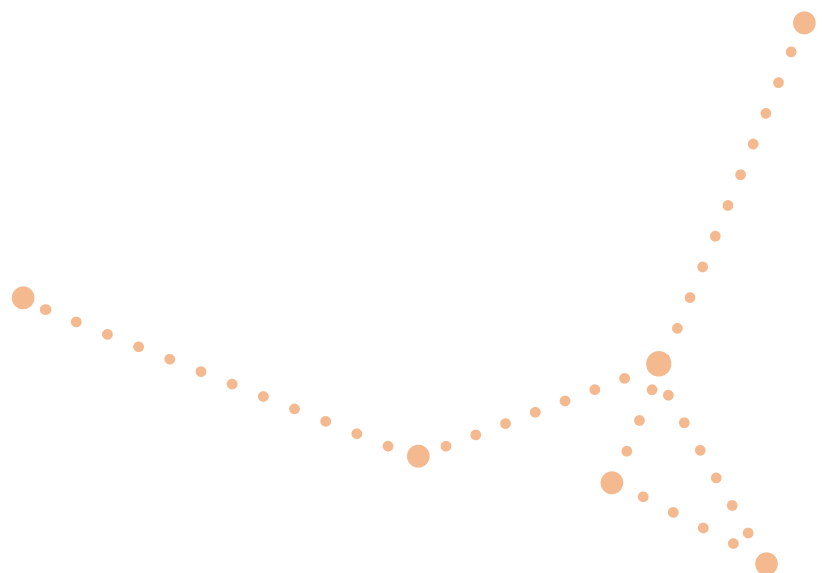




**Report of the MHPSS and
Climate Change Workshop 2023
and Co-Labs 2024**



INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on the recommendations and discussions from War Child and MHPSS Collaboratives workshop in Copenhagen Denmark, and two online Co-Labs regarding the integration of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) into climate change policies and programs. The aim is to provide a comprehensive background and overview of the key points raised during discussions.

In August 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Danish Red Cross and War Child co-hosted the conference “A Human Right Left Behind: Nordic Conference on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings” in Copenhagen. This conference responded to the need to inspire and align MHPSS strategies, approaches, and activities at a country and regional level to achieve short- and long-term impact. Experts in MHPSS-related policy, funding, advocacy, research, and practice, along with ministry focal points, came together in the Nordic region to represent their organisation or institution. During the conference, the “Nordic Road Map on MHPSS in fragile and Humanitarian settings” was endorsed to inspire and inform joint decisions and actions from 2022 to 2030.

In March 2024, the second Nordic Conference on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings will take place in Malmö, Sweden. The conference will focus on four topics and link them to the seven cross-cutting thematic areas identified in the Nordic Road Map. The four topics are as follows:

- MHPSS and gender
- MHPSS and innovation and digitalisation
- MHPSS and climate change
- Inclusion of MHPSS in healthcare

The workshop and co-labs were held by War Child Sweden together with the MHPSS Collaborative as one of three preparatory works for the 2nd Nordic conference on MHPSS in fragile and humanitarian settings. On November 23rd 2023, various stakeholders discussed the integration of MHPSS into climate change policies and programs. On January 16th and 30th 2024, two Co-labs were held to discuss challenges of MHPSS and climate change and possible recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The climate crisis has led to an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and disasters. These events amplify risks associated with health, safety, and infrastructure, challenging the global preparedness and response system. Moreover, it causes severe food crises, water shortages, conflict, migration, and gender-based violence as well as exacerbating adverse social, economic, and environmental conditions that generate increased risk to livelihoods. People caught in humanitarian crises contribute the least to global warming, yet they are the most vulnerable to its impacts. In 2023, 12 of the 15 countries which were deemed most vulnerable to the climate crisis witnessed international humanitarian responses, underscoring the urgency of addressing these interconnected challenges.

Beyond the environmental implications of the climate crisis, it has far-reaching impacts on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of individuals, families and communities, including mental disorders, emotional resilience and social cohesion. Several concepts and terminologies related to climate change and mental health has emerged, such as ecological grief, solastalgia and climate anxiety, which relate to experiences of, or anticipated, ecological loss; pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace; and anxiety associated with perceptions of climate change.

The mental health toll exacted by climate change is profound and varied. Climate-related anxiety, stress, and trauma are projected to rise, affecting vulnerable populations such as children, adolescents and young people, the elderly, and those with underlying health conditions. Immediate experiences post-disaster, intensify mental health challenges, encompassing traumatic experiences, stress, anxiety related to loss, fear, social isolation, and economic implications. The confluence of these stressors can have a detrimental impact on children's healthy development, increasing levels of anxiety, distress, and suicide risk. They gravely exacerbate existing mental health disorders and disrupt protective social structures, underscoring the urgent need to address climate change and its impacts.

