families, communities and other services in the immediate circles of care are sufficient to enable a child or young person to have psychosocial wellbeing. However, there are many stressors or risks to families and communities which result in breaks in the circles of care. Some of these are HIV and AIDS, conflict, poverty, family disintegration and abuse. The breaks in the circles of care can be depicted as:

Supportive environment provided  
by government provision of  
services and protection



Source: Richter, Forster and Sherr, 2006

When one circle is no longer intact such as if a family has suffered loss due to death or migration of a key member or the community is shattered as a consequence of conflict, it is necessary to provide additional support through other layers within the circles of support. Thus, when the immediate family is not able to provide care and support, the first layer of support is the extended family. If the extended family is also overburdened, or there are no members of the extended family where the family is, then the community needs to support the family.

In cases where the community cannot cope with the demands it is necessary for education, health, social protection and other services to offer care and for NGO programmes to support them. Where services and local NGO programmes are not able to provide this support then it is necessary for external help to be brought in. Cluver, Fincham and Seedat (2009) hypothesised that the negative effects of severe multiple disadvantage in a particular sphere of a child's life could be moderated by protective factors in other spheres. They subsequently conducted research on a sample of 1,025 South African children and adolescents which found that support from carers, school staff and friends was perceived to buffer the deleterious effects of exposure to trauma within the family circle (Cluver, Fincham and Seedat, 2009).

The level of stress on families and communities is very high throughout much of East and Southern Africa. This is a result

of HIV and AIDS, poverty, conflict, alcohol and substance abuse and high levels of abuse and domestic violence.

These multiple stressors have resulted in family and community disintegration. There is therefore a great need for additional support to boys and girls, youth, their caregivers and families from the community and service levels.

The impact of HIV and AIDS in East and Southern Africa, often together with poverty and conflict, is not just economic, biological or physical. Most programmes respond to the more visible impacts of the pandemic (e.g. nutrition for orphans, antiretrovirals (ARV) for infected people, cash transfers). There is evidence that the impact of HIV and AIDS, conflict and poverty contain psychosocial dimensions that need to be addressed. These impacts may also be spiritual, social and emotional. These are the unseen "soft" issues. Most policies and programmes in East and Southern Africa have neglected these pertinent areas to the detriment of children, youth, families and communities.

Child and youth-related policies, services, and programmes need to respond holistically to all the needs and rights of children and youth. This entails mainstreaming psychosocial care and support through all facets of programming and service delivery. PSS mainstreaming facilitates the provision of care and support to many children and youth on a continuous and long term basis.

# Target users for the guidelines

This guideline is directed at child and family focused programmes, government ministries/ departments and institutions, and community-based programmes. Mainstreaming can be implemented with little external support but it is recommended that organisations/institutions seek support when necessary.

# Purpose of the guidelines

These guidelines aim to stimulate action and promote a multisectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to mainstreaming PSS so that government and organisational programmes incorporate psychosocial care and support for children and youth.

## The guidelines:

- Provide and elaborate on the REPSSI PSS mainstreaming model
- Describe what PSS mainstreaming is
- Provide generic guidance on how to mainstream PSS which can be adapted to suit different organisations and government ministries /departments
- Emphasise the value and importance of collaboration and networking in order to meet the holistic needs and rights of boys and girls, youth, families and communities

# Definitions of key words and terms

The following section provides definitions of key terms and concepts which any organisation or government ministry/department embarking on PSS mainstreaming will need:

## Psychosocial

The psychosocial represents the relationship between the psychological and social aspects of our lives, with each continually influencing and interacting with the other. Every person is influenced by the interaction between:

the psychological, or intra personal components which are the cognitive, emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives and; the social, or the inter personal relationships with family, community and friends as well as the broader social environment such as culture, traditions, religion, socio-economic and socio-political environment.

The dynamic interaction of the psychological and the social areas of our lives influence the way we interpret our environment and the choices we make. This includes our ability to seize opportunities and overcome challenges.

