

1. *INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF BACKGROUND*

New ways of working are needed to respond to the large-scale humanitarian and development challenges of our day. This is a time for working together across sectors and for innovative collaboration with local leadership. This paper lays out principles and mechanisms for more participatory ways of working together with local faith actors¹ for the sustainable wellbeing of children, their families, and communities.

This paper has been produced as part of a global partnership initiative on Faith and Positive Change for Children (FPCC).² Led by UNICEF, partners include Religions for Peace, (RFP) (interfaith convening partner), the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) (knowledge partner), and Harvard Divinity School (religious literacy partner). The paper was drafted by JLI with guidance from the FPCC Advisory Group, a group of engaged supporters of FPCC from a range of non-governmental organizations and academia.³

This paper is firmly grounded in a growing evidence base on the role of faith actors in bringing about positive social and behavior change. JLI has completed a literature review from over 100 sources, a mapping of 26 technical guidelines, toolkits, and standards documents, case studies of UNICEF-faith actor collaboration in 17 countries through primary research, and co-created an evidence-based Theory of Change. The principles refer to key sources, including previous frameworks and guides summarized in Annex A. We also recommend exploring the full evidence base, including many in-depth case studies that exemplify the principles below, through the documents at the FPCC website.⁴ For more about how to put the principles into practice, the FPCC Program Guide and Thematic Modules provide specific guidance.

2. FAITH INFLUENCES THE WELL BEING OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Faith influence can be a mixed blessing. At worst, faith influences can drive conflict, discrimination, exclusion and division. At best, faith influence has powerful lasting transformational qualities that shape social and cultural norms, contributing to positive behavioral outcomes and results for children.

The powerful positive influence of faith can be seen in faith actors' unique understanding of their communities,⁵ holistic view of wellbeing and psychosocial support to their constituencies,⁶ authority

and trust⁷ with communities that allows them to promote the abandonment of harmful norms⁸ and adoption of key practices for child wellbeing,⁹ social capital and scale to work through extensive networks,¹⁰ and track record of leadership and interventions for social and behavior change.¹¹

GO TOGETHER!

Collaboration is needed to achieve the SDGs by 2030: "Facing such challenges and deep polarization within countries across the world, no country, no group, no organization can go it alone. Everyone including FBOs need to rally around the SDGs." ¹ Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed

GO LOCAL!

The mission of NEAR Network, a movement of civil society organizations rooted in the global south, encapsulates the message of localization: "A world where local communities have the capacity, resources and agency to address the challenges that impact them." ¹

Challenges arise when faith actors perpetrate and sustain practices¹² that are harmful to child wellbeing, such as child marriage¹³ and female genital mutilation,¹⁴ or abuse their positions of power. Issues particularly arise for partnerships between development and faith actors. Political affiliations and agendas can complicate partnerships,¹⁵ as can distrust between secular and faith actors who see each other's ideologies and some practices as non-complementary.¹⁶ Faith actors have experienced instrumentalization by development partners, with short-term, donor-driven projects and consultations that are one-offs with joint planning and problem solving on an ad hoc basis, rather than from inception and in collaboration.

“One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding.” P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2000

The reverse happens when faith actors seek opportunistic engagement with development partners with little or no effort to improve coordination or avoid duplication. Other partnership challenges include language and cultural barriers, such as potentially antagonistic terms (“harmful traditional practices”)¹⁷ and differing interpretations of rights,¹⁸ lack of religious literacy (from development partners)¹⁹ and development literacy (from faith actors), privileging one faith partner and not including others, including a lack of formative research to map out the scope of possible faith partners and their beliefs and influences, and a loss of the transformative elements of faith and belief when “NGO-ized” into standard development parameters.

Over the years, development and faith actors have been working to learn how to overcome partnership challenges and maximize cooperation, with many studies recommending improved ways of working.²⁰ The following principles summarize the main lessons for successful collaborations.

