

Partnering with Local Faith Actors to Support Peaceful and Inclusive Societies



A joint work of the Joint Learning Initiative on
Faith & Local Communities and the PaRD work-stream
on SDG 16: peace, justice and strong institutions

Work-stream co-leads:



The Network for
Religious and
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⋮ Executive Summary

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) brings together governmental and intergovernmental entities with civil society organizations, such as religious and value-driven organizations, to harness the positive impact of religion and values in sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. One of PaRD’s focus areas is Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace and justice.¹ PaRD’s SDG 16 work-stream commissioned the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI),² an international collaboration focused on building and communicating the evidence base on the roles of religions in sustainable development, to conduct this scoping study on partnerships with local faith actors (LFAs) for peaceful and inclusive societies.

It is increasingly recognized faith-based actors both presently and historically have played a fundamental role in fostering resilience, preventing violent conflict, and sustaining peace. They do so both through theological interpretation and dialogue as well as by providing leadership in action, both in peacebuilding and in development. At the same time, challenges remain in establishing fruitful partnerships between international actors and LFAs. Such challenges include a lack or inaccessibility of documented and disseminated evidence regarding the impact of LFAs, a lack of research synthesizing the disparate initiatives around the world, and the difficulty in navigating the diversity among LFAs. Moreover, an overall lack of trust, knowledge, and capacity on the part of secular/non-religious institutions exist, as does a lack of clear and coordinated efforts towards implementable actions to improve partnership between LFAs and international actors.

This study, therefore, seeks to distil learning about the roles played by LFAs in facilitating, leading, and advocating for peaceful and inclusive societies and to provide evidence-based recommendations to guide engagement and partnerships between LFAs and international actors (non-governmental organizations, bilateral governments, and multilateral institutions). This scoping study includes a review of relevant literature and ten case studies of local faith actor partnerships in peace work in two regions: the Lake Chad Basin and South Asia. The case studies cover examples of partnerships between actors operating at different levels (local, national, regional, and international) of actors. The case studies were completed using interviews with fourteen people. As a supplement to these interviews, participants provided additional documentation pertinent to each case, including background reports and evaluations, which were reviewed. and documentary reviews. The case studies cover international and local partnerships that include aspects of working with factors for peace in Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Myanmar, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Cameroon, as well as reference to cross-regional activities in these areas.

Key Observations

Focusing on the role of LFAs in fostering peaceful and inclusive societies, and the ways international actors can better partner with LFAs in this work, the main findings from the case studies can be categorized into those on methods and mechanisms for implementation and those on opportunities and challenges in partnerships.

1 United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 16, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>.

2 See, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, www.jliflc.com.

Methods and Mechanics

- **Both a beneficiary and a partner in certain contexts, religious leaders are a frequent point of interaction for peacebuilding projects.** Defining the role of religious leaders, and therefore what level of religious leader to target for participation in a project, is important. Working across hierarchies from high-level religious leaders to the most local level, participation from all levels may be needed in a project but this will require different approaches, such as advocacy with high level leaders to approve training for more local level leaders.
- **There is a growing necessity for media literacy and media usage in order to share peaceful messages by religious and traditional actors.** Media programming has emerged as a relatively common area of activity, particularly in an era of “fake news” and related to the need to demonstrate positive counter narratives to hate speech, circulating through different media channels. This includes work through radio and TV, as well as social media such as YouTube. Much of this is context specific and depends on the countries’ media access, with radio acting as the most appropriate means in some countries, and social media in other countries where stronger internet access exists.
- **There is a need for inclusivity in building peaceful societies that must include women and youth in highly religious contexts.** The selection of participants for inclusive programming is also of note. Several examples show the need to include traditional and religious actors with other community leaders. Some questions remain on how to involve women and young people. The question of how to involve religious minorities was only somewhat mentioned, with media options used as one way of reaching out to those who are marginalized or choose to remain distant.
- **Programming initiatives that take a nexus approach represent innovative ways to work across humanitarian-development-peace silos,** although more efforts are needed to break out of existing silos. These include integrated development and peace programs and programs that work jointly on the environmental and peace initiatives.
- **Within implementation mechanisms, the use of certain language (e.g., “terrorism”) needs careful attention.** The translation from international peacebuilding language to language that makes sense in private sectors or in local contexts is a concern. Overall, language and the communication of concepts is a common challenge across several of the case studies, which is linked to the underlying ways in which the issue has been analyzed and framed.
- **Training and training of trainers, including religious leaders, is a common method used by INGOs to reach local faith communities with information on key areas of knowledge and practice for peaceful and inclusive societies.** Working with LFAs also requires capacity building training focused on financial and administrative support, and although this is not directly related to peacebuilding, it allows for the implementation of peace projects and facilitates partnerships and funding flows with international actors.

Partnership Opportunities and Challenges

- **It should be neither a default option to engage LFAs, nor should it be an option to avoid LFAs.** When approaching partnership with a local faith actor, it is crucial to understand that actor’s place in their context. Religiously related conflicts do not necessarily mean religious actors are default partners and conflicts without any religious connotations do not mean religious actors are irrelevant. These case studies demonstrate why and how to engage with LFAs in supporting peaceful and inclusive societies.

- **Trust building is crucial for partnerships in peacebuilding work, but it takes long-term engagement, which is often difficult due to funding cycles.** Funding mechanisms that do not employ multi-year engagements will be unable to support the relationship building process that has emerged as a particularly crucial element for partnerships to flourish and fully support LFAs in peacebuilding efforts.
- **There is a role for intermediaries, connectors, or brokers in forging a path for local partnerships and international organizations.** This relates to a relationship building process where trust is established between local, national, and international partners. The broker bridges capacity and serves as a translator between local needs and international priorities. There remain challenges regarding communication between LFAs, intergovernmental actors, and donor governments. A need exists for brokers to operate across these stakeholders to translate. Intermediaries are also key for funding. Several of these case studies include LFAs whose only international funding comes through a national or international intermediary.
- **Engaging and strengthening links between local, national, regional, and international level religious and traditional actors, including those outside of the usual suspects, is crucial.** There are several instances of partnerships across faith-based and non-faith-based organizations, with faith-based and non-faith-based partners operating at varying levels of community engagement linking up. While many of the international FBOs were key partners for LFAs, this is not a pre-requisite, and LFAs can and do partner with secular international partners for peacebuilding activities. In partnerships in which government collaboration is needed, the case studies demonstrate the varying approaches used in different contexts. In some cases, it was the LFA introducing the INGO to the government and helping create and manage relations with the government. In others, the INGO helped facilitate introductions and interactions between the LFA and government partners.
- **External perceptions of partnerships can be influential.** For example, in contrast to past research assertions that proselytization is a fear connected with engaging LFAs, fears around proselytization were not centered on LFAs, but on their international partners. More specifically, concerns exist around neo-colonial and Western/civilizational mentalities of international actors. The local partners can help negotiate to demonstrate international actors do not want to force their religious perspective on others. On the other hand, international actors can help raise the visibility of LFAs and showcase their work.

Recommendations for international actors on peacebuilding partnerships with local faith actors

- Engage in contextual analysis, such as through the United States Institute for Peace’s Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding Analysis Guide,³ as an example, or participatory tools such as Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts, to identify appropriate partners and then move to co-creative and participatory project design and implementation, to ensure meaningful, sustainable, and equitable – rather than instrumentalizing – partnerships.
- Integrate capacity sharing as an integral component of any program – including capacity building for international actors and not only national and local partners. International actors should reflect on their religious literacy and ability to appropriately work with LFAs, as well as a need to learn about methods of peace building in the given local

3 United States Institute for Peace, *Religious Peacebuilding Action Guides*, 2018. <https://www.usip.org/programs/religious-peacebuilding-action-guides>.

context. LFAs may need capacity building on international concepts of conflict mediation, reconciliation, interreligious dialogue, and other key peacebuilding concepts.

- Contextualize existing tools and work towards participatory processes. Current guides may have been developed in the Global North and be inappropriate for local contexts as a result. A focus on capacity sharing and integrating local partners from the beginning of programs places an emphasis on the need to incorporate local and international ideas into contextually relevant program materials.
- Use context appropriate training, remembering capacity sharing approaches with LFAs may be most appropriate as a first step that can lead towards other trainings for local religious leaders. Training of trainers can help with reach, but cascade approaches with a limited group of religious leaders cannot guarantee impact.
- Understand and act with existing structures, including religious education institutions and media platforms, that allow for wide reach and access to otherwise marginalized groups. Work across online and offline platforms to allow for follow-up activities from media messaging.

⋮ Introduction

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) brings together governmental and intergovernmental entities with civil society organizations, such as religious and value-driven organizations, to harness the positive impact of religion and values in sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. PaRD aims at greater and institutionalized communication and coordination between secular and non-secular actors, while fostering new synergies through cooperation and collaboration of its members. One of PaRD’s focus areas is Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace and justice.¹

PaRD’s SDG 16 work-stream includes members from a range of non-governmental, governmental, and intergovernmental organizations. In their workplan, the SDG16 work-stream identified a need to “collect and share good practices and models of violence prevention and peacebuilding processes in which religious and traditional actors have been involved in SDG 16.”² PaRD’s knowledge partner is the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI). The JLI is an international collaboration focused on building and communicating the evidence base on the roles of religions in sustainable development.

It is increasingly recognized faith-based actors both presently and historically have played a fundamental role in fostering resilience, preventing violent conflict, and sustaining peace. They do so both through theological interpretation and dialogue, as well as by providing leadership in action, both in peacebuilding and in development. Discussions of religion and conflict often lead to the conclusion religion can play a role in both raising and lowering levels of violent conflict. In other words, religion can act both as a *divider* (a source of conflict) and a *connector* (a source of peace).

At the same time, challenges remain to establishing fruitful partnerships between international actors³ and local faith actors (LFAs).⁴ These include:

- A lack or inaccessibility of documented and disseminated evidence regarding the impact of LFA’s roles in shaping discourse and providing leadership;
- A lack of work synthesizing disparate initiatives around the world from various actors;
- Difficulty in navigating the diversity among LFAs, including in terms of political orientation;
- An overall lack of trust, knowledge, and capacity on the part of secular/non-religious institutions, as well as many LFAs, for such engagement; and
- The lack of clear and coordinated efforts towards implementable actions to improve partnership between LFAs and international actors, as well as the lack of widespread knowledge of existing efforts making it difficult to create normative practices.

1 United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals 16, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>.

2 International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, internal document made available to for purpose of this report.

3 International non-governmental organizations (including those that are secular and faith-based), governments, and intergovernmental organizations.

4 Local faith actors refer to those groups and organizations that have some structure and are organized towards working on a matter of social impact. We choose the word “actors” rather than “organizations” to recognize they take a variety of forms, such as leadership, informal groups, and networks, which may not be formally registered as an organization. LFAs are also different to faith communities, such as congregations, that represent the spiritual community, but may not be working on social issues. LFAs are part of and affiliated to faith communities in many and various ways.

This study, therefore, seeks to distill learning about the roles played by LFAs in facilitating, leading, and advocating for peaceful and inclusive societies, and to provide evidence-based recommendations to guide engagement and partnerships between LFAs and international actors (non-governmental organizations, bilateral governments, and multilateral institutions).

Specific objectives include:

1. To generate evidence of the role faith actors can play in fostering peaceful and inclusive societies.
2. To draw lessons about what contributes to effective peacebuilding by LFAs.
3. To generate recommendations for how international and national actors can better support LFAs in their work.

Methodology

This scoping study for the SDG 16 work-stream was undertaken by the JLI. It includes a review of relevant literature and ten case studies of local faith actor partnerships in peace work in two regions: the Lake Chad Basin and South Asia. The literature review takes a more global scope, but the case studies focused on these two regions because a previous survey of the activities from members of the works-stream demonstrated the most common sites of activity included countries in these areas. The countries included in these regions for the purpose of this report are as follows: the Lake Chad Basin region (broadly defined to include Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and the Central African Republic) and South Asia (again, broadly defined to include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, as well as additionally adding and allowing for case studies from Myanmar because of work-stream presence in the country).

The literature reviewed is both academic and grey (e.g., organizations' research reports). A set of key terms⁵ was used to conduct specific searches on Google Scholar, ALNAP, and ReliefWeb, in addition to "faith"/ "religion" and "partnership." Limited searches were also conducted in Italian, Spanish, German, Arabic, and French in order to broaden the geographic base of the literature reviewed. Due to ongoing work by JLI and PaRD on specific topics and in order to avoid overlap, we have not included additional information on gender-based violence, trafficking, and violence against children, even though they are included in SDG16. The literature review includes more international projects because of the nature of the online search process, highlighting the reality of research and communications funding that largely resides with actors in the Global North. As such, this review is not comprehensive and only seeks to provide a broad overview of some of the main issues to introduce the reader to key topics before examining the case studies in more depth.

Using a purposive and snowball sampling strategy, respectively, the members of the work-stream suggested case studies and interviewees to the JLI research team through an expression of interest form posted online in March-April 2019. The expression of interest form was used to gather case study and interview recommendations. All interviews were, therefore, conducted between April and May. The chosen case studies purposefully represent a mix of more well-known and established projects, on the one hand, and some lesser known and more local projects on the other. After following up on interview leads and balancing representation between countries and regions, fourteen people were involved as research

⁵ *Peacebuilding, Inclusion, Conflict prevention, Conflict transformation, Conflict sensitivity, Conflict mediation, Conflict resolution, Reconciliation, Xenophobia, Social cohesion, Radicalization, Violent extremism, Atrocity crimes.*

participants across the ten case studies. There was mostly one research participant per case study, but in some cases, there were two people interviewed together in a group interview. All interviews with participants were conducted by skype, except in one case where two written responses were submitted due to translation issues. We also reviewed additional documents from the organizations in the case studies. As a result of using a snowball sample, the case studies largely represent actors in the work-stream or connected to the work-stream. Again, these case studies are not meant to be representative or comprehensive of all the different types of activities conducted in international-regional-national-local partnerships for peaceful societies and social cohesion. Instead, these case studies aim to demonstrate a range of partnership types that both highlight new information about partnerships in already known cases and shed light on previously little-known cases to introduce them to an international public forum through PaRD.

Background

In this background, we provide a general, though by no means exhaustive, overview from the literature on the roles played by faith actors in supporting peaceful and inclusive societies. It serves to set the scene about our knowledge on partnerships among faith actors and between them and secular actors (including NGOs, governmental and intergovernmental actors), before advancing into the ten case studies from South Asia and the Lake Chad Basin.

In this study, the term “faith actors” (FAs) is used to encompass a variety of entities. These entities may be centralized or decentralized, global or local, grassroots or high-level, operating formally or informally at different levels, and often across institutional and territorial boundaries in practical and/or theoretical domains. This mirrors the diversity of faith groups and engagements. Local faith actors (LFAs) are those faith actors operating at national levels to more grassroots, community initiatives. Due to the comparatively small amount of available information on the most local levels of LFAs, however, this review chooses to specifically highlight initiatives involving community-level organizations.

Peacebuilding activities are understood in this study as initiatives, projects and programs that “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” as identified by SDG 16.⁶ In particular, this review concentrates on the roles of FAs during different stages of conflict (prevention, humanitarian assistance, mediation, transformation, resolution, reconciliation) and in building peaceful, inclusive societies and social cohesion. Where possible, information on localization (i.e., support of international/national to local actors) and partnership dynamics are highlighted, in accordance with PaRD’s interests in governmental, inter-governmental, and local actor partnership.

The roles of faith actors throughout different stages of conflict

In the last decade, FAs have increasingly been recognized as key actors in responses to

6 United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 16, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>.

conflict,⁷ including in humanitarian assistance,⁸ diplomacy, and in conflict resolution efforts.⁹ At the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, over 150 FAs signed the Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action in which they committed to expanding their humanitarian engagements and fight against the use of religion for the sake of violence and conflict. They also called for greater acknowledgment and collaboration with secular actors.¹⁰ The UNHCR's Global Compact on Refugees has pointed out the importance of faith-based actors' interventions in the areas of conflict prevention and reconciliation.¹¹ Faith-based humanitarian interventions have also been linked to processes of localization of humanitarian intervention due to the long-term, rooted presence of LFAs in affected communities.¹² UNOCHA's "New Way of Working"¹³ and the triple nexus approach,¹⁴ which recognizes links between humanitarian, development, and peace work, highlight there needs to be a link between all stages of prevention and response in protracted crises where violence is part of the crisis. However, faith-based actors are not mentioned in these approaches and much remains unsaid about the dynamics of local faith actors, working across humanitarian-development-peace silos, and in contexts where religious belief and practice may be part of the complexity of the conflict. In the following sub-sections, we briefly illustrate some of the most significant aspects of FAs' engagements in responses to conflict.

