

Annual Report 2023



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1. Introduction

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the annual narrative report for ICBS covering the year 2023. As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with gratitude for the incredible support and dedication that have fuelled our efforts to advance our mission of making community-based sociotherapy accessible to more people and work on setting up and expanding our community of expertise.

The year 2023 was marked by many positive changes taking place. In close collaboration with partners in Rwanda, we have been able to start a large regional programme expanding community based sociotherapy in the Great Lakes region. Besides this, support to other partners and NGOs was provided in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda to implement community based sociotherapy.

The year 2023 was also the year that ICBS embraced the organisational structure inspired by sociocracy 3.0. A structure aiming to enhance a flexible, participatory working environment, prioritising people and fostering a supportive workspace. The organisational structure is reflecting the philosophy of community-based sociotherapy (CBS). The objective is to practice CBS principles not only in the training, but also in our daily work. It was an ambitious plan, especially because it was the first year we were going to hire staff on payroll. Continuous reflections will guide adaptations when needed.





2. ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW

In 2023 the ICBS team has taken time to reflect on its mission and objectives. Strategic objectives have been formulated in the new multi-annual strategic plan 2024-2028. The strategic objectives are broken down in annual objectives and specified in the annual operational plan 2024.

Vision

We envision a world where people whose lives have been disrupted by war, violence or natural disasters can live their lives in peace and enjoy meaningful social relationships.

Mission

We contribute to peaceful communities and improving the psychosocial well-being of people living in areas disrupted by crises, by facilitating access to community-based sociotherapy.

Purpose

We work to develop a community of experts and a knowledge institute for community-based sociotherapy based on core principles of the approach and defined quality standards.

To achieve our objectives, the team has reflected together on new strategic objectives for 2024-2028. The strategic objectives for the coming years are:

- **FOSTERING A VIBRANT COMMUNITY OF EXPERTISE**
- **ACCREDITATION OF CBS PROFESSIONALS**
- **BUILDING A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE ON CBS**
- **INCREASE ACCESS TO CBS**
- **SUSTAINABLE CBS-INSPIRED ORGANISATION**

For more insight in the organisation's strategic objectives and how we are planning to achieve these, we refer to the strategic plan 2024-2028.

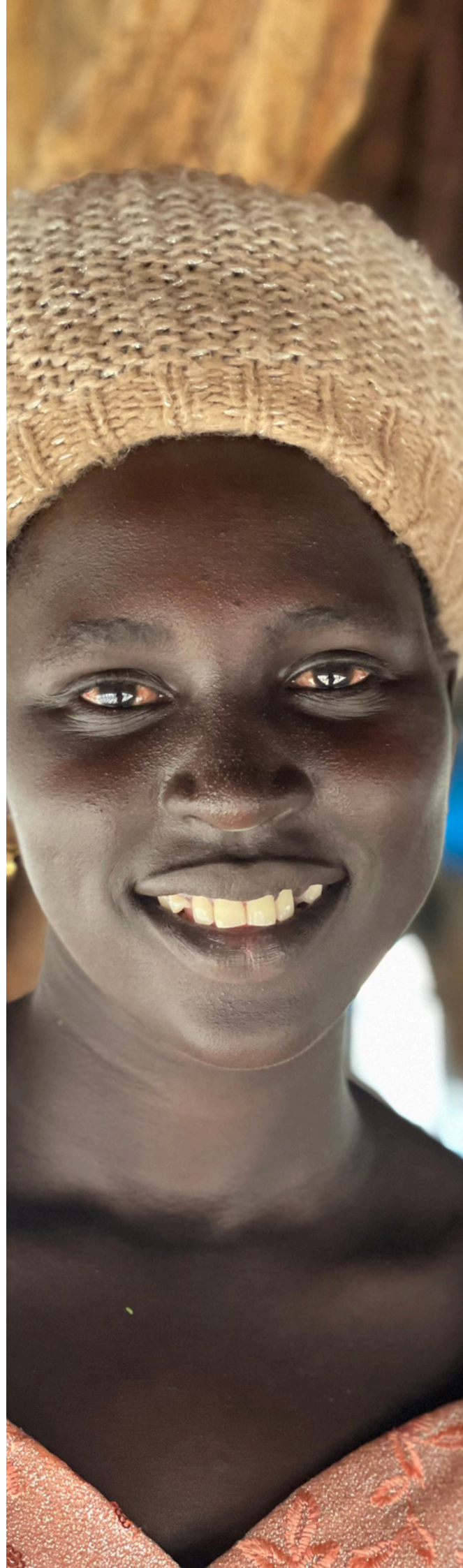
Human resources

The year 2023 was marked by growth. Growth in terms of projects as well as growth of our team. Recruitment started which resulted in fulfilling almost all positions of the General Circle (management team) and supporting consultants as planned.