3. 8 PRINCIPLES OF MORE PARTICIPATORY WAY OF WORKING

The eight principles outlined in this document are also aligned with and build on the Bangkok Statement²¹ signed by over 100 participants from 20 countries at the Global Faith for Social and Behavior Change Communication workshop in Bangkok in July 2018. The Statement has a strong focus on equity, participation, and on inclusive and evidence-based partnerships - and thus on diversified, tailored approaches to FPCC. Likewise, the principles acknowledge and draw inspiration from various principles and standards paper developed by UN and donor agencies in the last decade, as described in Annex 1.²²

The FPCC Initiative is grounded in a rights and evidence-based framework, the Theory of Faith for Social and Behavior Change.²³ The framework directs us away from sometimes instrumentalized and traditional ways of engagement with faith actors, and towards more integrated, systematic, sustainable ways of collaborating for the benefit of children. The framework affirms that faith actors and institutions bring with them certain transformational qualities, both inherent and latent, that are significant for achieving social and behavior change outcomes, including an agency/non dependency mindset, faith mandate and motivation from sacred texts, healthy and equitable relationships, non-discriminatory and inclusive practices, safe spaces to engage on sensitive issues, and values of stewardship and accountability to the divine or a moral vision for action.

The following table summarizes the main differences between instrumentalizing and participatory approaches to collaboration, framing parameters of a more effective way of working with faith actors for sustainable change for children.

A top down instrumentalizing <i>status quo</i>	A ground up aspirational, participatory future
Image of human is economic/material	Recognizes inherent human dignity, equality and sacredness of life; affirms agency
Short term, thematic/single sector interventions	Multi-sectoral/integrated/holistic - speaking to hearts and minds
Project-based; vertical and siloed	Sustaining and community systems strengthening
Top down; hierarchical	Confidence in community solutions - participatory, co-created, multi-level
Donor funding dependent	Asset based; multiple funding sources
Focus on religion/faith actors as “isolated” partners	Focus on faith actors in connection with other groups in society and faith as integral to all aspects of lives
Focus only on high-level formal religious leaders, mostly male	Inclusive, equitable approach also engaging informal, traditional leaders - especially women and youth leaders
Mutual discomfort/suspicion/bias between faith and secular actors	Complementary learning between actors with valuing of transformational power of faith and heart-mind dialogue
Limited/default options for partnerships (favoring pre-established relationships)	Broadening relationships through formative research to understand how existing structures work, who is excluded and why. Engaging whole of community through plurality of non-faith, faith, and traditional actors.
Little and generic monitoring and evaluation (M&EAL); results stay with the donor	Tailored and participative M&E and follow-up processes, shared results
One-off lecture-style religious and development literacy/capacity building trainings. International actors as capacity “holders”	Two-way knowledge exchange and capacity sharing, with recognition of mutually beneficial capacities
Global North -> South	Increased South-South local cooperation and knowledge exchange
Guidelines on ways of working compiled by Global North actors; international standards	Evidence-based guidelines on ways of working compiled collaboratively a range of actors
Assuming that there will be a cascade effect through religious structures after trainings of trainers	Ownership, sustainability, and effectiveness at different levels through participative processes and follow-up
Unchecked power imbalances; subcontractor relationship	Participative analysis of power imbalances and joint decision-making relationships
Use of “development jargon” and culturally inappropriate language	Use of local and culturally appropriate language and communication

To move from the status quo towards a more collaborative future, our joint efforts have underlined eight key principles.

PRINCIPLE # 1. Understand and value the transformational power of faith

- Learn about the powerful influence of faith actors for social and behavior change
- A **commitment to long term partnership** is needed to build the trust and relationships that break down biases between faith and development partners, open and foster spaces for dialogue for all, and find common understanding on issues that are important for children and their communities.
- **Sensitivities** about potential areas of conflict, cross purposes, or limitations are best dealt with transparently by bringing them up for discussion to find a middle ground and developing clear strategies and agreements as required.
- Faith actors who **participate in and own collaborative processes** will be best placed to engage in the transformation of social behavior by authentically exerting influence at individual, community, and national/international level.
- **Practical example:** In the 2014-2015 Ebola response in West Africa, the spread of Ebola during religious burial rituals was contained when religious and community leaders were engaged to explain and change expectations and practices relating to the preparation of bodies for burial. The role of these leaders in affecting transformation was game changing in the overall Ebola response.²⁴

Principle #2. Have confidence in community solutions. Adopt a respectful reciprocal learning approach leading to mutual understanding

- The participatory approach is grounded in the understanding that **communities have their own traditions, successful experience, assets,²⁵ ways of working and preferred solutions** and that these can be very powerful in achieving good outcomes for children.
- Working with faith actors should not be a default option. Participatory partnership needs to begin with **an understanding of the roles and competencies of the different faith and development actors** are, including power dynamics and who is excluded. Different actors will have different competencies, including technical and culturally specific knowledge, and the ability to speak to different groups.
- Framed in a **listening and joint learning process**, faith actors should be active partners in discussion of most critical needs for children in their communities, about the definition of “success,” and about the most effective strategies for sustainable change in their contexts.

