Community Solutions to Post-Resettlement Adaptation Challenges: Implications for Policies & Practices

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Presentation Outline

- Project background and overview

- What are Community Learning for Empowerment Groups?

- CBPR principles applied through CLEGs

- CLEG implementation process

- Solutions identified through CLEGs

- Experiences of CLEGs in practice: Strengths, challenges and recommendations as viewed by Community Leader

- Policy and practice implications

- Q & A

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Project Background

- In 2015, Canada began resettling 45,000 Syrians who arrived as refugees

- Supports have focused on addressing their immediate physical needs and mental health
  - Overlooked their psychosocial needs

- Combined Domains of Social Integration and Adaptation and Development after Persecution and Trauma (ADAPT) frameworks
  - Theoretical grounding to holistically examine refugee trauma, migration, and integration experiences

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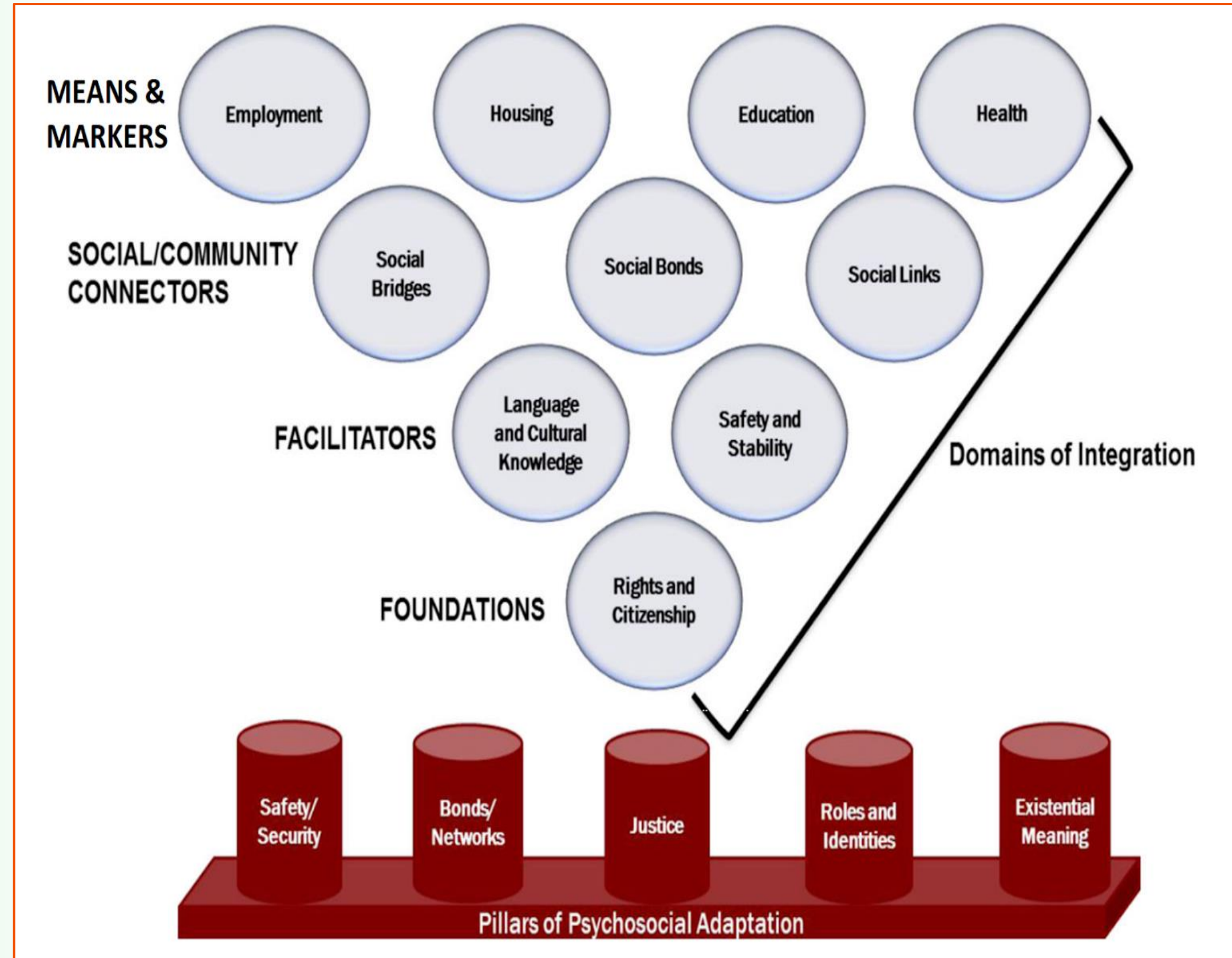
Project Overview and Methodology

Objectives:

- Examine the psychosocial adaptation needs, challenges and processes of different Syrian refugee groups
- Understand the processes involved in developing and
- implementing community learning empowerment groups
- Understand how identifying and creating community-based solutions affect these groups' integration pathways
- Mobilize knowledge generated through the development of a resource manual to be used by Syrians and other refugee groups

Research Questions:

- What psychosocial challenges and needs do different Syrian refugee community members identify during early years of settlement?
- What psychosocial strengths and adaptation processes do different Syrian refugee community members utilize during early years of settlement?
- What are the processes involved in developing and implementing community empowerment learning groups?
- How do community-identified solutions affect different groups' integration pathways?