Organisational Risk and Integrity Assessment 2023

In 2023, ICBS was awarded a grant from the Netherlands Embassy in Rwanda, in partnership with our partners Community Based Sociotherapy Rwanda (CBS Rwanda), the Anglican Church, Byumba Diocese (EAR Byumba) and Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Uganda (TPO Uganda): the CONNECT project. As part of the CONNECT project development process, an organisational risk and integrity assessment was required by the donor. The first assessment was done at the beginning of 2023, resulting in a list of recommendations for ICBS to be implemented during the first six months, (the inception phase) of the regional project in the Great Lakes Region.

The recommendations were related to both the organisational structure as well as financial management of the organisation. The recommendations, however, did not come as a surprise as the organisation was undergoing big transformations at that time. During the inception phase the team worked hard to successfully address all outstanding recommendations to achieve satisfactory results by the end of 2023.



3. Program Highlights



The year 2023 is characterised by professional growth of the organisation. ICBS received an increasing number of requests to provide training in the CBS methodology and provide support in research methodologies related to (psycho)social wellbeing, social dignity and other related topics.

Besides this, in collaboration with partners in Rwanda and Uganda, ICBS was able to develop a regional project to expand CBS in the region and increase awareness on the importance of linking peacebuilding to mental health and psychosocial support interventions.

This chapter provides an overview of some of ICBS' programmatic highlights.

Regional CONNECT project in the Great Lakes Region

Rwanda and Uganda

The CONNECT project in the Great Lakes Region started in July 2023 and is planned for 3 years. This project will be implemented in 4 countries in the Great Lakes Region, in collaboration with our partners Community Based Sociiotherapy Rwanda (CBS Rwanda), the Anglican Church, Byumba Diocese (EAR Byumba) and Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Uganda (TPO Uganda).

In June we started a six-month inception period, in which ICBS had time to start up the project and address outstanding recommendation from the Organisational Risk and Integrity Assessment conducted in the months before the proposal was accepted. Throughout the inception phase, the project team engaged in a series of activities to adopt an informed approach to project implementation and fortify our project strategy.

ICBS facilitated kick-off meetings with the project partners. These sessions aimed to disseminate updates on the project, discuss the expectations of each partner, and outline the activities planned for the inception phase. It also provided a forum to strategize on how each organisation's expertise, resources, and networks would contribute to realising the objectives of the CONNECT project. Clear lines of communication and decision-making processes were established to facilitate effective collaboration. The roles and responsibilities of each consortium partner were thoroughly deliberated upon to ensure alignment and accountability. Moreover, ICBS started to engage with the Ministry of Health in Rwanda with whom a memorandum of understanding was developed. With the Ministry of Health as the line Ministry, ICBS is able to register an office in Rwanda in 2024.