## Psychosocial wellbeing

Psychosocial wellbeing is the state in which an individual, family, or community has cognitive, emotional, and spiritual strengths combined with positive social relationships. This state of wellbeing will then motivate the development of life skills which enables them to understand their environment, to engage with it and make healthy choices which lead to hope for the future

## Psychosocial support (PSS)

Psychosocial support is a continuum of love, care and protection that enhances the cognitive, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of a person and strengthens their social and cultural connectedness. Effective psychosocial support enhances individual, family and community competencies and positively influences both the individual and the social environment in which people live.

Good practice in psychosocial support draws on the strengths of the child, youth, family and community, to strengthen resilience which leads to thriving.

The holistic nature of psychosocial wellbeing requires that psychosocial support is appropriately, adequately and

consistently provided through home and family, school and friends, community and local services.

## Mainstreaming

This is the deliberate and planned inclusion of an approach or an issue into all levels of operation within an organisation or government ministry/department across all of its functional units. Mainstreaming may extend beyond a single institution to encompass broader or national policies and programmes.

## PSS mainstreaming

PSS mainstreaming is the deliberate and planned inclusion of PSS into every aspect of an organisation or government ministry/department from the leadership and policy level, through organisational culture and practice, to all areas of the programme cycle. When PSS is mainstreamed, organisational policies, programmes and practice are developed and delivered in a way that promotes psychosocial wellbeing of staff, boys and girls, youth, families and communities.

# Guiding principles for mainstreaming PSS

As your organisation or ministry/department considers mainstreaming PSS, there are principles that have to be considered as they help to guide the process.

- Promote ownership of mainstreaming PSS within the organisation or ministry/department. The involvement and participation of targeted groups in policy formulation, planning and implementation is critical.
- Ensure involvement of children and youth, with consideration of gender and age, at all levels.
- Consider cultural values, beliefs and indigenous knowledge that influence the children, youth, families and community you are serving. Indigenous knowledge and value systems cannot be ignored if mainstreaming PSS is to be sustainable, relevant and meaningful.
- Equity and non-discrimination – interventions need to promote non-discrimination with respect to gender, age, language, ethnicity and disability.
- Mainstreaming efforts should be located within existing institutional structures such as international conventions, regional commitments and national policies on children and youth.
- Partnerships and a multisectoral, collaborative approach are fundamental to ensuring the wellbeing of children, youth, families and communities.

# Short and long term benefits of PSS mainstreaming

- **Organisational policies and procedures:** are designed to enhance the psychosocial wellbeing of staff and the organisation or ministry/department, thus improving productivity.
- **Cost effectiveness:** mainstreaming PSS will improve the quality and effectiveness of programmes in achieving their own objectives (e.g. research has shown that education programmes that have mainstreamed PSS also achieve much better results in terms of enrolment, retention and progression of children in the education system). Thus, the resources that are available will create greater impact within the community for children, youth and families.
- **Increased reach:** More children and youth will have access to PSS thus the overall wellbeing of children, youth and their families and communities is improved.
- **Standardisation and sustainability of PSS through incorporation into policies** of governments, international cooperating partners and organisations.
- **Strengthening existing support structures for children and youth:** mainstreaming calls for increased partnerships and collaborative processes to ensure a more holistic and integrated response. No single organisation can address all the needs and rights of children and youth.
- **Increased knowledge about mainstreaming PSS:** as organisations mainstream PSS, the pool of knowledge and expertise in this area will increase. This knowledge can be documented and shared to build evidence.
- **Expanded community response:** psychosocial care and support for children and youth is often neglected due to its intangible nature. Mainstreaming PSS will help unlock community innovation, creativity and caring. Communities, families, youth and children will be able to advocate for their rights, take over projects and localise them.
- **Genuine participation and partnership with communities:** PSS mainstreaming creates opportunities to develop and nurture mutually beneficial partnerships. This enhances community competencies and confidence. Thus programmes will be based on and respond to issues that affect communities, and they will participate in these programmes making them more effective.