Reach and trust

There are many examples from around the world of the ways in which faith actors have been able to ease tensions and facilitate access for humanitarian assistance to reach those in need during and immediately after conflict. FAs played key roles throughout the former conflict in Myanmar.¹⁵ In particular, they were often able to reach areas inaccessible to other actors and deliver assistance after negotiating with "soldiers, border guards and camp managers."¹⁶ They also were able, thanks to their networks and influence, to lobby the government about the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹⁷ In the Central African Republic (CAR),

7 For an overview, see, Chris Shannahan and Laura Payne, *Faith-Based Interventions in Peace, Conflict and Violence: A Scoping Study*, Coventry, UK: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities; Coventry University, May 2016. <http://peace-and-conflict.jliflc.com/resources/faith-based-interventions-peace-conflict-violence-scoping-study/>.

8 E.g., *World Humanitarian Summit, Global Consultation Final Report*, Geneva, October, 14.-16, 2015, 191-192, https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/WHS_GloCon_final_report.pdf.

9 E.g., Anne Stensvold and Ingrid Vik, "Religious Peacemakers on the International Scene: Hopes and Motivations," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 1, no.3 (2018), 9-22, doi: 10.1080/15570274.2018.1509288; Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, *About Multi-Track Diplomacy*, <https://www.imtd.org/about/what-is-multi-track-diplomacy>.

10 *World Humanitarian Summit, Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action*, May, 2016, <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/CHARTER%20FOR%20FAITH-BASED%20HUMANITARIAN%20ACTION.pdf>.

11 UNHCR, *Part II: Global Compact on Refugees. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, New York: United Nation, September 2018, https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf.

12 As discussed in the *Forum on Localizing Response to Humanitarian Need*, See, Olivia Wilkinson, *Forum on Localizing Response to Humanitarian Need: Conference Summary*, Colombo, Sri Lanka, October 16-19, 2017, <https://jliflc.com/resources/localizing-response-humanitarian-need-conference-summary/>.

13 NOCHA, "New Way of Working," OCHA Policy Development and Studies Branch, 2017, https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/NWOW%20Booklet%20low%20res.002_0.pdf.

14 E.g., UNDP, "The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus," remarks at the launch of the Nigeria National Human Development Report, *On Achieving Human Development in North East Nigeria – "Towards an Understanding of the Humanitarian-Development- Peace Nexus,"* October 5, 2018), <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/speeches/2018/towards-an-understanding-of-the-humanitarian-development--peace-.html>; International Council of Voluntary Agencies, *Learning Stream: Navigating the Nexus. Topic 1: The "nexus" explained*, Briefing Paper, 1-4, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ICVA_Nexus_briefing_paper%20%28Low%20Res%29.pdf.

15 UNHCR, *Partnership Note. On Faith-Based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders*, 2014. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/hcdialogue%20/539ef28b9/partnership-note-faith-based-organizations-local-faith-communities-faith.html>.

16 *Ibid.*, 11.

17 *Ibid.*

tensions between local Christian communities and Muslim IDPs were mitigated with the help of World Vision, allowing them to access services in the town and not be confined to the camp.¹⁸ At the same time, FAs’ humanitarian aid delivery can also be less inclusive or even discriminatory, when recipients are only selected among the members of the same faith community, as in the case of some FBOs assisting conflict-affected people in Jos, Nigeria.¹⁹

In contexts of forced displacement due to conflict, it has been observed that international and national FAs can serve as intermediaries between secular international humanitarian agencies and LFAs, facilitating localization processes and guaranteeing aid and services are delivered to groups who might not trust international organizations or, in general, people who are not already part of their community. For instance, the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD) and the Jordan Syria Lebanon Sub-regional Forum (JSL, part of the ACT Alliance) - both faith-based organizations (FBOs) - connect donors with local and trusted implementing partners²⁰ such as churches²¹ and women groups²² assisting refugees. The issue of trust is important not only at the level of delivering assistance, but also in terms of partnership building between national and international FBOs and LFAs, and between donors and FBOs, as they mediate between the languages and priorities of different actors “by investing in relations that enabled mentoring and ongoing capacity-building.”²³ This speaks to the role FAs can play in securing relationship building and integration, not only in their local contexts, but also in local-international partnerships.

Spiritual support

As highlighted by the Charter for Faith Based Humanitarian Action, FAs are in the best position to provide spiritual assistance to conflict-affected communities and individuals.²⁴ Recent literature discusses the main arguments for and the challenges presented by engaging faith actors in psychosocial support such as a perceived lack of impartiality.²⁵ Religion, in general, has been identified as both a possible factor of risk and of protection in adversity.²⁶ Specific examples show the potential benefits of using religious resources for mental health and psychosocial support programming for conflict- and displacement-affected people. In the context of post Eritrea-Tigray border conflict, the *Mähebar* and *Sewä Sanbat*’ religious associations in northern Ethiopia played important roles in fostering harmony and mutual assistance in the community. More specifically, they helped families experiencing a loss or a wedding through donations and regular visits.²⁷ In another example, HIAS Chad engages in spiritual support activities for refugees who experienced conflict in Darfur through

18 See case study included *Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities and World Vision International, Learning Brief: the Role of Faith in Strengthening the Continuum of Protection for Children on the Move*, 2018, <https://jiliflc.com/resources/learning-brief-continuum-of-protection-for-children/>.

19 Nkwachukwu Orji, “Faith-Based Aid to People Affected by Conflict in Jos, Nigeria: An Analysis of the Role of Christian and Muslim Organizations,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (September 1, 2011), 486-488, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fer034>.

20 Kathryn Kraft, and Jonathan D. Smith, “Between International Donors and Local Faith Communities: Intermediaries in Humanitarian Assistance to Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon,” *Disasters* 43, no. 1 (January 2019), 31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12301>.

21 *Ibid.*, 30.

22 *Ibid.*, 35.

23 *Ibid.*, 38.

24 [World Humanitarian Summit, Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action](#).

25 Wendy Ager, Michael French, Atallah Fitzgibbon and Alastair Ager, “The Case for—and Challenges of—Faith-Sensitive Psychosocial Programming,” *Intervention*, 2018, doi: 10.4103/INTV.INTV_20_18.

26 Atallah Fitzgibbon and Michael French, “Developing Guidelines for Faith-Sensitive Psychosocial Programming: A Desk Review,” *Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief Worldwide*, 2017, 14-27, https://jiliflc.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/F-SPSP_Desk-Review_November-15th-2016.pdf.

27 Fitzgibbon and French, *Developing Guidelines*, 21-23.

collaboration with local Islamic religious leaders, including two-way training on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and psychosocial issues, and on the roles of the Islamic faith for the community.²⁸

A Guide on Faith-sensitive Mental Health and Psychosocial Programming in Humanitarian Settings was jointly issued in 2018 by the Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief Worldwide.²⁹ The Guide is written to correspond to the main sections of the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial support in Emergency settings. It acts as a faith-sensitive accompaniment to the main secular guidelines used for psychosocial response. The Guide, referring to the UNDP 2014 “Guidelines on Engaging with FBOs and Religious Leaders,”³⁰ also mentions possible challenges to collaborating with LFAs - especially regarding proselytization, discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or religious beliefs, and connections to violent groups. However, it also identifies ways forward that can be considered when trying to mitigate those risks and to address those challenges, e.g., through “familiarizing each partner with the technical language and mission of other actors,” training on conflict management, and engaging third party actors to mediate between intergovernmental and grassroots organizations.³¹

Conflict mediation and resolution

FAs are often engaged in conflict mediation, transformation, and resolution activities. Equally, religious belief and practice can be identified as part of a conflict, such as factors contributing to conflict. Several studies and guidelines, in fact, warn that engaging FAs in responses to conflict and in peacebuilding can present challenges and risks, and should not be considered as a *default* option. For instance, the 2018 United States Institute of Peace (USIP) publication “Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding – Analysis Guide” highlights “conflicts with significant religious dimensions do not require only religious peacebuilding responses, and those without them do not necessarily require only secular peacebuilding responses.”³² Moreover, experiences of religious diplomacy and interreligious dialogue have been described as raising questions of whether religious diplomats and their objectives are truly representative.³³ When engaging religious leaders in peacebuilding efforts, it should be noted they might not have a unifying role, but rather only represent the interests of one part of their community.³⁴

However, there are also several examples of powerful and effective initiatives aimed at ending religious conflict and promoting peace, often through role modelling and partnerships developed between FAs and with secular actors. One example is the experience of an imam and a pastor who, in the Nigerian state of Kaduna, joined forces to fight the inter-religious violence that has spread in the region since the early 90s.³⁵ Having themselves been affected

28 Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief Worldwide, *A Faith-sensitive Approach in Humanitarian Response: Guidance on Mental Health and Psychosocial Programming*, 2018, 47-8, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2018/documents/faith-sensitive_humanitarian_response_2018.pdf

29 Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief Worldwide, *A Faith-sensitive Approach*.

30 UNDP, *Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders*, October 2014, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/2014_UNDP_Guidelines-on-Engaging-with-FBOs-and-Religious-Leaders_EN.pdf.

31 UNDP, *Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders*, 10-11.

32 United States Institute of Peace, *Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding – Analysis Guide*, 2018, 88, <https://jiflfc.com/resources/religion-in-conflict-and-peacebuilding-analysis-guide/>.

33 Anne Stensvold and Ingrid Vik, *Religious Peacemakers*, 9-22.

34 USAID, *Toolkit: Religion, Conflict & Peacebuilding*, 2009, <https://jiflfc.com/resources/usaid-religion-conflict-peacebuilding/>.

35 Jeffrey Haynes, “Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 47, no. 1 (February 1, 2009), 66, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X09000000>.

by the conflict, the religious leaders embraced non-violence and collaborated to found the Muslim–Christian Dialogue Forum (MCDF).³⁶ In 2003, the MCDF -in partnership with the USIP organized a forum on dialogue attended by Christian and Muslim youth and religious leaders in Kaduna, who agreed to a set of shared commitments, including the need to respect and know more about each other’s religious tradition.³⁷

FAs can also be key actors on a higher diplomatic level. The Community of Sant’Egidio - previously involved in several peace processes, including secret negotiations in its headquarters in Rome that led to the ending of the Mozambique civil war in 1992³⁸ - played a critical role in the CAR peace process. In 2017, a peace agreement was signed in Rome, which provided an avenue for dialogue through relation building and mutual acknowledgment,³⁹ and Sant’Egidio reported to the UN Security Council on the situation in the country.⁴⁰ Soon after the recent peace agreement signed in Karthoum, the President of CAR met the Pope, ratified the Framework Agreement between the Holy See and the Central African Republic, and thanked the Community of Sant’Egidio for their support during the war and in conflict resolution efforts.⁴¹

Conflict transformation and reconciliation

Research has identified “Tradition- and faith-oriented insider mediators (TFIMs) as Crucial Actors in Conflict Transformation,”⁴² stressing the value of less formalized and more “insider” peacebuilding efforts.⁴³ According to one study, they often play important roles such as acting as observers in peace negotiations and monitoring ceasefire agreements.⁴⁴ In order to foster cooperation with and among traditional mediators, the United Nations Mediation Support Unit (MSU) initiated the creation of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers in 2013.⁴⁵ This happened after elders and local traditional leaders were found to be vital, for example, to the reconciliation process in Somalia.⁴⁶ After several UN failed attempts to have

[org/10.1080/14662040802659033](https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040802659033).

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*, 67-68.

38 See Raffaele Marchetti, “Italian Hybrid Diplomacy,” *Contemporary Italian Politics* 10, no. 2 (2018), 193-207, doi: 10.1080/23248823.2018.1472900; Mario Giro, “The Community of Saint Egidio and its Peace-Making Activities,” *The International Spectator* 33, no. 3 (1998), 85-100, doi: 10.1080/03932729808456823.

39 It must be noted the peace agreement did not hold. Andrea Bartoli and Mauro Garofalo, “Prevention through political agreements: The community of Sant’Egidio and the Central African Republic,” in *Preventing Mass Atrocities: Policies and Practices*, ed. Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr (London: Routledge, 2018), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781317353607/chapters/10.4324/9781315665931-10>; see also, Philip Pullella, “Central African Republic Forces Sign Church-mediated Peace Accord,” *Reuters*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralaf-rica-accord-idUSKBN19A30G>; Christian Ani Ndubuisi, “Challenges ahead for AU in ending CAR conflict,” *Institute for Security Studies (ISS)*, October, 23, 2017, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/challenges-ahead-for-au-in-ending-car-conflict>.

40 Community of Sant’Egidio, *Sant’Egidio at the UN Security Council to report on the situation in the Central African Republic*, November, 6 2017, <https://www.santegidio.org/pageID/30284/langID/en/itemID/23100/Sant-Egidio-at-the-UN-Security-Council-to-report-on-the-situation-in-the-Central-African-Republic.html>.

41 Godfrey Kampamba, “Pope and CAR President Satisfied for Framework Agreement Between their States,” *Vatican News*, March 6, 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2019-03/pope-president.print.html>.

42 Mubashi Mir and Luxshi Vimalarajah, “Tradition- & Faith-Oriented Insider Mediators (TFIMs) as Crucial Actors in Conflict Transformation: Potential, Constraints, & Opportunities for Collaborative Support,” *Baseline Study, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, Publication 1.*, 2016, https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/TFIM_FullReport_final.pdf.

43 *Ibid.*, 8.

44 *Ibid.*, 20.

45 KAICIID, *What We Do: Cooperation with the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers*, <https://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/cooperation-network-religious-and-traditional-peacemakers>.

46 Antti Pentikäinen, “Reforming UN mediation through inclusion of traditional peacemakers,” *The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers*, November 2015, 5, <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/reforming-un-mediation-through-inclusion-of-traditional/>.

a new government formed through negotiations with actors outside Somalia, the alliance of elders was finally included in the process that led to the formation of new and legitimate institutions.⁴⁷ This change occurred thanks to Finn Church Aid/Network's and Religions for Peace's efforts to mediate between traditional leaders and the UN, including mapping of key actors and organizing meetings among representatives of the different traditional groups.⁴⁸

Inter-religious initiatives can also be crucial to reconciliation processes. In Myanmar, Religions for Peace led a coalition of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim leaders to address the country with a shared vision of peace, which included calling on the Union Government for an investigation into crimes committed in several parts of the country, and for the institution of a conference to address the humanitarian issues with the presence of all actors involved.⁴⁹ In November 2018, the Religions for Peace Advisory Forum on National Reconciliation and Peace in Myanmar (RfP Advisory Forum) met for the first time in Nay Pyi Taw, focusing on education, women's empowerment, and on two agreements with the government of Bangladesh and with the UNHCR and UNDP on the issue of forcibly displaced people and the possibility of safe and dignified voluntary return.⁵⁰

Through the over forty partnerships KAICIID has worldwide, the organization has recently focused on enhancing a strategic regional approach in the countries/regions where it operates - the Arab Region, the Central African Republic, Myanmar and Nigeria.⁵¹ For instance, it supports the CAR Interfaith Platform and, in collaboration with government actors, contributes to the establishment of local peace and reconciliation committees.⁵² Activities have included capacity building for the Plateforme des Confessions Religieuses de Centrafrique (PCRC) in Bangui, supporting advocacy efforts against hate speech threatening peace and reconciliation processes, and ensuring religious and community leaders are included in local peace committees.⁵³

Faith actors, social cohesion, and peaceful cohabitation

FAs can be key to preventing conflict and building peaceful societies, and the importance of their engagement is widely recognized. For instance, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect issued a "Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes,"⁵⁴ in the framework of the "Fez process,"⁵⁵ which started in 2015 in Morocco with a multi-faith declaration from religious leaders recognizing the "paramount role" FAs can play in promoting peaceful coexistence and in preventing and responding to atrocity crimes and committing to the implementation

47 *Ibid.*

48 *Ibid.*

49 Religions for Peace, *A Multi-Religious Vision of Peace and Development in Myanmar: A Letter to the People of Myanmar*, May, 24 2018, https://rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/rfp_letter-people-myanmar.pdf.