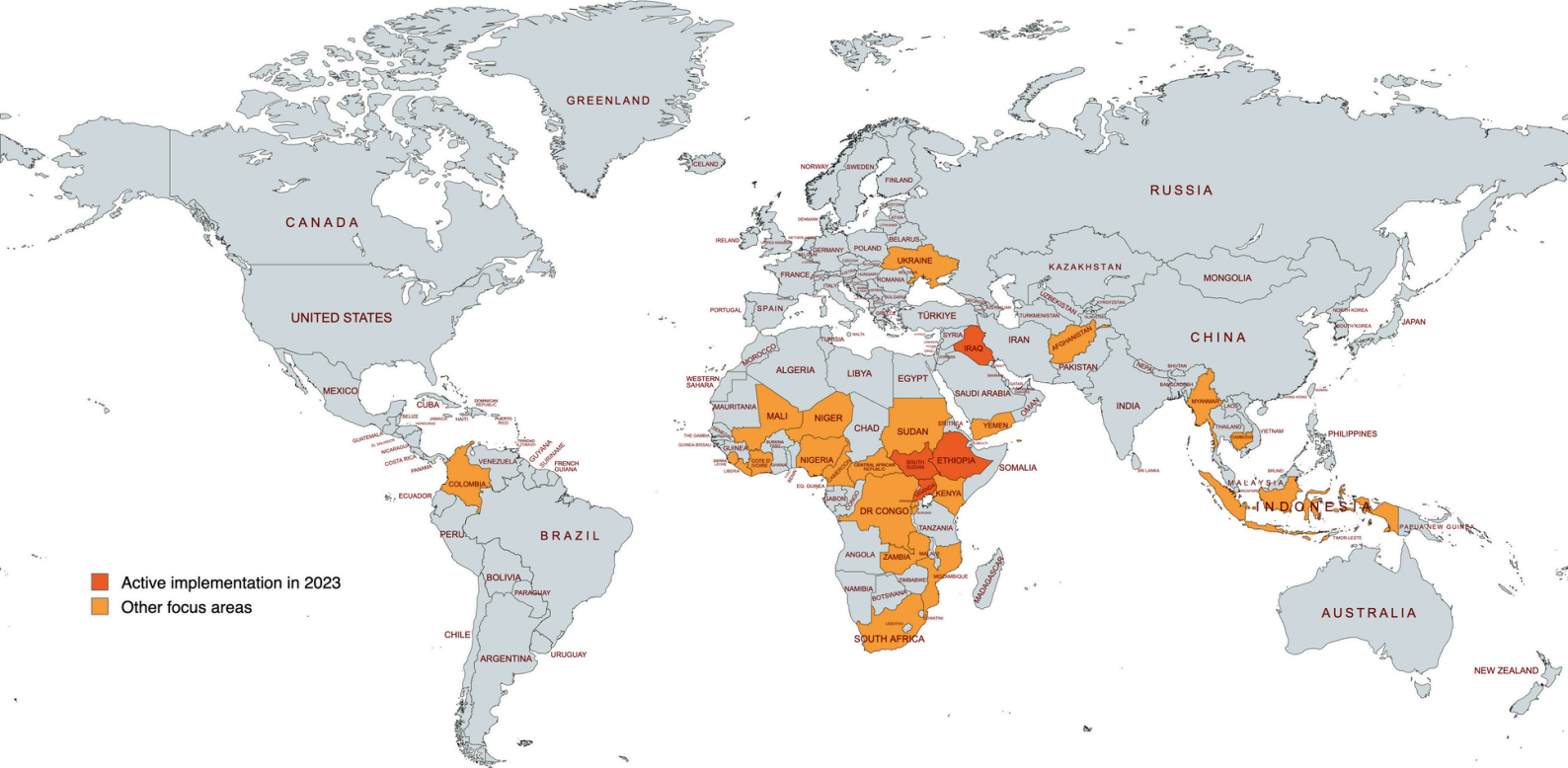
As part of the project proposal development, ICBS conducted organisational assessments with partners in Rwanda and Uganda. Initially conducted remotely, these assessments were later followed by on-site evaluations to delve deeper into organisational structures and capacities. The assessments focused on various key areas, and based on the findings, recommendations were formulated and integrated into partnership agreements. These recommendations primarily centred on policy adaptations, capacity building, and staff recruitment to bolster the implementation of the CONNECT project.

Following the signing of partnership agreements, the recruitment process for project staff commenced in Rwanda and Uganda. The emphasis was placed on hiring individuals with the requisite skills and experience to ensure effective project delivery. The recruitment efforts made substantial progress, with most of the planned staff already recruited and employed.

Various workshop sessions were conducted in November 2023 to facilitate collaboration and alignment among consortium partners. These workshops encompassed topics such as CBS implementation guidance, consortium collaboration, project introduction, research design, and strategy development. They provided a platform for stakeholders to align on project objectives, methodologies, and operational frameworks.

Efforts were made to fostering a positive foundation for consortium management and collaboration. Check-in meetings were organised to address specific needs and challenges within each organisation, while promoting openness and constructive dialogue. Measures were implemented to normalise conflict resolution and empower team members to address tensions effectively. Capacity building initiatives and the finalisation of governance structures remain priorities to ensure cohesive collaboration moving forward.

The inception phase of this regional project ended by the end of 2023.



