

Empowering Torture Survivors:

Building Participatory Tools to Address Urgent Needs

Workshop on Integrating Support for Victims of Torture in Indonesia, Timor Leste, Myanmar
“Empowering Torture Survivors: Addressing Our Needs, Our Communities’ Needs”.
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AJAR is working with survivors of torture in Indonesia, Myanmar and Timor-Leste, focusing on victims of mass torture who continue to be denied their right to truth, justice and reparations. In this process, we have learned that survivors need a way to meet some of their urgent needs. In order for them to continue to engage in the long process to achieve some kind of justice.

As part of our commitment to empowering survivors, AJAR has secured support from UN Trust Fund for Torture Victims to provide direct assistance to survivors. However, we are committed to develop methods that are empowering and participatory for survivors. On April 3-4, 2016, we gathered our partners from the three countries, including twenty survivors and human rights workers. The aim of the workshop was to build a collective tool to identify priorities assisting victims.

Workshop objectives:

- To map the pressing needs of victims of torture and strengthen our understanding how survivors rebuild their lives
- To deepen our knowledge about trauma and support
- To develop strategies for project implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Schedule:

Day 1	Day 2
Introducing the Workshop & Ourselves	Building monitoring tools
Mapping Victim's Needs & Vulnerabilities	Discussion on vulnerability criteria
Mosaic: rebuilding live after torture	Country-based strategies
Dealing with trauma & doing self-care	Self-care and closing

Introducing Ourselves, What We Are Grateful For

The facilitators asked participants to divide into three country groups. In each group, we introduced ourselves: our names, our organizations and also “something that we are grateful for.” Each group was tasked to draw a collective painting about the things that they are grateful for. [See **Mosaic**, Section 1, Activity 3: Gratitude Paintings.]



Indonesia: We are grateful for long walks in nature, drinking coffee, looking at the ocean, enjoying coconuts, flowers, fish, and children playing.

Myanmar: We are grateful for peace and health, and the hope that all the ethnic groups can live together in harmony. But peace can only be sustained by national reconciliation, and when victims are able to overcome their trauma. Hope in a rainbow,



Timor-Leste & Maluku: Our picture is so full because we realize that there is enough resources in the world to make everyone happy. We are grateful for our country that is open. There is our beautiful landscape, mountains, pristine rivers, ocean full of fish. We are grateful for religious tolerance, here depicted as a church and mosque. We are grateful for new births, showing our fertility. Still residual fear of militarization coming back.

Our Framework and Mapping Victim's Vulnerabilities

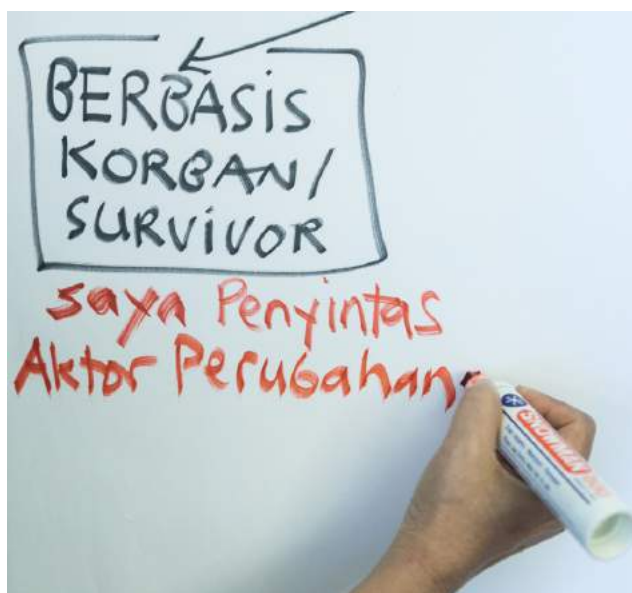
Galuh Wandita, AJAR, introduced the next activity. As part of our search for a new way of working with survivors, AJAR and partners are developing participatory tools to unlearn impunity in the last three years. We believe that low levels of accountability and high levels of impunity are the major contributing factors to ongoing cycles of mass human rights violations. Dictators and authoritarian regimes promote cultures of low accountability so that abuse of power and mass theft of national resources may continue undisturbed. When transitions to democracy occur they are accompanied by deep cultures of corruption, nepotism and impunity that were the foundations of the authoritarian regime.