50 Kaitlyn Hasegawa, "Religions for Peace Advisory Forum Provides "Open Space" to Advance National Reconciliation and Peace in Myanmar," Press Release, November 26, 2018, <https://rfp.org/press-release-religions-for-peace-advisory-forum-provides-open-space-to-advance-national-reconciliation-and-peace-in-myanmar/>; "Advisory Forum on National Reconciliation and Peace Held in Nay Pyi Taw," *The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Ministry of Information*, <http://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/?q=news/22/11/2018/id-15682>.

51 KAICIID, *Annual Report 2018-2019*, <https://www.kaiciid.org/publications-resources/2018-2019-annual-report>.

52 KAICIID, *Annual Report 2018-2019*, 16.

53 *Ibid.*, 23.

54 United Nations, *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes*, 2017, https://jilflc.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Plan_of_Action_Religious_Prevention_of_Incitement.pdf.

55 UN OSAPG, *The Fez Process and the Fez Plan of Action on the Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes*, 2017, http://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/News/Midterm_Meeting/The_Fez_Process_and_the_Fez_Plan_of_Action.pdf.

of the plan of action.⁵⁶ As illustrated in the following sub-sections, there are specific ways in which FAs take part in these processes, including through interreligious dialogue, advocacy efforts, education, and an inclusive and holistic approach to peacebuilding.

Preventing violent extremism and discrimination

The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2178⁵⁷ “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts,” in 2014, recognizing the importance of addressing violent extremism, including radicalization and urged member states to do so by engaging with civil society and “by empowering youth, families, women, religious, cultural and education leaders.”⁵⁸ FAs are often involved in initiatives aimed at countering violent extremism and radicalization. For instance, Arigatou International and the Global Network of Religions for Children developed the Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism (BRAVE) in Kenya, engaging youth and religious leaders in the peaceful message of religion.⁵⁹ The BRAVE program also engages returnees and aims at spreading counter-narratives and through social media to fight radicalization into violent extremism.⁶⁰ Another example is the Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove) initiative. In February 2017, the African Union Commission’s Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (AUC-CIDO) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), jointly launched the iDove pilot project,⁶¹ using innovative youth-led approaches to highlight the soft power of religion in preventing violent extremism (PVE). iDove builds on existing youth initiatives and supports young people’s engagement and ideas in its quest to develop non-violent approaches to problem solving and to strengthen social cohesion.

Religious advocacy efforts at a high level have addressed the issue of religious extremism and discrimination. In 2016, the Marrakesh declaration, signed by religious scholars from the Middle East–North Africa (MENA) region,⁶² marked a milestone for the rights of religious minorities in countries with a Muslim majority. Its implementation, however, poses several challenges, not least since it “has received far more attention from religious minorities and media outside the Muslim world than it has within it.”⁶³ It has faced criticism for not representing true commitments, but rather only a facade of intentions.⁶⁴ However, based on the Marrakesh declaration, there have been efforts to support the institution of full citizenship for all communities,⁶⁵ and the Declaration has been described as a possibly effective tool

56 UN OSAPG, *Fez Declaration, 2015*, http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.11_Fez-Declaration.pdf.

57 UN Security Council Resolution 2178, UNSC Doc. S/RES/2178, September, 24 2014, 6-8, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2178>.

58 UN Security Council Resolution 2178, para 16.

59 Global Networks for Children, “GNRC Members in Kenya Held Youth Engagement Forum through Building Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism (BRAVE), June 20, 2016, <https://gnrc.net/en/component/content/article/10-news/in-the-news/3682-gnrc-holds-a-youth-engagement-forum-in-kisumu-county>.

60 The Brave Program, http://www.braveprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Brave_manual.pdf.

61 “Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove), Report, February 2017-September 2018, http://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/Resources/Knowledge_Center/iDove_Report_February_2017_-_September_2018.pdf

62 Religions for Peace, *The Marrakesh Declaration and Commitments to Action*, 16 November 2011, <https://rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-Marrakesh-Declaration-and-Commitments-to-Action.pdf>; see also <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/>.

63 Hayward, Susan, “Understanding and Extending the Marrakesh Declaration in Policy and Practice,” *United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Special Report 392, (September 2016)*, 6, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR392-Understanding-and-Extending-the-Marrakesh-Declaration-in-Policy-and-Practice.pdf>.

64 *Ibid.*, 6-7.

65 Religions for Peace and UNAOC, *High-Level International Consultation: Partnering with Religious Leaders of the Middle East in Advancing the Protection of Minorities in Muslim Majority States, Final communiqué, May, 13 2016*,

to achieve more religious tolerance, provided it allows for the “application of human rights norms through the lens of Islam.”⁶⁶

Peace Education

Education is key to building peaceful and cohesive societies, and religious institutions are responsible for the education of millions of children worldwide. The Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding found *madrassahs* in Pakistan, amounting to around five percent of education institutions, while generally perceived as connected to militancy and conflict, also showed a higher awareness of social injustice in connection to Islamic values of equity in the students.⁶⁷ Sometimes Quranic schools are the only viable option for rural or impoverished communities, as in Chad and Niger, where they provide education to an estimated population of 14 million.⁶⁸ There, the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice partnered with the local Zinder union of Quranic schools as part of a project financed by USAID to introduce peace education in Quranic schools in Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso.⁶⁹ A study found this intervention posed several challenges stemming from the skepticism Quranic school teachers and religious leaders had towards trainers coming from outside their communities.⁷⁰ However, this particular challenge was addressed by Muslim experts who could speak Arabic and demonstrated knowledge about Islamic peacebuilding and history.⁷¹ In Nigeria, the Peacemakers in Action Network supported efforts to build a “more inclusive and less polarized religious education” initiated by a Pakistani peacebuilder in local *madrassahs*, and which the Nigerian network members hoped to extend to Christian schools.⁷²

Religious education institutions, however, are not the only context where peace education can take place. In Nigeria, the Da’wah Institute has issued a document called “Responses to fifty faith-based arguments against peaceful co-existence and an introductory examination of Islamic textual evidence for peaceful interfaith relations,”⁷³ facilitating Qu’ran-based reflections and constituting a resource for training on religious tolerance and friendly interfaith relations, which can serve both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. In addition, informal, community-led peace education aimed at supporting reconciliation between Muslims and Tamils in post-war Jaffna, Sri Lanka was found to be potentially more effective than curricular peace education.⁷⁴

https://rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Final-Communique-English_0.pdf.

- 66 Ahmed Salisu Garba, “The Prospects and Problems of the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Muslim Majority Communities,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 16, n. 4 (2018), 57, DOI: 10.1080/15570274.2018.1535038.
- 67 Naureen Durrani, A. Halai, L. Kadiwal, S. K. Rajput, M. Novelli and Y. Sayed, “Education and Social Cohesion in Pakistan,” *Summary Report, Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, UNICEF PBEA Program, University of Sussex, 2017*, http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/67152/1/_smbhome.uscs.susx.ac.uk_dm50_Desktop_Pakistan%20Summary%20Report_March2017.pdf, 21.
- 68 Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Mohammed, Ilham Nasser, and Seddik Oubouhacen, “Introducing Values of Peace Education in Quranic Schools in Western Africa: Advantages and Challenges of the Islamic Peace-Building Model,” *Religious Education* 111, no. 5 (October 19, 2016), 537, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2016.1108098>.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 539.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 543-544.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 544-545.
- 72 Joyce S. Dubensky “Building Peace Through Trans-local Community and Collaboration: The Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action Network,” *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 24, (2018), 87, <https://irstudies.org/index.php/jirs/article/view/331>.
- 73 The Da’wah Institute of Nigeria, “Muslim Relations with Christians, Jews and Others: Association, Dissociation, Kindness, Justice and Compassion,” 2018 , <https://jilifc.com/resources/muslim-relations-with-christians-jews-and-others/>.
- 74 Ross Duncan and Mieke Lopes Cardozo, “Reclaiming Reconciliation through Community Education for the Muslims and Tamils of Post-War Jaffna, Sri Lanka,” *Research in Comparative and International Education* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 2017), 76–94, , <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499917696425>.

Interreligious efforts for peacebuilding

Several of the examples mentioned in this literature review present an interreligious dimension either because they are initiatives built on partnerships between FAs of different religious traditions, or because they involve implementers/donors and recipients of different faiths. However, specific attention has been given to interreligious peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue in many and varied contexts. For instance, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) have developed a program called CIRCA (Capacity for Interreligious Community Action) to support peaceful coexistence among Muslim and Christian communities in Egypt, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda through training and practical local interreligious projects.⁷⁵ As highlighted in the final evaluation of the program, the engagement of religious and traditional leaders focused on shared religious values and local ownership of practical projects were found to be enabling factors, while lack of access to the program for women, NGO procedures, and rapid staff turnover in NGOs and FBOs hindered its effectiveness.

In CAR, CRS leads an interfaith peacebuilding partnership supported by USAID and in collaboration with the CAR Interfaith Platform, World Vision, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Aegis Trust, and Palo Alto University, promoting reconciliation and helping conflict-affected people to overcome trauma.⁷⁶ In this case, women and children were able to access peacebuilding activities at the community level, but the leadership remained dominated by male leaders.⁷⁷ CRS has also worked on social cohesion in CAR with the program Secured, Empowered, Connected Communities (SECC), in partnership with Search for Common Ground, Caritas Bangassou, the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commissions in both Bouar and Bangassou, and the Central African Interreligious Platform. Along with the creation of community social cohesion committees and capacity building activities, the program delivered social cohesion workshops with Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim leaders, and trained hundreds of trainers from members of different faith communities.⁷⁸

In general, the program had a positive impact, as well as unintended positive effects, such as the village of Bouar becoming known as a “haven of interreligious peace,” the creation of multi-religious committees for livelihood in Kabo, and the return of a group of Muslims to the village of Njim from displacement in Cameroon.⁷⁹ However, follow-up stages of the trainings and visibility of the program were found to be lacking more effective networking, monitoring, and evaluation, and the program would have benefited from qualified, local staff who could guarantee long-term engagement.⁸⁰ It has also been noted the available scholarly research on interfaith dialogue initiatives by faith-based NGOs is not extensive and, given the diversity of the contexts in which they take place, further enquiry into their effectiveness is necessary.⁸¹

A holistic approach to peacebuilding and social cohesion

75 Catholic Relief Services (CRS), *Building Capacity for Interreligious Action: Final Evaluation of CIRCA Project*, October, 2 2017, <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/research-publications/building-capacity-interreligious-action-final-evaluation>.

76 Michael Stulman, “New Peacebuilding Force in Central African Republic,” *Catholic Relief Services*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.crs.org/stories/new-peacebuilding-force-central-african-republic>; see also USAID, “Central African Interfaith Peacebuilding Partnership (CIPP),” <https://partnerships.usaid.gov/partnership/central-african-interfaith-peacebuilding-partnership-cipp>.

77 CRS, “*Interreligious Action for Peace: Studies in Muslim-Christian Cooperation*,” ed, Tom Bamat, Nell Bolton, Myla Leguro, and Atalia Ome, 2017, https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/interreligious_action_for_peace_march_2017.pdf, 18.

78 CRS, *Interreligious Action for Peace*, 50-51.

79 *Ibid.*, 51-52.

80 *Ibid.*, 53-54.

81 N. Uysal, “Peacebuilding through Interfaith Dialogue: The Role of Faith-based NGOs,” in Roy S., Shaw I.S. (eds) *Communicating Differences*. (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016), 276-277.

Peacebuilding and social cohesion are often strongly linked with health, environmental, and other SDG-related issues. Similarly, conflicts described as being caused by tensions between religious groups often have more to do with distributive justice than with theological differences.⁸² Integrated programming across different sectors to build peaceful and tolerant societies can address these links in a holistic way and develop more effective interventions. In this sub-section, some examples of the holistic nature of faith-based engagements in this area are illustrated. For instance, Ecopeace Middle East's⁸³ environmental peacebuilding initiatives are both bottom-up (community-level programs) and top-down (advocacy efforts), and are implemented in partnership with other NGOs and intergovernmental organizations. One of their initiatives, addressing rehabilitation of the Jordan River Project, includes a multifaith toolkit for educators and community leaders to raise awareness and support action using scriptures, sermons, and other religious texts.⁸⁴ As noted in a recent study, environmental challenges related to climate change can provide an opportunity for cooperation across and beyond theological and social tensions or conflicts.⁸⁵

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) has also highlighted decentralized renewable energy can be used as a peacebuilding tool, as it enhances community ownership and control, fostering relationship-building and benefit-sharing among neighbors, provided adequate and equally-distributed resources and capacity are available.⁸⁶ In another research document developed in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Fund of the United Nations (FAO), QUNO have addressed the role of farmers' seed systems in sustaining peace and resilience.⁸⁷ For instance, in Sheema district, Uganda, a community seed bank improved social cohesion through cooperation and information exchange between households, and especially fostered women's participation to the management and implementation of the project.⁸⁸

At the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, The United Refugee and Host Churches (URHC) founded by refugees and local people in 1996 established a distributive justice mechanism in the camp.⁸⁹ The main strategies used in conflict prevention and resolution activities at family- and camp-level were trust building and transparency, using open communication, serving the vulnerable, and providing education.⁹⁰ In the same context of conflict-driven protracted displacement, the Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief worked with local religious leaders in a so-called Religious Consortium and facilitated their inclusion in the Camp Coordination Team.⁹¹

Inclusivity

The need for an approach to peacebuilding that ensures the inclusion of people who would

82 See, for instance, Louisa Lombard and Enrica Picco, "Distributive Justice at War: Displacement and its Afterlives in the Central African Republic," *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez012>.

83 EcoPeace Middle East, <http://ecopeace.org>.

84 EcoPeace Middle East, *Faith-Based Advocacy Program*, <http://ecopeace.org/projects/lower-jordan-river/faith-based-advocacy-program/>.

85 Saleem H. Ali, "Reconciling Islamic Ethics, Fossil Fuel Dependence, and Climate Change in the Middle East," *Review of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 2 (August 2016), 172–78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2016.135>.

86 Isobel Edwards, "The Role of Decentralized Renewable Energy in Peacebuilding," *Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO)*, 2018, 8, <https://quno.org/resource/2018/12/role-decentralized-renewable-energy-peacebuilding>.

87 FAO, "Farmer Seed System and Sustaining Peace," Rome, 2018, 1-35, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca1793en/CA1793EN.pdf>

88 FAO, *Farmer seed systems and sustaining peace*, 32-33.

89 David Boan et al., "A Qualitative Study of an Indigenous Faith-Based Distributive Justice Program in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya," *Christian Journal for Global Health* 5, no. 2 (2018), 3-20, <https://doi.org/10.15566/cjgh.v5i2.215>

90 David Boan et al., "A Qualitative Study of an Indigenous Faith-Based Distributive Justice Program in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya."

91 Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief, *A Faith-sensitive Approach*, 17-18.

otherwise be excluded or marginalized is often stressed in the literature. There are several initiatives and documents describing faith actors' engagements in this sense, while some explicitly work on inclusion as a pillar of their activities.⁹² For example, Search for Common Ground Nigeria have developed a media campaign consisting of a series of videos called "Fridays with Fatima" aimed at mobilizing individuals to engage for peacebuilding in their communities.⁹³ The importance of women's roles in peacebuilding and reconciliation, sanctioned by UN landmark resolution 1325/2000⁹⁴ on women and peace and security, is also described by several studies.⁹⁵ For instance, Gusii and Maasai women of faith in Kenya deployed resources from their respective religious traditions to foster reconciliation through prayers and acts of forgiveness, as well as mourning and burial rituals.⁹⁶ At the national level, in Thailand, the Peacemakers Network in partnership with Religions for Peace Inter-religious Council for Thailand facilitated and supported a meeting between Muslim and Buddhist male and female leaders to react to escalating violence connected to religious groups in the south of the country.