Methodology	Training & Facilitation Guide	CLEGs	Resource
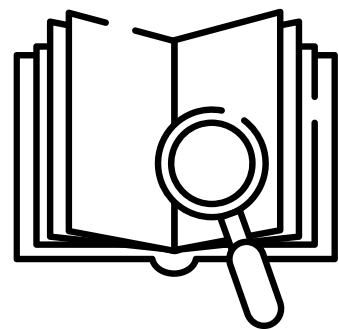
- **Community-based participatory research (CBPR)**
  - Ethnographic data collection methods involving CLEGs
  - Thematic analysis

- Training of community leaders
- Co-development of facilitation guide with the help of cultural brokers and community leaders

- 7 Syrian community leaders
  - 62 participants
  - 42 CLEGs
  - 8 focus groups

- Community empowerment model resource development
  - Community and academic presentations with community leaders

Community Learning for Empowerment Groups (CLEGs)

1) Empowerment

- "A process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives" (Rappaport, 1984, p. 2).
- Community members have the fundamental role of the transformation process (Freire, 1993).
- CBPR facilitated an equitable partnership with guidelines for an empowering and power-sharing process, while attending to social inequalities (Israel et al., 2008)

Co-Construction of Knowledge through Dialogical Space

2) Dialogical Space

- Freire (1993) positions dialogue as a human phenomenon that transforms the world, and to exist humanly is to name the world.
- Transformative dialogue occurs when all engaged have mutual humility, love, faith, and trust, while also engaging in critical thinking (Freire, 1998).
- CBPR method facilitated co-learning and capacity building among all partners.

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Cultural brokering within CLEGs
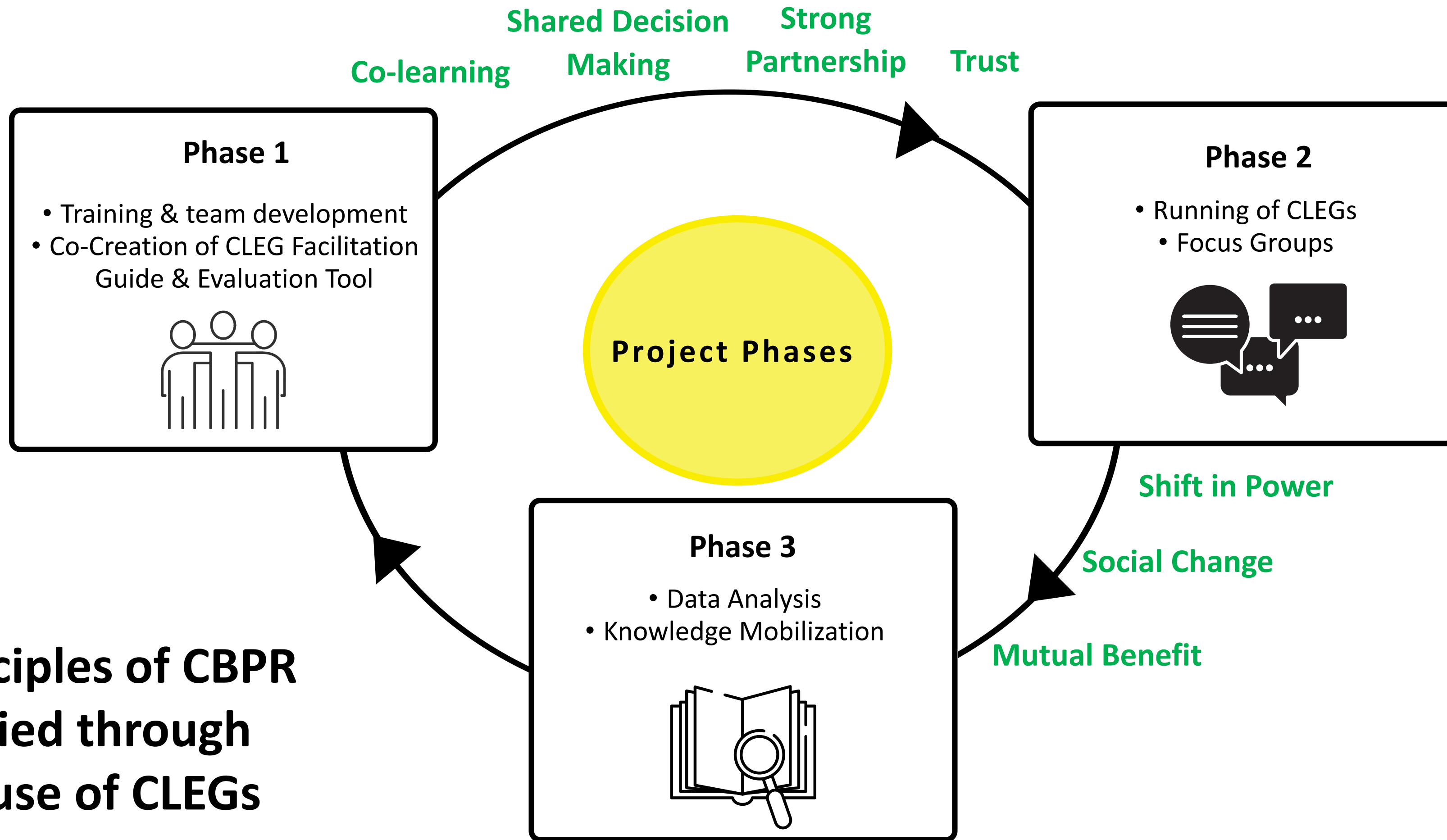
Who are cultural brokers?

