



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders

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1. Introduction

Faith matters to people, and matters to development. In many parts of the world, faith-based organizations (FBOs) and religious leaders (RLs) are influential in both the political and social spheres, and have a broad following in society. Their presence in local communities, coupled with their capacity to deliver critical services, allow them to mobilize grassroots support, earn the trust of vulnerable groups, and influence cultural norms – all of which make them vital stakeholders in development. With their involvement in local communities and their standing as moral leaders, many FBOs and RLs command the respect of local and national authorities, which can make them valuable peace mediators in tense environments.

Working with FBOs and RLs is especially crucial in areas where governance structures are weak and fail to ensure human rights and administer basic services, including in relation to protection, justice and education. UNDP engages with FBOs and RLs in many areas including democratic governance, sustainable development, conflict prevention, peace building, poverty reduction, combating HIV and AIDS, and promoting women's rights and gender equality. In many countries, UNDP supports capacity development, interfaith dialogue and networking of faith actors.

FBOs and RLs can link development actors with beneficiary communities, and engaging them in the right conditions can enhance development impact and sustainability. This may involve consulting with FBOs and RLs to: (i) ensure their meaningful participation in policy dialogue processes facilitated by UNDP; (ii) help determine UNDP country programme priorities; and (iii) include them in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. UNDP will need to be selective in partnering (either informally or through formal agreements) with FBOs and RLs to ensure that such partnerships are based on shared values, objectives and commitments, in particular as they relate to gender equality and women's empowerment, and respect for universal human rights.

Faith actors are diverse: there can be significantly divergent priorities and viewpoints within a single faith tradition, and even greater divergence between the practices of different faith and spiritual traditions. From religious institutions to local community service providers, it is important to understand the missions of potential partners and their capacity to deliver, and carefully assess the extent to which a common ground can be found on the basis of shared values. It is therefore critical that UNDP staff assess the benefits and risks of potential relationships with FBOs and RLs within their specific context before engaging or partnering with them.

2. Purpose of these guidelines

These guidelines are part of the Action Plan of the 2012 UNDP Civil Society and Civic Engagement Strategy¹. The strategy emphasizes the need for UNDP to develop innovative relationships with a diversity of civil society actors, including women's rights networks, youth groups, faith-based groups and

¹ [UNDP Civil Society and Civic Engagement Strategy](#) (2012).

grassroots organizations. It is a useful framework for both *empowering* and *engaging* civil society to achieve both *downstream* local development results and *upstream* policy impact, underscoring that civic engagement is intrinsic to the work of UNDP. The need to expand participation in pursuit of equitable access to development is further emphasized in the UNDP Strategic Plan² and other important strategies including the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy³ and UNDP Youth Strategy⁴. For the first time since its creation, a representative from the faith-based community was nominated to the [UNDP Civil Society Advisory Committee](#) in 2012.

These guidelines aim to encourage UNDP staff to streamline faith-sensitive development policy and programming that contributes to sustainable human development. They specifically aim to:

- Strengthen internal capacities and raise awareness among UNDP staff about issues of common concern with FBOs and RLs;
- Provide a working definition of FBOs and RLs for application in UNDP programming;
- Highlight the opportunities and risks associated with engaging with FBOs and RLs;
- Identify lessons learned from previous collaboration with FBOs and RLs;
- Complement existing UNDP corporate policies and procedures⁵ and other methodologies and tools produced to inform and improve UNDP programming;
- Encourage UNDP staff to think creatively about partnerships with faith actors and to avoid pitfalls that could result from ill-advised forms of engagement;
- Assist UNDP staff in mapping, formalizing and monitoring partnerships with FBOs and RLs based on their strengths and complementarity with UNDP; and
- Enable FBOs and RLs to better understand the nature of their relationship with UNDP and to find points of entry and common concern.

The annexes to this document contain an indicative list of FBOs, as well as useful links to relevant reading material.

3. Terminology

UNDP views faith actors as one of several types of civil society partners.⁶ The UNDP definition of civil society organizations (CSOs) encompasses a diverse range of actors engaged in not-for-profit activities including policy advocacy groups, transnational coalitions, NGOs, indigenous peoples' organizations, women's and youth groups, social movements, volunteer associations, professional and media

² [UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017: Changing With the World](#).

³ [UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017: The Future We Want – Rights and Empowerment](#).

⁴ [UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future](#).

⁵ Information on the formal mechanisms for partnering with faith-based organizations (as for all CSOs) can be found on the UNDP [Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures](#) website under “Partnerships”.

⁶ [UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy of Engagement](#) (2001) and [UNDP Strategy on Civil Society and Civic Engagement](#) (2012).

associations, think tanks, academia and trade unions. Faith-based groups may overlap with some of these categories, but all are considered CSOs for purposes of formal engagement.⁷

FBOs can range from small, grassroots organizations with simple structures and limited staff to global institutions with highly sophisticated bureaucracies, wide networks, and substantial financial and human capacity; many large FBOs already work with the international development community. Some organizations are loosely inspired by faith principles, while others are formally linked to religious institutions. Even among FBOs in the same faith tradition, there is an inherent diversity.

FBOs and RLs may be connected to traditional religious hierarchies or based on established tribal divisions that have ancient roots and contribute to cultural norms; other faith actors are aligned with governments and involved in developing and adopting national legislation. In addition to providing spiritual and traditional guidance, FBOs and RLs are part of the social fabric of communities and some may have greater access, scale and legitimacy than local governments. In fragile states, FBOs and RLs may be the only actors offering basic social services.