Some faith-based programs are also aimed at engaging young people and children in peacebuilding activities. For example, in Niger, a program funded by the US State Department and implemented by the interfaith National Youth Council of Niger, with its Peace & Security Forums and Tech-Camp, targets young people through media campaigns and the engagement of religious leaders to counter violent extremism.⁹⁷ In CAR, World Vision's "Children as Peacebuilders Project"⁹⁸ engaged 4944 children (2604 boys and 2340 girls), among which 300 children are formerly associated with armed forces, in peace clubs. There, they received psycho-social support and vocational training, as well as training on social cohesion, tolerance, and child protection.⁹⁹

However, the exclusion of some minority religious groups from peacebuilding efforts has also been discussed in the literature. A study on religious radicalization in Cameroon has observed interreligious dialogue structures did not have a strong presence in many parts of the country, and that their impact was very limited.¹⁰⁰ This, the report suggests, is at least partly due to the lack of inclusion of some religious groups such as revivalist churches (on the rise in the country) and minority Islamic currents such as *Ahmadiyya*.¹⁰¹ In fact, there is a need for more inclusive partnerships and a deeper understanding of the diversity of religious

92 Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, *Our Work: Inclusivity*, <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/our-work/inclusivity/>.

93 "Fridays with Fatima: We ARE the Government," *AllAfrica*, February, 8 2019, <https://allafrica.com/view/resource/main/main/id/00121167.html>.

94 UN Security Council Resolution 1325, UNSC Doc. S/REC/1325, October 31, 2000, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000)).

95 See for example Kathrine Marshall et al., "Women in Religious Peacebuilding." *Peaceworks*, Berkeley Centre for Religions, Peace and World Affairs and USIP, 2011, <http://www.usip.org/publications/2011/05/women-religious-peacebuilding>; Mother's Union - Christian Care for Families, *Women, Peace and Security: The Need for Women's Meaningful Participation in Peacebuilding*, 2017, <https://jilifc.com/resources/womens-participation-peacebuilding/>.

96 Ogega, Jackie, "How Women of Faith Deploy Religious Resources in Conflict and Peacebuilding," *Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa (CIHA)*, January, 29 2016, <http://www.cihablog.com/how-women-of-faith-deploy-religious-resources-in-conflict-and-peacebuilding/>.

97 CORDAID, *The Role of Young People in Preventing Violent Extremism in The Lake Chad Basin*, 2017, <https://www.cordaid.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/11/Report-The-Role-of-Young-People-in-Preventing-Violent-Extremism-in-the-Lake-Chad-Basin.pdf>.

98 World Vision International, *Children as Peace Builders Project - World Vision CAR, End of Project Management Report*, 2018, <https://jilifc.com/resources/children-as-peace-builders-project-world-vision-car/>.

99 World Vision International, *Children as Peace Builders Project - World Vision CAR*.

100 International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: The Threat of Religious Radicalism*, Africa Report 229, translation from French (3 September 2015), 23-24, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroon-threat-religious-radicalism>.

101 International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: The Threat of Religious Radicalism*, 24.

traditions, beyond asymmetrical power relationships.¹⁰²

Lessons from the background review

This brief overview of the literature has given an overview of some of our existing knowledge on partnerships between international, national, and local faith actors, and partnerships between faith and non-faith actors on peacebuilding work. Faith actors are present and active at all stages of conflict from prevention to reconciliation and long-term peaceful and inclusive societies. There are some areas in which faith actors are particularly engaged and targeted, such as countering extremism and efforts for interreligious harmony. Growing areas of interest include the work of faith actors across environmental and peace projects, as growing pressure on the earth deepens food insecurity and water scarcity-related conflict. In order for faith actors' peace work to be holistic and inclusive, we must look to who is involved and why, and although there are many advantages, this background review has also highlighted the marginalization of some religious groups, the hierarchical structures that can exclude, and the potential dangers of partnership without strong contextual analysis.

Following this overview of some of the literature, we now turn to the case studies, as compiled from documentary evidence and interviews with key informants. The ten case studies, emanating from South Asia and the Lake Chad Basin regions, provide a brief overview of the organizations and projects, their experiences with partnerships, and a summary of lessons from each. The final section of this report then analyses and summarizes the overarching lessons from the literature and all the cases.

¹⁰² Katherine Marshall, "Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Webs that Connect Development, Peace and Religion," in *Religion, Peace, and World Affairs: The Challenges Ahead: Berkeley Centre Ten-Year Anniversary Essays* (Berkeley Centre for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, 2016), 52-55, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/religion-peace-and-world-affairs-the-challenges-ahead>.

: Case Studies

South Asia

Bangladesh: The experience of a national actor working with local religious leaders on media-based peace programming¹

The Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)² brings together eighteen stations and works as a catalyst for community radios. Its aim is to serve and give voice to remote and marginalized populations (rural and youth in particular). The BNNRC engages in lobbying activities with the government and in capacity strengthening for the community media sector in Bangladesh. It also functions as a bridge to international fora and donors. The BNNRC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

The STRIVE (Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism through Community Radio) Program³

The STRIVE program is aimed at raising awareness around countering violent extremism in local, rural communities in Bangladesh and at strengthening community radios' skills in addressing violent extremism. It was first implemented as a pilot project from May 2017 until January 2018, thanks to a grant from Democracy International, with the roll out of two community radio stations: Community Radio Sharabela in Gaibandha and Community Radio Borendra in Naogaon district. The direct targets of the pilot project were fifty young community radio journalists and broadcasters, and 3,000 rural community people (youth and young women in particular), with an indirect target of around 20,000 listeners. After implementing the pilot project, BNNRC now shares the experience with other radios. The program has an online/offline approach, so the activities include radio magazines and talk shows (with a phone line for the audience to ask questions) as well as gatherings in the communities (e.g., courtyard meetings, Community Radio Listeners' Club (RLC), Youth Clubs, discussions in schools).

As highlighted by Md. Dulal Hossain, "community radios can reach the people who live in the remotest areas where other media have not." This inclusive approach is reflected in their guiding principles of "leaving no one behind," and "not to blame each other."⁴ Moreover, violent extremism is a common problem for families and communities that can only be addressed collectively. As another interviewee highlights, "if we design the project just for some, we might create more tension."⁵ Religious leaders, youth leaders, parents, teachers, media practitioners, cultural activists, and representatives from community-based

1 JLI interview with Mark Manash Saha, Program Coordinator, American English Radio Project (AERP) in Bangladesh, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) April 16, 2019, Santa Sutradhar, Station Manager, radio Sarabela, Gaibanda, April 27, 2019, and Md. Dulal Hossain, Project Officer, PROCHESTA Project, Radio Borendro 99.2fm, Naogaon, April 27, 2019

2 Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication, Who We Are, <https://bnnrc.net/who-we-are/>.

3 Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication, <https://bnnrc.net/strive/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/strive4bnnrc/>.

4 All interviewees, 2019.

5 JLI interview with Mark Manash Saha, April 16, 2019.

organizations and civil society organizations, as well as local government departments were engaged in the implementation. In particular, religious leaders played an important role in making “community mobilization easier as people trust them more than other stakeholders.”⁶ The engagement of marginalized people who “would never have thought their words would be printed”⁷ was also highlighted as key to establishing relationships of mutual respect and acknowledgment of different voices. In the case of interfaith dialogues organized to address violent extremism, “religious leaders highlighted the causes behind emerging violent extremism in society as due to lack of mutual respect to each other’s faith,”⁸ and acted as role models by sitting together and having peaceful conversations.

The impact of the program was assessed through a baseline and an end line survey about perceptions and opinions of different stakeholders as well as crime rates related to conflicts and confrontations between different groups in the communities. A number of workshops and meetings included monitoring activities organized during the implementation of the program, and a lessons learned workshops was held after completion.

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

Engaging religious leaders was sometimes challenging in the beginning, as they were reluctant to get involved because “they thought that it was [an] issue that should be addressed by the law and order enforcement authorities.”⁹ Moreover, some of them feared the project would promote a specific political agenda and refused to participate at first. However, after the program demonstrated it was not acting in favor of one faith community over another and each tradition was acknowledged and respected, they agreed to take part in the activities. Engaging the government also presented initial challenges, but local government officials and police officers finally decided to join the activities of the program, viewing it as an opportunity to address violent extremism from a community-based perspective and to foster civil society participation.

Some challenges emerged connected to the use of an inclusive approach. In particular, the use of terms like “terrorism” and “ISIS” or “Al Qaeda” would have prevented some groups or individuals from feeling the program provided a non-partisan and non-judgmental space to talk about violent extremism, so other words were used instead. In particular, “demotivation”¹⁰ was used to describe the state of being potentially subject to the influence of/being recruited by extremist groups. The inclusive approach also meant there was a plurality of speakers at talk shows and a phone line for people to call and pose questions. This also presented challenges that were addressed through the development of guidelines and knowledge products (including quotes from religious texts) for the speakers, and through editing phone calls to avoid offensive language (if needed) before broadcasting them. The inclusion of several different voices meant marginalized groups and communities felt represented and thus contributed to fostering mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

Lessons

This case study provides useful information for wider reflections on effective peacebuilding by LFAs:

- The opportunities of an inclusive approach (minority groups, marginalized communities) to social

6 JLI interview with Santa Sutradhar, April 27, 2019.

7 JLI interview with Mark Manash Saha, April 16, 2019.

8 JLI interview with Md. Dulal Hossain, April 27, 2019.

9 *Ibid.*

10 JLI interview with Mark Manash Saha, April 16, 2019.

cohesion projects, especially with regards to countering violent extremism;

- The strategies that can be used in media initiatives to ensure plurality and to foster dialogue;
- The importance of language in relation to reach and inclusion, e.g., the potential damage of using terms like “terrorism; and”
- The key role played by religious leaders as role models for social cohesion and inclusive societies.

Afghanistan: An international-national partnership working with rural religious leaders on access to justice¹¹

CAID's work in Afghanistan¹² began in 1996 in the Western part of the country and expanded over the years to other regions. The organization provides humanitarian response to people affected by conflict and natural disaster, including internally displaced people (IDPs), and is engaged in programs aimed at combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and empowering women, creating livelihoods and inclusive economies, sustaining resilience, and stabilization. CAID's peacebuilding efforts are structured within their "From Violence to Peace"¹³ strategy. One of CAID's most recent peacebuilding projects, Promoting Access to Justice,¹⁴ is part of the In Their Lifetime (ITL)¹⁵ seed fund supporting new approaches to development work.

The Promoting Access to Justice Project

In rural Afghanistan, the key people for peacebuilding and justice work are religious leaders and community elders, and any kind of program that does not coordinate their activity with them cannot succeed - Nasir Ahmad Foshanji, ITL Project Manager

The project started in 2017 as an effort to tackle the lack of access to justice for poor and marginalized people, in particular women, and to strengthen the linkage between the formal and the informal justice system. UNDP data shows Afghanistan's Human Development Index (HDI) was ranked 168 out of 189 countries and territories, and on the Gender Inequality Index (GII), it was ranked 153 out of 160 in 2017.¹⁶ The project is currently implemented in ninety communities selected at the beginning of the project. The communities are located in Herat and Baghdis Provinces in the North-Western part of the country. CAID's work starts with a Participatory Vulnerability Capacity Assessment (PVCA)¹⁷ of the needs and the current resources/capacities of the community, followed by a culture/religion-sensitive action plan design. This includes involving the community and religious leaders from the very beginning. The first step when approaching a community is, "...first knock the door of the religious leader and elder, after that talk to men and women. In Afghanistan there are traditional barriers to talking to men and women together, so we organize two separate assessments."¹⁸

The main activity consists of establishing Community Based Human Rights Committees (CBHRC), each formed by two human rights defenders and three CBHRC members, preferably selected among religious leaders and community elders (the local shuras or village council), who constitute the informal justice system. Mullahs (religious leaders) are the most trusted authority to solve disputes as they are literate on Shari'a law (whereas community elders might not have the same knowledge). For instance, religious leaders know how a divorce case should be presented by a man or by a woman according to Islamic law, their decision on the case will be respected by the community, and the government will in

11 JLI group interview with Engineer Mohammad Yaqoob Rauf, Program Manager for From Violence to Peace and Nasir Ahmad Foshanji ITL Project Manager, May 23, 2019

12 Christian Aid, Christian Aid in Afghanistan, <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/afghanistan>

13 Antia Rahmani, "From Violence to Peace in Afghanistan," Christian Aid, September 11, 2018, <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/news/violence-peace-afghanistan>.

14 Christian Aid, A Story of Justice for Afghanistan's Most Vulnerable, <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/programmes/itl-october-news-afghanistan-justice>.

15 Christian Aid, In Their Lifetime (ITL), <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/programmes/their-lifetime-itl>

16 UNDP, Human Development Indices and Indicators 2018 Statistical Update, Afghanistan, Briefing Note for Countries on the 2018 Statistical Update, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/AFG.pdf.

17 Christian Aid, Good Practice Guide: Participatory, Vulnerability, and Capacity Assessments (PVCA), October 2009, 1-19, <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-03/christian-aid-good-practice-guide-PVCA-oct-2009.pdf>.

18 JLI interview with Engineer Mohammad Yaqoob Rauf, Program Manager for From Violence to Peace, May 23, 2019.

some cases refer to religious leaders in case of tensions between communities. CBHRCs can play a significant role in raising awareness about human rights and building capacity at the community level, but also in facilitating referral to the formal justice system when the informal one fails to protect the rights of the most marginalized members of the community.¹⁹

Ten training sessions are provided to both the members of the formal and of the informal justice systems on several issues, including human rights, anti-corruption, conflict resolution, and communication and management. Two Legal Awareness Officers for each province (one male and one female) regularly visit communities to raise awareness and provide training on key legal issues, and to monitor the implementation of the project, and a case record book is kept at the community level. When governmental partners such as the Justice Department and Attorney Department from Herat conduct field visits with CAID and implementing partners' staff, they are able to consult the books, monitor the project, and understand which cases have or have not been forwarded to the formal justice system.

The Access to Justice project also includes the use of communication tools developed ad hoc such as TV and radio ads, as well as booklets on peace, conflict resolution, elimination of violence against women, and access to justice that are based on Islamic perspectives and human rights. In particular, some articles of the constitution (which is based on both Shari'a and international human rights law) have been translated into local languages. These tools are used by Legal Awareness Officers during their visits and trainings. Due to the high rate of illiteracy in rural areas, the support of religious leaders in spreading messages and using their influence in the community is crucial. For instance, they talk about human rights according to Islam during Friday prayers and advocate for wajib (compulsory education) for both boys and girls, which is key to promoting access to justice.

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

Collaboration between the government and CAID on this project consists of liaising between the formal courts, the Justice and Attorney Departments and the communities as the informal justice system actors, but also training officials working for the formal system. The government regularly monitors CAID and its partners' work, including through field visits. CAID Afghanistan's Access to Justice project is implemented by local non-faith-based NGO partners²⁰ with three years of collaboration, under a specific set of rules and responsibilities. As mentioned throughout this case study, collaboration with religious leaders and community elders is key to the success of this project. However, religious radicalism, cultural barriers, and corruption have been reported as the main challenges to effective partnerships. In particular, opposition groups are an obstacle to education especially for girls and women, who are also the most affected by poverty and child/forced marriage. Even though the staff is Muslim, there is a misconception CAID's humanitarian work is connected to a Christian and/or a Western agenda, which can sometimes hinder the project's implementation. This is, for instance, addressed through collaboration with local non-faith-based NGO partners who are engaged in the implementation of the project.

CAID Afghanistan works with Christian Aid's headquarters in the UK and in Ireland, and the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), and Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR). This allows for advocacy at national (ACBAR) and international (BAAG) levels, on issues related to access to justice and peacebuilding. CAID's advocacy

19 As in the case of Mahjabeen's divorce case in the Baghdis Province, see, Christian Aid, *A Story of Justice for Afghanistan's Most Vulnerable*, <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/programmes/itl-october-news-afghanistan-justice>.

20 See, *Coordination of Rehabilitation and Development Services for Afghanistan*, About CRDSA, <http://www.crdsa.org/index.php/en/>.

efforts are also aimed at promoting an inclusive approach to peace, in particular with reference to women and civil society in the context of the Qatar peace talks.

Lessons

In terms of lessons learned and broader implications for discussions around how international actors can better support LFAs in peacebuilding, this case study shows:

- Religious and traditional leaders should be involved from the beginning of program development, because of their knowledge and influence in the community;
- Cultural norms concerning gender and tensions related to religious affiliation, as well as mistrust towards actors perceived as promoting a Western agenda, should be taken into account and addressed through specific programming strategies and methodologies; and
- The importance and opportunities provided by partnerships between faith and governmental actors and of efforts to bridge the religious/secular divide, especially in contexts of conflict-affected and fragile states.