CBS training in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda

ICBS has been involved in training staff and community facilitators in different countries in the world, usually invited by donor organisations or implementing NGOs looking for methodologies impacting people's psychosocial wellbeing and community peacebuilding. Each training is tailored to the specific context where training is provided, however, the aim is to have the following sequence in training: a basic training of 15 days, an intermediate training of 5 days, an advanced training of 5 days and if required refresher training.

When possible, we facilitate a training of trainers (TOT), ideally after completion of the advanced training. Reason for recommending a TOT after the advanced training is by that time, the facilitators have sufficient experience in facilitating sociotherapy groups and at the same time it gives the trainers a good impression of the competences and readiness for people to become CBS trainers.

South Sudan

In South Sudan, ICBS was invited to conduct multiple trainings in 2023, including an advanced training for facilitators who have joined the basic and intermediate training the previous years.

The advanced training was used to make a selection of potential candidates for the training of trainers (TOT). During the TOT, facilitators were trained to become CBS trainers, together with project staff from the implementing organisations.

“I am now making all the decisions with all the members of my family, they have a say in how the money is spent.”

-Male facilitator in Kolnyang South Sudan





Uganda

In 2023, ICBS has conducted the advanced training for facilitators in two regions in Uganda: South West and West Nile. Training took place in refugee settlements, with facilitators who had been involved in CBS since 2021. Even though the setting is challenging, the groups were highly motivated and improvements in skills and comprehension of the training were noticeable.

Participants were openly sharing their experiences, and showed adaptability to challenges they were facing. During the advanced training, a selection of potential CBS trainers was made. These participants joined the Training of Trainers (TOT) at the end of 2023.

The general objective of this TOT is to equip local trainers with a good understanding of the CBS approach, and required skills to design, facilitate and evaluate training sessions of new CBS facilitators. Both staff of the implementing organisation as well as CBS facilitators participated in the TOT

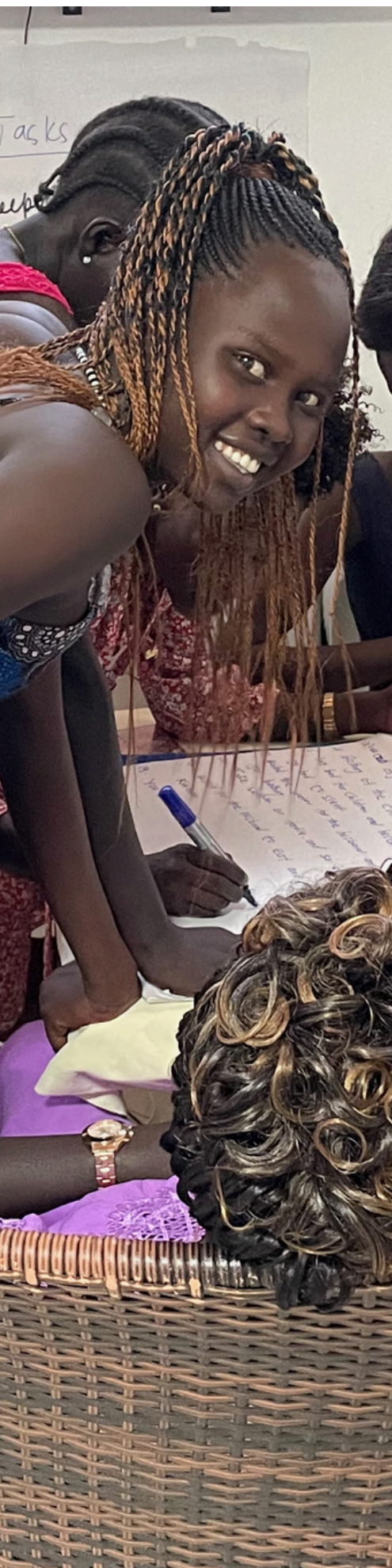
“I was so wounded. Everything we discussed in the group was linked to my personal journey since Congo till here in Rubondo. Reaching here things became worse as I felt surrounded by enemies (who could poison me at any time). I was hopeless and unsafe as I could trust anybody. I did never experience sleep. But surprising thing, when I joined sociotherapy, there were relaxation games we were playing...when I were lacking sleep, I was waking up and preform some of them, I am sure that the one who could see it would imagine that I was mad but as outcome I was sleeping after this. Today, I feel I am another living lady while I was feeling dead”

-Participant Rubondo

Ethiopia

Activities in Ethiopia were limited in 2023. The implementing organisation continued their work in Gambella region and plans were made to conduct an advanced training for the existing facilitators. Due to the security situation, this training was postponed to early 2024.

