ACCOMMODATING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN YOUTH PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMS

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

AUTHORS

Ariel Ehmer	Joshua Kvernen	Matthew Mead
Brianna Musselman	Jiro Okada	Heidi Green
Sarah Mokadem	Caitlin Kelly	Rachel Walsh Taza

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ABOUT SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

Search for Common Ground (Search) has been working since 1982 to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving. Search uses a multi-faceted approach to find culturally-appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacities to handle conflicts constructively. We employ media initiatives and work with local partners in government and civil society to understand differences and act on commonalities.

Using innovative tools and working at different levels of society in more than 30 countries, Search engages in pragmatic long-term processes of conflict transformation. Our methods consist of mediation and facilitation, training, community organizing, sports, theater, and media production including radio, TV, film, and print.

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INTRODUCTION

In situations of violent conflict, young people are generally viewed as either victims or perpetrators. As victims, youth are viewed as lacking agency and in need of protection; as perpetrators, they may be held accountable for committing violence and undermining stability. However, many young people around the world are active peacebuilders. Search for Common Ground (Search) works in partnership with young people to create stronger enabling environments for children and youth to transform conflict their communities.

Search works with young people across a wide spectrum of religious beliefs. In some contexts, religion is a key element of conflict and/or peacebuilding. ***Even when religion is not a key element of a conflict, it plays an important role in the lives of many young people who participate in Search programs.***

PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

This toolkit presents an overview of how youth programs across the globe accommodate religion, identifying positive outcomes and challenges from case studies in the field. The toolkit starts by examining the different types of programming engaging young people and their religious identities (inter-, intra-, and non-religious programming), and provides case studies with lessons learned for each. A section with recommendations for incorporating gender sensitivities in religious peacebuilding follows, and the toolkits concludes with a review of practical religious considerations for designing and implementing programs. At the end of the toolkit, two appendices provide additional guidance on religious sensitivity in the program cycle and relevant resources for further reading.

Search staff from various regions and backgrounds provided insights about respecting, accommodating, and engaging young people's religious beliefs into inter-, intra-, and non-religious programming for this toolkit. We hope that sharing insights from programs in different locations and contexts will contribute to the efforts of Search and other peace practitioners to continuously improve practice in this area.

KEY TERMS

INTER-RELIGIOUS   Inter-religious means "between two or more different religions."

INTRA-RELIGIOUS   Intra-religious means "within one religion."

NON-RELIGIOUS   Non-religious, for the purposes of this document, means "not *explicitly* religious." Although programs may be non-religious, they often benefit from the consideration of religious issues.

THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGION IN PEACEBUILDING

According to the Pew Research Center, religious faith is increasing globally. Over the next 35 years, religious adherents will make up a growing percentage of the population, while the share of religiously unaffiliated people will decrease.[1] Continued changes in birth rates and life expectancies, migration patterns, and people switching faiths will dramatically change traditional religious demographics in many regions of the world.[2] With religion's deep claims on individual and community identity, beliefs, and actions, ***religion can play either a real or perceived role in violent conflict—but experience shows religion can play an equally important role in creating peace***.[3]

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS SENSITIVITY IN PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH IN CONFLICT

Human differences exist and range from easily identifiable physical features to more abstract and deeply held convictions on politics and religion. Having a greater understanding of the religious context and background where programs take place is important for creating a safe space for participants.

Becoming familiar with the dynamics of privilege and oppression between religious groups in the community or country where a program takes place allows peacebuilders to be sensitive toward participants and ensure everyone is included and comfortable. When designing program activities for young people, it is important to consider the structures, cultures, and relationships of privilege in the programming context.

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1   Pew Research Center, The Future of World Religions, 9.
2   Pew Research Center, The Future of World Religions, 24.
3   United States Institute of Peace, "Religion in World Affairs: Its Role in Conflict and Peace."

Programs may only involve one religious group, or they may include many. Although differences are more apparent in inter-religious contexts, beliefs and practices also differ from one person to another and from one tradition, sect, or denomination to another within the same religious group.

See Appendix A for a diagram on religious sensitivity in the program cycle.

When designing programs engaging young people in peacebuilding, it is important to ask the following questions, even if the program itself is not focused on religion:

- *Do all the youth in this program practice the same religion? Are they a mix of religions? Or are there a few who practice one religion while the majority practices another religion?*

- *How can we make sure that young people of all religions (even minority religions in the community) feel welcome to participate in this program?*

- *Does the program need adaptations to make it equitable to youth with different religious identities?*

- *How might the societal privilege of one religious group unintentionally manifest and cause conflict in programming?*

INTER-RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING

Many conflicts involve two or more groups identifying with different religions. While religion can be used as a "divisive factor" to fuel tensions and justify violence, the root causes of violent conflict are typically related to competition over resources or unmet basic human needs.[4] Longstanding "inter-religious" tensions in Israel, Nigeria, and the former Yugoslavia are examples. Inter-religious peacebuilding seeks to bridge the divisions that occur between different religions. Tensions can develop over time for a multitude of reasons, including fundamental disagreements over theology, or holy sites and religious figures. Protracted conflicts may include disputes over history and blame for political injustice and oppression.