# REPSSI Model of Mainstreaming

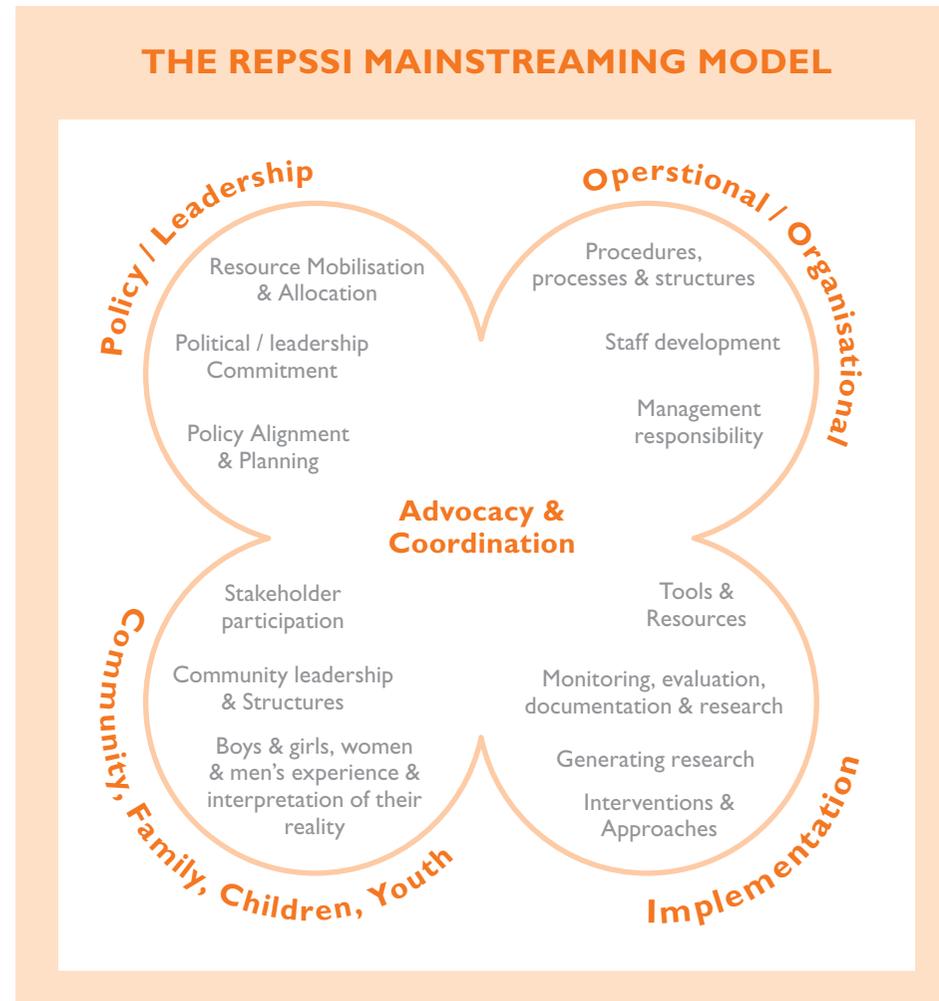
REPSSI developed a model that can help you identify areas that will facilitate the mainstreaming of PSS. This model was inspired by the Web of Institutionalisation which was developed by Caren Levy (1996).

The REPSSI mainstreaming model identifies four main spheres which can also be understood as areas of focus.

The spheres are:

- policy or leadership
- operational or organisational
- implementation
- children, youth and community participation

Each sphere has within it elements that need to be addressed for mainstreaming to effectively take place. The spheres are open because the work done in each one affects aspects of the others. As advocacy and coordination are cross cutting issues they are at the centre.



## 1. Policy or Leadership Sphere

For mainstreaming to be sustainable or effective it needs to be reflected in government and organisational policies, frameworks, guidelines and plans. This requires political leadership and commitment to the process. In addition, organisational policies, frameworks, guidelines and plans need to be aligned with national, regional and international policies relating to children, youth and communities such as national plans of action (NPA/NAP), Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (SADC's CSTL programme), national health policies relating to children and mothers, and poverty reduction strategies. This will ensure that organisational efforts contribute to the national agenda for children, youth, families and communities. Organisations and departments must place value on consultative processes that engage children, youth, families and communities.

The implementation of policies and programmes that promote mainstreaming requires that resources are both mobilised and allocated.

### Political / leadership commitment

- The leadership of the ministry, department or organisation needs to understand, value and be committed to the process of PSS mainstreaming. This must be achieved through awareness raising and convincing leadership that the benefits of mainstreaming are worth the investment of resources required.

- Leadership has the responsibility to ensure that PSS is reflected in the policy documents, and strategic frameworks and plans.