Example: In Egypt, UNICEF supports the long-standing engagement of faith actors and the Ministry of Awqaf. The partnerships have developed publications, training materials for religious leaders and theology students, and community engagement formats based on community dialogue and viewing clubs of docu-drama. The partnership established with Al Azhar University in 1984 expanded to the Coptic Church in 2014 to produce Peace, Love and Tolerance, the first interfaith publication on child protection.²⁶ The partnership demonstrates the effectiveness of a two-way capacity sharing and learning process between UNICEF and its faith partners.²⁷

Principle #3. Be mindful of power inequalities and be inclusive of marginalized groups

- The inclusion of **minority religious and other groups, as well as traditional and informal leaders (such as women and youth leaders)**, has to be prioritized to ensure empowerment, equality and plurality. Recognizing people's agency, this equity approach avoids imbalances of power, commits to leave no one behind and shifts to making aid as local as possible.
- **Instrumentalization** should be recognized and avoided. Drawing on the capacities of all partners for leadership and coordination, participatory processes emphasize joint decision making.
- **Example:** In Panama, UNICEF has partnered with the inter-religious council (COEPA) to increase cooperation within the council and promote youth awareness and empowerment against domestic violence and child abuse. The Youth Engagement and Participation program supports regular interfaith youth meetings and a periodic Youth Assembly, in which young people are free to choose the topics addressed, express their own beliefs and practices, and become advocates of their own rights²⁸.

Principle #4. Adopt participative planning processes valuing heart-mind dialogue and systems strengthening

- From the start of the planning process, co-creation is key. Participation is a cardinal principle at every stage of the collaboration - from formative research and needs assessment to programming, from implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Local leadership and decision-making is central to the effectiveness and sustainability of partnerships. This also means continuing relationship building, checking in, and follow up processes so that the engagement does not trail off.
- **Example:** Mothers Union "Listening Observing Acting" (MULO) process.²⁹ Mulo is a community led process of putting faith into action, and exploring how to work together to bring lasting wholistic change according to the specific needs of each community.

Principle #5. Identify and discuss challenges and difficult areas

- Differences on attitudes towards gender, sexuality, and other human rights may occur. Participatory practice intentionally opens safe space and makes time for active listening, discussion of differences, and integrated planning. The aim should be to build on common goals and understanding -such as preventing maternal mortality, as a basis for change.
- Steps may include: facilitate articulation of a positive vision or goal, unpack whether current realities are helping or hindering that vision and discuss whether and how changes need to be made towards achieving the intention.
- **Example:** World Vision's Channels of Hope³⁰ includes deep reflection on science and theology, plus an intentional session on "Tough Stuff" to bring together science, theology, and ethics. Another example is the Ouagadougou Partnership³¹ that has sought to open space to discuss religious beliefs and family planning.

Principle #6. Commit to evidence-based decision-making, ongoing evaluation and learning, and to being informed by outcomes

- Partnerships and programs are most effective when they are informed by evidence, and when they include participative processes of monitoring, evaluation and reflection. Best practices examples and guidelines can help build better partnerships and should be developed in a collaborative way. Commitment to co-creation of M & EAL process, and feedback loops on results is key.
- **Example:** The partnership between UNICEF and the Kenyan Inter-religious Council on the Faith for Life Initiative showed that co-designing, co-developing and testing training materials together with religious leaders ensured a strong initial buy-in. The initiative's monitoring and evaluation processes showed the importance of increasing faith actors' participation in order to use measuring strategies that are meaningful to them rather than focusing on reporting and being purely "extractive".³²

Principle #7. Explore and document new enabling and facilitation roles for global FBOs and other intermediaries