Definitions⁸

For the purpose of these guidelines, the term ‘faith actors’ encompasses the two following categories:

- (i) Faith-based organizations (FBOs)** are “organizations that derive inspiration and guidance for their activities from the teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within that faith”.⁹ They comprise a range of religious charitable organizations affiliated with one or more faith and spiritual traditions, which may include:
 - Religious congregations (such as churches, mosques, synagogues or temples);
 - Charities sponsored or hosted by one or more religious congregations;
 - Non-profit organizations founded by a religious congregation or based upon faith and spiritual traditions; and
 - Coalitions that include organizations described above.
- (ii) Religious leaders (RLs)** are men and women with a formal affiliation to a religion or spiritual path who play influential roles within their communities and the broader civil society. Examples include priests, imams, rabbis, clerics, monks, nuns, lamas, traditional indigenous spiritual guides such as shamans and sukias, and lay religious leaders.

The complexity and variation of faith actors make it difficult to draw broad policy recommendations applicable to all faith actors across regions. However, UNDP engagement with FBOs and RLs should be

⁷ In some countries, FBOs are considered to be public organizations because they exist under the auspices of the government and their staff is paid by the state budget; this is the case for instance for the Christian Orthodox Church in Greece.

⁸ See other United Nations system guidance: UNFPA [Guidelines for Engaging Faith-based Organisations as Agents of Change](#), UNAIDS [Partnership with Faith-based Organizations: UNAIDS Strategic Framework](#), and UNHCR [Partnership Note on Faith-Based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders](#).

⁹ Clarke G. and Jennings, M. (2008). [Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular](#). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

considered within the larger scope of engagement with civil society as a whole. When selecting the most appropriate and effective partners to work with, UNDP staff need to assess the partnerships in terms of the risks and benefits they bring, and shared objectives such as upholding human rights and empowering women.

4. Why engage? Opportunities and comparative advantages

FBOs and RLs are part of nearly every community on earth. They not only make significant contributions to development, but add value to United Nations efforts in a number of ways. In many countries, FBOs and RLs are the dominant civil society actors.

Graph: Benefits of collaboration with faith actors¹⁰

COLLABORATIONS CAN:	THROUGH THE FOLLOWING MEANS:
Expand coverage of interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing the pool of available resources (human, financial, material) • Coordinating implementation to ensure coverage of excluded and/or under served populations
Improve cost efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capturing economies of scale and pooling purchasing power • Increasing throughput from “fixed cost” delivery infrastructure • Avoiding costly overlaps in service provision
Amplify advocacy and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregating multiple actors to influence policy decisions • Reinforcing public messaging at various levels (local, nat'l, int'l) and from various sources (faith and secular)
Catalyze learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematizing the collection of data and information • Facilitating knowledge exchange and best practice sharing
Develop trust and tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a foundation for building relationships and mutual respect
Facilitate cross-sector engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating “politically neutral” platforms for secular entities to engage the faith sector (as opposed to partnering with single faiths) • Lowering the transaction costs (for donors, governments, secular NGOs) through consolidated points of contact

More specifically, cooperation with FBOs and RLs can add value to the work of UNDP in many ways:

- **Critical development experience:** Historically, many faith actors have extended vital social services to local communities, especially humanitarian relief, health and education.¹¹ While FBOs and RLs are well-known for providing food, clothing and shelter, some also have less documented expertise, which may in some contexts be more controversial, in areas as diverse as nutrition, marriage

¹⁰ Source: Center for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty (2010). *Many Faiths, Common Action: Increasing the Impact of the faith sector on Health and Development: A Strategic Framework for Action*. Washington D.C., USA.

¹¹ For example, in Zambia, approximately [50 percent of all rural health facilities](#) are run by the Churches Health Association of Zambia, with a total of 144 health facilities (including hospitals, health centres and health posts), and eleven health training schools in 56 of Zambia's 74 districts.

counselling and pension plans. In some instances, communities find the services provided by faith actors better and easier to access than government services.