“Unlearning impunity” requires a range of initiatives including but not limited to:

- Uncovering the truth relating to violations and developing an environment in which the truth is valued and protected;
- Building the level of understanding of human rights among populations that have been intentionally isolated from this knowledge and the advances that have taken place in other parts of the world;
- Increasing the access to justice of the poor and marginalized who are most often the victims of injustices and abuses of power.
- Strengthening the will to prosecute those most responsible for mass crimes and the mechanisms that are required to achieve this, including legal reform. Only when this is achieved will future leaders understand that decisions to conduct programs of mass violations will have personal consequences for them;
- Building a culture of tolerance and inclusion in contexts where divisions have been nurtured for political and financial gain and deepened by the scars of violence.
- Addressing the divisions involves ensuring unusually high levels of inclusion in all initiatives and taking proactive steps to foster reconciliation between divided groups and individuals;
- Reforming institutions that do not support accountability and promote a culture of impunity and those that are not based on a culture of truth, justice and accountability. This may include the security forces, courts, law enforcement bodies, media, educational institutions, religious bodies etc depending on the context.

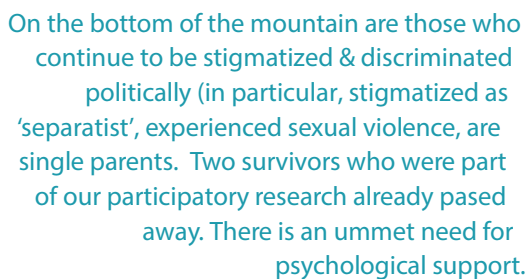
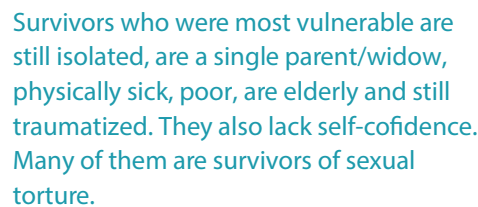
- Empowering victims, supporting their rehabilitation and the strengthening of survivors groups so that the unique moral authority of their voices may be heard and included in their communities, in forming national policy and law making;

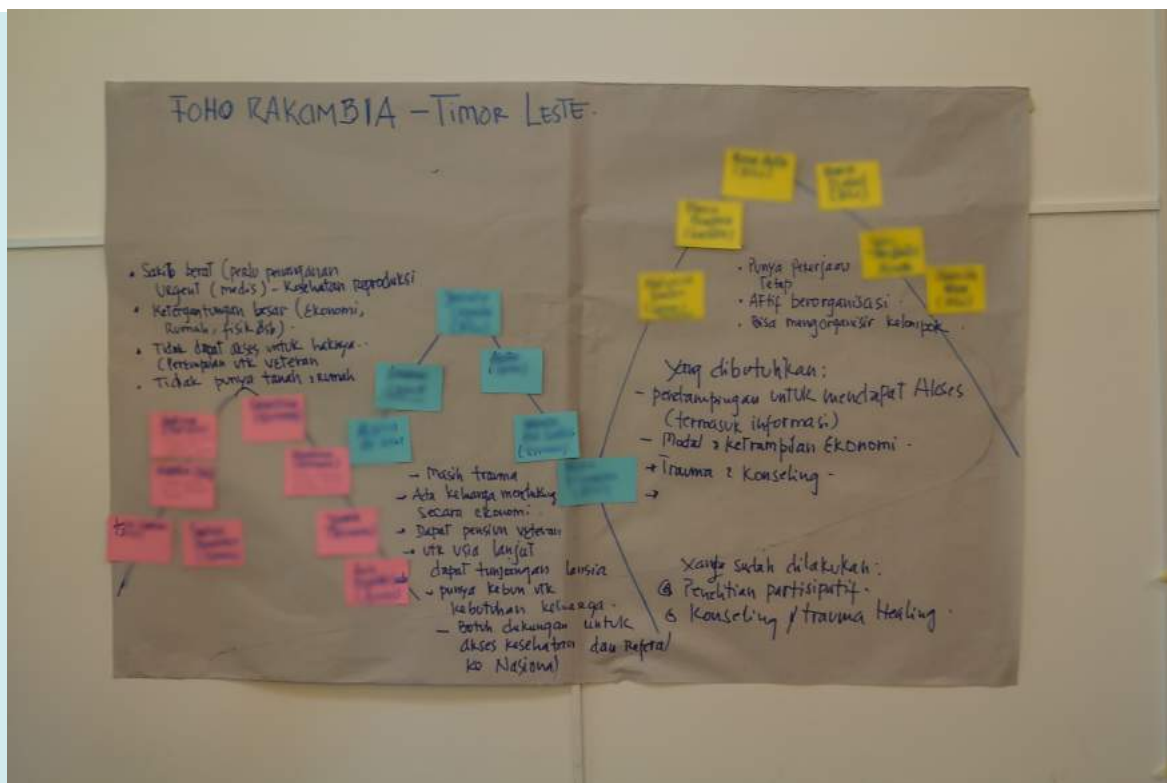
In our context, transitional justice processes through national/ international mechanisms have yet to deliver on their promise of justice. Victims experience an atrophy of justice. Although many long for some form of justice, they adjust their expectations and become disempowered. Their genuine participation in the long walk to justice is a key to breaking the cycle of impunity.