However, religion can also play a valuable role in finding common ground and building peace between divided groups. Many inter-religious peacebuilding programs focus on identifying shared values between religions, while celebrating the uniqueness of different religions. Beliefs promoting peace and justice can be found in nearly every religion.[5] For example, the "Golden Rule," which indicates that you should treat other people the way you would like to be treated, is found in at least 14 major religions around the world. By teaching the Golden Rule to youth, they may develop an understanding of empathy, compassion, and support for their neighbors. This approach can be used for initial interfaith understanding. The recognition of similarities humanizes the "other" by dismantling the barrier between "us" and "them". As participants recognize similarities, they are better able to find common ground and work toward the promotion of peace in their communities.

Creating safe spaces for open dialogue and reflection can foster tolerance and understanding, challenge misconceptions, and build trust among young participants in interreligious programming. Interreligious dialogue may include verbal and non-verbal exchanges of perspectives and information between people from different religious groups- from informal discussions to joint art exhibitions and performances- and is more constructive between participants who are firmly grounded in their own beliefs.[6] Religious identity and references—including holy texts, sites, and figures—can be a powerful resource when working with youth in peacebuilding. Engaging young people's religious identity can help enrich dialogue among participants and further examine their beliefs about self, others, and spirituality as a whole.

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4   Kadayifci-Orellana, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding," 150.
5   Kadayifci-Orellana, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding," 150.
6   Kadayifci-Orellana, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding,"152-153.

Young people in Central African Republic play a football match to prove that their Christian and Muslim communities can come together.

INTER-RELIGIOUS CASE STUDY :

CAR

WORKING TOGETHER FOR EDUCATION

At Search - Central African Republic (CAR), the office in the capital Bangui has worked with youth to create a comedy acted out by five people, including two Christians, two Muslims, and one neutral staff member (of these five, two participants are girls). The purpose of the skit is to advocate for the return of Muslim students to schools and universities. In December 2013, during the height of inter-communal conflict, schools were closed out of concern for staff and student safety. Almost a year later, in October 2014, classes resumed, but there were no Muslim students or teachers in school because they were afraid to return. They were not forbidden to come back to school, but many Muslims were afraid to leave their neighborhood (in some CAR cities, Muslims fled completely to neighboring countries). Concerned that their friends were not attending school, Christian students reached out to Search and we launched an initiative to address the issue.

Search staff first met with Muslim students, then Christians to discuss coming together to advocate for safe returns. After both groups individually determined they were

ready to talk, Search organized a joint meeting. For five days in March 2015, 30 youth (15 Christians and 15 Muslims) participated in training on social cohesion and nonviolence, including rumor control and conflict management. The young people created action plans in which Muslims first talked with peers about returning. Then Christians spoke with peers about stopping the violence to allow their Muslim friends to return. Working together, Muslim and Christian youth organized community-building events to advocate for Muslims' safe return to school, to create confidence, and to eliminate fear.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Create space for young people from the same faith to come together on the issue of coexistence, before asking them to join forces with young people from a different religious group. This helps young people to collaborate with different religious groups without feeling threatened.

- United advocacy or action by youth from different religious backgrounds helps mitigate pre-conceived prejudices about the different groups. It is important to ensure that leadership of joint activities is inclusive and sensitive to the perspectives of participants from different religions, particularly those who are typically marginalized.[7]

- Empowering youth with trainings on social cohesion and nonviolence prepares them for leadership roles, and offers them an opportunity to influence others in their religious community.

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7   This lesson was also drawn from another program engaging youth as ambassadors for inter-faith and intra-faith tolerance in Indonesia. See evaluation listed in the bibliography under Corlazzoli, "Internal Summative Evaluation: Youth Ambassadors for Tolerance and Religious Diversity."

Leaders from three major religions in Jerusalem speak to young people about respect and tolerance.

INTER-RELIGIOUS CASE STUDY:

JERUSALEM

UNIVERSAL CODE OF CONDUCT ON HOLY SITES

Staff members in Search's Jerusalem office have developed an experimental pilot program based on the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites.[8] In the introductory phase, participants take a quiz to assess their knowledge of the three Abrahamic religions. Then, they look at photographs of different holy sites and pictures that are symbolic representations of various religious practices and beliefs (for example, the Catholic rosary). The participants reflect on these pictures and identify one that pushes them away, draws them in, or makes them feel unsure and place one of three differently colored stickers next to the image. The students have an open discussion about the stickers and how they feel about certain religious sites and symbols. They then repeat this activity with about 20-30 artifacts from different religions. Participants may choose an artifact that interests them. In one program, someone picked up a Qur'an and said that it makes them uncomfortable to know nothing about its contents when they live in a country surrounded by Muslims. These facilitated discussions help participants

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8   More information about the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites, how it was developed, and where it is being implemented is available at www.codeonholysites.org.

express their feelings and identify prejudices that may exist.