Members of the participant ethnic community that are responsible for bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds to bring about change and reduce conflict (Yohani et al., 2019)
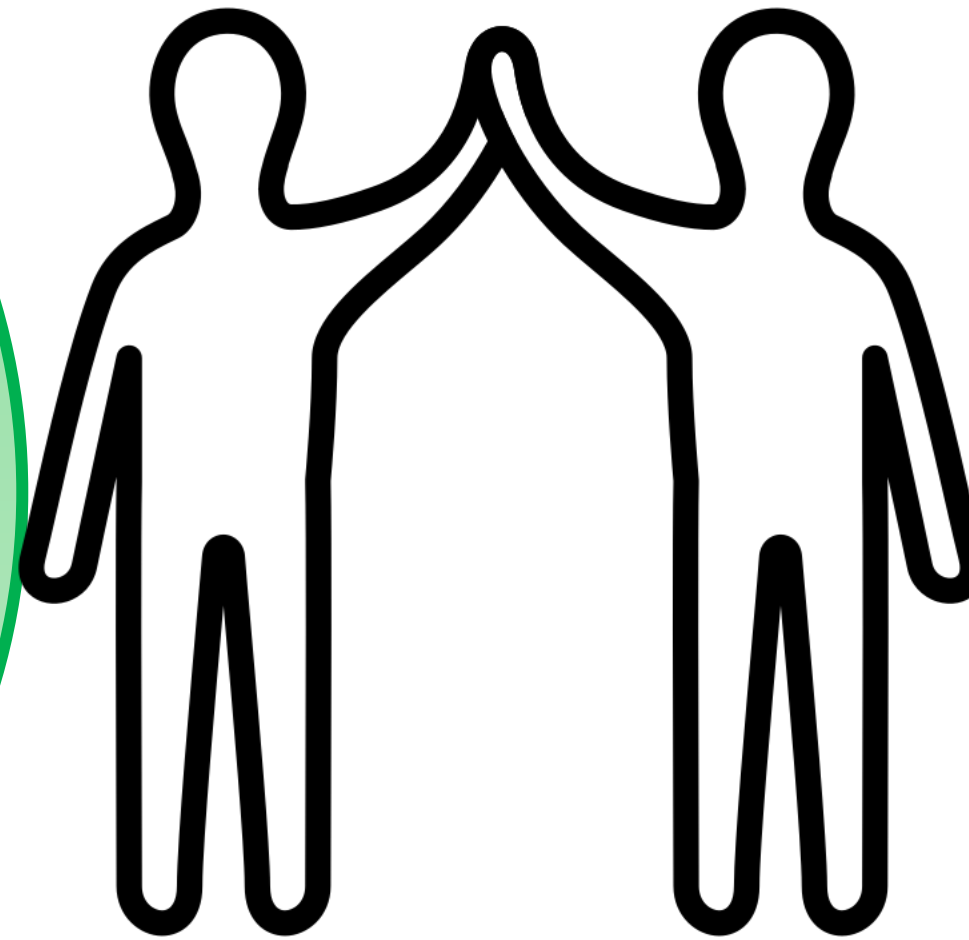
Why are they important?

- Act as a bridge between research team members and community members

- Ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion in cross-cultural research contexts

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Project Phases

Phase 1
- Training & team development
- Co-Creation of CLEG Facilitation Guide & Evaluation Tool

