

Mental Health
Manual for
Rights Holders

Mental Health Manual for Rights Holders

Co-created by a consortium of VOICE grantee Organisations; Stay In School Initiative (SISI), Teenage Mothers and Child Support Foundation (TMCSF), Mental Health Uganda (MHU), Buwaya Hope Initiative Project (BUHOP), Bukolooto Mosque and Community Development Association (BMCDA), Child's Chance International (CCI), Brain Injury Support Organisation Uganda (BISU), Association of Persons with Disabilities Living with HIV/AIDS (ADIPHA), Mbeleni Foundation, Center for Disability Rights, Research and Governance (CEDIG), Organisation for Community Empowerment Lyantonde (OCE), Rightsholders from participating Organisations and **Dr. Kenneth Kalani Okware**, Psychiatrist Senior Medical Officer, Ministry of Health Uganda

Table of Contents

Foreword	01-02
Introduction	03
Mental health	04
Mental illness	05
Stress	06
Common causes of stress	07
Identifying signs of stress	08
What is depression	09
Recognising symptoms of depression	10
Providing support for stress and depression	11
Counselling skills for emotional support	12
Maintaining mental health in stressful situations	13 - 19
When and where to refer someone for professional help	20-21
Some of our workshop Icons	22 -24

Foreword.



In our previous projects under VOICE, mental health emerged as a critical need among our rightsholders, requiring immediate solutions. The growing awareness of its profound impact on rightsholders, their families, and communities highlights the urgency. Social, political, and economic pressures, global pandemics, and other challenges underscore the need for comprehensive mental health support. This handbook, created by the media advocacy community of practice, serves as a guide for rightsholders to understand, identify, and manage mental health challenges. This handbook is not merely a collection of insights and strategies but also a testament to the power of collaboration and shared learning. The organizations contributing to this handbook bring diverse perspectives and expertise, united by a common goal: to enhance mental health support in our communities. Their collective wisdom and dedication are reflected in every chapter, offering practical tools, evidence-based practices, and compassionate guidance. The linking and learning team facilitated this collaboration through dialogue, mutual support, and shared experiences. The organizations in this community of practice co-created a tool that is both informed and widely applicable. This handbook embodies their shared vision and collective effort. We are especially grateful to VOICE for their generous funding, which made this project possible.

VOICE's commitment to supporting the media advocacy CoP in implementing mental health initiatives and fostering international collaboration has been instrumental. Their support underscores the importance of global partnerships in addressing mental health challenges and promoting wellbeing.

As you delve into this handbook, we hope you find valuable information and strategies as well as inspiration and encouragement. Mental health is a journey that none of us must walk alone. By leveraging the collective knowledge and experiences shared within these pages, we can build stronger and more resilient communities, equipped to support every individual's mental health needs.

As a consortium, we extend our deepest gratitude to all the practitioners, and individuals who participated in the workshops held from June 23rd to 25th, 2024, at Cardinal Nsubuga Leadership Training Center and all others who have contributed to the production of this handbook. Your dedication and hard work are making a difference, and together, we are creating a brighter, healthier future for all.

Sincerely,

Mwogeza Jonah

**Chairperson
Media Advocacy Community of Practice**



INTRODUCTION

This Manual provides community leaders and members with knowledge and skills needed to promote wellbeing, recognise common signs and symptoms of stress, depression and provide basic support to persons with stress and depression. The target audience shall be community leaders, volunteers, health care workers, educators and other community members.

Mental Health issues including stress, depression and other mental illness represent a significant public health burden in Uganda. These conditions affect a wide range of the population, contributing to people suffering, disability and economic loss.

