



Healing the Wounds of the Past to build a lasting peace



Promoting the healing of memories methodology in francophone Africa
by training local facilitators

In July 2022, the South African *Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM)*, in cooperation with its sister organisation *Healing of Memories Luxembourg (HOM-L)*, will for the first time launch a healing of memories facilitator training programme for French-speaking African countries.

This project draws its inspiration from the existing English-language training programme, which has been held in Cape Town on an annual basis since 2012. The main sessions of the francophone version, which will be held in Cotonou (Benin), will be supplemented by practical work on the ground in each the countries concerned. This new initiative will be launched thanks to the support of the *Partage Luxembourg Foundation*, which plans to include it in the 2022-26 Framework Agreement it will sign shortly with the Luxembourg Government.



Cotonou (Benin), 2019: Healing of Memories workshop, with participants from Ghana, Togo and Benin

Healing of Memories: a method developed in South Africa

The healing of memories processes are based on the belief that we are all in need of healing, because of what we have done, what was done to us or what we have failed to do. We all carry wounds from the past, often connected to the experiences of our family, our community or our country, burdens which prevent us from living our lives fully and freely.

The healing of memories workshop is an opportunity to acknowledge the emotional wounds which we carry. It also provides a safe space where we can tell our life story in an atmosphere of confidentiality and respect. When our story is shared, acknowledged and revered, we can take one step towards healing personal and interpersonal wounds.

The healing of memories methodology, developed by Michael Lapsley, founder of the IHOM, with his colleagues, focuses in particular on the impact which events that have affected the nation or community have had on the lives of individuals. Many African countries carry deep wounds, both ancient and recent, many of them over several generations. They include the scars left by slavery, colonialism, oppressive regimes, internal and external conflicts, social and economic injustices and terror attacks by fundamentalist groups. For many, recent events such as the current pandemic have brought up old memories and reopened old wounds ... Restoring peace and eradicating injustice is not just about signing political agreements: we need to dig deep, so that those who have suffered are given an opportunity to heal their psychological, emotional and spiritual wounds, and face the future with renewed hope. Healing of Memories also seeks to empower individuals by equipping them with the tools to retake charge of their own lives, drawing on their creative capacity, cultural riches and natural resilience.

Background and preparatory phase of the project

Following the launch of the French edition of Michael Lapsley's memoir (*Guérir du passé: Du combat pour la liberté au travail pour la paix*), a number of West African social justice groups in contact with IHOM Luxembourg expressed a keen interest in healing of memories and asked him to come and talk about his book and the work of his Institute. And so in July-August 2019, Michael Lapsley visited Togo and Benin, accompanied by two of his South African co-workers and two members of the Luxembourg group. The people they met on that visit, including a partner group of the *Partage Luxembourg Foundation* who came specially from Mali, were able to experience the healing of memories process for the first time. Given the enthusiastic response to the visit, it was felt that a follow-up should be planned and that steps should be taken to set up a French-language training programme in Africa.

As part of this preparatory phase, Michael Lapsley will visit West Africa again in November 2021 – this time to meet groups from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.



Michael Lapsley: An Anglican priest, who was involved in combating the injustice of apartheid in South Africa. In 1990, he was the victim of a parcel bomb attack, in which he lost both hands. After the fall of the apartheid regime, realising that South Africa was still a 'deeply divided and wounded society', he founded the Institute for Healing of Memories in 1998. His methodology has now spread way beyond the borders of South Africa.

See the documentaries:

- Michael Lapsley – Healing the Wounds of the Past (7 minutes):
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7la2_JVmMM4&t=16s (English-French, subtitled)
- The Father Michael Lapsley Story (16 minutes):
www.youtube.com/watch?v=muJgx0TO48s



Sègbohoulé (Benin), 2019: Workshop for young people from Ségou (Mali)

A theoretical and practical training programme

Participants

The training programme, due to start in 2022, will be for partner organisations working on the ground and wishing to integrate healing of memories into their activities. Each partner organisation can apply for a few representatives to take part in the 10-day main training session, which will take place once every two years in Cotonou (Benin). This session will be followed by a practical training phase in their own country, including healing of memories workshops which they will be expected to organise for local target groups. Initially, the programme will be for trainees from six West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal and Togo). Recruitment will then be extended to participants from a number of Central African countries. Trainees will undertake not only to attend the Cotonou sessions and take part in the practical phase back in their own country, but also to help build up a team of healing of memories facilitators in their region.

Trainers

The training will be given by Michael Lapsley, two or three co-workers from the Institute for Healing of Memories and two representatives of Healing of Memories Luxembourg, as well as specific contributions from local speakers in the case of the Cotonou sessions.

Programme content

- 10-day joint training session every two years for some 20 participants in Cotonou, led by the IHOM/HOM-L team: participation in two (standard and phase-2) workshops to experience healing of memories for oneself; history and methodology of healing of memories; learning to be a facilitator, including role-playing exercises; visits to significant places linked to collective memory and the healing process;

- Follow-up video-conference sessions between South Africa, Luxembourg and the relevant countries in francophone Africa;
- Practical implementation on the ground: trainees identify target groups in their respective countries for healing of memories work (survivors of oppression, discrimination and violence, refugees and displaced persons, abused women, marginalised groups, unemployed youngsters); trainees within the same region organise a 3-day healing of memories workshop for 15 participants, under the supervision of a member of the IHOM/HOM-L team;
- Advanced training sessions for lead facilitators, learning to act as workshop coordinators.

Financial implications

Thanks to the involvement of *Fondation Partage Luxembourg*, this ‘Healing the Wounds of the Past’ training programme will be eligible for financial support from the Luxembourg Government, covering 80 % of the project’s total costs for the duration of the 2022-26 Framework Agreement. This means that the organisers – the *Institute for Healing of Memories* and *Healing of Memories Luxembourg* – need to raise funds to cover the remainder of the costs over that five-year period, i.e. EUR 20 000 per year (see attached budget estimate).

All contributions, however modest, towards making the training programme a reality and supporting this healing work in Africa, are very welcome!

‘When horrible things happen to us, they leave ‘poisonous memories’ in each of us. And that poison – anger, hatred and revenge – is liable to take control of us, to destroy us, if we keep it inside us. Healing of memories is about acknowledging and laying to rest those things in the past which would destroy us and taking from the past that which is life-giving.’

(Michael Lapsley, founder, Institute for Healing of Memories, South Africa)

Luxembourg, May 2021

Institute for Healing of Memories, PO Box 36069, Glosderry, 7702 South Africa
info@healingofmemories.co.za www.healing-memories.org

Healing of Memories Luxembourg, 19, rue Pierre Maisonnet, L- 2113 Luxembourg
healing@healing-memories.lu www.healing-memories.lu