CONFERENCE AND CO-LABS

On November 23rd 2023, actors came together to discuss the intersection of climate change and MHPSS. It focused on where we are now, what we know, and how we need to improve. 16 participants attended from MHPSS Collaborative, War Child, PS-Centre, Save the Children Denmark, Danish Red Cross, DIIS/RUC, master students of disaster at Copenhagen University and Catalyst Co-Labs.

With two 90-min sessions, Catalyst Co-Labs facilitated a co-design process to discuss the challenge of climate crisis and possible recommendations with twenty-nine experts working at War Child Sweden, United for Global Mental Health, WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, Save the Children Denmark, Barnfonden, Senior Fellow at Universidad Mayor, Healthy Brains Global Initiative, MHPSS Collaborative, African Children and Youth Development Network, PhD student at Universität Koblenz, IFRC Psychosocial Centre, WHO, United Nations Populations Fund of The International Organization for Migration, Assistant Professor at McGill University, Researcher at Bielefeld University, Doctors Without Borders, IFRC in MENA, Yes Theatre for Communication Among Youth, Professor at Tecnológico de Monterrey, Danish Red Cross, Researcher at University of Helsinki, SAJIDA Foundation, UNDP Peer Helper, EcoManka.

WORKSHOP:

During the workshop, the effects of the climate crisis were discussed. The climate crisis affects many communities in various ways, including flooding, drought, food insecurity, water shortages, intensified tropical storms, the potential impact of conflict, migration, and gender-based violence. The worst affected groups are indigenous communities, children, youth, urban, poor and marginalised peoples. Inequalities between global north and south are increasing, as well as loss of cultural heritage because of the abandonment of traditional practices due to loss of social cohesion and land.

FROM GROUP DISCUSSION:

- There is a lot of work regarding climate change and MHPSS, however, there is lacking joint effort with both.
- Everyone recognised the importance of having early detection of how the climate crisis affects the communities. Organisations can have pilot interventions from the climate crisis lens.
- The work needs to be more localised. The concept and understanding of climate crisis vary depending on location.
- Need for more policy interventions and much more coordination between the different stakeholders and organisations.
- How can we effectively mitigate the emotional impacts of climate change?

FURTHER DISCUSSION:

- Create and find funding with an intersectoral collaboration.
- Engage donors and have an integrated approach.
- Involve affected communities.
- Co-design research with the affected population.
- Do not continue siloing.
- How do you do anticipatory action with MHPSS? What are the triggers, and how can research define these triggers?

CO-LAB 1 - DISCUSSING THE CHALLENGE:

In the first Co-Lab, the challenges of MHPSS and the climate crisis were discussed. In the discussions, it was highlighted that there is a need for the inclusion of children and youth, integration of MHPSS in climate action plans, adopting climate-neutral policies and practices, including climate crisis as a priority in humanitarian settings, ensuring that solutions and actions for climate-related challenges are led and understood locally, work transdisciplinary with climate crisis and MHPSS, and the need of multisectoral and community-based approach. Moreover, the discussion pointed to the lack of evidence and intervention strategies specifically targeting young people in the climate crisis context, challenges in funding MHPSS integration, and the issue of stigma around mental health.

Actors pointed to the need to focus on the development of impactful methodologies and measurements for interventions, legislation and financial strategies for mental health, preparedness and proactive approaches to disaster management, integrating climate considerations with mental health programs, addressing root causes and engaging youth voices in policy reform, have a contextual understanding and adaptation in program design, and have an emphasis on community-driven development and layered interventions.

CO-LAB 2 - DISCUSSING RECOMMENDATIONS:

In the second Co-Lab session recommendations were discussed. It focused on funding and finance, as well as policy and advocacy recommendations.

FUNDING AND FINANCE:

Firstly, strategies on how to advocate for integrating MHPSS in climate funding were discussed. Key points included that we need diverse funding sources, focus on long-term strategies, promote cross-sector awareness, change the narrative with impact examples, include youth perspectives, collaborate globally, build evidence on mental health impacts, and leverage existing networks. Secondly, how we can support MHPSS interventions in a climate crisis was discussed. Discussants pointed to shifting to outcome-based models, fostering cross-sector collaboration, mapping and repurposing existing resources, adapting tools for climate impact,

securing funding for locally led solutions, emphasising community resilience, embedding MHPSS in risk management, and incorporating technology in outreach and training initiatives. Finally, approaches to integrating MHPSS with climate action were discussed. Key takeaways involved the need to secure diverse funding, engage international agencies, have joint planning with experts, build cross-sector capacity, involve youth in program design, prioritise community co-creation, train professionals on mental health impacts, advocate for budget inclusion, and showcase MHPSS integration success stories.