Phase 2
- Running of CLEGs
- Focus Groups

Phase 3
- Data Analysis
- Knowledge Mobilization

Co-learning   Shared Decision Making   Strong Partnership   Trust

Shift in Power

Social Change

Mutual Benefit

Principles of CBPR applied through the use of CLEGs

Diversity within CLEGs: CLEGs Compared to Syria
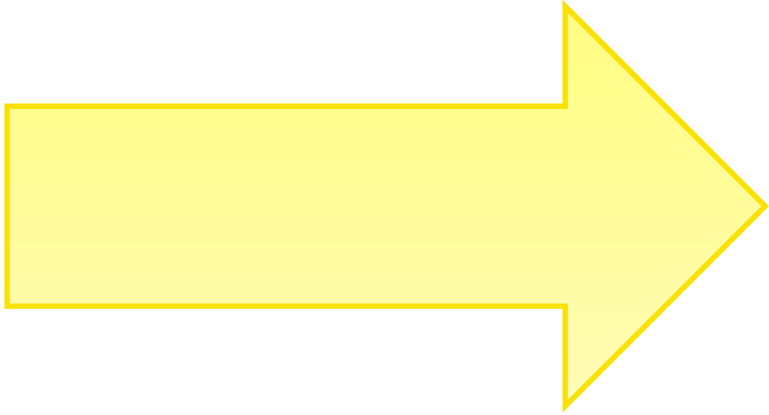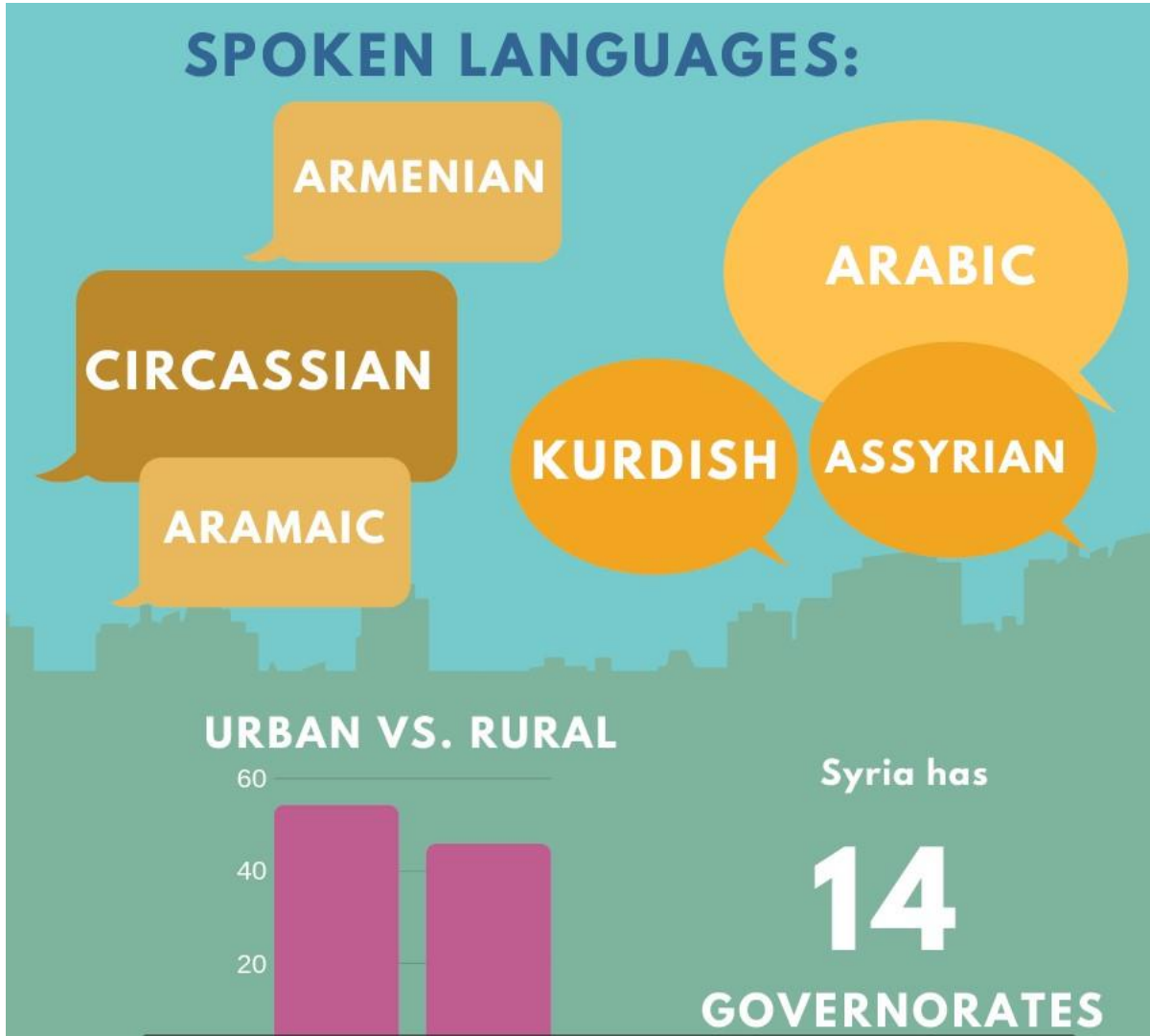
- The Syrian community represents a mosaic of ethnicities, languages, and religions

