

POLICY BRIEF

Effective Inter-Religious Action for Peacebuilding



At a time when religious differences are often used to incite violence, involving religious actors in building peace is highly strategic. Recognizing the potential of engaging religious actors in achieving sustainable peace, the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) together with CDA Collaborative Learning and Search for Common Ground, has developed the Effective Inter-Religious Action for Peacebuilding (EIAP) project with support from the GHR Foundation. This ground-breaking initiative has sought to improve the evaluation of inter-religious action for peacebuilding projects and strengthen the evidence base for effective action. The work of EIAP was informed by a Global Advisory Council (GAC) created early in the project, consisting of eleven religious leaders and practitioners of multiple faiths representing Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist traditions across ten countries of origin. Throughout the project, AfP has also engaged donors and policymakers to share principles for effective evaluation of inter-religious action, including how policies and donor practices can promote or inhibit inter-religious action in peacebuilding and development initiatives.

EIAP has reviewed the [‘state of play’ in the inter-religious peacebuilding field](#), analyzing relevant literature and current evaluative practice. This work revealed that inter-religious peacebuilding has been more broad, diffuse, and complex than anticipated. It proved difficult to locate programs that had an explicit inter-religious peacebuilding focus - perhaps influenced by the fear of the ‘establishment clause’ in the US Constitution that requires a separation of church and state, and in Europe where there is a long-standing culture of secularism. The seven programs that we reviewed posited conclusions and program impact that were not supported by strong evidence; we also found that the programs lacked clear objectives, evaluation criteria, and data, and did not apply a conflict- or gender-sensitive approach. More fundamentally, the evaluations revealed a reliance on individual level change with little evidence to support greater community or societal change. This analysis was highly useful in identifying more explicit and varied theories of change for inter-religious peacebuilding, and highlighting the need for resources that can be used to monitor and evaluate inter-religious programs from a faith-sensitive perspective.

Informed by these findings, the program developed a practical Guide titled: [Faith Matters: A Guide for the Design, Monitoring & Evaluation of Inter-Religious Action for Peacebuilding](#), on how to design, monitor and evaluate inter-religious programs. The guide is focused on two primary audiences – the largely secular evaluation community and the inter-religious peacebuilding community.

What is unique about evaluating faith-based action? The Guide identifies what is different about a faith-based approach to peacebuilding and what the implications are for monitoring and evaluation, including:

- *Value system* rooted in values of peace, justice and compassion.
- *Motivation*: Spiritual direction, guidance and calling, via scripture, meditation or a mentor, can be a major factor in determining what a religious actor does.
- *Understanding of Success/Failure* from the perspective of faithfulness to a spiritual calling.
- *Accountability* to a long-term faithfulness to a divine calling or a faith community.
- *Faith-based transformation* that emphasizes individual spiritually-inspired changes in attitudes.

To accommodate these differences, evaluations should employ mixed methods approaches that are complexity-aware, participatory, and include questions designed to capture the faith-based dimensions of the intervention (e.g., expressions of reference through the effects of the use of prayer, sacrament, scripture, meditation, and rituals). As the Guide identifies, there are illustrative examples of indicators related to inter-religious action that have been developed by faith based organizations like Catholic Relief Services.

‘Religious Literacy’ is also critical for evaluation teams. It is essential for evaluators to be versed in both the context and the faiths involved, taking stock of participants’ personal perspectives, experiences, and lenses.

The inclusion of marginalized voices in an evaluation is important. This includes the voices of women, children, youth, sexual and gender minorities, and persons with disabilities whose marginalization may be sanctioned (or even mandated) by certain interpretations of religious teachings, and reinforced by a hierarchy of religious leaders who function as de facto ‘gatekeepers.’

Faith-sensitive design, monitoring and evaluation of inter-religious actions for peacebuilding: Recommendations

In addition to adopting good peacebuilding project design and the foundational elements of good monitoring and evaluation practice, we recommend the following actions be taken to specifically account for the distinctiveness of faith-based approaches or the involvement of religious actors in peacebuilding:

Policy-makers and donors

- Encourage implementers to adopt the principles of good project design by developing explicit theories of change, goals, indicators, and objectives related to program impact. These should involve religious actors in respectful, authentic ways that are faith-sensitive, recognizing the unique contributions they can make to peacebuilding through prayer, ritual, ceremony, witness and role modelling.
- Encourage the integration of a faith-sensitive perspectives in all programming and DM&E practices where religious identity is a factor in the conflict dynamics (similar to gender mainstreaming).
- Encourage the adoption of a faith-sensitive lens to the conflict assessment, staffing, procurement, participant selection, selection of activities, and DM&E.
- In the next round of guidance issued by USAID on religion and conflict, ensure there is guidance on rigorous inter-religious, faith-sensitive DM&E practices as recommended from the EIAP *Faith Matters* Guide, with a particular focus on indicators and baseline assessments.

Practitioners

- Develop clear theories of change that include the role played by religious actors, and that are designed to capture the distinct contributions made by faith-based approaches to peacebuilding (including expressions of reverence and the use of scripture, preaching, public statements, rituals, and reconciliation approaches).
- Incorporate appropriate faith-sensitive indicators, goals, and project objectives that can capture evidence of project outcomes.
- Integrate a 'religious actor' dimension into all programming where religious identity is a factor in the conflict dynamics (like gender mainstreaming).
- Recognize the diversity of roles religious actors can play in the project in the areas of: validators / gatekeepers, spiritual / trauma healers, healers, conflict transformers, participant recruitment / selection, dissemination / reinforcement / multiplier, role model, convener, connector / bridgebuilder.
- Adopt Do No Harm principles in engaging religious leaders/actors and avoid the instrumentalization of religion through tokenistic gestures.
- Pay greater attention to the influence of the global and regional contexts on the conflict dynamics and outputs, outcomes, and impacts of inter-religious action for peacebuilding. Keep in mind that one event on the global/regional stage can have repercussions locally. Religious identity will not and cannot be the only/main cure or problem.
- Intentionally integrate consciousness of spirituality in the design and implementation of an evaluation through the choice of surveying instruments, the ethics of the evaluator, and the composition and behavior of the evaluation team.
- In conducting the evaluation, allow for the complexity of layered identities. The evaluator needs to understand how a respondent's religious identity relates to their other identities (gender, age, education, position in the labor market, local activist or leader, etc.) and how that relates to their behavior.
- The evaluation should explore links to change and impact at the wider community level that might contribute to longer-term, durable change, even though most religious actions are directed at change at the individual level (personal transformation in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors).