POLICIES AND ADVOCACY:

The discussion on policies focused on leveraging the voice and leadership of youth, integrating local context and needs into policy formation, including MHPSS in climate policy development and incorporating MHPSS and climate crisis into regular health services. The discussions pointed out that to amplify youth leadership, we should acknowledge power imbalances, include diverse perspectives, provide youth training, leverage existing youth-led approaches, involve youth in planning, integrate MHPSS in community initiatives, establish effective consultation, create a collaborative youth consortium, and support youth-led research. Moreover, how to integrate local context and needs into policy formation was also discussed. The discussants argued that we need adaptable and clear policies, collaboration and use of contextual information, active involvement of local communities and youth, ethical implementation, and integration of MHPSS- and youth-related concerns in climate vulnerability analyses. We should also use a holistic approach, working across subjects and influencing high-level thematic choices to ensure that policies are responsive and inclusive of specific community needs. How to include MHPSS in climate policies was also discussed. Key takeaways were the need to build a strong argument using evidence and case studies, monitor effectiveness, ensure adequate funding, foster coordination between MHPSS groups and climate platforms, encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, train service providers, develop guidelines, make MHPSS a horizontal aspect of policies, and emphasising evidence-based policymaking. Finally, how to incorporate MHPSS and climate crisis into regular health services was discussed. The discussants pointed to the need to advocate for their inclusion in national policies, engaging multi-level actors in dialogue, incorporating education into health professionals' curriculum, advocating for positive long-term effects, supporting capacity development, implementing community-based programs, collaborating for better response systems, integrating existing projects and research, and establishing long-term development programs with a focus on MHPSS and climate change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the discussions a few recommendations were proposed from the hosts of the Co-Labs and shared with the participants that will further be discussed at the 2nd Nordic conference on MHPSS in fragile and humanitarian settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS – FUNDING AND FINANCE

R1: Foster diversified funding strategies for climate resilience and mental health support

Flexible, adaptive funding that caters to community-identified needs and solutions is needed. Prioritise diversified funding strategies to support climate resilience and mental health initiatives. By diversifying funding sources, sustainable support for comprehensive climate resilience efforts that prioritise/integrate mental health and psychosocial support can be ensured.

R2: Apply a system-oriented approach for integrated responses

Funders should adopt a perspective that considers the entire system of climate-related challenges, acknowledging the interconnectedness of environmental, social, economic, health (including mental health and well-being) factors.

R3: Establish a multi-stakeholder advisory group for integrated climate resilience funding

A diverse and system-oriented approach to address the MHPSS consequences of the climate crisis requires a transdisciplinary and intersectoral focus. Establishing an advisory group/think tank to develop long-term strategies for securing funding from established and non-traditional sources, incorporating youth perspective, fostering global south collaboration and building a robust evidence base.

RECOMMENDATIONS – POLICY AND ADVOCACY

R1: Empower and diversify youth engagement in climate crisis and MHPSS policy development and implementation

There is a lack of youth engagement in policy making related to climate crisis and MHPSS. There is a need to acknowledge diversity, providing meaningful training, leveraging existing successes, and institutionalising inclusive practices. It is recommended to actively include youth and local youths in policy development and implementation. To ensure youth participation, platforms and trainings need to be developed as well as collaborating with existing youth-led groups and applying their approaches and achievements.

R2: Create comprehensive MHPSS and climate change policies for inclusive and adaptive community development

Adaptability, transparency, community engagement, and inclusivity are essential to establish a resilient foundation for community development. There is a need to foster community engagement in policy development and implementation. Policies need to be regularly reviewed to meet evolving community needs. Inclusive policy development actively involves local communities, youth, and organisations, fostering diverse perspectives.

R3) Integrate policies to include MHPSS and climate change

Climate change affects the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing and in turn the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of affected populations affect the resilience of societies and their abilities and willingness to engage in climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. For this reason, it is imperative to integrate MHPSS into climate change-related policies and climate change into mental health-related policies.

R4) Generate evidence to support climate change and MHPSS policies

Build a compelling case based on evidence approaches and already existing ways of working. Establish effective monitoring, secure ample funding, and promote collaboration between MHPSS groups and climate platforms to ensure that MHPSS is a core element in all climate policies, driven by evidence-based approaches.

R5) Integrate mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in national health and climate change policies.

Climate change serves as a risk amplifier, increasing the risk of poor mental health and wellbeing even further among those already at increased risk. By incorporating climate-related mental health considerations into national health and climate changes policies and fostering multi-level dialogue involving various actors, health systems will strengthen their ability to address increasing mental health and wellbeing needs resulting from climate change.

