
East and Southern Africa Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Community of Practice

Terms of Reference

OCTOBER 2019

Background

In recent years there has been recognition of a growing need for a community of practitioners to be able to better represent and articulate the mental health and psychosocial issues faced by people and organizations in East and Southern Africa (ESA) to the global arena. In order to meet this need, Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) and MHPSS.net have partnered to launch a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Community of Practice (CoP) in ESA to aid in exchange and collaboration across the development and humanitarian emergency nexus.

In February 2019, REPSSI and MHPSS.net facilitated an ESA MHPSS CoP Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya. This meeting convened a range of MHPSS stakeholders working in the region to explore the need and scope for a regional CoP to support future MHPSS services and practitioners. In preparation for this meeting, a consultative process was initiated in September 2018 to assess the current needs and resources for MHPSS in ESA. The consultation and subsequent inaugural meeting generated insight into the array of needs experienced on the ground as well as key areas of interest and activities stakeholders would like to see facilitated, ultimately confirming the need for the development of a CoP.

The overarching goal of the CoP is to provide a platform to facilitate exchange of regional knowledge and learning on MHPSS programming, and support coordination and information sharing amongst humanitarian and development actors working on MHPSS in the region. The CoP is envisioned to encompass both 'virtual' and 'on-the-ground' activities, engaging a wide cross-section of stakeholders (i.e. academics, frontline workers, donors, policy-makers and duty bearing officials, civil society, advocates, programme managers, etc.) working at national and regional levels.

In 2019, 'virtual' meetings and webinar sessions have been, and will continue to be, coordinated to convene experienced colleagues in the region to shape the CoP strategy and content. These meetings are being convened with the intention to finalize the CoP vision, mission, specific objectives, and activities in order to meet the needs in the region, to identify potential partnerships and opportunities for future stages of the CoP, and establish a provisional timeline in which these developments will be achieved.

This document outlines the following with regard to the ESA MHPSS CoP: purpose, objectives, strategic focus areas, principles, membership and structure, resourcing and short-term priorities.

PURPOSE & Objectives

The purpose of the ESA MHPSS CoP is to create a forum to:

1. Contextualize global standards and interventions,
2. Strengthen the coordination of MHPSS actions across regional and national levels, and
3. Promote innovation, research and good practice in MHPSS services regionally.

Specific objectives of the ESA MHPSS CoP will evolve over time according to changing needs in the region. The specific objectives at this time include:

1. Conduct mapping of MHPSS stakeholders (i.e. academics, frontline workers, donors, policy-makers and duty bearing officials, civil society, advocates, program managers, etc.) working at national and regional levels.
2. Launch webinar sessions in order to gather experienced colleagues in the region to shape the strategy and content of the CoP through discussions on its vision, mission, specific objectives, and activities to meet the needs in the region and identify potential partnerships and opportunities for future stages of the initiative.
3. Collect and develop practical and region-specific MHPSS tools and resources, which can be shared widely with the MHPSS community.
4. Foster growth of the ESA MHPSS CoP network on MHPSS.net and via face-to-face meetings in order to share MHPSS materials (e.g., guidelines, manuals, posters, videos, etc.) and experiences (e.g., current research, case studies and best practices) between members and stakeholders.

Strategic Focus Areas

Strategic focus areas include:

- Innovation and research
- Collaboration and networking
- Information and knowledge sharing
- MHPSS advocacy and human rights (e.g., generation of issue/ policy position papers, policy briefs, calls for action)
- Capacity building and technical support
- Resource mobilization and fundraising
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Bridging of development and humanitarian sectors
- Shared terminology and vocabulary
- Coordination (i.e., supporting coordination of research by members across region)

Guiding PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles of the ESA MHPSS CoP are to:

- Function as a knowledge hub
- Enable local identity through:
 - Regional and national leadership

- Community involvement and engagement
- Representation of regional and national field experiences, priorities and voices
- Ensure relevance to members and sector
- Promote collective responsibility, benefits and resource mobilization
- Promote gender inclusivity
- Engender trust amongst members through:
 - Durable solutions
 - Shared vision and common objectives
 - Sensitivity to political and cultural contexts
 - Effective people and organizations
- Foster learning through:
 - Convening and connecting practitioners within and across geographic and organizational boundaries
 - Facilitating development and dissemination of knowledge and evidence
 - Reflective practice
 - Provision of safe space

Membership and Structure

Membership

The ESA MHPSS CoP is made up of members reflecting the reality of distributed leadership and service delivery in different countries of the ESA region and seeks to build networks and working partnerships between them.