- Recognizing the autonomy and agency of local actors, international FBOs are shifting resources and strategies away from direct program implementation and more towards technical, strategic, resourcing support.
- Local faith actors can benefit from skilled support strategies including:
 - Convening and supporting emerging alliances, as well as maintaining effective intermediary organizations.
 - Scalable, collaborative faith and community mobilization mechanisms
 - Developing and adapting resources and methods for capacity sharing, fundraising, and systems strengthening.
 - Enabling evidence generation and learning using participatory approaches
- Examples: Salvation Army Faith-based Facilitation process³³ is way of helping people think, talk, explore and respond to their issues in the light of faith. In Mozambique, UNICEF supports national interfaith organizations that have developed expertise in working with international donors through years of experience in development and relief work. For instance, PIRCOM 34 (Inter-religious Program Against Malaria) acts as local and national broker, as it is able to communicate with development partners (knows the jargon!) and can use its knowledge in donor compliance requirements, while being able to engage diverse religious networks, particularly through the Mozambique Council of Religions (COREM), and the Government and communities nationwide.

Principle #8. Work with Local Faith Actors (LFA) to build and amplify their capacity for advocacy

- LFAs are uniquely positioned to monitor government delivery on commitments, to hold to account and to advocate for unmet needs. They may need help in forming alliances, developing, adapting and conveying messages, and understanding the donor/public sector landscape.

- Technical and capacity support in developing advocacy skills among LFAs and helping them establish broad advocacy coalitions across faith and geographies is a valuable partnership function.
- **Example:** ABAAD, a secular partner with expertise in advocacy and activism, and UNICEF are engaged in a country-wide program in Lebanon bringing together religious leaders from all major religious traditions to discuss differences and potential commonalities in a “protected” environment. These discussions will lead to the identification of key shared priority messages and of religious texts that justify the messages across faiths, and to plan advocacy interventions targeting the different faith communities, for instance through media outreach, including the dissemination of religious leaders’ messages in public media.³⁵

4. WHAT THIS ALL MEANS FOR LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Focusing on the agency of local leadership calls for a radical repositioning of mission and method of INGOs, international organizations, and donors, both secular and faith-based. A collaborative, reciprocal, non-instrumentalized approach to partnership calls for institutional humility, intentional servant leadership, and a commitment to ‘graduation’ of local partners as capabilities develop. It also implies a commitment to the time needed to build trust, to listen, and to engage adequate feedback loops. Contextual assessments of priorities, goals, and needs take into account the assets of local faith actors, as well as those of the international partners. Actors outside communities may be able to offer funding, technical expertise, coalition building, advocacy skills, and help in navigating the complex development sector.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL FAITH ACTORS

- Assess community *assets*, as well as needs, based on continuous community engagement
- Clarify expectations of partnerships
- Coordinate with other LFAs and local actors
- Value intermediary mechanisms, skills, and assets of external entities, not only funding opportunities

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES, NGOS, AND FBOS

Where shared beliefs bring international and local faith actors together, particular attention should be paid to checking theological and religious practice assumptions, which may differ greatly between contexts, and perpetuate neo-colonial/civilizational practices of the past. Likewise, where differing secular and religious worldviews meet, attention is needed to secular biases that may view religious beliefs and practices as “outdated” and secular views as superior, again to ensure that there is not a neo-colonial imposition of worldviews.

Reflecting a commitment to local autonomy and deeper more sustainable partnerships, many international FBOs and NGOs are already³⁶ and should further seek to:

- shift HQ human and financial resources to locally-led country and district offices;
- renew theological reflection and exploring new ways to work with their local denominational networks, or explore ways to discuss secular and religious dynamics in new and existing partnerships, as connected to other power dynamics in partnerships;
- adopt and adapt participatory planning and mobilization processes, and strengthening community engagement and social accountability processes;
- value a joint learning approach grounded in capacity sharing;
- invest in participatory research on local faith actors;
- prioritize facilitation and support of local actors over direct implementation;
- adjust fundraising goals to incorporate local priorities, with joint resource mobilization.

UNICEF COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT HAS DEVELOPED 'MINIMUM QUALITY STANDARDS AND INDICATORS IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT' TO PROVIDE GLOBALLY ESTABLISHED GUIDANCE ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE AS WELL AS HUMANITARIAN ACTION. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STANDARDS IS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGH QUALITY, EVIDENCE- BASED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT SCALE IN DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS. THE STANDARDS PRIORITIZE PARTICIPATION, EMPOWERMENT AND OWNERSHIP, INCLUSION, TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION, ADAPTABILITY AND LOCALIZATION, AND BUILDING ON LOCAL CAPACITY.³⁷

IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS AND DONORS

- Commit time and resources to non-instrumentalization and to developing procedures that support more co-creative and localizing approaches
- Map faith actors in country contexts to expand inclusive, representative partnership
- Respond to stated priorities and needs of local communities and facilitate community engagement as a fundamental approach in all development processes
- Invest in strengthening the evidence base and M&EAL on FPCC, with feedback loops to communities
- Multilaterals and bilaterals could position a faith partnerships representative in each country who knows the local actors, builds relationships with the local actors, and understands the beliefs and practices and points of intersection.