- ***Maximizing community impact:*** The statements of religious or spiritual leaders often have more impact in communities than awareness-raising workshops by development agencies. UNDP needs to be sure that the messages that its FBO and RLs partners convey are consistent with its core values and mandate. In remote and conflict-prone areas, houses of worship or faith-based services may also extend physical protection and vital space for humanitarian response.
- ***Long-term sustainable presence at the grassroots level:*** Faith actors have a strong grassroots presence, working in inaccessible areas often not covered by government services. During conflicts, they tend to remain on the ground after other humanitarian actors have left, ensuring sustainability. Local engagement through FBOs can encourage dialogue, deter further violence and address enduring issues such as gender-based violence and forced recruitment of soldiers.
- ***Legitimacy in the eyes of beneficiary communities:*** Religion is often central to the social, cultural and moral fabric of communities, and many religious organizations see their work as serving a higher call to support humanity. Representatives of FBOs and RLs may be seen as gate-keepers, opinion-leaders and in some contexts are more trusted and influential than secular leaders in their communities. FBOs have the ability to communicate with beneficiaries and make vulnerable communities' voices heard. Because of this legitimacy, FBOs and RLs can be sensitized to reach out to women and marginalized groups when other actors cannot.
- ***Public policy influence:*** FBOs are increasingly at the forefront of public policy advocacy. Engaging faith actors in public policy discussions capitalizes on their reach among a large cross-section of society, promoting more inclusive policies across all UNDP thematic areas. This expanding area of UNDP engagement with FBOs holds much promise for ensuring gender equality, promoting good governance and social inclusion and minimizing conflict.
- ***Reinforcing inclusive social values and best practices:*** Often, engagement around human rights begins with the engagement of FBOs. In fragile states, working with FBOs is a critical means of building capacity for stable and democratic governance, and instilling positive and inclusive social values. The consistent involvement of FBOs and RLs over time can support sustainability in areas with weak governance structures.
- ***Advocacy and networking:*** FBOs and RLs have extensive networks of congregations, affiliates and individuals. These networks constitute remarkable channels of communication as well as human and financial resources. Such large national constituencies hold great potential to complement UNDP's development efforts.
- ***Motivating voluntary service:*** Religious organizations have a very high commitment to development and peace. They motivate action by emphasizing compassion and service, unity and interconnectedness, and justice and reconciliation. Faith actors mobilize large numbers of highly motivated and skilled volunteers, who see volunteering as part of their calling and strive towards peaceful development. Many faith actors are also motivated to come together in joint volunteer action.

- **Confronting violent extremism:** Religious authorities need to be involved in countering regional and national narratives that support violence. Many religious communities are already engaged in activities countering violent extremism. Their participation is instrumental, especially in conflict areas and fragile states: communities that are not included in dialogue and peace processes can actually become more vulnerable to violent extremism.
- **Peace and reconciliation:** FBOs and RLs have been pivotal in developing key concepts of peace and non-violence as well as creating peace.¹² Faith actors can engage a range of stakeholders in positive dialogue to identify entry points for reconciliation. Partnerships with community leaders of all kinds are critical to UNDP engagement in ending violence.

Case study – Zimbabwe: Peace and reconciliation starts with local RLs

During the politically sensitive period of 2008-2009, a group of church leaders from different Christian denominations came together to reflect on the role of their churches in defusing tensions in the country. This resulted in the establishment of the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum (ECLF), which then engaged religious and community leaders across the country to promote local peace dialogues and outreach.

Recognizing the central role of faith actors in building cohesion within society, UNDP in Zimbabwe initiated collaboration with ECLF in 2009 to build the skills of local religious leaders in conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation.

Impact

As a result of its capacity-building programme, UNDP engaged community mediators and peace facilitators in reconciliation efforts. In the process, ECLF empowered several women facilitators to conduct training in promoting peaceful dialogue. ECLF facilitated local community platforms for peace dialogue that brought together political parties, traditional leaders, police and local council leaders to support community cohesion. At the national level, UNDP facilitated collaboration among ECLF and national stakeholders such as the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration to ensure a more coordinated approach to peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe.

Lessons learned

- Instead of simply offering grant-making projects, UNDP can engage FBOs in projects that build capacity and are geared towards direct implementation.
- UNDP support was critical in highlighting the role of ECLF as an agent for development and peace in Zimbabwe, and strengthening the capacity of its members. ECLF is now developing innovative strategies for engaging with government institutions as part of its collaborative programme on peacebuilding.
- FBOs and RLs can facilitate access by UNDP to communities and their leaders to maximize support for peacebuilding and conflict resolution at the local level.

¹² Institute for Economics and Peace (2014). [*Five Key Questions Answered on the Link between Peace and Religion*](#). New York, USA.

- As with other CSOs, efforts to build FBO capacity can have negative consequences if FBOs see UNDP only as a source of funding rather than as a partner working towards the same goal.

5. Challenges, risks and mitigation strategies

For many faith actors, spiritual faith is the motivation for action. But working with them can be complex because not all FBOs have an inclusive outlook. Differences in religious beliefs and interpretations can be drivers of conflict and ethnic and social tensions. In addition, some religious practices and customs sanction various forms of discrimination and exclusion.

Conditions in which it is unacceptable for UNDP to engage with FBOs and RLs include:

- **Exclusion and proselytising:** UNDP cannot engage with FBOs and RLs who discriminate against members of other faiths (or within their own faith) or those they consider irreligious. It is also unacceptable to engage with faith actors who proselytize or impose conditions for delivering assistance that are contrary to UNDP core principles,¹³ including non-exclusivity and non-endorsement. Imposing such conditions hinders trust with local communities, conveys disrespect for local beliefs and customs, and can be damaging to the reputation and integrity of UNDP.
- **Stigma and discrimination:** For UNDP, the human rights-based approach comprises both development outcomes and the process by which rights are realized – emphasizing equality, non-discrimination, participation and accountability. Some FBOs may be challenged by work on issues that touch on sensitive areas such as health, including sexual and reproductive health, social protection, security, HIV and/or work with lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LBGT) individuals and communities. There is however common ground between UNDP’s approach and that of many faith actors, for example, in addressing negative stigmas related to people living with HIV.
- **Focus on vulnerable groups:** UNDP recognizes that vulnerable groups¹⁴ require specific attention because they face the particular challenges of exclusion, inequality and multiple forms of discrimination. While faith actors often have unique access to vulnerable communities, especially in crises contexts, some can exploit this access to consolidate power by oppressing vulnerable groups or proselytizing to spread their faith. It is important that UNDP partners with those institutions that (i) are most able to give voice to marginalized people (including the diversity of their views and needs); (ii) remain accountable to these groups, and (iii) adhere to the fundamental values and principles that underpin the work of UNDP and the UN family in particular the respect for diversity and for the universality and indivisibility of human rights.
- **Gender inequality and disregard for women’s rights:** As with all of UNDP’s work, advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment is part of our policy and programmatic work with FBOs

¹³ See the UNDP [Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures](#) (POPP) website under “Partnerships”.