In Timor-Leste, survivors have created a motto “I am a survivor and an actor for change.” Survivors are involved in reaching out to other survivors, doing research, and conducting advocacy. They are also reaching out to victims of domestic violence, and becoming a mentor and inspirator for the younger women. These next two days, we will focus on how to support individual empowerment, identify the most vulnerable based on principles that we develop together at this workshop. Part of supporting individual empowerment will be to facilitate assistance to victims of torture, as part of our cooperation with the UN Trust Fund for Victims of Torture. We need to find a balance between individual assistance and the empowerment approaches that we have been developing in our community-based work. We also need to connect this urgent assistance with long-term access to services and support. So now, referring to the group of survivors we are working with, we will try to identify who are the most empowered, who are in the middle, and who are most vulnerable and why. We will discuss in small groups. [See **Mosaic**, Section V, Module 14: Mountain of Strength and Vulnerability.]

The following are the key points from our group discussion:





In Timor-Leste, the most empowered have a job, are active in organizations and organizing groups. They have become mentors who inspire others.

In the middle are survivors who are still traumatized, but have some family support and social assistance (elderly support) and have a small garden to meet basic food needs. They still need support to access health care.

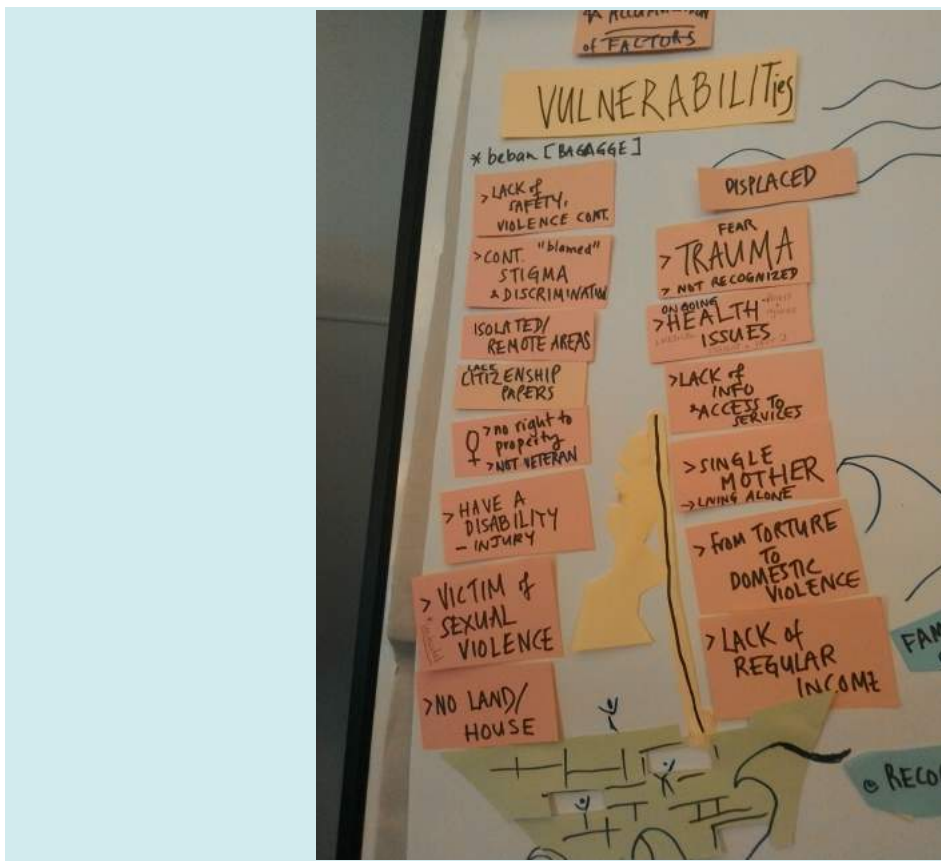
The most vulnerable are sickly, do not have property nor economic resources. Many of them are survivors of sexual torture.