### Policy, alignment and planning

This involves ensuring that:

- Relevant government and organisational policies, frameworks and guidelines reflect PSS mainstreaming.
- Organisational policies, frameworks, guidelines and programmes are aligned to national, regional and international policies, frameworks and guidelines that promote the mainstreaming of PSS (e.g. NAP/ NPA, children's policy, Southern African Development Community (SADC) frameworks, ACRWC, UNCRC, Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL), maternal & child health policies).
- Strategic plans reflect and promote mainstreaming of PSS.
- The organisation has policies and guidelines necessary to support PSS mainstreaming which are operationalised (e.g. child protection policy, child participation policy, gender policies and a staff wellbeing or wellness policy).

### Resource mobilisation and allocation

- Resource mobilisation is done in a way that acknowledges and enhances community and family strengths and resources to ensure sustainability of local PSS initiatives.
- Resource mobilisation is done in a manner that is cognisant of issues that are pertinent to or affect the psychosocial

wellbeing of children and youth (e.g. the ethical issues around use of photographs and using people's identities).

- Resource mobilisation includes budget lines for mainstreaming PSS.
- Resources are allocated for activities that contribute to mainstreaming of PSS. These activities can include consultation meetings with community members, supporting children's or youth clubs, or national advocacy work or coordination.

## 2. Operational or Organisational Sphere

The process of mainstreaming requires that a ministry or organisation considers important operational aspects. A key element of this sphere is management responsibility for operationalising the mainstreaming agenda. To effectively do this, management needs to invest in staff development and ensure that organisational procedures facilitate mainstreaming and contribute to the wellbeing of staff and people who access services from the ministry or organisation.

Staff skills and competencies in PSS programming are important in the mainstreaming process. Skills need to be spread among implementing staff and not merely located with one or two individuals. The responsibility for mainstreaming needs to cut across different departments and child-focused projects. The ministry or organisation has to make deliberate efforts to implement policies (developed in sphere above).

## Management responsibility

- Senior management value and are committed to the mainstreaming process.
- Senior management takes full responsibility for operationalising policies that mainstream PSS into the programmes of the ministry or organisation.
- Management supports staff as they undertake their activities. Activities such as debriefing sessions, counselling and developing flexible work plans can enhance staff's motivation and capacity to mainstream PSS.
- Management puts into place a mechanism to report on psychosocial outcomes.

## Procedures, processes and structures

- Design procedures that facilitate PSS mainstreaming, making it possible for implementing staff to promote the wellbeing of children, youth, families and communities.
- The Operational or Organisational Handbook reflects procedures that promote psychosocial wellbeing of staff and people supported by the ministry or organisation.
- Informal procedures within the ministry or organisation promote psychosocial wellbeing.

## Human resource development

- The ministry or organisation ensures that it has staff with the necessary capacity to deliver PSS programmes. All staff involved in mainstreaming should have the necessary skills and orientation. This includes receiving

quality accredited training in PSS, regular refresher training and mentorship.

- Workloads of implementing staff are arranged in a manner that allows them to do things differently (e.g. mainstream PSS). Staff have opportunities to be exposed to what other organisations are doing in relation to psychosocial mainstreaming. This can be done through exchange visits, regional PSS forums, newsletters, and libraries of quality, up-to-date PSS programming resources.
- Ensure that staff responsibilities related to PSS mainstreaming are included in job descriptions and performance contracts, and that staff are rewarded for good work in PSS mainstreaming.

## 3. Implementation Sphere

One of the aims of mainstreaming PSS is to protect and promote the psychosocial wellbeing of children, youth, families and communities throughout the project cycle. This sphere focuses on the development and execution of community programmes. This includes the use of information, learning and research about PSS to generate new knowledge, and develop tools and approaches.

## Tools and resources

- Adapt and develop tools and resources to ensure they complement community and family efforts
- Use tools and resources that have positive psychosocial outcomes

- Use tools and resources that are contextually relevant, up-to-date and of good quality
- Train staff in PSS tools and resources
- Ensure that tools and resources which are used are cognisant of the needs of girls and boys, and take different ages into account.