The second phase features a field trip to a shared holy site such as Mount Zion, a synagogue which is sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Many Jews believe that if Christians pray in the room of the last supper, then the room of the synagogue is an unsuitable place for Jewish prayer, resulting in tension and discomfort. Participants discuss the attachments that religious groups have toward the site and can participate in a treasure hunt activity in which they must find information and interview other visitors to find out where they are from and how the site makes them feel. This helps young people understand the importance of the holy site and their own religious beliefs in nonthreatening ways.

In the final phase, participants develop their own code of conduct for holy sites and analyze how these sites can be places that are accommodating and respectful toward people of different religious beliefs. A follow-up session one week later assesses how much the participants absorbed, what they think, what they have learned, and what further reactions they have toward the experience.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Use the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites as a framework for examining the question of shared holy sites.

- Create safe spaces for young people to discuss their biases and feelings about other religions without judgment.

- Establish a baseline of trust and respect between young people of different religions before asking them to work together on shared initiatives.

- Once young people have built some trust, encourage young participants from different religions to develop their own codes of conduct for respect between their religious groups.

INTRA-RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING

In contrast to inter-religious programs that target relationships *between* different religions, intra-religious programs engage people *within* one faith tradition. Intra-religious peacebuilding can be used to encourage a faith-centric approach to peacebuilding, to prepare participants before an interfaith dialogue, or to build relationships and bridge divides between different sects or traditions within one religion.

An intra-religious program might encourage Muslim students to promote peace by sharing quotes from the Qur'an, or it might mobilize Christian youth to shun violence by reminding them of peaceful heroes from the Bible. While intra-religious programming does not necessarily promote any religion, nor does it preach or proselytize a religious message, it understands that religious identity is important to young participants. Religious beliefs, narratives, practices, and traditions influence how many young people perceive the world and choose to act. *Religion is important to many young people, and programs that focus specifically on their religious identities can help them understand and commit to peace in a deeper way.*

Recognizing that there are different interpretations and practices within every religious tradition, intra-faith dialogue can also help young people to feel more secure in their own beliefs before engaging in dialogue with peers from different religious groups. Having the space to explore their own tradition, understand differences in interpretations, and agree on shared values can help people engage in interfaith dialogue more effectively and constructively.[9]

This type of youth peacebuilding is also effective and appropriate when a faction is promoting violence within a religion, or when there are divisions between sects or groups within one religion. For example, many Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) projects work with Muslim communities to encourage positive messages of peace that are backed by religious teachings. These projects promote credible and constructive narratives from Imams and religious leaders that encourage non-violent pathways for addressing grievances as a way to counter the violent religious rhetoric of extremist groups. *There are also contexts in which one sect in a religious tradition may not perceive another sect as belonging to the same religious group, or may label them as "blasphemous." In this context, a combination of inter-religious and intra-religious approaches to peacebuilding may be more appropriate.*

Intra-religious peacebuilding can also be a valuable approach in communities that share a common religion but are divided along other lines. For example, in a community where there is tension, mistrust, and lack of respect between different generations, youth might be able to use shared religious beliefs to find common ground and build a dialogue with their elders. When a community is divided and experiences violence along generational, gender, racial, ethnic, or other lines, religion can sometimes be a point of common ground.

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9   Kadayifci-Orellana, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding,"

Pesantren students show off their comic books about religious tolerance and diversity.

INTRA-RELIGIOUS CASE STUDY:

INDONESIA

PROMOTING INTRA-FAITH UNDERSTANDING AND CRITICAL THINKING

In 2011, Search in Indonesia partnered with the Wahid Institute and Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (P3M) to launch a two-year intra-religious program called "Countering and Preventing Radicalization in Indonesian Pesantren." In the face of increasing rates of violence committed in the name of religion, the program sought to counter voices of intolerance and extremism by empowering the "silent majority" of moderate religious voices within their communities.

The program featured two primary activities. First, Search partnered with ten *pesantren*—private Islamic boarding schools run by local religious leaders—to set up and run local radio station programs. Second, *pesantren* students received training in radio and video production in order to take part in a documentary competition featuring the themes of tolerance, coexistence, and cooperation.

After completion of the program, evaluations identified positive impacts on teachers and students within participating *pesantren* as well as members of their local communities. The program helped inspire participants to think critically about what their own religious traditions have to say about peaceful coexistence and provided the tools to share those insights through media broadcasts, documentary films, debates, community outreach, and other activities. The intra-religious approach to peacebuilding and de-radicalization helped to empower a "moderate" voice for tolerance and understanding of differences within participating *pesantren* and the surrounding Indonesian communities.[10]

LESSONS LEARNED:

- When violent groups are using religion to promote intolerance, amplify religious voices that provide credible and constructive alternatives to violence from within the same faith.

- Use media to enable young people to reach their wider community, taking into consideration which media are most appropriate for audiences that may be vulnerable to extremist messaging. Ensure that young people receive appropriate training and consider using more than one medium to increase impact.