South Asia: A regional partnership on peacebuilding in Buddhist-Muslim contexts²¹

As part of its global engagement, the work of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (NRTP) in South and South East Asia has been developed through the Asia Working Group (AWG) since it started its activity in 2014. The AWG works in partnership with local, national, and international actors, including religious and traditional actors, towards building peace and social cohesion on a national and regional level. The AWG's work has addressed growing tensions between Muslim and Buddhist communities through its support of the International Forum on Buddhist-Muslim Relations. The NRTP is also leading a consortium together with Finn Church Aid, Religions for Peace, World Faiths Development Dialogue, Islamic Relief Worldwide and the Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF) to develop a regional project on interreligious dialogue and Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) in South and Southeast Asia funded by the EU.

The Network's peace support work in South and Southeast Asia

The Network focuses its work on religious and traditional actors and its peace support efforts are shaped by an inclusive approach aimed at bridging the gap between local-level religious and traditional peacemakers and high-level policymakers. In the context of South and Southeast Asia, the Network identifies Buddhist-Muslim dynamics as a priority area due to the tensions that have developed along religious fault lines, as well as peacebuilding processes that emerge not merely in individual communities and countries experiencing conflict, but also across borders from a regional perspective. The Network further engages in intra- and interfaith work as it recognizes the need for dialogue not only across religions, but also within the same faith groups. Through its Peacemaker Platform, it engages tradition and faith-based insider mediators (TFIMs) and provides direct needs-based capacity support to local peacemakers from South and Southeast Asia.

The Network provided support to local peacemakers through the development of an Interfaith Peacemakers' Fellowship Program.²² The participants are not only religious leaders in a conventional sense, but rather religious and traditional actors, both men and women from different age groups. To pilot this program, the Network collaborated with over thirty actors of Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu faith, as well as with universities in Thailand and Myanmar, the Sri-Lankan Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, Maluku Interfaith Institution for Humanitarian Action in Indonesia, and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists in Thailand. Besides receiving capacity building and conflict analysis training in the fellowship program, religious and traditional actors identified priority actions they would like to implement in their local communities, e.g., particularly in South Thailand, Myanmar, and Indonesia, and collaborated to develop and implement early warning and response systems in their communities. They were connected by the Network with technical experts to support them. Following the analysis stage, actions with the support of the Network also include meetings among religious and traditional actors from different countries working on specific issues including violence against women in contexts of conflict. The piloted program has now been expanded to sixty interfaith fellows as part of the EU-funded project on interreligious dialogue and Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB).

21 JLI group interview with Edla Puoskari, Asia Programme Manager & Mirja Brand, Asia Coordinator, Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, April 26, 2019.

22 "A Network of Diversity: Interfaith Fellows Advancing Peace in South and Southeast Asia," *The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers*, January, 2016, <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/interfaith-fellows-advancing-peace-in-south-and-southeast-asia/>.

During face-to-face meetings, the Network uses frameworks of conflict analysis through a religious lens developed by organizations like USIP and CSS/ETH Zurich, as well as frameworks for trajectory analysis to identify actions and predict meaningful directions to move forward in different contexts of peacebuilding work. Religious components are usually not covered by the Network Secretariat staff, as the participants “know their respective religious content better,”²³ but rather by traditional and religious actors themselves, e.g., interfaith visits to religious buildings. However, some of the Network members have developed tools comparing different religious traditions, as in the case of Religions for Peace. In general, in face-to-face meetings participants are provided with basic tools but are then in charge of deciding the content of the discussions and, at times, leading the sessions. The Network’s inclusive approach also translates into activities specifically targeting women and youth. For instance, the above-mentioned exchange workshop and meeting supported in December 2018 in Pattani in the Deep South of Thailand provided trainings and peer-exchange opportunities on preventing violence against women to Muslim women and Muslim youth from the Southeast Asia region.

The Network also works with governmental and intergovernmental actors in the region. Thanks to its strong connections with UN agencies, it has been involved in consultation and implementation meetings of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.²⁴ With the lead of Singapore and the US State Department, the Network supported a pilot training targeting ASEAN policymakers, partly delivered by some of the Network’s local and regional partners at the end of 2017.

Media and communication strategies are a crucial part of the Network’s peacebuilding work in the region, and are aimed at promoting peaceful ways to address conflict, by identifying and amplifying existing peace voices and constructive stories and initiatives to address hate speech and fake news from a positive angle, through their dissemination on different media outlets, including social media such as YouTube. This strategy targets different audiences through the engagement of mainstream and local and alternative media, as well as through workshops with key decision-makers and governmental actors. For instance, during a workshop on developing and designing a strategic regional media and communications strategy in Bangkok in 2018, one peacemaker working in the south of Thailand shared experiences from that context regarding media coverage of Buddhist-Muslim tensions and the difficulties of making local voices heard at the national level.

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

Collaborating and working as a Network in the area of peace, where religious and traditional actors are extremely dedicated and already committed in their activities, the question is how to design a contribution that really brings added value and not added burden - Edla Puoskari, NRTTP Asia Program Manager

Peacemakers who are doing extremely valuable work in their context often feel isolated and are not always in the position to build their capacity through peer exchange with others who operate in similar conditions. In this sense, facilitating a meaningful space for “actors that are very engaged in their own local specific context but can at the same time find strength from regional level understanding”²⁵ requires a lot of attention. Another related challenge in working with religious and traditional actors from different communities coming together to

²³ JLI interview with Edla Puoskari, Asia Programme Manager, April 26, 2019.

²⁴ United Nations, Plan of Action.

²⁵ JLI interview with, Mirja Brand, Asia Coordinator, April 26, 2019.

address peacebuilding issues is how to structure the activities so the work is sustainable and valuable beyond the face-to-face meetings. This is addressed by the Network through phased processes in which all participants are explicitly reminded of their accountability on next steps and actions, and of the importance of activities in-between meetings. Communication within the groups of participants is facilitated by the use of social media groups, when possible, and it has been found useful to connect local partners with other organizations on the ground. Having the possibility to cross-check and avoiding recommendations from one single source when identifying and collaborating with local peacemakers from conflict contexts are key to establishing and maintaining the right partnerships. This is pertinent because “it is not always true that once a peacemaker, always a peacemaker.” Another challenge regarding the identification of potential partner peacemakers is they might not be the established leaders of a community. Thus, consultations with different individuals and groups in the community, including women, are needed.

Collaborations with governmental and intergovernmental actors can also be challenging. For instance, peacemakers in some contexts at country level do not necessarily see a specific international entity as the right actor to engage with, due to perceived bias. The Network has sometimes played a bridge builder role in these cases. Together with Swiss and Finnish Foreign Ministries, UN Mediation Support Unit and DPA and CSS/ ETH Zurich, the Network is also providing training for UN officials on religion and mediation. As regards ASEAN and regional governmental actors in general, the challenge has been to bring the topic of peace to the fore in a context of a strong non-interference agenda and reticence to openly address many of the issues linked to peace. The approach of the Network in this case has been to adopt a more integrated approach by also focusing on the economic impact of conflicts. Overall, it has been noted “there is a lot of translation to be done and there have been challenges to reach out to the most relevant actors across different countries.”²⁶

Another important point is there is a need to engage women and youth more, and to establish collaborations with traditionally less engaged partners such as the private sector, particularly in media and communications strategies where creativity and openness are key. Here exists a challenge regarding the translation of the (I)NGO language and the ways to address engagement in peacebuilding issues, so it can become more accessible and appealing to actors in the private sector. Moreover, there is a danger in engaging only religious and traditional actors around conflict issues in that this can reinforce the narrative that the conflict is about religion, when it can actually be about power relationships, ethnic or economic tensions. As such, all relevant actors from a specific area should be involved in the process.

Lessons

This case study offers important elements for reflection, in particular regarding:

- The importance of creating feasible, durable, and effective links between local, regional, and international actors operating at these various levels and to serve the actual needs of the communities involved;
- The importance of investing in capacity building and peer-exchange linked to action on the ground and the possibility of reflecting on lessons learned;
- The need to engage a wide range of actors, including the private sector, and to be able to speak a common language;
- The need to develop creative media and communications strategies to include a wide

²⁶ JLI interview with Edla Puoskari, Asia Programme Manager, April 26, 2019.

range of audiences and ensure inclusion of, for instance, voices from specific local communities; and

- The risks of feeding into narratives that perceive conflicts as solely religious in nature by focusing only on religious and traditional actors and religious content.

Myanmar: A secular international actor partnering with local faith actors as part of civil society engagement for social cohesion²⁷

Search for Common Ground's (Search) work in Myanmar²⁸ began in 2014 and is aimed at supporting local processes of conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and fostering social cohesion. In a country recently transitioned from military rule, Search focuses on the need to bring local communities into the national conversation and to connect them with the progress of the nation-wide peace process. At the national and local level, Search Myanmar partners with governmental and intergovernmental actors, the media, the private sector, and civil society organizations (CSOs), including faith-based groups, women, youth, and minority groups. Using the Common Ground Approach,²⁹ Search Myanmar engages all stakeholders on specific issues affecting the communities, such as access to education or other types of service delivery, which creates opportunities for grassroots social change. Through media and direct community engagement, Search Myanmar works to transform the social norms and misperceptions fueling hostility between ethnic and religious groups in the daily lives of communities.

The work of Search in Myanmar

In Myanmar, Search has three programs, "Let's think, let's change," "Communicating for future," and "Social cohesion for service delivery," the latter of which is implemented in Rakhine state. All programs are shaped by a participatory research process to which all relevant stakeholders contribute. The purpose of this approach is to understand the priorities of communities. "Let's think, let's change: Promoting Diversity Through Popular Culture"³⁰ challenges some of the assumptions communities have, including in relation to perceptions of minority/majority groups and to gender and youth, in order to build social cohesion and strengthen the peace process. It does so through creative use of media that includes a radio show and a TV drama series called "Tip of the Needle" broadcast by the national MRTV (Myanmar Radio and Television).³¹ The program also has a strong presence on social media, with its Facebook page reaching over 60,000 followers³² and a YouTube channel featuring music videos and the possibility to stream radio and TV shows.³³ The radio show, funded by the Paung Sie Facility,³⁴ addresses sensitive issues including negative religious and ethnic stereotypes, as well as drugs, domestic violence, and equality, through a mix of interviews and music that inspire dialogue.³⁵ Offline activities include collective listening circles and community-level discussions on the topics discussed in the radio show. A facilitator guide in Myanmar and English was developed to support educational institutions, CSOs, and INGOs leading community-level discussions with local youth.³⁶

27 JLI interview with representative, May 29, 2019.

28 Search for Common Ground, Myanmar, <https://www.sfcg.org/myanmar/>

29 Search for Common Ground, Common Ground Approach in US Programs, Flyer, <http://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Flyer-Common-Ground-Approach-in-US-Programs.pdf>

30 Search for Common Ground, Let's Think, Let's Change: Promoting Diversity Through Popular Culture, Search Myanmar, <https://www.sfcg.org/lets-think-lets-change-promoting-diversity-through-popular-culture/>

31 Search for Common Ground, Diversity Through A New Lens: Let's Think, Let's Change, Let's See: Promoting Diversity, July 21, 2018. <https://www.sfcg.org/diversity-through-a-new-lens-lets-think-lets-change-lets-see-promoting-diversity-through-popular-culture-multi-media-and-radio-for-modern-myanmar-phase-ii/>.

32 Let's Think, Let's Change, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/letsthinkletschange/>.

33 Search for Common Ground Myanmar, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEP1L3xud-yYzu09tv6TeYA/>

34 The Paung Sie Facility Team, <http://www.paungsiefacility.org/>.

35 The Paung Sie Facility Team, "Let's think, Let's Change: Building Towards a More Cohesive Myanmar," Impact Stories, 1-4, http://www.paungsiefacility.org/uploads/3/0/1/8/30181835/20180712_lets_think_high_res.pdf.

36 The Paung Sie Facility Team and Search for Common Ground, Facilitator Guide, 2018, <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/LTLC-Book-Layout-Final-10.12.2018.pdf>.

The three-year “Communicating for future: building confidence and trust in the peace process”³⁷ program started in 2018 and is funded by the Joint Peace Fund.³⁸ In this program, Search is collaborating with national and local media to develop media products such as TV ads, public service announcements, and music videos that can help promote the peace process. The program’s inclusive approach is particularly evident in the engagement of local media and media targeting specific minority groups who might feel under-represented in the national media. Together with media actors, “representatives of the government, of ethnic armed organizations and CSOs”³⁹ were also engaged in the program through “liaison missions to Chin State and Mon State.”⁴⁰

In Rakhine state, Search is working with UNDP on a three-year program financially supported by the European Union called “Social cohesion for service delivery.”⁴¹ The aim of the program is to foster CSOs’ and local authorities’ contribution to governance and development. The program is now entering its second phase after a year of participatory research and trust building conducted with the different stakeholders. The second phase consists of carrying out trainings and other activities (peer-to-peer activities, exchange visits, and coaching and mentoring) aimed at enhancing CSOs’ and local authorities officials’ skills to promote good governance, participatory decision-making processes, and better service-delivery in a context of high poverty rate, tensions between different religious and ethnic groups, and a lack of trust in the local institutions. This is especially important because, while CSOs played a key role in service-delivery in Rakhine state during the military rule, communication between them and the local authorities needs to be improved.

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

Search Myanmar engages with CSOs at the local level, which includes faith-based organizations. This constitutes an opportunity to include a diversity of religious groups, but it also poses challenges related to the structure of the CSOs and to the extreme sensitivity around issues of faith. For instance, traditional CSOs, while potentially playing a key role in building social cohesion, have very diverse ways of organizing their work (e.g., informal structures, rotating membership), following a mission driven by specific faith values, and are sometimes reluctant to engage with international donors or external funding. The difficulties encountered in engaging them have been addressed through participatory project creation and slow-pace trust building. Most importantly, it has been noted that highlighting the religious aspects of a project or conflict and pushing for interfaith initiatives could undermine support for a process that effectively improves relationships through practical collaboration, not least because of the gap in dialogue between the national and local level.

Engaging with governmental actors in the context of Myanmar can be challenging because of tensions and mistrust between them and local communities deriving from the military period of rule. In the context of the program in Rakhine state, this has been addressed through slowly building a relationship of trust that allows for cooperation on specific issues concerning township planning projects. The first year’s participatory research activities conducted separately with the different stakeholders also helped tackle the general skepticism towards

37 Search for Common Ground, *Communicating for the Future: Building Confidence and Trust in the Peace Process*, March 22, 2019, <https://www.sfcg.org/communicating-for-the-future-building-confidence-and-trust-in-the-peace-process/>.

38 Joint Peace Fund, <https://www.jointpeacefund.org/en>.

39 Search for Common Ground, *Communicating for the Future*.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Search for Common Ground, *Social Cohesion for Better Service Delivery in Rakhine State*, March 22, 2019, <https://www.sfcg.org/social-cohesion-for-better-service-delivery-in-rakhine-state/>.

NGOs and their work in Myanmar. Partnerships with private actors and, particularly with local media actors proved essential to the engagement and inclusion of minority groups.

Lessons

This case study demonstrates some of the challenges working on development issues from a faith-sensitive perspective poses for international organizations, and the sensitivity in programming it requires. It shows:

- The importance of building relationships of trust with individual local stakeholders (both governmental and non-governmental, which often means faith-based in this context) over a period of time before starting to support dialogue and collaboration between them.
- That creative and innovative partnerships with media actors can prove effective in developing inclusive ways to engage youth, women, and local communities in general.

Myanmar: Implementing international faith community mobilization models with national faith actors for peace in the family⁴²

World Vision (WV) has been working in Myanmar since 1991, focusing primarily on Education, Health and Nutrition, Livelihoods, and Child Protection, with a team of more than 600 staff and 5,000 volunteers.⁴³ In the last two years, WV Myanmar has developed an advocacy campaign specifically concentrating on Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) at home and in schools, and -as of 2018- is operates in twelve of the fourteen states and regions, reaching a total population of 2.2 million people, including 1.5 million children.⁴⁴ The work of WV Myanmar is financially supported by World Vision US.

