



Religions for Peace 

JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE on
FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES



Religions for Peace-UNICEF Multi-Religious Faith- in- Action Regional Webinar in Western and Central African Region 2020

Highlights/Summary Report

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seven Regional Webinars to launch the Multi-religious Faith in Action COVID 19 Global Initiative #FaithinActionCOVID-19 | March-May 2020. See full Executive Summary of all webinars [here](#).

BACKGROUND

At the onset of the Global COVID pandemic in February 2020, the 3 main partners of the Global Initiative on **Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities** (FPCC) agreed to launch a multi-religious initiative to address the needs of families and communities in relation to the pandemic. FPCC is a partnership between Religions for Peace, UNICEF, and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI).

The #FaithinActionCOVID-19 initiative which was [launched](#) on April 7 by RfP, top religious leaders and UNICEF Executive Director released a joint statement and call-to-action to mobilize faith leaders for an on-going response to the global crisis precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The #FaithinActionCOVID-19 Initiative has outlined the following **7 main actions** as its core objectives:

1. Manage communication, misinformation, and rumors
2. Dispel fear, stigma, discrimination, reduce tensions and promote social harmony
3. Promote adaptation of religious gatherings, practices, rituals, handwashing, and hygiene
4. Address the specific needs of vulnerable groups
5. Promote the prevention of violence against children and women
6. Promote the participation and active engagement of children and young people
7. Promote and support the recovery of social services, resilience and return to normalcy

The Initiative also seeks to promote the wider FPCC goal of large scale **engagement of local multi-religious leaders**, their **faith communities** and **local FBOs**, in collaboration with **UNICEF country offices** through learning exchange, joint priority-setting and action planning, and mutual support.

REGIONAL WEBINARS

To rapidly connect with religious leaders, UNICEF country offices, FBOs, and other partners for briefing, consultation, and learning exchange, the Initiative organized a series of 7 regional webinars, aiming to:

- **Increase awareness** and strengthen **coordinated efforts** of the global Faith-in-Action Initiative,
- **Mobilize** and call to action inter-faith commitments of Religious Leaders and Faith representatives including Women of Faith and Interfaith Youth Network.
- **Equip** these influencers with a set of global guidance around the 7 main #Faith-in-Action objectives, including messages and resources that can be customized for local use.
- **Consult** with the religious leaders to learn about their existing efforts, understand their challenges and priorities for support.

Webinar Participants:

- RfP senior religious Leaders, members of regional and national IRCs, including Women of Faith, Interfaith Youth Networks, and district religious leaders
- Representatives from Ministries of Religious Affairs and other relevant Ministries
- National and local FBO affiliates and partners of international FBOs from the FPCC Advisory Group
- UNICEF technical leads from HQ, regional, country office and field offices
- WHO Regional representative
- Others at discretion of RfP

Over **700 participants** and **67 local partners** of international FBOs participated in the 7 Regional webinars. shared information about ongoing activities and good practice; listened to and asked questions about 3 thematic presentations; collectively identified key issues and challenges they were facing; and framed priority needs and asks of the Initiative's coordinating partners.

KEY ASKS & PRIORITIES

As a result of the webinars, several priority needs and asks will be supported as articulated by religious leaders, FBOs, and UNICEF staff:

- **Information dissemination** | assistance in content creation, framing appropriate messages that will balance science and religion, dissemination strategies, with particular focus on inclusion of technologically isolated, underrepresented and vulnerable groups.
- **Platform** | access to technical resources and outreach activities on a common platform.
- **Evidence gathering** | support in generating evidence from faith communities to inform communication strategies and inter-religious advocacy.
- **Vulnerable groups** | support for increased inclusion and participation of youth and women, religions that are not formally recognized, and advocacy and support on sexual and reproductive health.
- **Official Collaboration** | more systematic collaboration between sub-national and national levels and increased communication with the health sector.

Overarching and Strategic Asks

1. Desire to move beyond the global call to action and regional orientation to **concrete action on the ground at national and sub-national levels.**
2. Call for UNICEF as convener of a mechanism for systematic integration of the inter-faith constituency in global COVID-19 response. Specifically, formalizing a Troika (UNICEF, Inter-religious Councils and IFBOs) operating at global, regional, national and subnational levels.

ACTIONABLES

Resources

- Widely disseminate #FaithinAction resources, including thematic guidance presentation, technical resources.

Community

- Reach back to all regional webinar participants with package of materials and encourage widespread dissemination of the package to respective regional and local networks.
- Where possible support joint review and local adaptation of the Guidance.
- UNICEF and RfP co-hosting regular dialogue platform as a community information and feedback mechanism.
- Develop database of focal points within UNICEF, Inter-Religious Councils and FBOs (see Contacts Tab on website).
- Ensure inclusion of less-established faith and traditional groups.