Sincerely,

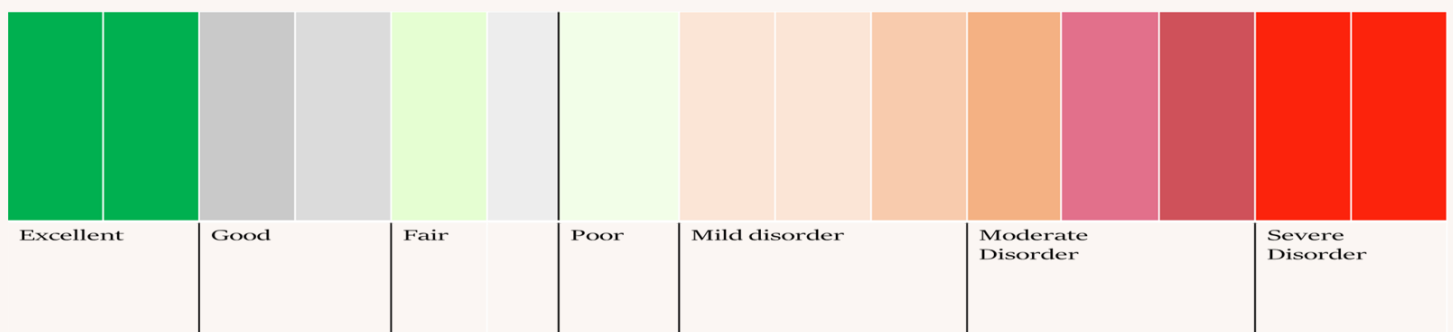
Dr. Kenneth Kalani Okware

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health refers to a state of being in which an individual realises their own potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to their community.

It encompasses emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing and affects how people think, feel and act.

Mental health falls on a spectrum that covers a range of mental health states from good mental wellbeing to severe mental illness.



Mental Illness

- Mental Illness encompasses a variety of mental health disorders that impact the brain, altering our emotions, thoughts, communication, and behavior.
- These disruptions often lead to issues in social interactions and job performance.
- Mental illnesses are characterised by significant distress or disability, and they pose a high risk of suffering, pain, disability, or significant loss of freedom.
- These conditions are common, affecting one in five individuals yet 80% of those affected do not receive the necessary treatment.
- Common mental illnesses include depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders.
- Other examples are schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, autism, and post-traumatic stress disorder.



Stress.

Stress is the body's response to any demand or challenge. Stress is a combination of physical, mental, and emotional reactions that you experience when the demands on you exceed the personal and social resources that you are able to mobilize to deal with those demands.

When one experiences too much for a long time, they can develop mental illnesses commonly referred to as depression.



Note:

We all experience some form of stress in our day to day lives, the cause and magnitude of stress varies. When stress becomes too much for us to handle, we can become mentally ill.

What Are The Common Causes of Stress?

There are many causes of Stress in Uganda;

- Poverty leading to difficulty in securing basic needs like food, water and shelter
- Dealing with chronic diseases like HIV/AIDS, cancers, Hypertention, Diabetes, etc.
- Gender based violence for example husband and wife fighting in a home
- Separation and divorce from relationships and marriages respectively
- Sexual violence like rape and defilement
- Bullying in schools for the learners
- Academic pressures in schools
- Forced Marriages
- Unemployment
- Insecurity in our communities
- Wars
- Natural disasters like floods and landslides
- Family conflicts
- Fertility issues in both men and women
- Loss of a loved one such as a spouse, sibling, child, close friend or other close relatives
- Excessive work in our workplaces

Note:

Everyone reacts differently to stress. What one individual finds stressful may not be perceived the same way by another.

How do you know that you are stressed?

People show different reactions to stress. The common signs of stress are listed here:

- Changes in sleep patterns. Commonly people with stress may have trouble falling asleep, however, others may sleep a lot.
- Changes in appetite. Stress commonly causes loss of appetite; however, some people may experience an increase in appetite when they are stressed.
- Disturbances in mood characterised by irritability, anger, and sadness. People who are stressed tend to easily get annoyed and show anger. They also often feel sad.
- Stress can cause excessive worries and fears. The fears can also present as panic attacks.
- Decrease in work performance. This can initially manifest as postponing assignments, or work then becoming absent from work.



Participants attentively following a presentation on Stress by Dr. Okware.



- Social activity also decreases to the point that one does not feel like socializing with others. Stress may lead to isolation.
- Stress can affect physical health, like unexplained headaches and muscle aches, also excessive fatigue or tiredness
- People who are stressed may excessively use alcohol and other substances as a way of dealing with the psychological pain.

What is Depression?