The peacebuilding work of World Vision in Myanmar

In our country, if you talk about peace they think it is opposition. So we are bringing the peace in the family. [...] We need to start with children, parents, families, so if they understand what a good family is, the peace is inside there. - Dr Tin Tun Win, Church Partnership Manager, World Vision International - Myanmar

WV Myanmar partners with Christian churches of various denominations - such as the Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC)⁴⁵ (more than 5,000 churches), the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC),⁴⁶ the Myanmar Evangelical Churches Alliance (MECA),⁴⁷ and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBC)(Memorandum of Understanding in process for MECA and CBC). The partnerships consist of training delivered by WV Myanmar staff to church leaders on five modules lasting two-three days: "Integral Mission" on eradicating poverty, "Celebrating Families,"⁴⁸ "Channels of Hope - Maternal Newborn and Child Health,"⁴⁹ "Channels of Hope - Child Protection,"⁵⁰ and "Dare to Discover,"⁵¹ targeting youth. WV Myanmar started training its own staff and then Christian church leaders through these models in 2016 and has since trained over 3,000 of them. Since there has been a high demand with further Trainings of Trainers (ToTs) and Training of Facilitators (ToFs) planned. When the training is finished, church leaders develop their own Plan of Action and implement it in their own communities. Monitoring and evaluation processes, as well as refresher trainings, are in the process of being designed. There are ongoing efforts to collaborate with other religious groups, including a pilot training with Buddhist religious leaders, following the Cambodian example.⁵²

42 JLI interview with Dr Tin Tun Win, Church Partnership Manager, World Vision International - Myanmar, May 6, 2019.

43 World Vision Myanmar, <https://www.wvi.org/myanmar>.

44 World Vision Myanmar, 2018 Annual Report, <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/FY%2018%20Annual%20Report%20Eng.pdf>.

45 World Council of Churches, Myanmar Baptist Convention, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/myanmar-baptist-convention>.

46 World Council of Churches, Myanmar Council of Churches, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/asia/myanmar/mcc>.

47 World Evangelical Alliance, Myanmar Evangelical Christian Alliance Holds 36th General Conference, Celebrates Growth, April 17, 2017, <https://www.worldidea.org/news/4766/myanmar-evangelical-christian-alliance-holds-36th-general-conference-celebrates-growth>.

48 World Vision, Celebrating Families, <https://www.wvi.org/church-and-interfaith-engagement/celebrating-families>.

49 World Visions, Channels of Hope for Maternal Newborn and Child Health, <https://www.wvi.org/church-and-interfaith-engagement/channels-hope-maternal-newborn-and-child-health>.

50 World Vision, Channels of Hope for Child Protection, <https://www.wvi.org/church-and-interfaith-engagement/channels-hope-child-protection>.

51 Myanmar Baptist Convention, Dare to Discover, <http://mbc-1813.org/2018/09/28/dare-to-discover-workshop/?lang=en>.

52 World Vision, World Vision and Buddhist Faith Leaders Join Forces for Children Protection, September 14, 2017, <https://www.wvi.org/article/world-vision-and-buddhist-faith-leaders-join-forces-children-protection>.

Participation in the “Integral Mission” model is only offered to pastors, while church members may participate in the “Celebrating families” training. “Dare to Discover” targets youth up to eighteen years old, while “Channels of Hope - Child Protection” is for religious leaders and their spouses first before being offered to the rest of the community. Participant selection is done at convention/conference/council level, based on shared criteria and objectives. Since most of the Sunday school teachers are female, and women’s groups play a key role in the churches and faith communities, participants involved in the trainings are usually equally distributed between women and men. The importance of the engagement of women is especially visible with regards to the implementation of the “Celebrating Families” model. Since other faith-based and non-faith-based NGOs, such as YWCA, YMCA, and the Salvation Army are also active in the same context, models such as the “Dare to Discover” (youth) and “Celebrating Families” (parents) are sometimes shared with them. Interfaith joint event launches were also organized in collaboration with MBC and MCC who, through their interfaith programs, invite members of other religious groups to discuss child wellbeing issues (child health, child education, child protection). In these contexts, the concept of love is often used as a way of creating a language acceptable to the different groups in order to talk about how to enhance child wellbeing and peace in the family and, particularly regarding EVAC. Corporal punishments inflicted by Buddhist monks and Christian pastors is present in Myanmar. During these events, participants commit to changing their behavior by writing on the wall and signing. As an example, participants commit to not using a stick to punish children. WV Myanmar staff have reported the positive effects of “Celebrating Families” training in terms of understanding the importance of finding a healthy work-life-balance, and providing good nutrition to their children and a peaceful environment for them in the family.

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

Since it is often too risky to implement activities directly in fragile areas, religious leaders attend WV Myanmar trainings in areas where there is less tension. In terms of partnerships with governmental actors, WV Myanmar reported that before the 1990s it was not possible to work with churches in the country. WV does not have a formalized partnership with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, they have addressed this issue by developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Social Welfare, and by presenting their work through technical programs (TPs) on health, education, livelihood and child protection, and underlining the fact that it does not directly concern religious or political issues. Moreover, the partnerships with MCC and MBC, who are linked with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, ensure the government knows what WV Myanmar is doing, and that the information about their programs can be shared.

WV Myanmar’s memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with churches do not include a budget, and are rather based on sharing resources, i.e., churches offering to disseminate information, recruit participant, provides venues and sometimes accommodation for training participants, and WV Myanmar providing training facilitators and booklets. WV Myanmar’s limited financial resources do not allow for full coverage of costs related to participation in the trainings (e.g., travel costs). In turn, partnering with national faith actors such as MCC and MBC guarantees the possibility to reach out to people all over the country and to use the facilities and connections they have, for instance, with governmental actors.

Lessons

This case study is interesting for work between international and local faith actors’ partnerships as it provides information on:

- The difficulties of addressing both religion and peace in some contexts and the value of working with local faith actors on explicitly non-religious activities;
- The value of addressing peace in the family with focus on child protection and ending violence against children (EVAC) with faith actors; and
- The strategies (e.g., working with other ministries on non-faith-affiliated projects, working with LFA partners as intermediaries to report on faith-based activities) that can be adopted by faith actors when direct partnerships with some governmental actors are impossible.

: Lake Chad Basin

Nigeria: A national faith actor supporting local faith actors in interfaith peacebuilding¹

The Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (COFP)² was founded in 2010 by John Cardinal Onaiyekan, one of the most respected and well-known Nigerian faith leaders. The Foundation was first established as connected to the Catholic Church, but later registered officially as a non-faith-based NGO. It has its headquarters in Abuja and works across the country through several projects concerning peacebuilding, interreligious dialogue, and social change through ethical leadership and governance. An example of COFP’s work on the ground is their project targeting conflict-affected women and girls living in IDP camps in Abuja and Taraba States. The project is aimed at empowering them through vocational skills training (e.g., bakery, jewelry making, knitting),³ and through the distribution of start-up kits to support their efforts to (re-)enter the job market. An evaluation of this project carried out in 2017 with over 150 women who lived in IDP camps showed around a third of them had been able to rent houses outside the camp and make a living thanks to the skills acquired from the project.⁴ The focus of this case study, however, concerns the COFP Fellowship Program and on the Irigwe and Fulani Communities’ – Owned Peace Pact Initiative.

COFP’s Fellowship program⁵

The Fellowship program started in 2018, is conducted in partnership with several other local and international actors including the Catholic University of Nigeria (VUNA),⁶ the Islamic Education Trust,⁷ the Nigerian government Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBIGC),⁸ and is sponsored by the GHR Foundation.⁹ The program targets thirty-five religious leaders every year - men and women of different ages and religious traditions selected from the country’s six geopolitical zones - and focuses on interfaith dialogue, ethical leadership, and conflict mediation. The main activities consist of three one-week-long modules in each Fellowship year covering several topics connected to peacebuilding, including elements from the Islamic and Christian traditions and, particularly regarding conflict and peace (e.g., the meaning and misuse of “jihad” and “just war”), interreligious dialogue and negotiation, and the role of communications and social media. At the end of the program, VUNA issues a certificate to the participants, and every fellow suggests a particular peace project for COFP to support through a small grant.

The partnership with the TBIGC developed after the latter was introduced to COFP and its

1 JLI interview with Sr. Agatha O. Chikelue, Executive Director, Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (COFP), April 23, 2019

2 Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace: *Uniting People of Different Faiths for Peace Through Dialogue*, www.cofpfoundation.org.

3 Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace, *Empowerment of Women and Girls in IDP Camps in Abuja and Taraba State*, <https://cofpfoundation.org/empowerment-of-women-and-girls-in-idp-camps/>.

4 Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace, *2018 Annual Report*, <https://cofpfoundation.org/source/COFP-2018-Annual-Report.pdf>, 24.

5 Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace, *Fellowship Program*, <https://cofpfoundation.org/cofp-fellowship-program/>

6 Veritas University, Abuja, <https://www.veritas.edu.ng/>.

7 Islamic Education Trust, <http://ietonline.net/index.php/welcome-iet/>.

8 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Our Mission*, <https://institute.global/>.

9 GHR Foundation, <http://www.ghrfoundation.org/>

Fellowship program by the GHR Foundation, which led to a collaboration involving a series of capacity-building ToT workshops. The workshops were held in Abuja, Nigeria in April 2018 and were delivered by TBIGC staff to a group of thirteen COFP staff and volunteers. They focused on project design, planning, set-up and implementation, monitoring & evaluation, project transition, and strategic planning, were based on the TBIGC's Supporting Leaders program,¹⁰ and were co-designed with COFP according to their specific needs. TBIGC was also invited to deliver three days of similar training during the second of three modules in the Fellowship Program. Monitoring and evaluation were conducted to make sure the training was effective and revealed "80% of COFP Fellows still testifies [sic] that the course is the most impactful of all the courses received during the Fellowship Program."¹¹

COFP's Irigwe and Fulani Communities' – Owned Peace Pact Initiative

When we or international organizations come with our or their own solutions, it doesn't really work. We have to allow people to come up with their own solutions - Sr. Agatha O. Chikelue, Executive Director, COFP

In the Middle Belt of Nigeria, as in other parts of West Africa and the Sahel, there has been escalating violence between the Fulani (predominantly Muslim herders migrating for transhumance) and predominantly Christian farmers.¹² Of all countries affected, Nigeria has had the highest tally in fatalities and displaced people as a result of the violence.¹³ Although many factors such as climate change, increasing demographic pressure, "land grabbing," the presence of armed extremist groups, and the proliferation of small firearms are fueling the conflict,¹⁴ the issue of animals entering territories used for farming has, in many cases, been framed along the lines of the differences in cultural, social, and religious traditions between the communities.

In this context, the Irigwe and Fulani Communities' - Owned Peace Pact Initiative, as part of the Building Common Grounds for Peace COFP thematic area, is aimed at addressing the conflict between herders and farmers in Irigwe land in Bassa near Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. An initial two-day meeting was organized in April 2018,¹⁵ attended by over 400 members of both communities and welcomed by the Local Government Chairperson. On that occasion, COFP realized the only meaningful way to proceed was to ensure local ownership of the peace process. COFP thus guaranteed financial support but suggested all consultations should be conducted by and within the single communities. At the end of the internal consultations, the communities informed COFP of the results. COFP then organized two separate meetings of the Fulani and of the Irigwe communities respectively and a joint session in Bassa and Jos (Plateau State) where negotiations between the two groups were finally possible. The final session was attended by men, women, youths, and traditional rulers, religious and opinion leaders, and led to the constitution of an Eight Man Strategic Peace Truce Implementation and Sustainability Committee (with male and female members), which periodically meets and evaluates the peace process. The local government was also invited as a witness.

¹⁰ Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Supporting Leaders*, <https://institute.global/co-existence/supporting-leaders>.

¹¹ JLI interview with Sr. Agatha O. Chikelue, Executive Director, COFP, April 23, 2019.

¹² See, for instance, "Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel: Toward Peaceful Coexistence," United Nations Office for West African and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Study, August, 2018, https://unowas.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport_pastoralisme_eng-2.pdf.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See, "the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace", 2018 Annual Report, <https://cofpfoundation.org/source/COFP-2018-Annual-Report.pdf> and "Town Hall Peace Meeting Between Fulani Herdsmen and Irigwe/Dong Communities in Bassa L.G.A of Plateau State Nigeria," COFP Foundation, April 19-20, 2018, <https://cofpfoundation.org/town-hall-peace-meeting/>.

The Chairman and the Secretary from both the Irigwe and Fulani communities were also invited to attend the COFP 2018/2019 Fellowship program and, at the end of their training, jointly applied for a small COFP grant for a peace project to be implemented in their own communities.

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

Ensuring the participation of religious leaders in the Fellowship program and providing training, coordination, and financial support for the communities to develop their own peacebuilding process was key to overcoming initial stalls in negotiations. In particular, it provided a space where they could develop their skills in mediation and interfaith dialogue and find ways to understand each other and work together towards peace and reconciliation in their communities. Most importantly, skepticism towards the engagement of external actors was addressed through a strategy prioritizing local communities' ownership of the activities and results.

One key example showed the relationship between the two leaders within the Committee, which was established as a result of negotiations supported by COFP, was critical to mediating conflict between Fulani and Irigwe. As cattle from a Fulani herder destroyed the crops of an Irigwe farmer, the dispute was solved through direct communication between the two leaders and by a Committee meeting at the end of which a *ram* (traditional symbolic gift) and a compensation were given to the farmer. The Committee is also in contact with local authorities who are asked to intervene when the conflict cannot be solved internally.

Lessons

This case study provides valuable insights regarding LFAs' contributions to effective peacebuilding:

- The importance of local communities' ownership of peace processes and of trusting local actors' potential to mobilize internal resources and find solutions;
- The opportunities provided by the integration between different programs that engage different actors; and
- The value of capacity-building with local faith actors in direct connection to the issues affecting their communities.

Central Africa: An international-regional actor partnership for social cohesion¹⁶

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is engaged in peacebuilding work in a number of countries in Africa, including Togo, Cameroon, and the Central Africa Republic (CAR), through collaboration with Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious leaders. In particular, CRS has strong links with Catholic Church leadership, such as the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa Region (ACERAC), whose members are bishops from Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. CRS also partners with other NGOs such as Islamic Relief Worldwide and World Vision, and with some of the governments in the region (e.g., in the Gambia).

The peacebuilding work of CRS in Central Africa

While its closest partners are Catholic religious leaders, CRS also engages in interreligious dialogue for peace. For instance, in Cameroon, while CRS previously worked mainly with Catholic churches, the recent crisis highlighted the need for an interreligious peace process. After an informal process of around six months, a platform for interreligious dialogue was launched with CRS support in Cameroon following the facilitation of a workshop with 40 religious leaders of Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Muslim traditions, equally distributed and coming from both Anglophone and Francophone communities throughout Cameroon. This workshop brought together a platform of leaders. The platform then identified key actions to work on in the coming months. One of them was to establish a dialogue with the government and with the leader of the opposition.

In other contexts, such as CAR, “the conflict is not among high level religious leaders of different traditions. What happens is a manipulation of religious identities, while we are having almost the same messages of working together.”¹⁷ Recognizing this dynamic, Central African leaders of the three largest faith traditions – Catholic, Protestant and Muslim – came together to form an interfaith platform to promote peace, called the Central African Interfaith Platform (PCRC in its French acronym). Upon their request, CRS supported some of the platform’s initial meetings and public events. A year later, CRS entered into consortium with Islamic Relief Worldwide, World Vision, and PCRC to establish an international partnership mirroring and supporting the PCRC’s interfaith advocacy. Through this consortium, and with USAID funding, the Central African Interfaith Partnership (CIPP) project was launched and has been underway for the past four years. The CIPP project works to reinforce the leadership of Central African institutions in promoting peace, rebuilding livelihoods particularly among youth, and promoting social cohesion through trauma healing and peace education. CRS applied its social cohesion methodology – the combined 3B (binding, bonding, bridging) and 4D (discovery, dream, design, deliver) approach¹⁸ - to work on peacebuilding at a personal level, at the level of one’s religious group, and in terms of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Through CIPP and other initiatives, CRS has reached thousands of individuals using this methodology, including religious leaders and community members, representatives of the government, and members of armed groups. In the case of CAR, as in Togo,¹⁹ CRS first facilitated separate workshops for each religious group, followed by a

¹⁶ JLI interview with Jean-Baptiste Talla, Regional Technical Adviser for Justice and Peace, CRS, May 6, 2019.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Catholic Relief Services, *The Ties That Bind: Building Social Cohesion in Divided Communities*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/research-publications/ties-bind>.

