

# The benefit of storytelling?

Each day we wake up to experiencing different life events and after these events we tell others what they did not see, it can be in our community social clubs, at police stations at court as witnesses or in family groups, each day radios, televisions and newspapers or social media platforms tell us stories happening around the world, stories of success, challenges, wars of or of progress, world leaders gather each day to hear stories and share their own stories. Story telling and listening is what we do everyday.

When used in supportive groups, the 'storyteller' can benefit from someone listening and bearing witness to their experiences, of sharing their burden of hurt and suffering. Storytelling can enable someone to speak their truth for the first time and to recognise the pain with which they have been living. Perpetrators of violence can also gain from storytelling enabling them to voice their actions, how they feel about them and often the pressures they felt they were under at the time.

The 'listener' can benefit from hearing about someone else's experiences which are similar to their own. Listening to others stories, allows them to see that others are struggling with similar challenges on a daily basis, perhaps flashbacks, nightmares, the inability to visit a particular place (like a water pump where an incident took place), perhaps difficulties in loving a child from rape. In relating to others and their stories, the listener may begin to feel less isolated or guilty and start a process of healing.

The 'listener' can also gain from hearing stories of people's experiences which are very different from their own. This can help people to see the different perspectives in a conflict, sometimes helping people realise the impact of their own experiences. For example: a woman who remained in her village during a conflict, hiding, fearful, witnessing firsthand the atrocities, supporting those who survived, taking on responsibility for others with no family left, dealing with her own loss, speaking with the woman who fled, spending years in a refugee camp, often starved of food and dignity, dependent on unreliable handouts from donors and NGOs, yet also subject to the horrors of rape and violence. They can hear each other's stories and understand the suffering that the others have been through.

Equally important is for these women to hear the story of those who were perhaps abducted, or chose to become combatants, and the trauma they live with on a daily basis. One of the keys to using storytelling for peace-building is the way in which the facilitator or group leader supports the process.

After stories have been told plans will be set in motion for solution to be found, to heal and to reconcile.