ANNEX 1 - Key documents informing these principles

- The 2008 Istanbul Consensus on the Principles of a Global Interfaith Network on Population and Development³⁸ informed the **UNFPA Guidelines for Engaging FBOs as Agents of Change**,³⁹ which strongly emphasize the need to foster South-South regional partnerships and knowledge-exchange and to focus on specific objectives to build alliances. UNFPA acknowledges the importance of a common understanding that is based on *cultural sensitivity, care and respect* (including of the need for different languages and methods).
- The **UNAIDS-FBO strategic framework**⁴⁰ published in 2009 to encourage stronger partnerships in HIV/AIDS-related interventions is based on the principles of the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 60/262, the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS,⁴¹ which include supporting national ownership and accountability, gender equality, a human-rights-based approach and a focus on engaging people living with HIV/AIDS at all stages, effective communication between partners, participatory decision-making processes and a clear agreement on partnership expectations.
- DFID’s 2012 “**Faith Partnership Principles - working effectively with faith groups to fight global poverty**,”⁴² sets out some key principles to guide collaborations with faith actors for sustainable change, including the importance of transparency about missions and ways of working, mutual respect between faith- and non-faith actors, and understanding of the different roles and added value of faith actors’ contributions.
- In 2012, UNICEF issued a **Guide on Partnering with Religious Communities for Children**,⁴³ which identifies *shared values* among different religious traditions, such as a holistic approach to children, a commitment to *addressing the needs of marginalized individuals and communities*, an emphasis on the dignity of the child, and the importance given to the family for the upbringing of children, which are also key elements of Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Guide also stresses the importance of mutual understanding, respect, trust, open dialogue and shared priorities when partnering with religious communities. In particular, it insists on the importance of understanding the roles that religious beliefs and structures play in the context of interventions.
- UNHCR’s 2014 “**Partnership Note on FBOs, LFCs and Faith Leaders**”⁴⁴ builds on the “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders,”⁴⁵ at the heart of which lie the principles of hospitality, respect and equality, shared by all religious traditions. The document also acknowledges faith as a “basic need”, and the subsequent value of spiritual support.

- ‘**Building Effective Partnerships Between Public Sector and Faith Groups**’⁴⁶ conducted by McKinsey and Co with the Joint Learning Initiative in 2015 from interviews with 24 FBOs, academic, multilateral and intergovernmental organizations, illustrated that careful consideration of the *suitability of collaboration*, identification of *shared values and understanding* (including through religious literacy trainings), faith actors’ *participation in decision-making and programming*, and better *evidence on the impact* of the interventions are needed.

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ENDNOTES

¹ We are using “faith actors” to include all levels of faith both formal and informal and including traditional and religious leadership, faith institutions and communities, and faith-based NGOs at local national, and global levels but with an emphasis on LOCAL faith actors as that is where the change happens and is sustained.

² <https://jliflc.com/resources/faith-and-positive-change-for-children-global-initiative-on-social-and-behavior-change/>

³ Co-chairs and Members of the FPCC Advisory Group (listed above)

⁴ <https://jliflc.com/fpcc/>

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¹² Carola Eyber and Selina Palm, “A Mixed Blessing: Roles of Faith Communities in Ending Violence against Children” (Washington D.C.: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, 2019), <https://jliflc.com/resources/a-mixed-blessing-roles-of-faith-communities-in-ending-violence-against-children/>.

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- ¹⁴ Katherine Marshall and Lucy Keough, “Fighting Female Genital Cutting: Religious and Traditional Leaders’ Roles in Combating Genital Cutting in Senegal and Uganda,” in *Mind, Heart, and Soul in the Fight against Poverty* (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 2004), 159–64.
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³³ Building Deeper relationships using faith-based facilitation www.salvationarmy.org/fbf

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