- Empower young people to play the role of peer educator on religious diversity and tolerance. The opinions and actions of close and trusted peers are highly influential for many young people. However, coordination and communication responsibilities should be shared between young people who represent the diversity of the community, to ensure activities do not depend on one person, and are inclusive.[11]

- Engage local partners and religious institutions, groups, and leaders throughout the project cycle, including the design and planning process. Their grassroots relationships and deep understanding of local religious beliefs and practices can improve program impact.

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10   Octavia, "Final Evaluation Report for the Project: Countering & Preventing Radicalization in Indonesian Pesantren."

11   This lesson was also drawn from another program engaging youth as ambassadors for interfaith and intra-faith tolerance in Indonesia. See evaluation listed in the bibliography under Corlazzoli, "Internal Summative Evaluation: Youth Ambassadors for Tolerance and Religious Diversity."

RELIGIOUS SENSITIVITY IN NON-RELIGIOUS PROGRAMS

Because religious identity is deeply ingrained in the value systems of youth and their communities, faith commitments are often blended with cultural practices in many communities. Religion is often an important aspect of identity for many youth. Young people who have grown up in a faith tradition may see the world, including conflict and peace, in terms of the religious teachings, stories, and values they know best. Although a program itself might be secular, individual youth may draw on their religious values, experiences, and worldviews to make themselves better peacebuilders. Therefore, understanding religious identity is vital to the creation of effective programming.

In non-religious programs, this does not mean explicitly building religious teachings or practices into the design. Rather, this means that the program should give young people the space and safety to reflect on what peace means to them and to understand peace in their own way, including exploring what their own value systems and religious traditions have to say about conflict and peace. If young people see peace as a religious calling, or if they find inspiration for peace within religious books, then this should be encouraged; if they tie their commitment to peace to their commitment to faith, this can help them strengthen their work and identity as a peacebuilder. On the other hand, young people may not see a link between their religion and their peacebuilding work. Each young person will incorporate "peacebuilder" into their identity in different ways, and it is important to give each the space and respect to find their own path to understanding peace.

There are other benefits to considering religion in non-religious programming, as well. Due to the importance of religious identity in many societies, it is vital to keep these sensitive issues in mind, even within non-religious programs. For example, in non-religious programs, the religious worldview of the majority of participants might inform program norms, from expectations on interactions between men and women and types of food served to participants, to break times and bathroom facilities available, and more. In such instances, participants from other religions may feel excluded or unwelcome, even when the program is supposed to be open to all religions.

The first step toward ensuring religious sensitivity in program design and implementation is a deep understanding of the beliefs and practices of different religious groups within the community where a program will take place. Involving or consulting youth from diverse religious backgrounds throughout the program cycle can help provide this understanding and identify programmatic considerations for making all groups feel welcome. See Appendix A for a diagram on religious sensitivity in the program cycle.

Religious sensitivity creates a safe and inclusive space for the participants to express their religious identities. In communities where religious identity heavily impacts day-to-day routines, religious sensitivity helps programs better accommodate participants and facilitates communication among both staff and participants.

Young researchers interview children in West Africa.

RELIGIOUS SENSITIVITY CASE STUDY:

WEST AFRICA

GUINEA, LIBERIA, AND SIERRA LEONE: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Search created a program that empowered youth between 18 and 20 years old to conduct research on violence against children within their countries. The program incorporated equal numbers of Christian and Muslim young men and women, although the program did not focus on religion. The first phase began with training sessions that provided youth with research tools, data analysis skills, and cultural sensitivity training. As a part of this cultural sensitivity training, the participants engaged in an extensive discussion on religious differences. Afterward, youth entered communities to conduct interviews and gather data about violence against children and youth. Despite the heavy demands on time and energy, as well as logistical challenges surrounding research in areas affected by the Ebola crisis of 2014-2015, each country team succeeded

in compiling reports that highlight their work.

While this program was not specifically focused on religion, youth researchers learned to accommodate religious differences within their research teams. In each country team, Christian and Muslim youth worked together to conduct research and write reports. In Guinea and Sierra Leone, part of training and data collection took place during Ramadan. Without guidance from program staff, researchers organized themselves in ways that allowed Muslim participants to fast, pray, and eat when needed while remaining active in the program.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Training on cultural and religious sensitivity empowers participants to express their identity and to accommodate the identity of peers from different backgrounds.

- Programs that successfully bring young people together across religious divides do not need to focus exclusively or primarily on inter-religious tolerance. A common goal, such as research on an issue important to youth from both faiths, can help improve relationships between religious groups with appropriate sensitivity training.

- Participants are the experts on their own contexts; young people can actively contribute and may have valuable insight for shaping programs to be more inclusive of different religious identities in their own community or context.[12]

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12   Adult supervision and guidance is still necessary, however, particularly as youth are learning about potential risk or harm activities can have.

INCORPORATING GENDER SENSITIVITIES IN RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING

Young women and girls have important roles to play as peacebuilders in communities worldwide. They often hold unique spaces and perform unique tasks within their religions.

At the same time, young men and boys are also invaluable peacebuilders, and their religious identities and beliefs can also impact the way they build peace.