For survivors of 1965 in Buru Island, the most empowered are involved in the development of their village, and are economically independent. They have a role in local government/ government established programs. In the middle are survivors whose administrative papers are completed, and are able to access some



government services and assistance. But they are sickly, and economically still fragile. Many are still blamed by their families and children. The most vulnerable are those who are elderly, a widow/widower, and sickly. A number became displaced when the 1999 religious conflict took place. They do not have administrative papers and cannot access government assistance. They are very traumatized, and need economic, medical and psychological support.

In Myanmar, AJAR and partners are working torture survivors. This includes women former political prisoners and also women survivors of rape in the conflict zones. Vulnerability is intensified when they continue to be traumatized. Trauma affects their capacity to rebuild their lives, including their capacity to make an income. Sometimes they are stigmatized so they cannot find work, or they lack skills. Some are disabled or sickly due to the long time of incarceration and torture. Another issue is recognition. There are survivors who were detained, interrogated and tortured at the military barracks for only a few days. Now some groups do not want to recognize them as “political prisoners” even though they experienced trauma and torture.



Summary: Wild Seas for Torture Survivors

In our context in Asia, the sea of impunity creates poor condition for survivors of torture. From listening to the group, we can create this image of two ships.

On the left is the ship that summarizes the accumulated factors that make victims of torture **vulnerable**. The ship has many holes on the body of the ship and its sail. The passengers have no oar or compass. They are wildly careening from one wave to another. Some passengers have already fallen into the ocean (as cumulatively 11 persons who participated in our research have now died). The vulnerabilities include:



- Lack of safety, continued violence
- Blaming of victim, continued stigma and discrimination, no recognition
- Ongoing trauma
- Incomplete citizen/administrative papers; lack of access to information
- Single mother or living alone
- Disabled, injured, ill health/ on-going health issue
- Do not own land/house, lack of adequate housing
- No regular source of income
- Victim of sexual violence
- Victim of domestic violence

From our group discussion, we also discover what things are needed for survivors of torture to move from vulnerability to being empowered. In this image, we see another ship also trying to survive in a wild sea, but here there are no holes on the ship and sail. Also the passengers hold oars and a compass. They are actively making choices, and are initiators who speak out. In this ship, the survivors have:

- A source of income/ employment
- Acknowledgement from the government, access to services and some are involved in dialog about services
- Access to counseling, trauma support, medical support and legal assistance
- Own land/home
- Have recognition and support from their family and community

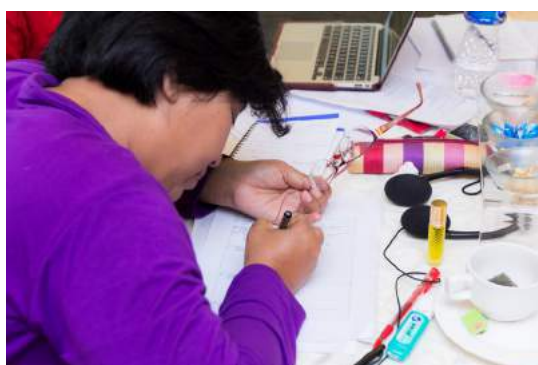
Thus, they become resilient. In this way, we understand that providing assistance, linking/-providing referrals to survivors is part of our on-going solidarity building and empowerment.

Mozaic: Survivors to Rebuild their Lives, Societies to be Free from Torture

Participants were asked to play musical chairs with a twist. During each pause when someone loses a chair, s/he was asked to pick up a hammer and hit a cloth bag to vent their frustration. Unknown to the participants, inside this bag were the gratitude paintings. By the end of the game, the paintings (on tile) had been crushed to many pieces.

Using this as a metaphor for survivors of torture rebuilding their lives, the participants worked in groups to build something beautiful from the broken pieces. [See **Mosaic**, Section IV, Module 9: Mosaic.] Each group was asked to focus on issues faced to meet survivor's basic needs, strengthen resilience, their views on justice and hopes for the future.





Listening to the groups presentation, we developed a deeper understanding about a holistic approach to working with survivors of torture. This is a *survivor-centered approach to transitional justice*:

Foundations for sustaining life: Torture survivors need to fulfill basic needs such as food and water, shelter, health care, and education for themselves and their families.