¹⁴ These groups include women, youth, representatives from indigenous, ethnic and minority groups, migrants, refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI), people living with HIV, and people with disabilities or living in conditions of poverty and/or conflict, sex workers and drug users, those facing religious discrimination, those suffering from domestic and sexual violence or victims of human trafficking into slavery or the sex industry.

and RLS¹⁵. How FBOs and RLS interpret women's roles within their faith and spiritual traditions – and the extent to which they promote gender equality and women's empowerment – can have an enormous impact on the lives of women and girls. It is unacceptable to engage with faith actors who promote negative and harmful gender stereotypes, and disregard the vulnerabilities of women in contexts where sexual and gender-based violence are widespread (e.g., early or forced marriage, and harmful traditional practices).

- **Connections to violent groups:** Religious groups or leaders may be connected to violent extremist groups or others considered terrorist organizations. This can be the result of group leaders espousing violence as a means to achieve their goals, or an imposed alignment of the group to a more extreme group. Often, moderate religious leaders are under threat in these situations.
- **Lack of transparency:** There are risks in partnering with any CSO that has a closed organizational and governance structure. Such organizations or their leadership may be involved with militant groups or even oppressive regimes, or may direct programme funding to activities that are inconsistent with UNDP values and goals. Although difficult to assess, UNDP will also need to be careful not to engage with FBOs that receive funding from unreliable sources.

There are a number of ways in which UNDP staff can mitigate these potential risks:

- **Inter-faith dialogue and partnerships:** To foster cooperation and trust, it is important to engage with FBOs and RLS that have expertise in inter-faith dialogue, particularly in conflict contexts. Seeking inter-religious partnerships during project planning and implementation generates *de facto* interreligious dialogue while keeping the focus on project goals. For example, during the evaluation stage, community and religious leaders might be invited to reflect together on topics such as “What we learned about each other as we were implementing this project” or “How has our working together on this project influenced our understanding of each other”?
- **Finding new strategic entry points:** For UNDP staff, streamlining faith-sensitive development policy and programming can contribute to create space for discussion on areas of work that were previously underexplored. And, engaging with faith actors can present an important opportunity for addressing systemic gender-based inequalities and discrimination. For example, to avoid inadvertently reinforcing hierarchies when engaging with male leadership in FBOs and RLS, in addition to working with male RLS who champion gender equality and women's empowerment, UNDP can support women to engage in religious debates and also be recognized as religious scholars whose interpretations also deserve to be heard, as well as support faith-based women's groups and networks.
- **Building capacities:** Familiarizing each partner with the technical language and mission of other actors strengthens their capacity to collaborate independently on a range of issues. Building partner capacity for data collection and reporting not only helps UNDP to evaluate its projects, but better positions FBOs and RLS to disseminate their knowledge within communities. Sharing lessons learned

¹⁵ [UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017: The Future We Want – Rights and Empowerment](#).

by actors from a wide range of faith and spiritual traditions can also be crucial in stemming harmful practices,¹⁶ gender inequality and religiously motivated human rights violations.

- **Internal training and United Nations coordination:** Annual training for UNDP Country Office staff on faith and development¹⁷ helps to bridge gaps in understanding and communication that interfere with planning, implementation and monitoring. In addition, a coordinated United Nations-wide approach to engaging FBOs and RLs – harmonized with United Nations Country Teams and other international organizations – is encouraged to ensure coherence.
- **Conflict management training:** In conflict settings, conflict-management training and discussions involving stakeholders from multiple faith and spiritual traditions can mitigate future tension. Creating space for the resolution of conflicts before projects begin avoids problems during implementation when representatives of different faiths interact with one another. Religious beliefs that hinder human rights or development should be challenged in the spirit of constructive dialogue and by engaging the appropriate leaders.
- **Mediation support for religious leaders (male and female):** UNDP can cooperate with professional mediation organizations such as the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers that support local grassroots initiatives. These organizations can sensitize UNDP staff to local faith and spiritual traditions and dynamics, and support grassroots mediation programmes that counter violent extremism. Using a third party for programme support also reduces the risk to UNDP reputation that comes with delicate dialogue involving insurgencies or groups espousing violence.

Case study – Arab States: Unifying religious leaders in the fight against HIV/AIDS

UNDP mobilized religious leaders through the *HIV/AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States Project* (HARPAS, 2004-2010) to address stigma and discrimination against people living with and affected by HIV in the region.

The initiative began in 2004 with a major colloquium that brought together 80 top Muslim and Christian religious leaders from 19 Arab countries. It resulted in the 2004 Cairo Declaration¹⁸, which committed religious communities to advocate for the end of HIV-related discrimination and protect women and children affected by HIV.