- Depression is a form of mental illness that affects one's mood and is characterized by a constant feeling of excessive sadness and inability to enjoy the things that they used to enjoy such as socializing, cooking, watching football, etc.
- Depression in Uganda is also related to poverty, adverse family and work relationship problems among others. Depression can affect anyone including children and the elderly.
- In most cases depression will follow difficult life events that represent a loss such as bereavement or job loss, Gender based Violence etc. However, it can also develop 'out of the blue' with no clear precipitant.
- Generally, females are two (2) times more likely to suffer from depression as compared to men.



How do you know if someone has depression?

Depression has many signs and symptoms. The most common ones are listed below.

- Persistent Low mood or unusual sadness.
- Loss of interest in what was previously enjoyed
- Disturbed sleep: commonly patients fail to fall asleep or wakeup too early in the night. However, few people sleep excessively.
- Some patients may have poor or excessive appetite and may lose or gain weight.



- Feelings of worthlessness, failure, guilt and self-blame
- Loss of energy, easily becoming tired and reduced activity, or unexplained general weakness
- Reduced concentration and attention. This can manifest as forgetfulness
- Recurrent thoughts of death and acts of self-harm or suicide.

Note:

These signs and symptoms should have lasted for at least 2 weeks

How do you support persons with stress and depression?



Supporting individuals with stress and mild depression involves;

- Recognizing symptoms
- Providing emotional support
- Encouraging healthy habits
- Promoting professional help

Emotional Support Counseling skills

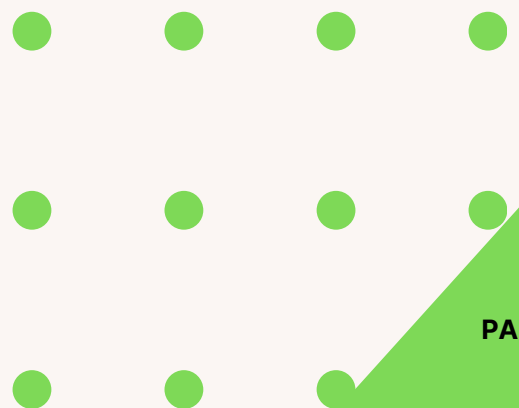
SKILLS	DESCRIPTIONS
Active Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show genuine interest.• Use verbal and non-verbal cues to show you are listening such as nodding your head• Summarize and repeat back what you hear to ensure understanding.
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Put yourself in their shoes.• Acknowledge their feelings without judgment.• Validate their experiences and emotions.
Encouragement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage them to talk about their feelings.• Offer support without trying to solve their problems immediately.• Highlight their strengths and past successes.
Build Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust and respect the person, build a relationship that shows respect that way the person can open up• Be consistent and reliable in your interactions, when you commit to help, provide counseling, do a follow up or refer
Open Ended Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask questions that require more than yes/no answers.• Example: "Can you tell me more about what's been bothering you?"
Validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledge the feelings of the person such as "it makes a lot of sense that you feel like this"• Give affirmations like "I can imagine what you were going through, anyone in your situation would think and do that"
Non-Judgemental Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accept the person's feelings and experience without judgement• Be neutral and avoid giving personal advice
Confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respect the person's privacy and maintain confidentiality of their information• Follow the legal guidelines

How do we stay mentally healthy despite the stressful situations?

Keeping Up Physical Activity: Physical activity is essential for normal growth and development and has several benefits to physical and mental health:

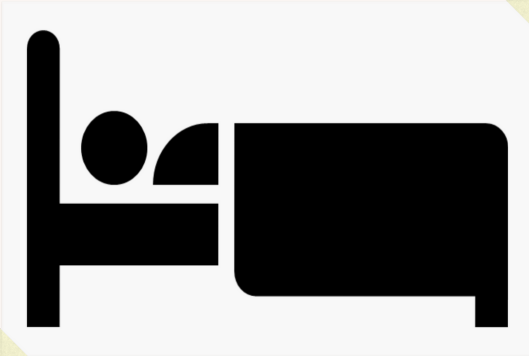


- Improves overall functioning and sleep, which has positive effects on mental health
- Helps reduce anxiety and depression and improves general sense of well-being
- Helps with weight management
- Reduces risk of cardiovascular disease, Type II Diabetes/Metabolic Syndrome, and some cancers
- Improves ability to do daily activities
- Enhances chances of living longer



How do we stay mentally healthy despite the stressful situations?