Resilience of spirit: Most survivors find a way to draw on their inner/spiritual strength to recover from the brutal violence and inhumanity they experienced. Sometimes this strength comes from their religious beliefs, philosophy of life, or commitment to a struggle.

Security, justice, recognition: In order to move forward, survivors need to feel safe, feel that they have been treated justly, and feel that their experience has been acknowledged by members of their families, communities, and society in general.

Hope for the future: Survivors' hopes to build a better life in the future for themselves and their children. These hopes may include access to education, information and technology, livelihood projects, etc.

Re-fresher on Trauma and Self-Care

Prabha Gulati, a volunteer at AJAR, is a trained psychologist who has had many years working on trauma. She led the next sessions, providing a presentation on trauma, conducting some role plays and at the end, doing a self-care exercise.

A traumatic event is when a person experiences, witnesses or is confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death, serious injury or a threat to self or others. Two categories of events:

- natural catastrophes – e.g. Floods, fires, hurricanes, droughts
- man-created catastrophes – e.g. War, concentration camp experiences, Degradation and humiliation, Prolonged harassment by authorities, Imprisonment without trial, Physical/sexual assault, torture, witnessing the torture and/or deaths of others, anything involved real or perceived threat to life and limb.

Often people have suffered from **multiple** or **chronic** traumatic events due to organised violence over a **prolonged** period of time. Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis"

Effects of torture and trauma on the individual

Impact of torture: Flight – fight – freeze response: **the hormone neuroadrenaline**, which reaches all of the body's organs and instructs them to prepare for a dangerous situation (to accelerate the pulse in order to supply more energy and oxygen, to perspire so that it will be harder for the attacker to take hold, etc.); **the hormone cortisol** that ensure the supply of energy necessary to deal with the stressful situation.

Among people suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) because the body's ability to regulate our nervous system, trivial stimuli cause a intense reaction, for example a loud noise will cause a significant acceleration of the heart rate.

Impact of trauma	Re-experiencing	Avoidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traumatic event is persistently re-experienced • Persistent avoidance of things associated with trauma and a numbing of general responsiveness • Persistent symptoms of increased arousal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nightmares • Flashbacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings or conversations associated with the trauma • efforts to avoid activities, places or people that arouse recollections of the event; difficulty falling or staying asleep, irritability or outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating

Symptoms

- Uncontrolled/frequent crying
- Extreme reactions to mildly stressful events
- Sleep disturbance
- Depression
- Anxiety interfering with daily activities
- Frequent bursts of anger
- Headaches, stomach aches related to stress
- Frequent Nightmares
- Inability to forget traumatic scenes
- Excessive preoccupation with one idea
- Blunting of emotions
- Suicidal thoughts/plans
- Extreme dependency and clinging
- Excessive physiological startle response

Torture survivors need to reconnect with ordinary life: *Grieving for actualities and potentials that were lost; seeing the positive changes, celebrating the survivor self, reconnecting with others.* Taking initiative, carry out plans, exercising independent judgment. Building trusting relationships.

If things go well

- I acknowledge where I am now
- I participate in groups
- I establish realistic goals

**I am learning
how to deal with
the trauma**

If things don't go well

- I depend too much on others
- I feel isolated from society
- I feel anger and resentment
- I feel guilt and self-blame

I am losing hope ...

If things go well

- I can express myself in terms other than my trauma
- I have access to resources and support
- I have learned ways of coping
- I have grown from my experiences
- I have friends

**I am getting on
with my life and
making plans**

If things don't go well

- I feel unsupported by my family members
- Society is rejecting me
- I am depressed and /or have other health problems

A torture survivors' expression of emotions associated with the second stage of the process are signs of the **mourning and recovery processes** at work. We can help to build the client's sense of **trust and connection**.

Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" Role of helpers is to move people and through your connection with them to empower and help them re connect with community and other survivors

What is peer support?