¹⁹ CRS Staff, “Religious Leaders Seek Peace in Togo,” Catholic Relief Services, May 21, 2018, <https://www.crs.org/stories/religious-leaders-seek-peace-togo>.

“bridging” workshop with representatives of all groups. In Cameroon, due to time constraints, a single joint workshop was organized, with the possibility for each religious group to have a separate space for reflection.

Based on the experience in CAR, CRS formalized its methodology through a manual called “The Ties That Bind: Building Social Cohesion in Divided Communities.”²⁰ The manual does not make direct reference to religion, but rather focuses on how to engage people in effective work around building social cohesion. In particular, it helps concentrate on the real causes of conflict and the dreams and aspirations of the different groups involved. Engagement with governments is also part of CRS peacebuilding work. For instance, in the Gambia, CRS advocates towards members of the Parliament and the Reconciliation Commission to deliver the same type of workshops.

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

“Religious Leaders are the frame of the door, which is not in and not out. They need to understand their position and to play their role” - Jean-Baptiste Talla, Technical Adviser for Justice and Peace

The work of CRS in the Central Africa region highlights the importance of working formally and especially informally with religious leaders, and to build upon established connections to develop peacebuilding work. CRS’s engagement benefits from mutual trust and long-standing personal relationships with Catholic bishops in several countries as, for example, Mr Talla, now Technical Adviser for Justice and Peace at CRS, had previously worked for over twelve years as the coordinator of the Justice and Peace Commission of ACERAC. This proved critical to peacebuilding work in Cameroon and CAR due to his existing relationships and trust with partners. As regards the delivery of CRS’s social cohesion workshops to different religious groups, initial suspicions could be overcome through choosing facilitators from the same religious group and cultural background of the participants, and thanks to the trust built during the process. For instance, in Togo, one high-level imam was initially against participation in the workshops because he thought CRS would use them as opportunities to proselytize. However, he changed his mind when the participants told him about the content and approach used in the activities. On a similar note, another example highlighted the importance of stating “we are not bringing the knowledge. It is rather a process to bring people to reflect on their own knowledge and to find solutions to their own problems.”²¹ Moreover, there should be a space for different organizations operating in the same country/area to share their approach, strategies, tools and to coordinate their projects.

Trust is not built formally, but rather through informal situations where people feel that you are there both in difficult situations and in positive situations. This helps build confidence and work together - Jean-Baptiste Talla, Technical Adviser for Justice and Peace

Other challenges related to the engagement of local faith actors concern, in some cases, mismanagement or misbehavior on the part of some religious leaders who, however, do not represent the general ethical conduct of their respective religious groups. According to CRS’ experience, governmental and intergovernmental actors should recognize the potential of religious leaders’ contribution to change towards peace at the individual as well as at the community and at national level. A notable example of this change occurred during a workshop Mr Talla delivered in CAR to Catholic bishops who had been invited by the archbishop after he went through the training. At that time, a priest had been killed in CAR

20 Catholic Relief Services, *The Ties That Bind: Building Social Cohesion in Divided Communities, Training Guide, 2017, 1-65*, https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/crs_ties_rev-08-03-2017_web.pdf.

21 JLI interview with Jean-Baptiste Talla, Regional Technical Adviser for Justice and Peace, CRS, May 6, 2019.

and the bishops initially reacted by saying: “how are we going to continue?” After the training, however, they managed to agree to issue a joint reconciliation message calling for Christians not to consider revenge.²² The training was also delivered to some members of the anti-balaka militias in CAR, and one of them decided to become a peacemaker and to re-build the mosque he had destroyed. In this regard, it is also important to stress the main challenges are not related to the workshops themselves, but rather to what happens on the ground, especially at the community level, as a result of the change instituted by the workshops.

Lessons

Broader reflections on partnerships between international, national, and local faith actors in peacebuilding can benefit from this case study in terms of:

- The ways in which trust between local faith actors can be built through long-standing relationships and informal collaboration;
- The value of subsidiarity, as developed in the Catholic tradition, to allow for decision-making at the most local level, which is linked to the contemporary humanitarian trend of localization;
- The strategies and the approaches used to overcome suspicion, such as choosing facilitators from the same religious and cultural group as workshop participants, building trust by avoiding an imposing approach (including proselytization activities), and emphasizing the mobilization of existing knowledge and resources; and
- The opportunities of avoiding direct confrontation with religious issues in social cohesion workshops and of focusing on the real causes of conflict.

²² *Ibid.*

Nigeria: An international actor builds capacity with a national partner to support grassroots interreligious dialogue²³

KAICIID's work in Nigeria concentrates on facilitating dialogue among leaders from different religious traditions to foster peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. KAICIID's three-pillar approach in Nigeria consists of supporting the launch and activities of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace,²⁴ providing small grants to local-level grassroots initiatives focusing on interreligious dialogue, and building partnerships with international and local organizations such as the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR),²⁵ the Kukah Centre,²⁶ and the Interfaith-Mediation Centre (IMC).²⁷ Since its establishment in 2017, IDFP works towards religious tolerance, mutual trust, and cooperation through the mobilization of religious leaders and faith communities across Nigeria. It is formed of fifty Muslim and fifty Christian members from across the country, has two national coordinators who are based in Abuja, an executive committee (five Muslim and five Christian) who meet every two months. A central coordination council is composed of forty of the hundred members of the Forum, some of which are also traditional rulers in their communities, particularly among the Muslim members.

The work of KAICIID and IDFP in Nigeria

KAICIID is the only funding body of the IDFP, and closely supports its activities in many ways. The two IDFP coordinators share the office in Abuja with the KAICIID team, who provide technical and programming advice, specifically through a KAICIID Project Officer who works just with IDFP to write concept notes and proposals. The forty members of the IDFP central coordination council receive capacity building training four times a year, mostly from Nigerian experts, but sometimes also from KAICIID's headquarters staff when the topic is not context-specific (e.g., on monitoring and evaluation or on documentation). The tools used in the trainings are mostly contextualized and specific, e.g., conflict mediation skills, and include religious content with explicit reference to Muslim and Christian texts.

The implementation of the 2018 IDFP Plan of Action was supported by KAICIID and consisted of advocacy visits in seven Northern Nigerian States, national advocacy activities on countering pre-election violence and preventing hate speech, and a workshop on human rights issues for forty Muslim and Christian women and girls coming who gathered in Abuja from different parts of the country. Sensitization for peaceful elections was achieved through interfaith workshops with youth leaders in Kaduna and Plateau States, which were also broadcasted by local and international radios, as well as through TV and radio jungles and the distribution of material during the workshops. A TV show broadcasted on two local TV stations and a social media campaign were launched as part of the project to prevent hate speech. Seven IDFP institutional members were awarded separate small grants by KAICIID to carry out peacebuilding initiatives against violent extremism and radicalization. KAICIID's small grant scheme, however, is not only open to IDFP members, but to all organizations.

The advocacy visits to Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna, and Zamfara states were tailored according to the different contexts. For instance, in Zamfara state, particularly affected by the farmers/herders conflict, the IDFP team, led by Fr. Stephen Ojapah, visited key stakeholders such as farmers' and herders' associations like the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association

23 JLI interview with Joseph Atang, KAICIID Nigeria Country Expert, May 15, 2019; JLI interview with Elder Uzoaku Juliana Williams, IDFP Co-Publicity Secretary, April 24, 2019.

24 Interfaith Dialogue for Peace, <https://www.idfpnigeria.org>.

25 Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, <https://www.ipcr.gov.ng/>

26 The Kukah Centre: Faith, Leadership, Public Policy, <https://thekukahcentre.org/>.

27 Interfaith Mediation Centre, <http://imc-nigeria.org/>.

of Nigeria (MACBAN), faith groups, local government officials, and traditional rulers, including the Emir of Anka and held a town hall dialogue meeting organized by the Federal Ministry of Information. As a result, the team was invited by one of the herders' associations to come back and support the mediation process, while the commissioner of police asked them to engage the "Yan Sa Kai" (a vigilante group).²⁸ Following the visits, Fr. Ojapah reported the experience had opened up many opportunities for dialogue and had "brought my community a lot of harmony and peaceful resolution of those smaller crises that can trigger larger national crises."²⁹

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

Forgiveness - some people say that they do not forgive, they have to take revenge. Let us talk about revenge, what do the Quran and the Bible say about revenge? [...] Forgiveness makes you closer to God. Some of the Muslims did not even know, so I apologized to the imams and sheiks, and I said, "correct me if I'm wrong", but they said I was perfectly right - Joseph Atang, KAICIID Nigeria Country Expert

Interfaith work with religious leaders presents great opportunities, but also challenges in a context where hate speech is on the rise. In fact, since some religious leaders have millions of followers on social media, they can play a key role in influencing faith groups and public discourse either towards religious tolerance or by fueling extremism and tensions along religious lines. This is especially true when there is a low level of education and a high level of poverty.

Apart from religious differences, it is economic, social and political differences that need to be addressed, so that people will be able to act freely. Education is important: if you are informed you will not be deformed. These people need to be enlightened - Elder Uzoaku Juliana Williams

The experience of KAICIID and IDFP has shown how different programs and the Forum can create a platform for dialogue based on religious texts and engagement in peacebuilding, but also that in some cases it is necessary to check on the accountability of some religious leaders who might not live up to their commitments when they go back to their communities.

As religious leaders, everyone wants peace for their communities, but some of them have failed to go beyond their desire. Some of them might have beautiful ideas, but they might not have what it takes to take it to the next level. Some of them have fears. When we went to Kaduna, we were attacked because there were riots"- Elder Uzoaku Juliana Williams

Collaboration with governmental actors at the local level has proved positive and necessary. At the national level, KAICIID is developing a partnership with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), which is affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, in order to join forces and establish a direct formal relationship with the government. From the point of view of financial support, the IDFP has activated a fundraising mechanism among its members and has, thus far, experienced difficulties in identifying local donors/funding partners so far. Security concerns have also been highlighted as a potential barrier for religious leaders' engagement and, in general, for the implementation of the projects.

²⁸ *Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace, 2018 Annual Report*, <https://www.idfpnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/IDFP-REPORT.pdf>, 7-8.

²⁹ *KAICIID Dialogue Centre, 2018-2019 Annual Report*, <https://www.kaiciid.org/publications-resources/2018-2019-annual-report>, 23.

Lessons

This case study offers some distinctive points for further analysis and discussion on the role of national actors with LFAs for peacebuilding, as supported by international actors, on:

- The complexity of working with religious leaders when there are both opportunities of partnerships with these actors, as influencers, and simultaneous challenges regarding their accountability and commitment to long-term change in some cases due to competing priorities and external pressures
- Security concerns can hinder peacebuilding work and the role of security forces (both governmental and vigilante); and
- The relationship between local religious and traditional leaders and national/international actors in mediation and dialogue through religious texts on issues related to peacebuilding.

Cameroon: A national actor gains international recognition for work with young people and local faith actors on skills for peace³⁰

Local Youth Corner Cameroon³¹ was founded in 2002 and has since been involved in over 300 projects for young people in partnership with more than a hundred national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations. It is community-based, led by young people (up to thirty-five years old), and coordinated nationally by Achaleke Christian Leke, who is also Pan Commonwealth Coordinator at the Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network, and was nominated Commonwealth Young Person of the Year in 2016.³² The organization is non-governmental and non-faith-based, but it is Christian-inspired. Most of the staff identify as Christian and take part in collective prayers and retreats, and the organization's programming is influenced by religious principles, from Christian as well as from other religious traditions.

The Creating Skills for Peace program

Building on UNSCR 2250³³ on the roles of youth in supporting and maintaining peace and security, Youth Corner Cameroon has developed a program focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration of young people who find themselves in conflict with the law and are, thus, potentially more likely to be recruited by extremist militias and be involved in violent crimes. A pilot version was implemented in 2016 and the full program has now been running for two years, involving eight prisons in six different regions both in the French and English speaking regions. The target group consists of around 5000 young inmates, of which 300 have been identified and trained as peer educators on a number of different skills, including fashion design and agricultural skills. Some inmates are engaged in the production of shoes using recycled tires. The shoes are then sold both locally and internationally with part of the profits going to the inmates.³⁴ After the prisoners' release, there is also an "incubator" support group to help former prisoners to access the job market and even start their own business.

The needs of young inmates are identified through consultations and assessments carried out in the detention centers. "We ask the prisoners what they think they need in order to change their perception of themselves and be able to have something to do."³⁵ Feasibility and access to resources are also taken into consideration. The trainings are led by young people in the community who are successful in the designated area. For example, they could have had success at starting a business or earning a living legally. The life skills trainings (which take place three times a week) also include peacebuilding activities with peacemakers from the community and religious leaders. Sport tournaments are also organized alongside the trainings and are seen as a tool for social cohesion and trauma healing. Sport competitions are branded in peacebuilding terms, e.g., teams are called justice, peace etc., and the jerseys carry references to the SDG. The program also has an educational component. Libraries have been opened in prisons and essay competitions are organized. In 2018, there were seventy-two entries from eight prisons, and the process proved to be valuable for the young

³⁰ JLI interview with Achaleke Christian Leke, National Coordinator, April 17, 2019.

³¹ Local Youth Corner Cameroon: Working Together for a Common Good and a Peaceful Society, <http://www.loyocameroun.org/>.

³² Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network, <http://cypan.org/>.

³³ UNSC, Security Council, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2250 (2015), Urges Member States to Increase Representation of Youth in Decision-Making at All Levels, Meetings Coverage, SC/12149, December 9, 2015 <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>.

³⁴ Local Youth Corner Cameroon, *Rehabilitating Violent Offenders in Cameroon Prison Through Production of Slippers From Used Tires*, January 20, 2019, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUF9GxIErhE>.

³⁵ JLI interview with Achaleke Christian Leke, National Coordinator, April 17, 2019.

participants who could reflect on and tell their own stories through writing.

The program also addresses trauma healing, family reconciliation of young prisoners, and their rehabilitation/reintegration (R-R) into the community after release. In this sense, the contribution of religious leader and (particularly in the North) traditional rulers is key to the success of the program, both in terms of psychosocial and religious counselling, including prayers in detention centers and to guarantee its sustainability after the prisoners are released and go back to their communities. Families are invited on special occasions to visit the young inmates together with religious leaders to facilitate reconciliation. Holy texts from the Quran and the Bible are often used to support the young prisoners in their healing process and make the case that forgiveness, reconciliation, and reintegration in the community are “of God, a prescription of God and something that they should take seriously if they believe in God.”³⁶ Religious and traditional leaders are able to ensure support and assistance to the former inmates after return.

Key reflections on partnerships in peacebuilding

Being awarded the Commonwealth Young Person of the Year in 2016 helped Achaleke Christian Leke and his organization start the pilot project for this program. His winning was considered “a national victory” and the government became aware of their activities. It took one year of advocacy, however, to convince the government they should be granted access to prisons. Consistency and persistency were crucial in the process of gaining access. Trust between the organization and the government was supported by the fact the project was showcased on international news and contributed to building a more positive image of the detention system in Cameroon. It helped the government to see the organization’s work as an effort to support the State in its mandate. The partnership with the government (including the Ministry of Education for the essay competitions) translated into contacts and collaboration with local and regional administrations.

At the community level, the organization has focal persons working in every region. The Local Youth Corner Cameroon enjoys trust, legitimacy, and partnerships built over the course of its existence since 2002. In the north, they work mainly with Imams, Quranic teachers, and traditional leaders (who are sometimes more trusted and respected than local administrators). In the south, they work more with Christian religious leaders and associations, including the Cameroon Baptist Service (CBS), the Catholic, Presbyterian, and other Protestant churches, and also with the Council of Imams. Although there were challenges related to prejudice towards (former) prisoners and traumatic experiences in the families, psychosocial counselling, spiritual support and communications campaigns both online and offline (including on radio and television) help create the right space for rehabilitation and reintegration processes.

Local Youth Corner Cameroon also partners with the United Network of Young Peacebuilders who provide training material and technical support, while Search for Common Ground collaborated on project design and implementation. Funding came from the US-based GHR Foundation and the Commonwealth Peace Ambassadors Network also provided support.

Lessons

This case study offers several insights of interest for wider reflection on local actors with links to faith generally and that work with religious leaders in particular, while basing their main organizational identity within another area issue, as in this case, around young people:

³⁶ JLI interview with Achaleke Christian Leke, April 17, 2019.