- Of the 7 community leaders in this project, 2 identify as Kurdish and one as Christian
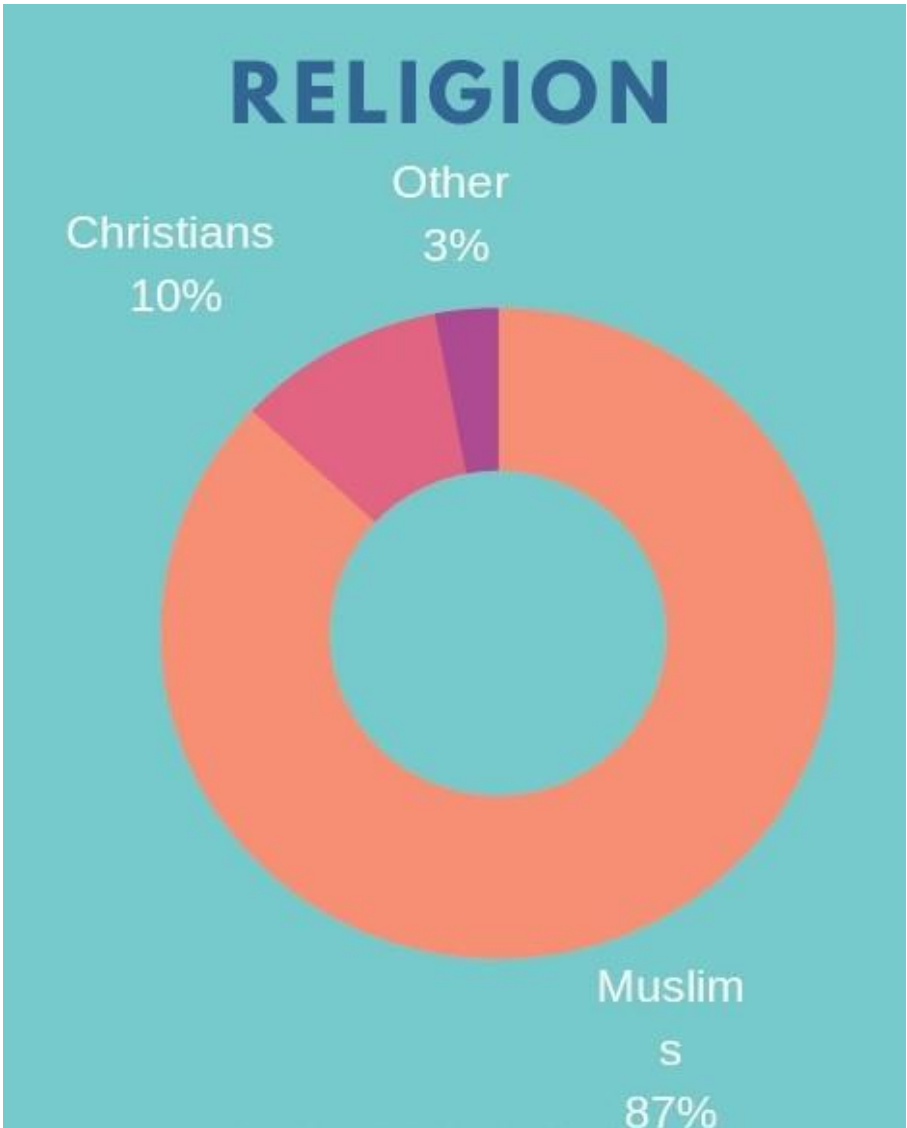
- Groups included:
  - 1 women's group
  - 1 senior's group
  - 1 youth's group
  - 4 mixed groups with participants of different ages

- Participants came from urban areas in Syria, as well as rural areas

CLEG Implementation Process- Phase 1

Team Development & Leader Training

- CBPR and data collection methods
- Group facilitation
- The ADAPT model's five core domains
- Trauma-informed practice
- Transformative adult learning theory

Co-creation of facilitation guide

- Concepts in Arabic language (Safety, Justice, Identity, Attachments, Meaning)
- Discussion questions:
  - Changes to phrasing, order, and categorization (into challenges, strengths, solutions)

- Facilitation of groups:
  - Culturally responsive approaches to group facilitation

9 research meetings and 1 evaluation/preparation meeting over 1 year

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CLEG Implementation Process- Phase 2
Example: Dialogue Using ADAPT Model