## Interventions and approaches

All interventions and approaches should:

- Complement and build upon existing family, community and government strengths and efforts to care for, protect and support boys, girls and youth
- Address the rights and needs of boys, girls and youth
- Take into account the voices of girls, boys, youth and their families and communities so that interventions are shaped by their realities and needs felt
- Be time bound and have a clear strategy for community ownership and programme sustainability
- Be culturally appropriate and gender sensitive
- Counter stigma and discrimination by giving the most marginalised a voice and reintegrating them into society

## Monitoring, evaluation, documentation and research

Implementing bodies should:

- Plan to monitor and evaluate the psychosocial outcomes of interventions.

- Clearly define expected psychosocial outcomes before interventions are implemented.
- Ensure that monitoring and evaluation tools are culturally sensitive, gender inclusive and not harmful to participants.
- Involve children, youth, families and communities in monitoring, evaluation, documentation and research
- Provide feedback to the community on the data or information collected. Share findings and changes in implementation strategy with all stakeholders for collective learning and future action.
- Ensure that documentation includes stories related to change and the community understanding of how the change is related to the intervention.
- Conduct research into issues that impact on psychosocial wellbeing (e.g. interventions and approaches used in the delivery of programmes).
- Plan for integration of learning gained through research into programmes.
- Monitor the mainstreaming process.

### Generating knowledge

Evidence from research, documentation, monitoring and evaluation should be organised and packaged into useful knowledge to:

- advocate for policy change
- create awareness
- plan or review interventions
- develop tools and inform approaches

- share with other implementing organisations
- feedback and support to communities in developing and implementing action plans in response to the lessons learnt through the research

### 4. Children, youth and community participation sphere

The benefits of mainstreaming are realised within the community sphere – for children, their families and communities. A relationship of mutual learning and accountability with all stakeholders is an integral part of mainstreaming. This will ensure that programmes are informed by the realities of girls, boys, youth, families and communities.

#### Community leadership and structures

Government extension workers, service providers and organisations working at community level should:

- Involve local leadership including traditional leaders, religious leaders, local political leaders, local government officials, opinion makers and influential people in planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes.
- Work through existing community structures such as burial societies, faith- based groups and child protection committees.
- Promote local level policy and by-laws to care for and protect children and youth.
- Support and encourage community leaders to influence national policy through relevant reporting structures.

### Stakeholder participation

- It is important to involve stakeholders including boys, girls and youth; women and men (caregivers/parents), service providers (teachers, nurses, police, social workers, agricultural extensions workers; women's clubs; and support groups).
- All stakeholders should be sensitised on PSS. Tools such as the Journey of Life workshops designed by REPSSI can be used for this purpose.
- Regular consultations with stakeholders should inform all stages (planning, implementation, monitoring and review) of interventions. Consultation should include regular feedback.

### Experiences and interpretation of reality

It is important that government extension workers, service providers and organisations working at community level:

- Create safe and appropriate (age and gender) platforms for children youth, families and communities to express their reality.
- Listen to children, youth, families and communities and respond appropriately. Be aware that the experiences and needs of boys and girls, women and men vary and may require differentiated responses.
- Develop approaches and interventions to respond to the reality using relevant language and materials.
- Support girls, boys and youth to become active agents, help them utilise opportunities in an age appropriate way as their roles in society evolve.



- Encourage child-to-child approaches such as kids clubs, children's and youth organisations which help develop skills on engaging with other people and making friends.

## Cross cutting themes

### Coordination

As work takes place in the different spheres there is a need for it to be coordinated; this can be between departments or line ministries and between government and civil society bodies. Coordination at each level within a broader system can help ensure that children and youth receive holistic services, organisations are accountable to all stakeholders (including children), resources are maximised and duplication of effort is reduced. Without coordination, PSS will remain a standalone activity.

- Coordination should take place at all levels.
- Effective community level coordination should be led by local leaders.
- Capitalise on existing community and coordinating structures at other levels to avoid duplication.

### Advocacy

The process of mainstreaming can bring many gaps and strengths in programming to the surface. Gaps should be addressed and strengths maximised, hence the need for advocacy. Advocacy helps to ensure sustainability of mainstreaming by changing or enhancing how things are done.