Maintaining regular sleep patterns: It's always good to have healthy sleeping patterns but especially during times of stress when our routines are disrupted. Here are some helpful tips:



- Try to maintain the same sleep schedule daily.
- Go to bed when you feel tired.
- Don't have any caffeine, alcohol, or nicotine at least 4-6 hours before bed.
- Don't take naps during the day. If you do, make sure it's short (less than 1 hour).
- Use the bed only for sleeping and sex. Don't watch TV or do work in bed.
- Avoid looking at your phone or other electronic devices or TV at least 2 hours before bed.
- Regular exercise can help with sleep.

How do we stay mentally healthy despite the stressful situations?

Avoid use of alcohol/substances to cope:



- We should be aware that the brain is vulnerable to addiction to alcohol and substances during stressful moments.
- It is therefore important to avoid the use of alcohol and substances during such times.

Know your limits/ draw realistic targets/ learn to say no:

- We live in societies where a lot is expected of us. Often times we do not have the resources to meet these expectations and we end up breaking down in our attempt to do so.
- It is important that we know the limits of what we can do and cannot do basing on our abilities.
- Saying no to certain expectations that you cannot meet is an essential aspect of self-care.



How do we stay mentally healthy despite the stressful situations?

Fostering your social connections:



Group photo for Mental Health workshop participants from the eleven (11) Organisations.

- As the old saying goes, "no one is an island." Building social networks is crucial for maintaining mental health. It allows us to share our difficulties and stresses with those around us.
- Additionally, our social circles can observe changes in our behavior when we're stressed and offer support or suggest seeking help.

Speak with a trusted friend or family member:

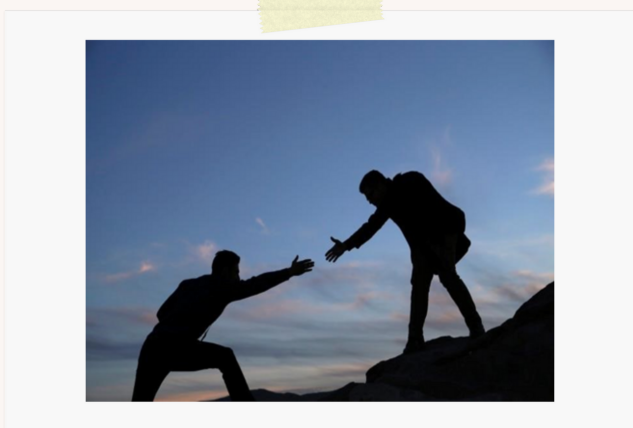
- A shared problem is a reduced problem!
- Confiding in someone you trust is the initial step toward addressing the issue.
- Even if we don't expect an immediate solution, we should cultivate the habit of having a trusted person to discuss our worries and stresses with.

*A Problem Shared
is
A Problem Halved.*

alamu

How do we stay mentally healthy despite the stressful situations?

Seeking support from family, friends, mentors, and/or spiritual/religious leaders:



- People are often willing to help during stressful times, but they may not realize you need support unless you ask.
- Everyone needs assistance at some point, and asking for support is not a sign of weakness. Offering support can be fulfilling as well.
- Let's all look out for one another and be ready to help those in need if we are able.

Create positive experiences:

- It's essential to take breaks from our daily demands and participate in activities that bring us joy.
- Whether it's traveling, socializing, shopping, dancing, or playing sports, engaging in enjoyable activities triggers the release of happy hormones, helping us stay calm and happy while preventing depression and anxiety.
- We should intentionally engage in healthy activities that make us happy.



Participant group discussions on stress and its management

How do we stay mentally healthy despite the stressful situations?



Meet Angela, a shining example of Positive Self-Talk.

Prayer:

- Engaging in prayer can significantly enhance our ability to cope during stressful moments.
- It provides a sense of comfort and connection to a higher power, which can be deeply reassuring.
- Prayer also offers a moment of pause and reflection, allowing us to gain perspective on our challenges. By focusing on our spiritual beliefs, we can find inner peace and strength to face difficult situations.
- This spiritual practice can be a vital tool in managing stress and promoting emotional well-being.