Impact

As the Arab Region's first interfaith network of religious leaders, HARPAS facilitated discussions in the faith-based community on responding to HIV in the region. More than 3,000 Muslim and Christian religious leaders including imams, muftis, ullamas, patriarchs and bishops, participated. They in turn trained tens of thousands of RLs in their communities to combat the stigma of HIV and AIDS with

¹⁶ For instance, the [Do No Harm “Analytical Framework”](#) is a tool for mapping the interactions of assistance and conflict and can be used to plan, monitor and evaluate humanitarian and development assistance programmes.

¹⁷ A United Nations system-wide training course is organized on a yearly by the United Nations Staff College with the collaboration of several United Nations agencies.

¹⁸ [The Cairo Declaration of religious leaders in the Arab states in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic](#), December 2004.

compassion and commitment. As a result of this unique initiative, the multi-faith network was able to respond to HIV in the Arab region, delivering preventive and treatment services to thousands of people.

Lessons learned

- There are tangible benefits to the interfaith approach: by overcoming their religious differences, RLs found common ground in tackling issues affecting the health and welfare of their communities.
- On issues such as HIV and AIDS, it is important to recognize the importance of RLs in their communities and their potential to influence the success of the project, and to listen sincerely to their ideas and concerns.
- Over time, RLs can bring in other stakeholders with whom they have contact, such as parliamentarians and the media. This ensures a synchronicity of efforts and builds a genuine civic coalition.
- It may also be beneficial to include secular activists or more moderate religious leaders to create a balance of ideas.

6. Guiding partnership principles

Many FBOs and RLs already carry out work that is closely related to that of many United Nations entities. UNDP should tap into these valued resources by identifying the partnerships based on shared values, objectives and commitments that will prove most effective in achieving its development goals. A few core principles of engagement need to be borne in mind to engender a trusting relationship with faith actors and sustain and respect:

Seeking impartiality and transparency

It is important to remember that all development actors – even secular ones – have their own prejudices and make assumptions about their partners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders. When partnering with FBOs and RLs, it is imperative, for involved staff, to maintain a non-judgemental attitude about beliefs and practices that are different from their own, and seek impartiality when partnering with more than one faith. Engaging religious actors alongside secular ones helps to create a truly representative coalition and minimizes the importance of religious differences.¹⁹

A few elements to take into consideration:

- Timing is critical in establishing impartiality: key leaders from different faith and spiritual traditions should be engaged at same time.
- Transparency in communications with different parties is essential to building trust. If possible, it is recommended to engage faith actors within a recognized inter-religious body that can advance common efforts without sectarian agendas. In addition, RLs should also be transparent in

¹⁹ While it is necessary to bring FBOs to the table to mitigate conflicts, the sensitive power dynamics between majority and minority groups may necessitate separate meetings with groups that have been discriminated against or marginalized.

communicating about the partnership with their congregations and communities – this maximizes acceptance and involvement in the partnership.

- Public outreach is a crucial aspect of communications: it is recommended that a press spokesperson be appointed for each project, and all UNDP staff and partners should refer queries to this focal point.

Building trust and mutual respect

Trust is a major factor in the impact that UNDP achieves with its partners. Establishing a sense of trust among development actors, stakeholders and beneficiaries requires a common vision, mutual respect and integrity as well as operational capacity. To maximize mutual ownership and inclusion, UNDP should demonstrate respect for the diverse faith and spiritual traditions of FBO partners as well as the customs, values and rights of beneficiary communities (provided they are not violating the UN's core principles and values).

The element of trust is especially important in fragile states. Establishing trust in these settings is a long-term commitment requiring sustained cooperation that is not disrupted by staff changes or political pressure. Mutual trust is particularly crucial in situations where harmful practices are challenged or when reconciliation is required to prevent violent reprisals.

Determining strategic entry points

Although their belief systems may vary, religious and secular actors can recognize the benefits of collaboration based on similar objectives. For instance, engagement around issues of economic justice, including poverty eradication and the reduction of excessive inequality is in itself an entry point for collaboration, as this is an area that is central to UNDP's work and in which most faith actors are ideologically comfortable and motivated.

Since not all faith actors address all development issues, partnerships need to be based upon comparative advantages. For instance, because of their efforts at fighting poverty, FBOs and RLs may be natural partners to advocate for comprehensive social protection programmes. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that many FBOs and RLs already deliver critical services in UNDP's areas of work.

Finding common ground

In new relationships, trust develops over time, and with experiences working together and through open communication. The goal is not to make UNDP's language more religious, or to persuade FBOs to adopt a more secular language, which can obscure their underlying mission and values. Instead, a common technical language can be developed to share common concerns and priorities.

Instead of minimizing the voices of faith leaders and religious communities, sound partnerships are built on honest dialogue about what each party hopes to achieve and whether there is common ground for

action. This strengthens the capacity of FBOs and RLs to work with international development actors, while raising UNDP staff awareness about different faith and spiritual traditions.

Leveraging partnerships to shape programme design and priorities

Stakeholder faith and spiritual traditions should reflect the demography of the region in which UNDP is operating. In this context, partnerships with FBOs and RLs can be part of a strategy to shape programme priorities in a way that maximizes impact based upon on each partner's assets.

This involves:

- Integrating partnership strategies into work planning and funding cycles;
- Making strategies for engaging with faith actors explicit in country programme action plans and work plans, and ensuring that the faith actors are involved in national planning; and
- Documenting experiences and sharing lessons learned.