Institutionalization

- Forge relationships between UNICEF and RfP entities at regional level.
- Support formation of country-level Inter-Faith Advisory Groups.
- Coordinate joint action planning and develop joint action plans.
- Ensure adherence to FPCC principles of participatory planning and non-instrumentalization of faith leaders.
- Support development of RfP-UNICEF Inter-Faith plans linked to country level Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) plans (and eventually the wider COVID-19 plans).
- Support development and implementation of a digital engagement strategy, engaging interfaith youth networks.
- Develop simple monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy, with indicators relating to the joint action and with reporting mechanism for the RCCE country plan.

KEY RESOURCES

- [Website: faith4positivechange.org](https://faith4positivechange.org)
- [Background to the Initiative](#)
- [Regional Webinar Reports](#)
- [Thematic guidance documents](#)
- [Resources on Faith & Positive Change](#)

Summary Report of the Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action Regional Webinar in WCAR (West and Central African Regions)

Examples of Faith-in-Action Responses by Country/Organization

Democratic Republic of Congo

- **Youth messaging through songs** - Interfaith Youth Network is encouraging school children to compose informational songs about COVID-19 to share with their communities; some are even composed in the local languages
- Some of these songs have even been shown on television
- **Mobilization of students to help with schooling** - Groups of students are mobilizing to distribute school materials and tutoring to students stuck at home, especially younger children
- **Joint Media awareness-raising** - Interfaith Youth Network and other NGOs have been promoting preventative measures and stay-at-home measures, especially through social media messaging
- **Coordinating with the government to disseminate information and enforce COVID-19 practices** - Religious offices and churches have been closed under guidance from the gov.

Cameroon

- **Au Cameroun, il y a eu des collectes pour les groupes les plus vulnérables de produits manquants, de faire des produits localement (fabrication de masques et même de gel hydroalcoolique)**
(In Cameroon, there have been collections for the most vulnerable groups of items that are lacking, to make the items locally (making masks and even sanitizing gel)
- **Distribution of food and resources** - Religious Leaders have aided with community collections of oil, rice, and soap to distribute to vulnerable people
- Religious leaders have aided with local fabrication of masques and hydroalcoholic gel (hand sanitizer)

Côte D'Ivoire

- **Religious community support for at-risk population** - Catholic Church communities have mapped locations of older and more vulnerable people so that members of their particular parish can reach out to them
- **Social media statements** - Many individuals have been sharing masses by their priests through social media as messages of hope

Mali

- **Church closures in accordance with COVID-19 practices** - Christian Churches have been closed under guidance from the government.

Nigeria

- **Joint Media awareness-raising** - Community radio is being utilized to spread information about COVID-19 responses

Main Issues and Challenges

- **Managing rumors and misinformation** - The biggest issue is in trying to send out the right messaging, manage misinformation, and combat rumors
- Many still do not know the signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- People, especially in traditional populations, still doubt the reality and severity of COVID-19 and think it is a sickness only of the rich and/or white
- **Religious resistance to COVID-19 response** - Religious leaders themselves need to increase their education
- In Mali there is still a group of Islamic religious leaders who have not closed the mosques, Friday prayers are held as usual
- **Lack of access to materials** - In Cameroon, many people are not able to buy soap or food
- Street children, the homeless, and handicapped people are particularly economically and sanitarily vulnerable
- **Discrimination against affected individuals** - In Cameroon, affected individuals are sometimes left completely isolated, with no support and a lack of information on how to care for COVID-19 patients

Priority Needs and Asks of UNICEF

- **Access to a platform of resources for outreach activities** - A platform of resources is highly needed to help respond quickly to those who conduct outreach activities
- Request for ways to explain the reality and severity of COVID-19 to combat misinformation and disbelief
- Request for a multi-media approach with material for social media, television, and radio, as well as material to reach the non-literate
- **Support for inclusion of isolated groups** - Need for solutions to better reach out to technologically isolated and/or rural communities while maintaining physical distancing
- Need to address how families can safely care for affected individuals
- Need to ensure populations such as street children, homeless people, and people with disabilities, and other overlooked populations are receiving care, attention, and appropriate information on COVID-19 response
- **Communication with religious leaders** - Determine how to reach and communicate with religious leaders, who are in violation of COVID-19 physical distancing measures
- **Combining religious messaging with COVID-19 response** - Collaboration with religious leaders on identifying passages in religious texts that can relay and reinforce COVID-19 response measures

- **Addressing food security issues** - Better addressing food shortages/ food insecurity
- The Democratic Republic of Congo is having food security issues combined with economic repercussions