Knowledge development



One of the ambitions of ICBS is to focus on localisation of research as part of the knowledge development component. In most evaluation studies, research approaches and scales to measure the effects of an intervention have been initially developed in western societies. Measurement tools (i.e. scales that measure depression, social capital, the ‘quality of life’ etc.) are thereafter being culturally validated in a certain context.

A rarely used, but more culturally valid research approach, is to start with items defined by the communities, and transform them into valid and reliable measurement tools. In 2023 the interest of partners and donors increased in research and knowledge development.

Iraq

ICBS, in collaboration with the University of Rwanda, contributed to a project in Iraq with the aim to promote localisation of research approaches and tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, by using a locally designed tool.

For this assignment, a social cohesion tool was developed using existing standardised tools in combination with locally identified items, the so-called “Bottom-up community items”.

Great Lakes Region

The localisation of research is also one of the key components CONNECT project in the Great Lakes Region, and is centred around making implicit local knowledge explicit. There are two main components to this process which are guiding the implementation of the activities:

- 1) Developing and implementing a localised mixed-methods research design that is guided by the local partners and academic institutions and explores societal issues and measures the effectiveness of CBS in the communities where CBS is operating, and
- 2) Developing a quantitative research tool that measures “social dignity” as one of the outcomes of CBS and is built on defined community bottom-up indicators and items.

A clustered Randomized Controlled Trial (c-RCT) is also part of the research design, and two PhD trajectories will be integrated. In 2023 a start is made to prepare for the above-mentioned interventions. Staff for the knowledge development team has been hired and plans have been drafted.

4. Partnership and Collaboration

This year, ICBS has strengthened its impact through strategic partnerships with our existing partners. Together with CBS Rwanda and TPO Uganda, we have developed a large regional project in the Great Lakes Region.

With other partners we have conducted training and have worked on further development of training materials and manuals. The partnerships have enabled us to leverage shared expertise, resources and networks.

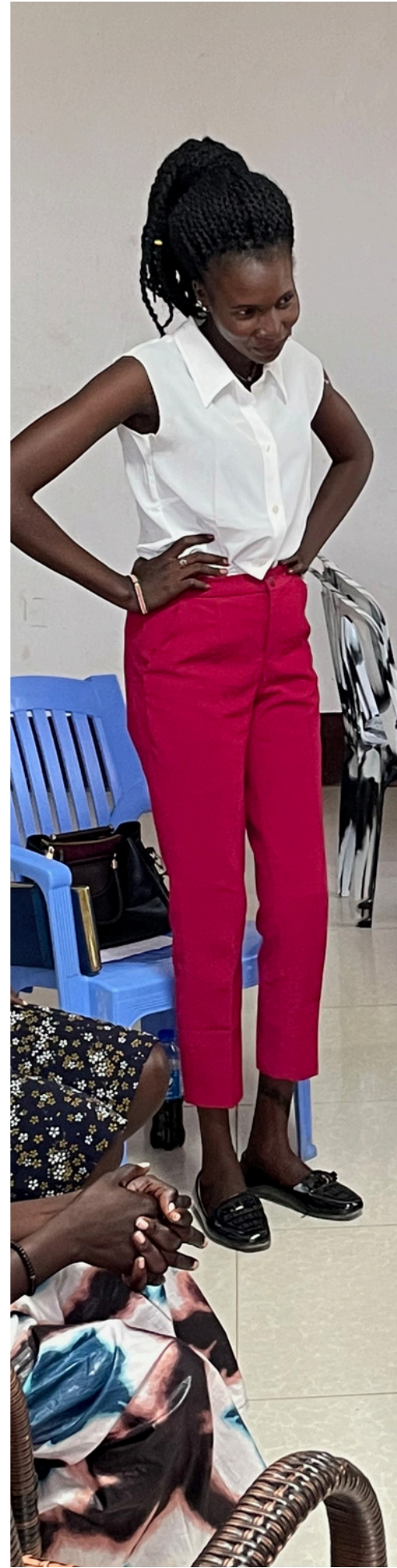
Working in consortia with partner organisations, some existing, others relatively new, presents unique challenges, such as coordinating across different institutional cultures, aligning varied objectives, and managing diverse communication and leadership styles. These complexities can lead to misunderstandings, delays and inefficiencies if not properly addressed. For one project, we were able to include a consortium facilitator.