- Advocacy needs to be targeted at all levels (community, organisational and national) and within all spheres in order to influence policy, programmes and practice.
- Communities and organisations need requisite skills and capacity in advocacy. It is important to support girls, boys, youth and communities to be able to advocate for themselves.
- Advocacy is also required for resource mobilisation.

# The steps of mainstreaming

## Step 1: Become informed

It is important to have an understanding of the issue you want to mainstream. You can do the following:

- i. Read extensively around PSS.
- ii. Attend forums, meetings or conferences that have PSS on their agenda.
- iii. Orient staff members on PSS concepts and mainstreaming.

## Step 2: Gain management commitment

For effective mainstreaming to take place, senior management of the organisation should play a leading role from the onset.

- i. Management needs to commit to leading the mainstreaming process within their organisation. You can document their commitment through minutes of meetings.
- ii. Ensure that the board of an organisation buys into the mainstreaming process.
- iii. Within government make sure the heads of departments (e.g. Directors, Permanent or Principal Secretaries) approve the mainstreaming agenda.

## Step 3: Develop the mainstreaming plan

Through a collaborative process involving representatives of the ministry or organisation, a plan for mainstreaming can be developed using the following process:

- i. **Assessment of ministry or organisation:** it is important to consider what is currently taking place in terms of PSS. You can do a PSS assessment prior to undertaking mainstreaming by using REPSSI's Psychosocial Support Assessment Tool (PSSAT). The tool allows you to analyse all the elements in the four spheres of the REPSSI mainstreaming model. The results will enable you to identify strengths and gaps.
- ii. **Develop a shared goal:** after assessment you can develop a shared goal that will help you focus on what you want to achieve in PSS mainstreaming. When developing the shared goal, involve key stakeholders who are important in ensuring that you achieve this goal. These stakeholders can be organisations or people at any level both inside and outside your organisation; children, youth, families and communities that you provide services to; government departments; and implementing partners such as community-based organisations and faith-based organisations.

- iii. **Identify entry points:** identify issues that you can work on quickly, those that you need to fundraise for and those which will take longer to implement. Work on what you think you can do fairly quickly before moving to longer term issues/activities. Areas in which the organisation is strong can be considered as your entry points. Consider the PSS programming principles when developing activities. An opportune time to incorporate PSS mainstreaming is when your organisation is working on a new strategic plan or reviewing existing plans.
- iv. **Develop a plan:** you now have a basic understanding of PSS and mainstreaming. You also have identified gaps in the provision of PSS and have decided on the best entry points for PSS mainstreaming. The next step entails developing a plan for mainstreaming PSS. The planning process should involve the children, youth, families and communities that you are working with. They are not merely part of the problem to be addressed, but possess the knowledge, skills and capacities necessary to address their challenges and problems. In mainstreaming PSS the voices of these stakeholders need to be heard so that programmes are shaped by their realities and needs felt. In your planning, consider areas that will impede the successful implementation of the plan and how to

address these. Formulate an activity plan and budget for mainstreaming PSS. Plans should include:

- Activity (including steps to be taken and resources needed)
- Objectives
- Resources required
- Deliverables/outcomes
- Timelines
- Responsible person/s or institution

### Action plan to mainstream PSS

Activity	Objectives	Resources required	Deliverables/ outcomes	Timeline/period	Responsible person/ institution

### Step 4: Mobilise resources for implementation

Consider resources that are available to facilitate the mainstreaming of psychosocial care and support. It is important that psychosocial care and support are not seen as separate and standalone from other child-focused activities. Psychosocial care and support principles and values can be incorporated into any project or programme targeting children and youth. This means that it may not be necessary to set aside resources exclusively for PSS programmes and activities, but to ensure that all activities targeting children and youth are designed and implemented with a view to incorporating psychosocial care and support. Consider the following:

- Ensure that human resources have adequate skills (invest in training where necessary), time, and are assigned to implement. Staff skills and competencies in psychosocial care and support programming are important in the mainstreaming process. Skills need to be spread among programme staff and not merely located with one or two individuals.
- Be aware of existing resources in your organisation such as training budgets, policies under review, planned community meetings and activities with children and youth that can be applied to ensure that PSS is mainstreamed.
- Identify resources within the community you are serving.
- Mobilise additional human and financial resources to support PSS mainstreaming.