Religious beliefs often inform gender roles in communities, and may present opportunities or challenges for engaging young men and women in peacebuilding. Understanding the relationships between gender and religion in the local context can help peacebuilders more fully engage young men, young women, boys, and girls for peacebuilding. Below are some general tips and findings about incorporating gender sensitivities as they relate to religious identities in peacebuilding programs.

For more information about how to activate the power of girls as peacebuilders, check out our "**Engaging and Recruiting Girls in Peacebuilding Programs**" toolkit, available on our **website**.

ENGAGING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN PEACEBUILDING

The international community has recognized the valuable contributions that both older and younger women make to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.[13] The experiences of young women in conflict and their relationships with religion are different than young men's. Because of these differences, young women offer an important perspective to religious peacebuilding.

- Women's faith groups tend to be deeply interconnected and frequently focus on promoting relationships among women.

- Scholars have found that women tend to be more religious than men in many societies. Research suggests that "women report a stronger personal faith, stronger commitment to orthodox beliefs, and more active participation in religious events and rituals."[14]

- Women inspired by their faith may be more likely to reach out to religious communities as a resource or as partners for peacebuilding work.[15]

- Many women tie their peace work to their religious faith, and although the vast majority do not play formal roles in their religious institutions, women influence religious interpretations and traditions in less obvious ways through their roles in family and community life and at local places of worship.[16]

- Research indicates that women are motivated by their faith to be involved in peace work; however, they often prefer not to be the center of attention.[17]

Girls in Sri Lanka build their dialogue skills.

13   The UN Security Council has adopted several resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security and Youth, Peace and Security since 2000 recognizing the important role women and young people play in international peace and security, notably Resolution 1325 and Resolution 2250.
14   Berkley Center, *Challenges of Change*, 23.
15   United States Institute of Peace, "Women in Religious Peacebuilding," 13.
16   United States Institute of Peace, "Women in Religious Peacebuilding," 11, 13-14.
17   United States Institute of Peace, "Women in Religious Peacebuilding," 11.

ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN PEACEBUILDING

Since men tend to dominate leadership positions, including those within formal religious institutions, it is crucial to gain their support and collaborate with them in order to encourage community-wide participation and acceptance of programs. At the same time, violent extremist groups which use religion to justify violence primarily target young men for recruitment currently. Engaging young men in religious peacebuilding can help strengthen and deepen their own understanding of their religious tradition and identity, and help build resilience to rhetoric that uses religious language or symbols to fuel intolerance and justify violence.

- Empowerment of men with religious faith typically does not receive as much attention as other groups in religious peacebuilding programs.[18]

- Similar to women, men are often bound by specific expectations and roles within society, which are commonly rooted in religious values. Getting men to join the conversation and talk about roles in society may help alleviate prejudices and create opportunities for gender equality.

- Religiously conservative men may become resentful of women in their lives having new opportunities and being away from their obligations at home (including those who were initially supportive). It is important to acknowledge men's concerns and provide equal opportunities for both genders. The following section includes more information on challenges and solutions to gender sensitivity and religion in peacebuilding programs.

- In many traditionally religious cultures, men often have the final say in the day-to-day activities of mothers, wives, or daughters. Educating young men on issues relating to gender and religion can help them become advocates for women's participation in the community and in leadership positions.

Young men in Burundi mobilize for peaceful elections.

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18   Berkley Center, *Challenges of Change,* 47.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS TO GENDER SENSITIVITY AND RELIGION IN PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMS

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES:	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:
Men tend to dominate leadership positions, including those within formal religious institutions. As a result, women's engagement in religious peacebuilding often goes unnoticed.	Take the time to discuss gender roles as they are viewed in the community, and ask questions that challenge participants to consider the validity of stereotypes. To ensure gender balance in peacebuilding programming, allow for equal opportunities to speak. One solution may be to have a physical object to pass around to participants so that only the person holding the object has the turn to speak. This can help girls, and all participants, feel that they have the opportunity to express themselves and be heard clearly.
The participation of girls in programming may be restricted by their families or communities due to religious or cultural beliefs on their roles and their needs for protection. An international organization in particular may have difficulty gaining trust from religiously conservative girls and their families.	To alleviate issues of trust around girls' participation, reassure parents of the nature of the program and invite male siblings to join activities as chaperones. If working with schools, invite teachers as chaperones. If you are an international or "outsider" organization, work with a trusted local partner to engage a greater number of religiously conservative girls, including other organizations in the community who focus on gender specific programs.
Young women and men may not have or be aware of female religious leaders within their own faith who can serve as role models.	Many religious texts highlight extraordinary women of faith. Identify and highlight these role models by directing young participants to female faith leaders from religious texts, historical examples, or popular culture. These religious teachings can also be used to have a positive influence on enduring cultural attitudes about violence against women.
Religious values differ based on culture and context. For example, a Muslim woman in Norway may have strikingly different values than a Muslim woman in Morocco.	Be sure to frame religious programming and messaging with respect for local values and definitions. Beliefs about a woman's role in society often have intertwined religious and cultural roots. It may be necessary to frame programs according to these conservative and traditional norms in the community. For example, engage and gain permission for women's participation from relevant authority figures, limit topics to those that do not contradict religious belief systems, or ensure programs are same sex only.