Case study – Afghanistan: RLs are empowered to make women's voices heard

UNDP is working with the Afghanistan Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs to raise awareness about women's rights through capacity-development programmes, scholarly competitions, advocacy, conferences and workshops. UNDP has trained religious leaders across the country about the rights of women from the perspective of Islam as well as national and international laws.

In addition to supporting publications that advocate for women's rights, activities have included student competitions, a national steering committee for women's rights, and master's degree programmes to strengthen the role of government officials in campaigning for women's rights. There are also plans to arrange for RLs in Afghanistan to visit other Islamic countries in order to exchange knowledge with other faith leaders.

Impact

As a result of the training initiative, many Afghan RLs have become advocates for women's rights. A recent survey in four provinces confirms that working with faith leaders is one of the important channels for public outreach on women's rights, especially to combat gender-based violence. UNDP has also trained religious leaders on legal education – including property and land rights – and coordination between state and traditional justice systems.

Lessons learned

- When working to further women's rights, it is critical to learn about local faith and spiritual traditions, and to show respect for local spiritual beliefs. By developing a constructive relationship with the Ulema (religious) council in Afghanistan, UNDP was able to engage local leaders who had previously expressed scepticism about whether the training was consistent with Islamic values.

- In fragile states, engaging local partners increases the programme’s reach and maximizes sustainability, while working with the national government and religious council confers legitimacy, increasing public confidence in national institutions.
- By engaging RLs, UNDP has the potential to influence national policies that respect women’s rights. But this work becomes only sustainable when it is supported by religious authorities who can advocate against harmful practices (such as child, early and forced marriage).

7. Putting these principles into practice

It is important to understand faith actors’ beliefs and agendas for development, and to identify productive ways of engaging FBOs and RLs that adds value to the work of UNDP. But implementing effective projects also requires internal capacity for assessing potential partners and mitigating the risks that accompany work with FBOs and RLs.

Some steps toward improving these competencies include:

- Cultivating an openness and curiosity, and recognizing and accepting the diversity of local faith and spiritual traditions as part of a greater appreciation of cultural context of the society and communities UNDP serves;
- Seeking to understand the basic concepts, principles and teachings of local faith and spiritual traditions, including the ways in which they diverge from UNDP principles, by engaging with members of religious communities;
- Reflecting on your own attitudes and potential biases about religion, spirituality and sacred traditions;
- Showing respect through appropriate dress, greetings and protocols when meeting with members of the faith community in order to earn respect in return;
- Inviting representatives of religious communities to share their perspectives on UNDP work in areas of mutual interest, as well as their own work with beneficiary communities;
- Gathering resources to build capacity for programme planning and implementation; and
- Bringing in expertise from other United Nations agencies or the United Nations Mediation Support Unit to settle conflicts and encourage dialogue among partners of different faith and spiritual traditions.

UNDP staff are encouraged to refer to the dedicated corporate policies and procedures for partnering with faith-based organizations (as for all civil society organizations), which can be found on the UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures website.²⁰

²⁰ See the UNDP [Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures](#) (POPP) website under “[Partnerships](#)”.

Other relevant methodologies and tools produced to inform and improve UNDP programming at the country level, for example:

- UNDP Guidance Note on Scaling Up Development Programmes (2013)²¹, which provides with practical actions and checklists to consider when designing and implementing programmes that support national scaling up initiatives;
- UNDP Guidance Note on Institutional and Context Analysis (2012)²², which offers practical guidance on how to use Institutional and Context Analysis to assess the enabling environment; and
- UNDP Guidance Note on Governance in Conflict Prevention and Recovery (2009)²³, which explains the main challenges and opportunities of UNDP programming in conflict context, and provides numerous country and programming examples, as well as practical tools and resources.

Understanding faith actors and their relationships with local communities

It is key to understand the mission, activities, target audience, financial resources, leadership and management structures of FBOs and RLs present in the country to select the most effective partners. UNDP staff also can deepen their understanding of the FBOs and RLs in their field of operations by being aware of:

- **Potential conflicts of interest and individual biases:** While UNDP strives to be a secular, rights-based, non-affiliated organization,²⁴ it is important to be aware of conflicts of interest with FBOs and biases (both positive and negative) by individual UNDP staff members.
- **Religious tensions:** While many FBOs and RLs contribute to peace and reconciliation, some faith actors might have tense relationships with other stakeholders or one another, which may lead to violence. In fragile states and conflict areas, FBOs and RLs can drive radicalization, but they can also increase local communities' resilience to radical elements by introducing alternative methods of conflict resolution. Tensions are diffused when religious authorities are involved and radical religious teaching is challenged from within the same faith tradition.
- **Financial and administrative capacities:** FBOs and RLs have widely varying administrative and financial capacities, and often heavily rely on the generosity of volunteers. Many require assistance with planning, implementing and monitoring large-scale projects. Some FBOs have no experience in data collection, which makes it difficult for them to evaluate their work and hinders monitoring by other actors.

²¹ [UNDP Guidance Note on Scaling Up Development Programmes](#) (2013).

²² [UNDP Guidance Note on Institutional and Context Analysis](#) (2012).

²³ [UNDP Guidance Note on Governance in Conflict Prevention and Recovery](#) (2009).

²⁴ As part of United Nations system, UNDP follows the principles articulated in the [United Nations Charter](#) (1945) and the [United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief](#) (1981). The latter calls for understanding, tolerance and respect regarding religion and all beliefs, and prohibits the use of religion for ends inconsistent with the United Nations Charter and other documents of principle.