ADAPT Conceptual Framework (Silove, 2013)
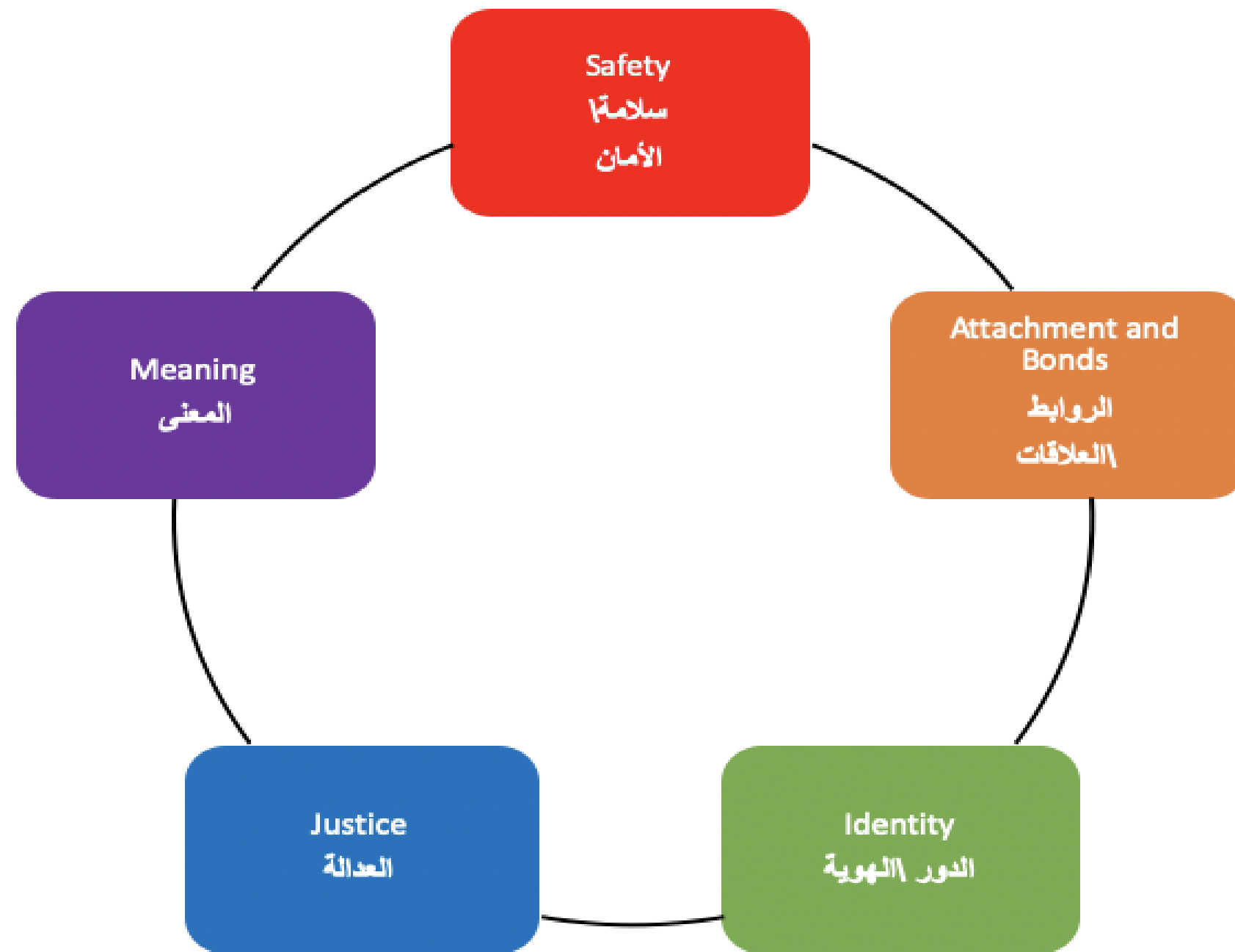
CLEG Discussion Questions

- What is our individual experience with this topic since coming to Canada?

- What are the common themes among these individual experiences?
  - What are our common challenges?
  - What are our common strengths?

- What factors have contributed to these experiences?
  - Why are we in this common situation?

- What can we do to address these factors and create change?
  - What can we do as individuals?
  - What can we do as a community?

- Who else might we include to support us?
  - How can we engage or involve them?
  - What would their role be in creating positive change?

Adapted from Smith et al., 1997

CLEG Implementation Process- Phase 2

Leader facilitated discussions
- Using co-created facilitation guide
- 5 modules (+ intro and conclusion), each on one domain of ADAPT model as springboard for discussion
- Conversation focused on challenge, strengths and solutions during early years in Canada
- 3 hours per group: food, transportation and childcare supports

Team Focus Group Discussions
- Leader reflections on individual groups
- Team discussion on processes involved in implementing CLEGs and content of discussion across groups

Data Analysis
- Began data analysis
- Pandemic interruptions

7 leaders led 6 CLEGs each = 42 CLEGs over 9 months

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CLEG Implementation Process- Phase 2
Example: Adaptations to Discussion Questions: Identity Module

Discussion Questions

As with the other modules, it is important to discuss the following questions with the group that is being taught the ADAPT model, as their unique personal, cultural, and historical experiences will impact their experiences of, and thoughts about, identity:

1. What is our individual experience with identity?
2. As we listen to each other, what are the common experiences among us?
   a. What are our common challenges?
   b. What are our common strengths?
3. What factors have contributed to these experiences?
   a. Why are we in this common situation?
4. What can we do to address these factors and create change?
   a. What can we do as individuals?
   b. What can we do as a community?
5. Who else might we include to support us?
   a. How can we engage or involve them?
   b. What would their role be in creating positive change?
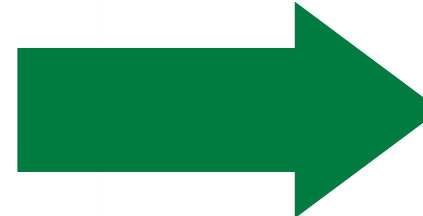
Potential Discussion Topics

Discussion Questions

As with the other modules, it is important to discuss the following questions with the group that is being taught the ADAPT model, as their unique personal, cultural, and historical experiences will impact their experiences of, and thoughts about, identity:

1. What are the positive aspects about your identity that you brought to Canada?
2. What has challenged your identity in Syria, in transition Countries, and in Canada?
   Probe:
   B) What are the challenges you see in other members of your family (wife? husband? child? sister? brother? mother? father?)
3. When we think of the challenges to our identity what solutions can we think of to create changes?
   Probe:
   A) What can we do as individuals?
   B) What can we do as a community?

4. Who else might we include to support us to make changes
   A) How can we engage or involve them with us?
   B) What would their role be in creating positive change with us?