Positive self-talk:

- Often, we tend to focus on the worst possible outcomes in the situations we encounter, neglecting the potential positive outcomes. This leads to worry and fear about the future.
- The saying "there is a silver lining in every dark cloud" reminds us to seek out the possible good in every situation and challenge the negative thoughts that highlight the worst-case scenarios.
- By doing this, we can remain calm and focused during stressful times.



How do we stay mentally healthy despite the stressful situations?

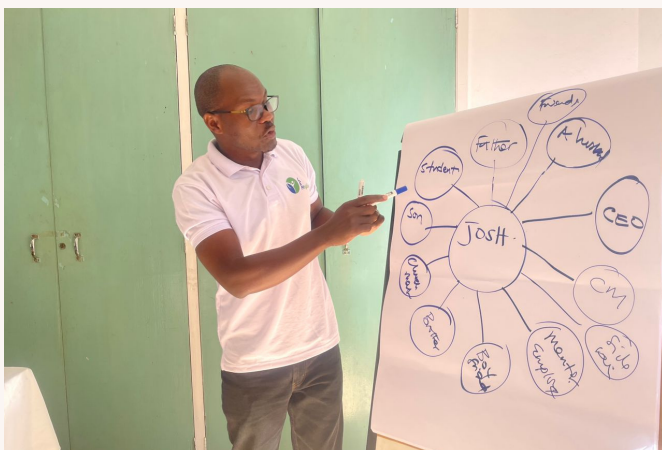


Maintain a Balanced Diet:

- Consuming a well-rounded diet is crucial for maintaining a healthy body, which in turn enhances our ability to manage stress effectively.
- A balanced diet provides essential nutrients that support brain function, stabilize blood sugar levels, and improve mood.
- Incorporating a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats can help regulate stress hormones and boost energy levels.
- Additionally, staying hydrated by drinking plenty of water is vital for overall health and stress management.
- A nutritious diet not only strengthens the immune system but also promotes mental clarity and emotional stability, making it easier to cope with stressful situations.

Consult a Professional:

- If stress or depression becomes too overwhelming, seek assistance from a mental health professional.
- Early intervention is crucial as it can help prevent the development of more serious issues.