Becoming familiar with potential faith partners: Sample questions

Fundamental questions include:

- What are the predominant faiths and spiritual traditions in the region? (Remember that traditional or animistic communities may lack formal structures.)
- What is its relationship to the government? To other non-government actors? Do conflicts exist?
- Are the FBOs under the umbrella of a government entity (e.g. Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Culture)?
- What kind of relationship exists between the different religious and spiritual communities in the region?
- What services or advocacy initiatives are religious actors undertaking in relation to UNDP goals and do they adhere to national standards?
- What relevant technical experience or skills do the faith actors have? Are they able to respond in case of an emergency? To manage complex operations?
- What financial resources do they have for carrying out the intended activities? If they need additional financial support, do they have the organizational capacity to handle financial inputs and reporting requirements?
- What influence do FBOs and RLs have in local, national or regional politics and governance, especially in addressing the needs of the most marginalized communities? What influence do they have on local perceptions of sensitive issues such as sexuality, HIV and women's rights?
- What human rights-based work around religion and culture, including women's rights and gender equality²⁵, is happening in the region? By whom?
- What is the gender balance of the FBO leadership? Do their faith and spiritual traditions hold men and women in equal regard? Do women participate in planning or providing community services? Do local FBOs or RLs condemn or minimize the participation of any group of individuals?
- Are there secular women's groups or religious groups in the region in which women hold a prominent role? Could they be included in the partnership (particularly if FBO or RLs in the region do not have a gender balance)?

Mapping individual FBOs and RLs' capacity for partnering with UNDP

The decision regarding whether or not to partner with faith actors should be based on an analysis of the benefits and risks of working together to achieve desired results. FBO partnerships should be a measurable component of the programme cycle, and robust baseline studies are crucial to establishing the most effective working relationships. Baseline studies can also be conducted by UNDP partners.

Identifying FBOs and RLs with the capacity and desire to engage involves inquiry and discovery. Every community has its own unique combination of faith actors as a result of its history, geography, cultural diversity, and migration patterns. Religious communities differ widely in size, geographical focus,

²⁵ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2010). [*Faith-Based Organizations and Service Delivery: Some Gender Conundrums*](#). Geneva, Switzerland.

structures, technical capacities and governance systems. Even within a single religious organization, there are differences in theological emphasis, political leanings and cultural influences.

Capacity-mapping exercise for potential FBO partners: Sample questions

- What do you know about the faith actor approached by/approaching UNDP? Are you familiar with its mission, values, internal organization, and human, technical and financial capacities?
- Is the FBO you are in contact with recognized by the government?
- Has the FBO already been assessed by other United Nations agencies in the country? Who did the assessment? When and how? What was the result? Is this organization partnering with UNDP in another country?
- Does the identified FBO have a code of ethics or human rights standards that is compatible with that of UNDP? What is the group's position on gender equality and on respecting the human rights of all ethnic, religious and other groups? Have we involved all parties in the FBO (e.g., male and female leaders)?
- Does the organization carry out any services or advocacy initiatives that are contrary to UNDP principles, which may jeopardize the work and legitimacy of one or both organizations?
- What are the benefits to UNDP of collaborating with this specific FBO?
- Can this collaboration potentially create a conflict between FBOs of different faiths or between them and UNDP? If yes, how can we mitigate this risk?
- Are the terms of the agreement clear to each party? Has UNDP clearly communicated the objectives of the collaboration?
- Should conflicts of interest arise, how might UNDP smoothly exit the relationship?

Widening the partnership

One way to balance the varied capacities and strategies of FBO partners is to widen the coalition to include secular partners or other faith actors with diverse beliefs. A broader approach promotes reconciliation and mutual understanding while facilitating access to beneficiaries and maximizing sustainability. It is particularly important to include both progressive female and male civil society leaders along with religious and cultural leaders in consultations when local FBOs and RLs are predominantly male or hold discriminatory attitudes towards women, minorities and certain marginalized groups. This gives women from civil society the opportunity to engage on an equal footing.

Throughout the collaboration, UNDP must remain sensitive to the dynamics at work within faith-based communities, including any conflicts or challenges to leadership. Religious leaders should also be encouraged to communicate with their congregants about their participation in the partnership. If leaders move forward without communicating, the congregants may be reluctant to get involved, and may develop different expectations about the project (e.g. if the target group is street-identified youth, they may be viewed as bad or dangerous rather than in need of assistance).

Case study – El Salvador: Preventing violence and empowering youth

In collaboration with church leaders, the UNDP Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities Project (2012-2015) in El Salvador is helping young people to build stronger relationships with their families and communities in order to lead more productive lives. The project works through inter-governmental partnerships and strategic alliances with civil society, including FBOs, to identify young people at risk, build their capacities and design civil engagement strategies that incorporate employment.

Impact

The project contributed to larger efforts within the country by focusing on youth at the local level while working with national institutions such as the Ministry of Justice and Security, the National Assembly, the Ministry of Economy and Labour, local governments and civil society (including local FBOs of diverse denominations). Due in large part to this national strategy, a 2012 truce among gangs contributed to the decrease of homicides in the country. As the project progressed, experiences, best practices and tools were shared with other Salvadorian municipalities.