Individuals from state or non-state entities interested in learning about and contributing to the improvement of MHPSS services in the region are encouraged to seek membership on an individual basis or to participate through organizational representation, as appropriate.

Organizations providing MHPSS regionally are encouraged to nominate representatives from their organizations to be representative members within the CoP and to nominate replacements when necessary to maintain ongoing representation.

Members are encouraged to join and participate in the CoP on MHPSS.net, which can be accessed for key resources, upcoming events, job information, and for making connections to others in the region.

Membership is open to:

- Front-line staff
- Field practitioners
- Academics and researchers
- Volunteers
- Policy makers
- Representatives of organisations with MHPSS mandate
- Representatives of collaborations without a specific MHPSS mandate (e.g., International Non-Governmental Organizations, United Nations Agencies, National Non-Governmental Organizations, Community Based Organizations, Community Structure Systems, Faith-Based Organizations, Civil Society Groups, etc.)

Structure

The CoP structure is a collaborative of all members with sub-regional focal points for East Africa and Southern Africa engaging with members on initiatives of their choice.

The CoP is guided by a Steering Group comprised of 8-10 members, of which at least 2 members are representatives of regional (ESA) organisations, with coordination functions delegated to an overall Regional Coordinator and two Sub-Regional Coordinators. At most two members of the steering committee can be individual (non-organizational) representatives.

The coordinator roles and functions are intended to rotate among members to ensure initiatives remain member-led and owned.

Figure 1: Coordination and Governance Structure



Resourcing

The ESA MHPSS CoP is responsible for raising funds or in-kind contributions for its functioning and operational costs where necessary. Member organisations will take on delegated responsibility for this, with the agreement and oversight of the Steering Group (and Coordinators). Protocols for this will be developed by the Steering Group and annexed to this TOR.

Priority short plan

The CoP will perform the following key tasks, subsequent to the finalization of this ToR in October 2019:

Immediate next steps:

- Create a CoP on MHPSS.net platform
- Draft and send an invitation for all current and potential participants to join the CoP on the platform
- Draft and finalize ToR with current ESA MHPSS CoP membership input
- Encourage and contribute to resource sharing on the platform (e.g. existing reports and publication on research, policies, documents, stories, and good practice in the ESA region)
- Identify key coordination focal point (currently REPSSI) and sub-region focal points for East Africa and Southern Africa

3-month Activity Plan:

- Share ToR with participating individuals/organizations
- Continue to encourage members to create a profile on MHPSS.net and join the ESA MHPSS CoP
- Continue to pursue ways of creating greater awareness of the ESA MHPSS CoP and invite other practitioners to join
- Identify and schedule a timeline for next steps and disseminate
- Develop a calendar of events where group members are updated on upcoming events
- Conduct an online survey of preferred purpose statements and assess willingness to take on voluntary role for short period of time

6-month Activity Plan:

- Continue following up on email invitation to the current CoP group with the link to register to the MHPSS.net CoP and request participants to continue to encourage others to join the CoP
- Share online links with reference groups as well as send newsletters and mail-outs to key organizations
- Ensure regular communications with current participating individuals/organizations
- Create a list of key invitees (individuals/organizations/entities) across the region and countries
- Conduct webinars every 2 months
- Explore opportunities for contextualization and localization of MHPSS activities (e.g. analytical study and/or situation analysis on MHPSS in EAC/SADC, regional forum of duty bearers (in) of MHPSS, etc.)

- Engage with governments and donors to promote awareness of the development of the ESA MHPSS CoP and raise awareness and priority for MHPSS for different stakeholders and sectors