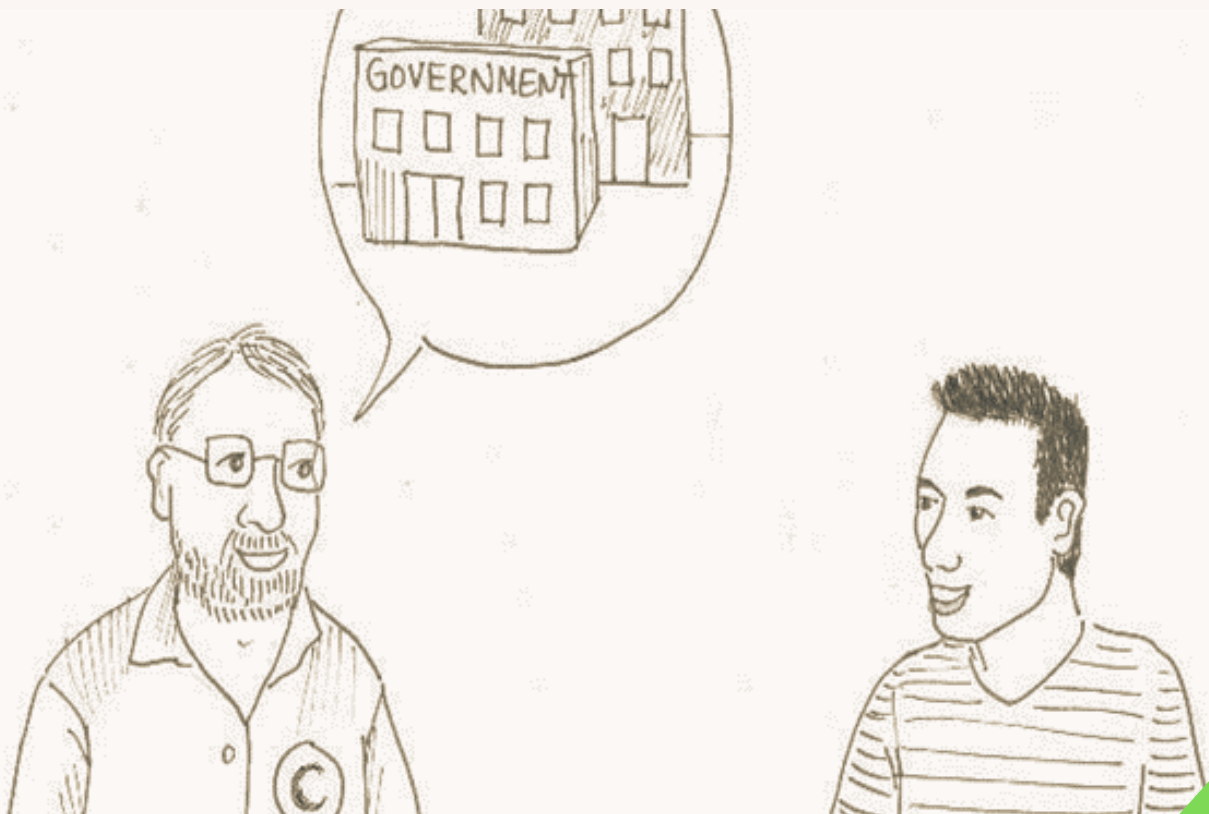


Dr. Okware illustrating some of the causes of stress.

When do I refer someone for professional help?

Some people will need to be referred to a professional for more specialized care if;

- Issues go beyond basic counseling
- Patients are so severely distressed that they are unable to function in their daily lives
- There is a mental health disorder
- There is a risk of self harm
- They are a danger to others



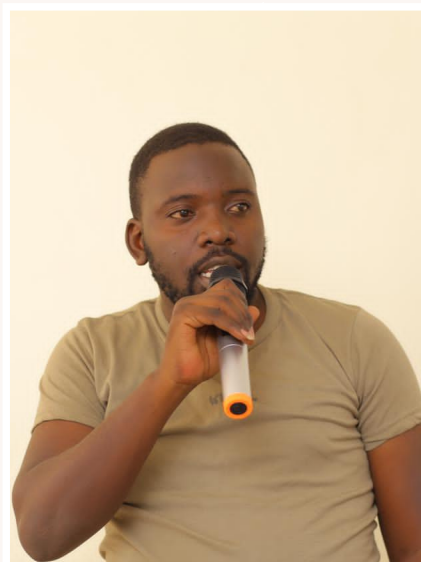
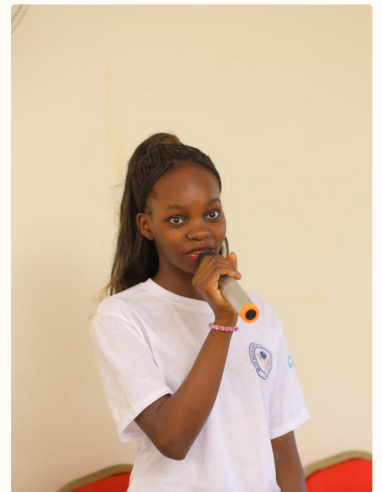
Where do I refer someone for professional help?

Referral:

- The initial point of referral should be any nearby government health facility.
- In Uganda, all primary health care centers should provide mental health services.
- For specialized care, regional referral hospitals and Butabika Hospital offer advanced mental health services.
- Additionally, look for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in your area that provide mental health support; these can serve as initial referral points



Participants taking notes on when and where to refer persons with mental issues.



Workshop Icons



Buwaya Hope Initiative Project (BUHOP) Team



Mental Health Uganda (MHU) Team



Bukolooto Mosque and Community Development Association (BMCD) Team



Child's Chance International (CCI) Team



Association of Persons with Disabilities Living with HIV/AIDS (ADIPHA) Team



Mbeleni Foundation Team



Brain Injury Support Organisation Uganda (BISU) Team



Stay In School Initiative (SISI) Team



Teenage Mothers and Child Support Foundation (TMCSF) Team



Center for Disability Rights, Research and Governance (CEDIG) Team



Organisation For Community Empowerment, Lyantonde (OCE) Team

PARTICIPANT

ORGANISATIONS



..together we can