NOTE FROM THE FIELD:

NIGERIA

In Nigeria, Search designed a program to reach out to young girls who have been negatively affected by violence. Girls in Nigeria have one of the lowest rates of education, and they are often affected by early marriages, forced marriages, and sexual violations in conflict. Unfortunately, young girls have been completely left out of the peacebuilding process. In an innovative pilot program called "**Naija Girls, Unite!**" Search staff found success when they worked specifically with young girls to help them build their knowledge, skills, and relationships with girls from other faiths. After the training, the girls went on to create their own school peace clubs, theater groups, and other initiatives to promote inter-religious peace. They have gained respect from community elders, and they have been asked to speak at community events. Many of their parents now report that they have changed their opinion of the other religious group because of what they learned from their daughter. The project proved girls can act as some of the most successful inter-religious peace builders when given the chance.

Christian & Muslim girls learn to trust each other during the "Naija Girls, Unite!" project in Jos, Nigeria.

"I was so scared when I first saw the Christian girls. I was feeling that these people could not love me because of my religion. But after we spent a day with them in training, we began to love each other... Now, I want to spend my life with them. All of them. I would like to be a peacebuilder forever and be together with them as one family."
- **MARIYA,** a 16-year-old Muslim girl in Nigeria

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

Search for Common Ground program staff have highlighted specific considerations that they keep in mind when developing and implementing religious peacebuilding programs:

♦ **Conflict sensitivity:** As with any peacebuilding programming, activities may have both positive and negative impacts, both intended and unintended, on conflict or peace dynamics in the context where they take place. These impacts must be taken into account throughout the program cycle, to ensure the program "does no harm" and actually "does good" for the conflict environment. In a more recent program with young people in Indonesia, one unintended positive outcome was that youth expanded their level of tolerance in areas not directly addressed by the program. In another unintended consequence, some youth participants were labeled as "infidels" or "liberals" because of their participation in the project.[19] **Conflict sensitivity is critical in peacebuilding programming engaging religious identities.** Additional guidance on conflict sensitivity and the "do no harm" approach is available on *DME for Peace*.[20]

♦ **Inclusion and diversity:** In addition to involving young people from different backgrounds (age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, etc.) in capacity building and project activities, it is important to ensure that young people whom the project empowers to then lead their own activities understand this principle as well.[21] Young leaders should understand the value of inclusion and diversity and be able to practice religious sensitivity, particularly for religious minority groups and marginalized young people, before a project provides them with a platform for initiating activities engaging peers or adults from different religions or sects. Team-building training is an important aspect of capacity building for young people who are working with peers from different religions for the first time. Follow-on technical support and monitoring during youth-led meetings and activities can help address any lingering tensions or competing interests that may arise afterwards.[22]

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19   Corlazzoli, "Internal Summative Evaluation: Youth Ambassadors for Tolerance and Religious Diversity."
20   www.dmeforpeace.org.
21   This is one of the "Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding."
22   Corlazzoli, "Internal Summative Evaluation: Youth Ambassadors for Tolerance and Religious Diversity," 18-19.

♦ **Community engagement throughout:** This is a good practice in all youth peacebuilding programming. The most effective youth participation in promoting peace and tolerance is done in partnership with adults. Engage the wider community, including young people's families, religious leaders, wider peer group, and other community leaders throughout the life of the project. This will allow the program to have greater and more sustainable impact. It can also help prevent stigmatization and potential risk to participants in sensitive contexts, where new relationships and ideas may be perceived negatively. *Consider your own context: Who else from the community should your program engage? Who will be directly or indirectly influenced by the program, beyond the direct participants?*

♦ **Sustainability:** Search teams in Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Indonesia and Nigeria found that to ensure inter-religious peacebuilding programs have a lasting impact, programs need sufficient budget and planning for post-project activities to continue the momentum for change gained during the project. Planning for post-project continuation or "exit strategies" should take place during the project development or design phase.[23] For example, opportunities to build the capacity of youth associations or organizations as agents of change, in addition to individuals, may offer greater sustainability.[24]

♦ **Technical support and guidance for youth-led activities:** Particularly as youth are still learning about the unintended consequences that activities may have, technical support and guidance is important to ensure that youth-led activities uphold ethical and protection standards and do not cause harm. Technical guidance can also help improve the sustainability and effectiveness of youth-led activities. This support should not diminish or infringe upon young people's leadership throughout the project, but should instead monitor and support the quality of programming. In a project empowering youth "ambassadors" to promote inter-faith and intra-faith tolerance in Indonesia, young people attended a "youth camp" to build their skills on conflict resolution and project management, and then received seed grant funding to implement activities engaging peers and the community. Some youth-led activities were successful in bringing together people from different faiths and increasing empathy and understanding. However, some youth-led activities also provided a platform to intolerant messages, and others failed to follow international development and ethical standards. Ongoing technical support and oversight helps ensure such issues are quickly addressed and prevents reoccurrence.[25]

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23   This recommendation was highlighted in recommendations based on a review of seven Search programs focused on inter-religious tolerance by an American University practicum in Fall 2016, but also applies to intra-religious programming.