Lessons learned

- The FBOs that implemented project activities through their local networks showed a high level of commitment and dedication. Their regular and decisive presence stimulated the participation of other actors.
- The projects were more effective when churches of various denominations were involved, enriching each other's actions with a more inclusive approach.
- UNDP's collaboration with diverse actors at the national and local levels – including government, FBOs and other civil society actors – can drive a significant reduction in violence and contribute to supportive national policies.
- Sustainability is maximized when partnerships build on previous experience and best practices, strategies and tools.

UNDP collaborates with FBOs and RLs in a number of ways: it can engage them strategically to exchange information and perspectives; develop joint initiatives; or co-facilitate policy discussions. Informal engagement with FBOs and RLs is also important in the context of preventing conflict, peacebuilding and strengthening civil society in fragile states. All these partnerships should be anchored in the development priorities and plans of programme countries. National ownership constitutes the foundation UNDP efforts at the country level.

The work of UNDP should also be coordinated with that of other United Nations agencies, especially those that have established relationships with FBOs and RLs (such as UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNAIDS). Joint strategies can limit duplication and ensure sustainability of the work when one agency completes its project.

As noted in the African Faith Leaders' Statement on the Post-2015 Development Agenda²⁶, “All people have equal dignity because they are all created by God; therefore, development should be people-centred, inclusive, just and holistic”. By engaging a diverse range of FBOs and RLs in innovative ways – and building capacity for heightened collaboration – UNDP ultimately maximizes the inclusion of beneficiaries and other stakeholders in sustainable development.

Monitoring partnerships with FBOs and RLs

Effective planning, monitoring and evaluation systems improve accountability (to communities, governments, and civil society), learning, and alignment with the UNDP Strategic Plan²⁷ and other important strategies including the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy²⁸ and UNDP Youth Strategy²⁹, and ultimately the impacts of UNDP’s efforts. UNDP must clarify in advance with all partners the purpose of its monitoring activities, including what will be expected of them. This process also enables FBOs and RLs to build capacity for monitoring their own activities in the future.

The expected outcomes of any partnership should be clearly specified in all agreements and project documents, guided by the following questions:

- Does the partnership help to advance specific outcomes of the project?
- Does the partnership support national, regional or global programmes?
- Have we reached an agreement on joint mechanisms of accountability, monitoring and evaluation?
- Is the partnership sustainable in the long term? Are there follow-up activities?

Once this information is collected, clear indicators need to be set to measure progress towards the outcomes. When monitoring joint efforts partners, it is critical to choose indicators that: (i) yield meaningful data about the changes taking place; and (ii) can be examined in a consistent and concrete manner. More information about finding the right monitoring indicators for measuring the effectiveness of collaboration can be found in the [UNDP Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results](#) (2011) and [UNDP Discussion Paper on Innovations in Monitoring and Evaluating Results](#) (2013).

²⁶ See the [Position Paper](#) issued by the Africa Faith Leader’s Summit in Kampala, Uganda, on 2 July 2014.

²⁷ [UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017: Changing With the World](#).

²⁸ [UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017: The Future We Want – Rights and Empowerment](#).

²⁹ [UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future](#).

8. Annexes

Annex A: Indicative list of faith-based organizations

The list of organizations below is not a list of endorsed FBOs, rather it aims at facilitating the identification of potential FBO partners working in the development sector. UNDP staff are encouraged to refer to the capacity assessment tool in the Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures website under “Partnerships” and “[Assessing Partnerships with Civil Society](#)”. FBOs and RLs from all faiths and beliefs should be considered when envisaging a partnership.

- [ACT Alliance](#)
- [Adventist Development and Relief Agency](#)
- [Aga Khan Development Network](#)
- [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee](#)
- [American Jewish World Service](#)
- [Baha'i International Community](#)
- [B'nai B'rith International](#)
- [Bright Hope](#)
- [Brot für die Welt](#)
- [Caritas Internationalis](#)
- [Catholic Agency for Overseas Development](#)
- [Catholic Relief Services](#)
- [Christian Aid](#)
- [Church World Service](#)
- [Compassion](#)
- [Cordaid](#)
- [Cross International](#)
- [Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance](#)
- [Episcopal Relief and Development](#)
- [EU-CORD](#)
- [Finn Church Aid](#)
- [Food for the Hungry](#)
- [Foundation Beyond Belief](#)
- [HOPE International](#)
- [Huairou Commission](#)
- [Interfaith League Against Poverty](#)
- [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#)
- [International Network of Religious Leaders Living with HIV](#)
- [International Orthodox Christian Charities](#)
- [Islamic Relief Worldwide](#)
- [Jesuit Refugee Service](#)
- [Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief](#)
- [Khalsa Aid](#)
- [Loretto Community](#)
- [Lutheran World Federation](#)
- [Lutheran World Relief](#)
- [Muslim Aid](#)
- [Quaker United Nations Office](#)
- [Salvation Army World Service Office](#)
- [SEWA International](#)
- [Soka Gakkai International](#)
- [Tearfund](#)
- [Trócaire](#)
- [Tzu Chi](#)
- [Religions for Peace](#)
- [United Evangelical Mission](#)
- [United Methodist Committee on Relief](#)
- [United Religions Initiative](#)
- [Young Women's Christian Association](#)
- [Women, Faith, and Development Alliance](#)
- [World Council of Churches](#)
- [World Faith](#)
- [World Jewish Relief](#)
- [World Renew](#)
- [World Vision International](#)

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