## Step 5: Implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and documentation

Implement the mainstreaming process using the plan you developed with participation of all stakeholders. Assign leadership responsibility for mainstreaming to specific individuals who are held accountable for this.

As you are implementing the mainstreaming plan you should monitor the process. Track the progress of the mainstreaming process at least on a quarterly basis. Document the mainstreaming process highlighting successes, challenges and changes you had to make to your plans. It is important to consider participatory monitoring in order to share lessons and contribute to generating knowledge to inform future PSS programming within and outside the organisation.

Measure the outcomes within the ministry or organisation using the PSSAT. Compare your score to the original score, track the areas in which progress is being made and those where progress is still needed. Also track outcomes in the communities where you are working.

## Step 6: Review

Include review of the mainstreaming process in your ministry or organisation's review processes. Move through the list of items that you prioritised as important for effective mainstreaming. Move from the least difficult items on the mainstreaming plan to the most difficult ones. Review the

mainstreaming plan to address areas where little progress is being made. Consider an external review of the mainstreaming process.

# Some conditions that may hinder PSS mainstreaming

When mainstreaming psychosocial care and support in child-focused programmes, it is important to anticipate challenges and complexities that could arise in the process. Various concerns may be identified by your organisation's stakeholders; these need to be addressed. Risk management is an integral part of the mainstreaming process. The following are issues you may need to be aware of:

- Mainstreaming PSS is a concept that can easily be misunderstood to simply mean integrating a few PSS activities into a programme. The mainstreaming approach that REPSI is promoting invites organisations and institutions to wear PSS lenses in all aspects of programming for children and youth such as in policies and procedures, theory building, research, working with target populations, political buy-in and staff capacity building.
- Mainstreaming PSS calls for a collective responsibility of all members/staff with specific assigned roles and responsibilities. However, if there is no clearly assigned location of responsibility to manage and monitor PSS mainstreaming progress there will be limited success.
- Framing of PSS mainstreaming as a single and finite target, rather than inclusion as a long term undertaking, requiring extensive capacity-building and organisational change can hinder mainstreaming.
- A lack of a clear goal for mainstreaming PSS may lead to organisations doing bits and pieces that result in very little change.
- Organisational culture, values and beliefs can hinder PSS mainstreaming (e.g. practices that position organisations as “experts” that need to educate children, youth, families and communities about their needs and how they should live their lives are problematic. This is because as they usually do not allow the targeted populations to express their concerns and hopes for their lives and be part of the solutions to the problems that they are facing. The participation of children, youth, families and communities is a core value of PSS mainstreaming. Pressure to produce “results” in a short time frame can also hinder participation which may be slower at the outset, but will ultimately produce more sustainable change.
- Mainstreaming is a lengthy process which calls for the investment of time and resources. This may not be appealing to organisations that want quick results.
- Ignoring or underestimating the role and contribution of children and youth in the mainstreaming process.
- Failure to connect organisational or departmental (internal) PSS mainstreaming efforts to broader political, social, economic and environmental realities can limit the success of mainstreaming.

# PSS programming principles

**Contextual relevance:** situates individuals within a local context and material environment, and the prevailing cultural and social values.

**Social inclusion:** directed at forming and strengthening the connection between the child and an adult in his/her life, and ensuring the child's inclusion in larger community networks.

**Family and community care:** focused on strengthening communities, families and other social institutions as responsive and protective spaces for children.

**Universal access:** advocates for universal access to essential services and state protection for the most vulnerable children.

**Child participation:** works to enable children to become active participants in building communities and planning for the future.

**Resilience building:** provides additional experiences that build resilience, enables emotional healing and which promotes improved coping and positive development, despite the experience of adversity.

## Conclusion

In order to ensure sustainable psychosocial care and support programming, organisations need to put in place policies and guidelines that support and promote the psychosocial wellbeing of children and youth through all programmes. In the absence of such policies, PSS interventions are dependent upon the passion of certain individuals and short term plans

that will not have a sustainable and long term impact on the lives of children, youth and their families or communities.

Should you have need for more information on PSS mainstreaming, contact your nearest REPSSI office. The REPSSI website [www.repssi.org](http://www.repssi.org)





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