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CLEGs Solutions Generation Process- Phase 3
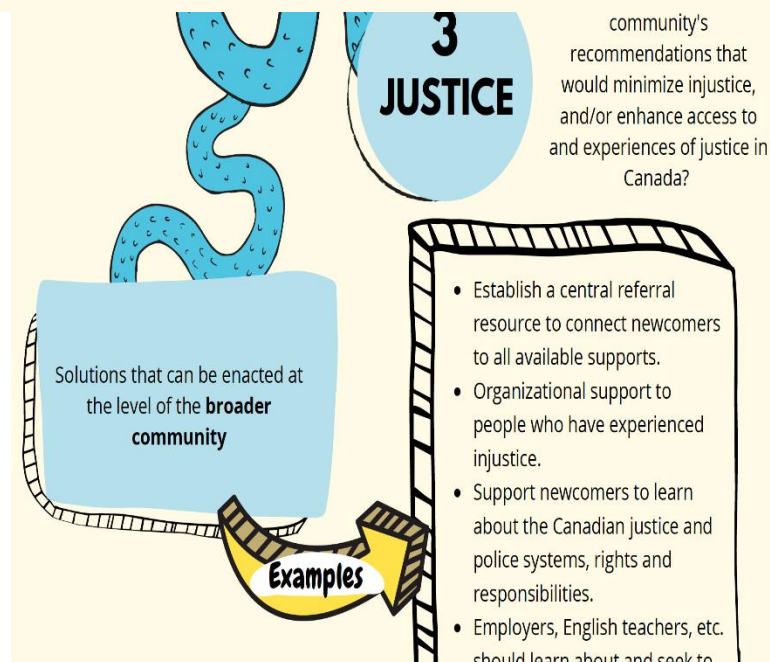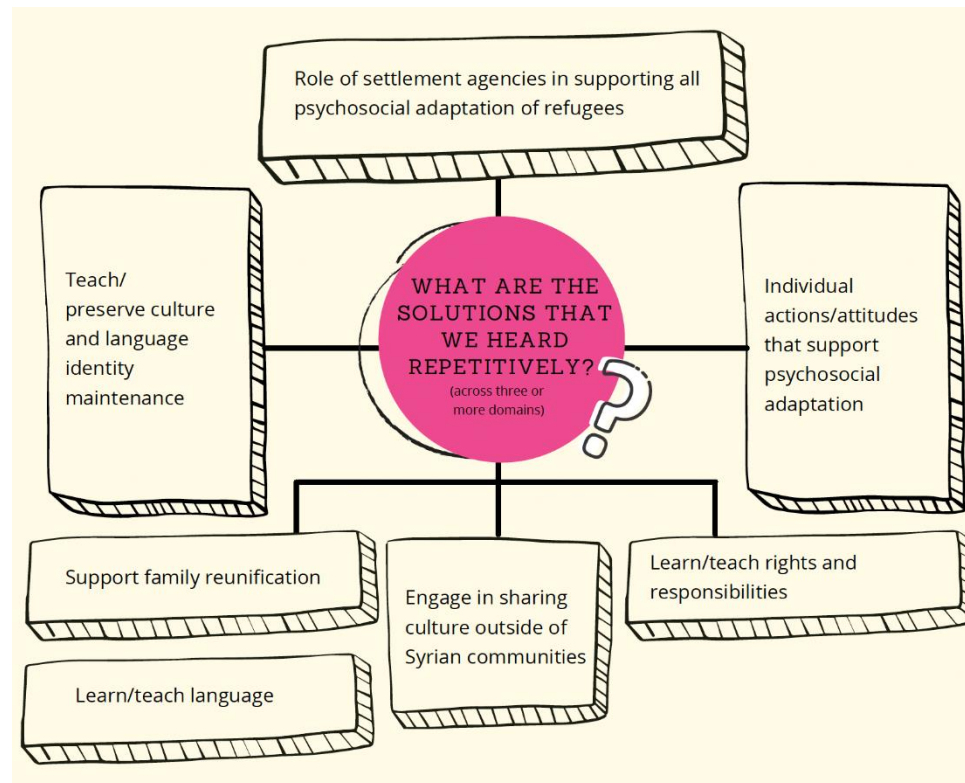
Response to Pandemic Interruptions
- Additional focus group and interviews on covid-19

Data Analysis
- Thematic analysis of CLEG discussion transcripts
- Secondary analysis of solutions identified across groups
- Project community leaders sorted and prioritized solutions
- Preliminary results shared with CLEG group members

Community-level knowledge mobilization
- On-line community forum – November 2021
- In-person community and stakeholder forum – February 2023
- Community report
- Project videos – in preparation

Other Mobilization Plans
- Presentations at academic conferences (I.e., National Metropolis)
- Developing a CLEG guide to support other refugee communities
- Sharing solutions with settlement agencies (i.e., Multi-cultural Health Brokers)
- Brief report to be shared with funder (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council), Minister of Trade, Immigration & Multiculturalism (Alberta), City of Edmonton, etc.