- Participation in international initiatives and international visibility can facilitate partnerships with governmental actors, which nevertheless require long-term advocacy efforts, transparency, and support to the governmental agenda;
- Stigma within individuals, at the family and community level, which hinders forgiveness, reconciliation and reintegration processes, can be addressed with the support of religious and traditional leaders; and
- Initiatives focusing on sports and creativity can be key to youth engagement and the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs.

Central African Republic: An international consortium directly working with local faith actors for Muslim-Christian interreligious dialogue³⁷

Finn Church Aid (FCA), together with KAICIID and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, is one of the main funders and promoters of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (the Network), as well as hosting its Secretariat. The Network’s peacebuilding work in CAR started in April 2014 with a high-level meeting between Muslim and Christian religious actors, the CAR government, and the US State Department. This happened after the inter-religious platform, a local national NGO in CAR, repeatedly asked for the involvement of the Network and other high-level US religious actors in the peacebuilding process to show solidarity and the possibility for dialogue, and in particular to engage faith communities in the Bangui Muslim district called “PK5.”³⁸ The peacebuilding work of the Network and that of FCA in CAR are often intertwined. FCA, while first focusing on education after the establishment of its offices in CAR in 2013, started concentrating on peacebuilding work through different projects in 2015. FCA is currently leading the Social Cohesion working group in CAR, which coordinates the activities of all INGOs and other stakeholders who are engaged in social cohesion, reconciliation, and peace work in the country.

The peacebuilding work of the Network and of FCA in CAR, in collaboration with the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

Since April 2014, the Network has prioritized work at the intra-faith level, addressing the rift within the Muslim community, especially between the imam of the central mosque and the Muslim communities of PK5 on the one side, and the Muslim members of the inter-religious platform on the other. Dr Mohamed Elsanousi, the Network’s Executive Director, travelled fourteen times to CAR in this phase from his office in Washington DC to coordinate intra-faith mediation through a neutral but inclusive approach. He established and fostered relationships with the single communities and religious leaders and made sure every step of the mediation process was known to and “blessed” by all other stakeholders. Other key actors who supported the intra-faith mediation process were Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the French ambassador, the CAR government, the Christian community, the Sant’Egidio Community, MINUSCA,³⁹ KAICIID, and FCA.

In particular, the first peacebuilding project in CAR FCA engaged in was funded by KAICIID and implemented in partnership with the Network. In its first phase (2015-2016), it focused on fostering synergies between Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim actors in CAR, with a specific focus on intra-Muslim relationships. The result of this, together with the efforts of the Network and the aforementioned partners, was the 2016 Central African Republic Conference on Intra-Muslim Mediation and Capacity Building, held in Vienna in partnership with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies.⁴⁰ The Conference was also attended by observers from the CAR government and Christian community, and produced an agreement and action plan,⁴¹ including the

37 JLI interview with Dr Mohamed Elsanousi, Executive Director of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, May 15, 2019; JLI interview with William Renoux, CAR Peacebuilding Program Officer, Finn Church Aid, April 17, 2019.

38 Boris Modeste Yakoubou, “Central African Republic: What is PK5?,” KAICIIDE Dialogue Centre, June 6, 2018, <https://www.kaiciid.org/news-events/news/central-african-republic-what-pk5>.

39 The UN Mission in Central African Republic, <https://minusca.unmissions.org/>.

40 Finn Church Aid, Muslim Leaders in Central African Republic Unite to Support Social Cohesion, <https://www.kirkonul-komaanapu.fi/en/latest-news/news/muslim-leaders-in-central-african-republic-unite-to-support-social-cohesion/>.

41 The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and the King Abdallah Dialogue Center (KAICIID), Central African Republic: Intra Muslim Dialogue and Capacity Building Conference, Agreement, Vienna, Austria, February 26, 2016, 1-7, <https://www.kirkonul-komaanapu.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Central-African-Republic-Agree->

establishment of a Muslim Committee to work towards peace and reconciliation.

During the second phase of the project (2017-2018), efforts to build bridges among different Muslim communities continued with eight trainings on dialogue and conflict prevention and resolution targeting 374 Muslim religious leaders and women and youth of faith across the country, and a conference gathering the Imams from all of the prefectures of CAR together with two Muslim scholars from Morocco, held in January 2018. This was an opportunity for thirty imams from all parts of CAR to meet each other for the first time after the crisis in 2013. In the second half of 2018, more trainings targeted Christian religious leaders, and women and youth of faith covering the same topics. For this project, the tools used in the trainings a manual on interfaith dialogue developed specifically for CAR by FCA, the Network, and KAICIID, which has specific references to religious texts.

Key reflections for partnerships in peacebuilding

“Trust between us and local faith actors was built from [the] beginning by being with them in their own house of worship [...] When we visited the first time the central mosque during the crisis there were 9 bodies of people killed. [...] You have to build trust; it is key work” - Dr Mohamed Elsanousi

In terms of partnerships with local faith actors, the experience of the Network, as well as that of FCA, show it is of paramount importance to build trust according to the specific context, and to stay neutral towards the disputes and tensions among different actors. Understanding their composition and the way they operate is also key to developing effective and non-counter-productive interventions. Organizing meetings with religious and traditional peacemakers, communities, and scholars from CAR, and from other countries, helped to address the isolation in which some of the religious communities found themselves. Moreover, when working at the intra-faith level, it is necessary that peacebuilding actors make sure all other stakeholders, including the local government and other religious communities, are aware of what is happening and support the process. Coordination and collaboration between INGOs and other stakeholders working on peacebuilding in the country is equally important.

Relationships between FCA and local/national religious actors such as the Muslim Committee and the PK5 community proved to be challenging because feelings around identity sometimes played a stronger role than the will to progress in the peacebuilding activities, which resulted in repeated delays in implementing activities (e.g., the January 2018 Imam conference being postponed twice). FCA tried to address the issues with the Committee and eventually an internal evaluation recommended to discontinue the partnership with the Committee. Committee members were invited to talk about this decision and agreed the best option was to discontinue direct collaboration. Communication between FCA and the Committee is still active, demonstrating the need for some more informal interaction outside of the program's context.

In the context of the trainings targeting Christian and Muslim religious actors, the challenges highlighted concerned limitations due to low levels of literacy among some of the religious actors and leaders, and security issues which prevented the training from being delivered in some areas. Another important point concerns the sustainability of mediation and peacebuilding efforts in general, which can only be achieved through the integration of peacebuilding and development engagements. This was highlighted by a woman in CAR who, in a conversation with Dr Elsanousi, highlighted how urgent development interventions were for her community. As partnerships with local herders and farmers and working through the local economies have proved to be highly effective, more collaboration between

peacebuilding and development actors is needed.

Lessons

This case study provides a wealth of suggestions on the role of international partners working with national partners and the realities of programming for LFAs on peacebuilding in such partnerships:

- The importance of building trust with LFAs based on their specific context and experiences;
- The complexities of addressing intra-religious divisions as a first step towards interreligious dialogue;
- The need to improve communication and coordination among different actors, including among development and peacebuilding actors;
- The opportunities offered by partnerships with governmental actors and of international collaborations to overcome isolation and support dialogue efforts; and
- The need to bridge development and peacebuilding silos to work together on interconnected issue.

⋮ Lessons Learned

In this research we aimed to generate evidence and recommendations about the role of LFAs in fostering peaceful and inclusive societies, and the ways international actors can better partner with LFAs in this work. In particular, we have been interested in highlighting the opportunities and challenges to partnerships and the methods and mechanisms used to implement these projects. Other areas of note include interactions with national government actors in countries with programs and relationships across levels of local, national, regional, and international and faith-based and secular initiatives. The lessons learned can be categorized into those on methods and mechanisms for implementation and those on opportunities and challenges in partnerships.

Methods and Mechanisms

- Training and training of trainers, including religious leaders, is a common method used by INGOs to reach local faith communities with information on key areas of knowledge and practice for peaceful and inclusive societies. Across these case studies we have seen examples of training on activities clearly associated with peace, such as conflict resolution and mediation, peace education, linking religious texts and human rights, and interreligious dialogue. Other areas, with peacebuilding elements, were also part of this, such as vocational and life skills training. Working with LFAs also required capacity building training focused on financial and administrative support, and although this is not directly related to peacebuilding, it allows for the implementation of peace projects and facilitates partnerships and funding flows with international actors. It was highlighted in some case studies as a particularly important aspect to training. Although trainings are a common model, we weaknesses, such as a lack of follow-up after trainings and little evidence about their long-term impact exist. Along with the need for capacity building with LFAs, these weaknesses point towards the need for multiple layers of training with LFAs and faith communities, sometimes starting with capacity building for LFAs before peace-focused trainings with religious leaders and communities can start. In other cases, LFAs may have strong existing financial and administrative capacity, but the need might focus on providing support for continuous training and follow-ups (instead of one-offs) and appropriate monitoring and evaluation capacity to measure the impact of the work.
- Both a beneficiary and partner in certain contexts, religious leaders are a frequent point of interaction for peacebuilding projects. Defining the role of religious leaders, and therefore what level of religious leader to target for participation in a project, is important. Working across hierarchies from high-level religious leaders to the most local level, participation from all levels may be needed in a project, but this will require different approaches, such as advocacy with high level leaders to approve training for more local level leaders. Stakeholder mapping and contextual analysis are critical tools in this process to ensure engaged groups represent the most effective partners possible in the given context. In hierarchical structures, cascading cannot be assumed if higher level leadership has not granted approved. In non-hierarchical structures, networks may be less obvious, but will still exist, meaning approaches may need to be adapted to suit and training of trainers and cascading cannot be a default option.
- Media programming emerged as a relatively common area of activity, particularly in an era of “fake news” and related to the need to demonstrate positive counter narratives to

hate speech circulating through different media channels. This included work through radio and TV, as well as social media such as YouTube. Much of this was context specific and depended on the countries' media access, with radio acting as the most appropriate means in some countries, and social media in other countries where stronger internet access exists. Online/offline models follow best practice examples for the use of media in development communications, as the offline activities (such as listening groups and follow-up focus groups or trainings with the targeted communities) allow for opportunities for different religious, including minority religions, to come together and put into practice some of what they have heard about on their own while listening to the radio.

- The selection of participants for inclusion in programming was also of note. Several examples have shown the need to include traditional and religious leaders, in a mix with other community leaders. This is incredibly contextually specific with some cases working through other community leaders before reaching religious leaders and other in others going to religious leaders first to reach the rest of the community. Involvement and participation of religious leaders from the very initial design and planning was important for several projects. Some questions remain about how to involve women and young people. Projects specifically focusing on young people had elements connected to creative and physical expression through sport, with religious leaders on hand to provide spiritual support for trauma healing. The question of how to involve religious minorities was only somewhat mentioned, with media options used as one way of reaching out to those who are marginalized or choose to remain distant.
- Programming initiatives that take a nexus approach represent innovative ways to work across internally constructed humanitarian-development-peace silos. More efforts are needed to break out of existing silos. These include integrated development and peace programs, and programs that work jointly on the environment and peace initiatives. There were few examples of humanitarian-peace or humanitarian-development-peace initiatives, highlighting the continued existence of these silos.
- Religious institutions educate millions of children around the world and are key potential peace educators. Although this role for peace education was highlighted in the background review, it did not occur in the case studies. Instead, advocacy for education was part of the training and outreach work with religious leaders that occurred. There were no examples of projects in religious educational institutions. Returning to the previous point on nexus and integrated approaches to programming, a gap was revealed in peace and education related activities concerning faith group participation.
- Within implementation mechanisms, the use of certain language needs attention. In some cases, this was about replacing one word with another, such as “demotivation” in Afghanistan, or using a well-regarded and approachable term, such as “love” for familial peace in Myanmar. The translation from international peacebuilding language to language that makes sense in private sectors or in local contexts was another concern. In other cases, this was about shifting the language and topic away from an explicitly religious focus altogether so that alternative influences on the conflict could be examined. Overall, language and the communication of concepts was a common challenge across several case studies.

Partnership Opportunities and Challenges

- There is a role for intermediaries, connectors, or brokers in forging a path for local

partnerships and international organizations. This relates to a relationship building process where trust is established between local, national, and international partners. The broker is not necessarily only national, or only an international FBO. There are layers of brokering. The broker bridges capacity and is a translator between local needs and international priorities. Brokers can act as mediators between partners, bringing different partners to the table and understanding who should talk to who. The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers was established as a broker, but other organizations also act as brokers, such as the secular local NGO that interfaces between CAID and religious leaders in order to help overcome misguided perceptions of CAID.

- There was not as much evidence of partnerships with intergovernmental and donor governments. These relationships are often mediated through intermediaries that flow through international, regional, and national organizations. There remain challenges for communication between these levels and the lack of understanding among intergovernmental and international actors about LFAs’ realities remain.
- Intermediaries are also key for funding. Several of these case studies include LFAs whose only international funding comes through a national or international intermediary. Some local actors can access international funds through foundations such as GHR. Aside from these examples, funding mechanisms not supportive of multi-year engagement will be unable to support the relationship building process that has emerged as particularly crucial for partnerships to flourish and fully support LFAs in peacebuilding efforts.
- When approaching partnership with a local faith actor, it is crucial to understand that actors place in its context. It should not be neither a default option to engage an LFA, nor should they be totally avoided. Religiously related conflicts do not necessarily mean religious actors are default partners and conflicts without any religious connotations do not mean religious actors are irrelevant. An overly reductionist approach that categorizes the usefulness of LFA partnership to specific contexts will translate into missed opportunities. This requires actors looking for partnerships to examine their own biases around the work of LFAs and work instead to examine who are the best actors for the job in a given context. The risk, in fact, of focusing on religious actors alone lies in the potential to feed into narratives that the conflict is specifically religious. There may need to be a range of actors involved including, but limited to, religious actors. Alongside this, the instrumentalization of LFAs for international partners own goals will only lead to short term success. Again, as highlighted in the methods and mechanisms lessons, collaborative and co-creating approaches avoid instrumentalizing partnerships.
- Government collaboration was almost always a critical aspect of consideration in the partnership, even if the government was not directly involved in funding or implementation. The case studies demonstrated the varying approaches used in different contexts. For some, it was the LFA introducing the INGO to the government and helping to create and manage relations with a government. For others, the INGO helped facilitate introductions and interactions between the LFA and government partners. The dynamics do not put power exclusively in the hands of international partners or national and local partners. Rather, these change from context to context. These relationship building exercises can be mutually beneficial for all – with local and international actors benefiting from new networks – but often these include significant negotiation.
- There were several instances of partnerships across faith-based and non-faith-based organizations, with faith-based and non-faith-based partners operating at varying levels

linking up and down between the local and the international. While many of the international FBOs were key partners for LFAs, this is not a pre-requisite. LFAs or local and national NGOs have a fluid approach to defining identity, with mixtures of faith-based staff working in largely secular organizations on projects implemented with religious leaders.

- External perceptions of partnerships can be influential. For example, fears around proselytization were not centered on LFAs, but on their international partners. Local partners can help negotiate this to demonstrate international actors do not want to force their religious perspective on others. On the other hand, international actors can help raise the visibility of LFAs and showcase their work.

⋮ **Recommendations for international actors on peacebuilding with local faith actors**

- Engage in contextual analysis This can include going through the USIP Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding Analysis Guide to identify appropriate partners and then move to co-creative and participatory project design and implementation to ensure meaningful, sustainable, and equitable – rather than instrumentalizing – partnerships.
- Integrate capacity sharing as an integral component of any program – including capacity building for international actors and not only national and local partners. International actors should reflect on their religious literacy and ability to appropriately work with LFAs. LFAs need capacity building on conflict mediation, reconciliation, interreligious dialogue, and other key peacebuilding concepts. However, current guides may have been developed in the Global North and may not be appropriate for local contexts. The focus of capacity sharing and integrating local partners from the beginning of programs places an emphasis on the need to incorporate local and international ideas into contextually relevant program materials.
- Employ context appropriate training, remembering capacity sharing approaches with LFAs may be most appropriate as a first step that can lead towards other trainings for local religious leaders. Training of trainers can help with reach, but cascade approaches with a limited group of religious leaders cannot guarantee impact.
- Understand and act with existing structures, including religious education institutions and media platforms, that allow for wide reach and access to otherwise marginalized groups. Work across online and offline platforms to allow for follow-up from media messaging.

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