24   Corlazzoli, "Internal Summative Evaluation: Youth Ambassadors for Tolerance and Religious Diversity."

25   Corlazzoli, "Internal Summative Evaluation: Youth Ambassadors for Tolerance and Religious Diversity."

♦ **Age-appropriate programming:** Participation must be balanced against protection for young people, in accordance with their age and competencies. Young people have very different life experiences in different environments and cultures, and the skills and competencies they develop at different ages vary widely. The definition of "youth" itself can also differ across countries and cultures. Search typically disaggregates age groups by 5 year increments (for example, 10-14 years, 15-19 years, 20-24 years, etc.), unless different age categories are more appropriate in context. *Consider whether program activities are appropriate to the competencies and needs of different age groups in your context, and make adaptations as necessary.*

♦ **Using and selecting channels for media outreach:** Media outreach, such as radio and TV programming or social media, is important for religious peacebuilding programming since it allows youth to engage across divides and allows their voices and perspectives to be heard by the wider community. Design outreach to reach across religious groups or sects, depending on a program's objective, and be conscious of gender when selecting a medium for engagement. For example, in many West African countries, young women primarily listen to radio while young men watch more television than their female counterparts.

♦ **Separate conversations by group:** In areas with religious tensions, program staff in CAR found it helpful to meet with followers of different religions separately before bringing everyone together for a meeting. However, program staff in Jerusalem has found dividing participants by faith presents an obstacle. *Consider your own context. Is there religious tension in your community? Is it time to bring youth together to start building trust and discussing commonalities, or would they feel safer if they began a conversation within their own religious group before meeting youth from the other religion?*

♦ **Chaperones:** Acknowledging and welcoming chaperones for young people, based on local and cultural expectations, has helped increase engagement in various contexts. In Nigerian Muslim communities, it is important to consider who might serve as chaperones for young women during activities. Program staff in Yemen has found it helpful to engage girls by encouraging parents to send male siblings with them to program activities. *In your program, will girls and young women need chaperones? Will boys and young men need chaperones? Who can be an appropriate chaperone, and who can encourage more participation?*

♦ **Dress code:** Program staff in Nigeria and other countries have noted that clothing can be a sensitive issue. It is important to recognize restrictions of dress (like wearing a hijab or yarmulke) for program participants, and to make sure the environment is comfortable and accommodating. *Will your young participants have to wear a uniform for the project? If so, make sure you can anticipate and accommodate religious and cultural differences in how young people dress.*

♦ **Food:** Program staff in Nigeria have also found it helpful to be sensitive to food issues. For example, Muslim participants may follow halal guidelines and Jewish participants may adhere to kosher food restrictions. Do any of your young participants have food restrictions? Can you provide appropriate food for all participants during breaks and lunches?

♦ **Holidays:** Program staff in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have found it helpful to be aware of religious holidays when developing and implementing programs. One program in these countries took place during Ramadan, which meant that Muslim participants needed time and accommodations to be able to fast, pray, and eat at specific times. *Will any of your participants need to limit their involvement due to a holiday? Can you anticipate these holidays in advance and help the young participants make plans to continue in the project?*

♦ **Activity locations:** In more traditional areas in Tunisia, young men and young women cannot be together in certain places. Program staff in Jerusalem have found that certain Jewish beliefs prohibit entering a church or place of worship of another religion. It is also important to host activities in an easily accessible location for participants. *Have you selected a location that all participants can access?*

♦ **Prayer:** Staff in Nigeria has found it helpful to respect prayer times and include prayer breaks. Programs in Nigeria that involve Christian and Muslim participants start their activities with "unity prayers" that allow participants from both religions to contribute. In Jerusalem, however, certain Jewish beliefs prohibit praying while followers of other religions are present. *Have you given young people the time and space to pray in a way that makes them feel respected and welcomed in the program?*

See Appendix B for additional resources on peacebuilding programming engaging religious identities.

NOTE FROM THE FIELD:

INDONESIA

In Indonesia, some program concepts can be interpreted as outside, foreign, or Western ideas. Search in Indonesia has conducted programs in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) to promote tolerance among youth. The Indonesia team learned to be careful when using the term "tolerance" because it was interpreted as a Western value. Interestingly, Indonesian participants did not view the idea negatively. They perceived it as a foreign idea, but valued it.
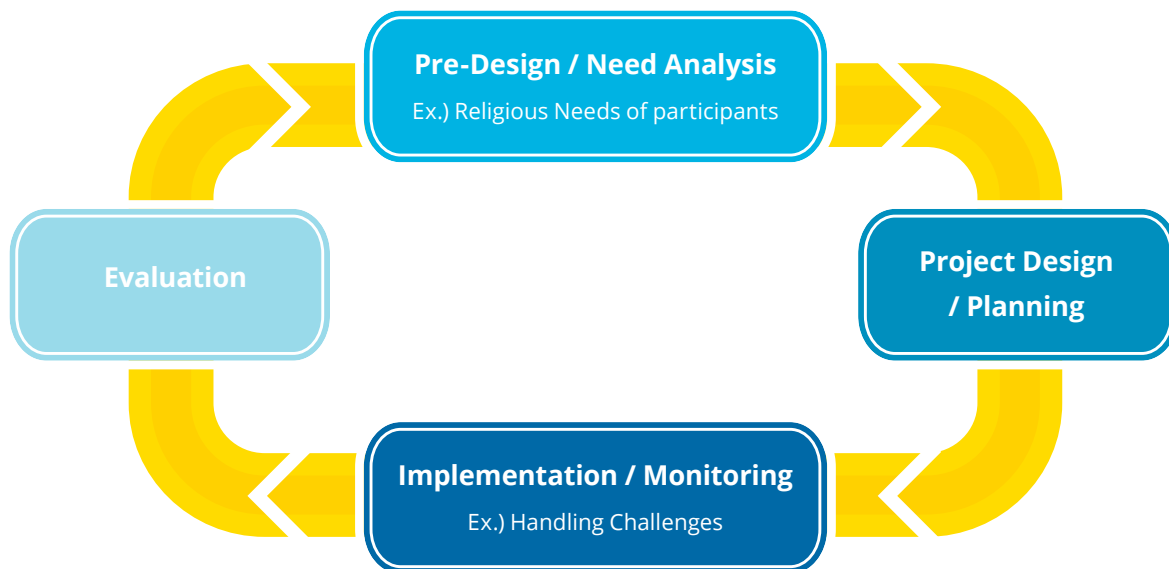
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APPENDIX A - RELIGIOUS SENSITIVITY IN THE PROGRAM CYCLE

All stages of the program cycle can be sensitive to religious issues. While we focus on the religious needs of youth participants, programs should also consider the religious needs of their parents, families, and communities as a whole.

Pre-Design / Need Analysis
Ex.) Religious Needs of participants

Project Design / Planning

Evaluation

Implementation / Monitoring
Ex.) Handling Challenges

STAGE 1: PRE-DESIGN/NEEDS ANALYSIS

We can consider religious sensitivity to be a participant need rather than a barrier to programming. For example, respecting a certain prayer time should be considered as a need of participants who want to achieve the program outcomes and reach their goals.

In order to conduct the program so that everyone's religious needs are accommodated, families, communities, staff and participants should develop knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that focus on religious needs throughout the program. The needs may differ depending on the communities, families, and individuals involved.

For example, a participant may not want staff, or other participants, to touch her (behavior), to know she wants to pray at certain times (knowledge), and/or to create a comfortable group atmosphere without alienating her (attitude). These needs should be respected even if the program solely focuses on, for example, media production.

STAGE 2: PROJECT DESIGNING/PLANNING

Religiously sensitive program designs consider the religious needs of youth, their families, and communities throughout the life of the program. For example, we want to design the program content, methods, logistics, youth recruitment, and staffing in religiously sensitive ways.

STAGE 3: IMPLEMENTATION / MONITORING

During implementation and monitoring, we may encounter interesting findings and challenges related to the religious identities of participants and their communities. It is essential that programs are able to adapt to new feedback and insight on activities and how to improve access and inclusion for all participants.

STAGE 4: EVALUATION

Throughout the evaluation process, we uncover impacts of the program on the participants and their communities. Even in programs that do not address religious identity directly, the religious sensitivity of the program may be considered.

For example, the following questions might be helpful for participants in evaluation:

- Did you gain new knowledge about your own religion or other religions?
- Based on what you learned in the program, did your attitudes toward your religion or others change?
- Did you take actions to respect someone else's religious needs?

APPENDIX B - RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Alliance for Peacebuilding, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, and Search for Common Ground – Literature Review of Effective Inter-Religious Action in Peacebuilding Programming
http://dmeforpeace.org/sites/default/files/EIAP%20Literature%20Review_%20Final%2014%20December%202016.pdf

Berkley Center - Faith, Gender, and Development
https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/challenges-of-change-faith-gender-and-development

DM&E for Peace – Recommended Resources from the Effective Inter-Religious Action in Peacebuilding Global Advisory Council
http://dmeforpeace.org/eiap/resources

UNICEF - Partnering with Religious Communities
https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index_60057.html

United Religions Initiative - Resources
http://www.uri.org/browse_resources

United States Institute of Peace – What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs
http://dmeforpeace.org/sites/default/files/Evaluating%20Interfaith%20Dialogue.pdf

United States Institute of Peace - Women in Religious Peacebuilding
https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW71-Women_Religious_Peacebuilding.pdf

United States Agency of International Development - Religion, Conflict, & Peacebuilding: An Introductory Programming Guide
http://dmeforpeace.org/sites/default/files/USAID_Religion%20Conflict%20Peacebuilding.pdf

Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites
https://www.sfcg.org/universal-code-of-conduct-on-holy-sites/