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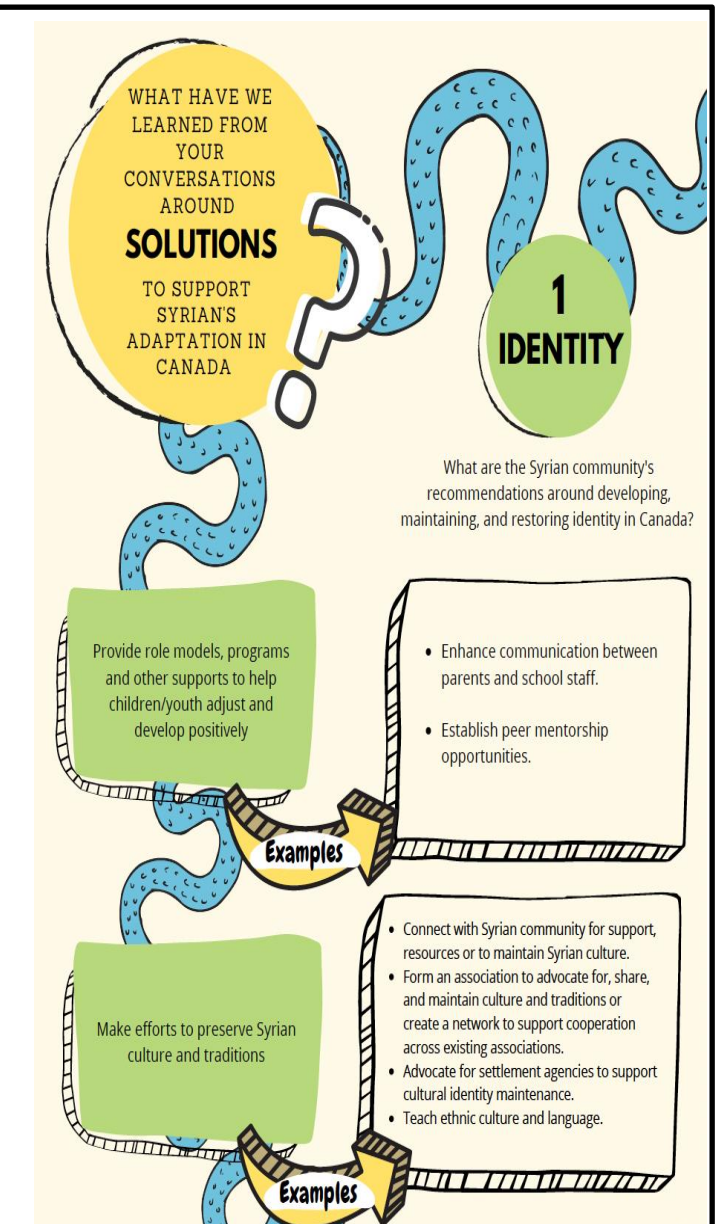
Findings: Solutions

Within the Syrian Community:

- Form a unified Syrian entity (an association or umbrella organization) to maintain and share Syrian culture, advocate, learn about Canadian systems, and support newcomer families
- Create spaces of dialogue and sharing emotions, stories, and experiences

Within Government:

- Support newcomer employment by recognizing foreign-earned credentials and experience, and creating connections to supportive employers
- Facilitate family reunification by easing requirements, improving navigation and convenience of the sponsorship process, and providing more direct support to newcomer sponsors

Findings: Solutions

– Provide more opportunities for women to learn English, specifically mothers and women with children

– Prioritize access mental health and social supports

– Support entrepreneurship within newcomer communities

– Prioritize understanding youth's unique experiences and development needs, and addressing their immediate, urgent and long-term needs

Findings: Solutions

Related to the Pandemic

- Opportunities to meet with other Syrians and non-Syrians
- Access to financial support for rent, groceries, and other financial obligations
- Learn/teach technology skills
- Form unified Syrian community organization in Edmonton
- Access to more employment opportunities and support for finding employment
- Distribute information through in-person events
- Facilitate family reunification
- Respond to injustices

Experiences of CLEGs in Practice: Strengths, challenges and recommendations

Hasan Al Ebrahim
Syrian community leader & CLEG facilitator

Policy and Practice Implication

(1) Restructure and reorganize supports provided through settlement organizations
- Include a psychosocial focus in resettlement rather than exclusive focus on language learning and housing
- Focus on mental health prevention rather than (reactive) crisis interventions
- Include programming for underserved refugee groups (e.g., male identifying, LGBTQ+ members)

(2) Focus on family reunification with recently resettled refugees

(3) Address barriers to accessing language learning for women and seniors:
- Explore innovative approaches to address space and child: caregiver ration challenges faced by organizations . For example, involving community seniors in child support to ease burden on organization, facilitate first language development, culturally relevant caregiver relationships (for senior and children)
- Provide English language classes that are culturally relevant to seniors by enlisting bicultural English language teachers and provision of classes in community settings (vs. schools)

(4) Support access to entrepreneurship opportunities for newcomers

(5) Prioritize mental health and psychosocial supports for all refugee children and youth using a school-based prevention model

(6) Use Community Learning for Empowerment Groups (CLEGs) as community-level mechanism
- Safe dialogical spaces for processing trauma and addressing community needs.
- Co-generation of solutions, co-implementation of solutions.

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Acknowledgements

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IetJ00zwVMU&list=PLww1dvjSoO4NE9Z0qYYNYMliaQOjNNwsJ&index=17

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Questions

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