This consortium facilitator plays a crucial role in overcoming these challenges by acting as neutral mediator who ensures clear and consistent communication, aligns the consortium's goals and fosters an environment of collaboration and trust. By facilitating regular meetings, preventing or resolving potential conflicts and ensuring partners are equally engaged and informed, the facilitators helps streamline the processes and enhances the effectiveness and cohesion in of the consortium's efforts.

One of the in 2023 formulated strategic objectives is to cultivate a thriving community of expertise in Community-Based Sociotherapy (CBS), focusing on knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and support. This involves:

- Connecting CBS practitioners for collaborative endeavours.
- Co-organising CBS-related learning events.
- Facilitating connections between organizations planning CBS implementation and experienced practitioners.
- Providing organisational support, including funding access, to community members.

In 2023, a start has been made formulating the objectives and plan of action to bring this objective alive.



5. LOOKING AHEAD



Building on the foundational changes initiated last year, we have successfully implemented our new governance structure inspired by sociocracy and self-managing teams. With the basic structure in place, we are now learning-by-doing, adapting the structure according to our team's needs and refining our processes to better meet our goals. This iterative process has strengthened our internal cohesion and clarified our collective mission. Moving forward, our priority is to consolidate these advancements by further embedding these practices within our daily operations and enhancing our team's capacity for autonomous decision-making.

A new supervisory board has been constituted and formally registered. However, the board is still in transition as Articles of Association require a change from one-tier board to two-tier board, which separates the duties and responsibilities between the Mission Circle (Supervisory Board) and the General Circle (Executive Board/Management Team). This change is anticipated to take place in the first quarter of 2024 and will facilitate greater transparency and accountability in the organisation's governance.

2019

2020 - 2022

2023

ESTABLISHING

1. ICBS established under the name IICBS.
2. Team of 3 co-founders.
3. Brainstorm about shaping the organisation.

START-UP

1. Networking with potential partners and interested donors.
2. First service contracts to provide training on CBS.
3. Design of organisational structure based on CBS principles.
4. Identifying supervisory board members.

RECOGNITION

1. Practicing new organisational structure.
2. Hand-over to the new supervisory board.
3. Developing new projects in collaboration with partners.
4. Financial resources to cover an inclusive team of committed employees.

As we look to the future, our focus remains on building a robust international team dedicated to developing a solid knowledge institute for CBS professionals worldwide. At the same time, we have made significant strides in our communication strategy, aiming to foster stronger connections with other professionals, donors, facilitators, and trainers at the intersection of MHPSS and peacebuilding.

This coming year, we will continue to enhance our outreach efforts, ensuring that our message and mission resonate more broadly and effectively. By doing so, we aim to cultivate a vibrant, collaborative network that supports and amplifies the impact of our work globally.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This year has been marked by a continued and growing recognition of community-based sociotherapy as an evidence based methodology in the realms of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Peacebuilding. The demand for training and expertise in CBS has notably increased, reflecting a broader understanding of its efficacy and impact. Our efforts to form new partnerships and reinforce existing ones have borne fruitful results.

At the organisational level, the Institute for Community Based Sociotherapy (ICBS) has undergone significant transformations. Our incredible team, driven by commitment to the principles of community-based sociotherapy, is ready to bring ICBS to the next level. Both externally, by further developing strategies to enhance quality CBS training and localised research. As well as internally by striving for a more democratic, less hierarchical, inclusive, and transparent organisational structure, processes, and culture. We are in a transitional phase, with acting board members gradually transferring tasks and responsibilities to a new independent supervisory board.

Amidst these positive changes, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who contributed to our accomplishments in 2023. We are deeply appreciative of the volunteers who provided invaluable legal, financial and strategic support. We also thank our donors, whose collaboration has enabled us to initiate new community-based sociotherapy projects in various countries.

Our new supervisory board members have already infused our projects and evolving organisational structure with fresh inspiration and valuable insights. We are particularly grateful to our partners and members, whose impactful work within their communities and contributions to the dissemination of CBS knowledge and skills are truly commendable.

As we look ahead, we are excited about the opportunities that 2024 will bring. We anticipate another year of advancing the exchange of knowledge on community-based sociotherapy worldwide, driven by the shared goal of fostering mental health and peacebuilding in diverse communities.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Partners



Kingdom of the Netherlands