A process of helping someone who is similar to you help themselves. This type of helping relationship can help an individual to:

- Explore and understand a problem
- Obtain information and skills for managing a problem
- Make changes to their attitudes and behaviour

Difference between counselling and peer support. While you are not counsellors, you are supporting victims and working with them in the absence of counsellors you are working with them in a helping relationship which at its core has the aims listed in this slide. So we are going to talk strategies that will be about equipping you to do the work you do more effectively

Fundamental values of helping or befriending

- Respect
- Empathy
- Genuineness
- Trustworthiness
- Confidentiality

Verbal and non-verbal communication factors

- Verbal communication 20%
- Nonverbal communication 80%

Exercise

- Nonverbal communication: What are some important nonverbal communication factors in an interview situation?
- Brainstorm and then feedback...
- Factors include: body language (touch, posture, gestures, nodding, facial expression), tone of voice (loud, soft, empathetic, abrupt, hesitant), proximity of participants, gender, age, clothing (uniforms), overly formal or casual setting, light (too bright or too dark), background noise,

Role Play & Self-care techniques (in practice)

Participants took part in role plays for active listening techniques. Using case studies from the field, they sharpened their skills for asking open ended questions.

At the end of day 1, participants also took part in some self-care activity. We agreed that we must try to do more meditation, yoga, massage, developing a better balance between work and family life, taking some time to go for a walk, do some exercise etc. That our organizations must promote these activities to ensure sustainability.



Day 2: Developing our collective tools & strategies for victims support

Based on the issues raised in the first day, we created a simple assessment tool to help each organization assess the survivors based on their vulnerability/empowerment. We also discussed a format for collecting and tracking basic information. [Note: for AJAR and partners our main outreach and information gathering tool is through participatory action research (PAR). These forms are designed to distill information from what has been gathered through PAR.]

VULNERABILITY-EMPOWERED SPECTRUM

No	The victim/survivor:	If Yes, indicate with -1
1	Has no regular sources of income or livelihood	
2	Inadequate shelter, does not own a home or land for agriculture	
3	Is older than 60 years (WHO definition for older person/elderly)	
4	Has a disability or injury as a result of torture or violence	
5	Shows signs of ongoing trauma (nightmares, fear, lack of trust, depression etc)	
6	Experienced sexual violence	
7	Continued discrimination by family or community	
8	Lack of access to basic services, including health, education, and administrative identity papers	
9	Is a single parent/widow/widower	
10	Facing threat of new violence (due to political context, domestic violence)	
Total		

**** The more ticked Yes is an indication of vulnerability; a -10 score means very vulnerable.**

No	The victim/survivor:	If Yes, indicate with +1
1	Has a regular source of income or livelihood	
2	Has a home and/or land for agriculture	
3	Leadership skills for organizing and communicating	
4	Demonstrated commitment for working on community issues/problems	
5	Able to get some local/ official recognition	
6	Is resilient in the face of disappointments	
7	Able to build contacts and relationships inside and outside the community	
8	Has special skills or resources needed by the community	
9	Strong solidarity/compassion and is present in meetings with other victims	
10	Is able to travel, has high mobility	
Total		

**** The more ticked Yes is an indication of empowerment; a +10 score means very empowered.**

SURVIVOR'S NEEDS

No	Type of Needs	
1	Medical /Health Assistance, transportation support	
2	Psychological assistance (counseling, trauma recovery)	
3	Economic assistance/ seedfunds for livelihood (farming, trading)	
4	Referral to access to basic services, including identity papers	
5	Skills/livelihood training; education	
6	Special care for the elderly	
7	Facilitation of dialogue with family and community members	
8	Engagement in documentation/memory / action research	
9	Legal assistance, access to information about laws and policies	
10	Other (please write-in):	

Format for Survivor's Database

Name:

Address:

DOB or (approximate age):

Case Summary:

Violations Experienced, Perpetrator & When (period):

Truth or Justice Mechanisms already Accessed & When:

Impact:

Assistance Received:

Period/When Received:

Impact:

Has regular sources of Livelihood: Yes/No; Explain _____

Owns property: house/land? Yes/No; Explain _____

Other Notes:

Attachments: Photos/ files etc

Follow-up Meeting with Survivor

Date:

Location:

Who:

Notes on Survivor's Current Condition:

Notes on Follow-Up To Do: [What, Who, When]

Closing

The two-day workshop ended with a deep discussion on how to move forward. We reaffirmed the principle of 'do no harm' as we find a way to work together. We also are aware that we are trying to work collectively using a community-based empowerment approach, together with providing assistance to the most vulnerable. We are working to strengthen leaders within the survivors' community, while also organizing support for the most needy. We must learn to strike a balance, while also ensuring transparency, good practice for information and resource sharing, monitoring and evaluation etc etc. At the same time, we are working in contexts where impunity is the norm, discrimination against victims is still strong, and in some cases, new violations continue to take place

We ended the two day workshop with a new commitment, and the promise to meet again to compare notes.

