

LEARNINGS & FINDINGS

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.

Key Learnings & Findings

- 1. Inter-religious peacebuilding is more broad, diffuse, and complex than anticipated.**
- 2. Terminology and audience must be defined clearly and concisely.**
 - How do you define religion, religious leader/institution, religious actors, secular, etc.? Creating consistent definitions across the field is essential for standardization and replication.
 - It is critical to identify distinct audiences and not attempt to answer everyone: implementing organizations (secular, faith-based, international, local, large, small), evaluators (secular, from faith traditions), donors (government, foundations, secular, religious).
- 3. The full potential of involving religious leaders, institutions, and communities in building peace has yet to be realized.**
- 4. The work of secular organizations is often not sufficiently sensitive to the role and potential of religious leaders, institutions and practices. At the same time, inter-religious programs are not always sufficiently conflict or gender-sensitive in their approaches to programming.**
- 5. Religious identities and differences between religions are vast.**
 - Religious actors can play a diversity of roles in the project in the areas of: validators / gatekeepers, spiritual /trauma healers, conflict transformers, participant recruitment /selection, dissemination / reinforcement / multiplier, role model, convener, connector / bridgebuilder.
 - Religious leaders may have different motivations for participating, including values / goals, prior relationships or experiences, duty, access to new networks, etc. convener, connector/bridgebuilder.
 - There are a variety of power dynamics in religious hierarchy that privilege certain voices and marginalize others, which can have large implications for interaction with religious actors.
 - Perceptions of safe spaces differ from religion to religion. It is critical consider comfort/safety of respondents when selecting a religious institution for evaluation activities.
 - The efficacy of religious leaders/institutions is closely tied with status, trust, behavior, individual charisma, religiosity of operating context, and shifts in factors external to the project
- 6. There is a measurement gap in demonstrating the impacts of inter-religious action for peacebuilding.**
 - 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.
 - There is a weak evidence base for inter-religious peacebuilding with an absence of clear criteria for success and evaluation, and a lack of sound externally validated or triangulated data.
 - There is little rigorous evidence that inter-religious peacebuilding affects behavior or conflict dynamics beyond the individual level to the broader socio-political level.

7. Evaluating faith-based action is unique so the approach must be responsive to these differences.

- Evaluations should employ mixed methods, 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).
- Evaluations must be complexity-aware, understanding respondents' shifting relevance of religious identity based on localized/contextual/personal considerations, religious aspects of secular programming, and explanatory value of disaggregating by religion.
- Evaluations must take into consideration the impact of time and inter-religious peacebuilding activities. How to evaluate where there is no project but a long-term mandate that could span generations?
- Evaluations must be wary of falling victim to evaluating being a 'good religious person'.
- Evaluation teams should be religiously literate and assess their own religious identities. It is essential for evaluators to be versed in both the context and the faiths involved, taking stock of both participants' and their own personal perspectives, experiences, and lenses.
- Evaluations should be inclusive of marginalized voices; including, 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.'

