



Religions for Peace-UNICEF **Multi-Religious Faith- in- Action** Regional Webinar in East and Southern African Regions (ESAR) **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://www.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 ESAR (East and South African Regions)

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

South Sudan

- **Joint Media awareness-raising** - The Interchurch Council of South Sudan reports that 14 denominations are collaborating together to reach out to educate and inform people, including utilizing local radio channels
- Religious Leaders utilized Holy Week to centralize messaging about COVID-19
- **Coordinating advocacy statements from senior Religious Leaders** - Religious Leaders are working on getting appeals on COVID-19 response from every Archbishop

Kenya

- **Development of thematic awareness-raising materials** - The All Africa Conference of Churches developed a leaflet to call churches to action and create awareness about increasing sexual abuse of children during the spread of the COVID-19 and the accompanying lockdown regulations
- **Increasing access to information: Letter to faith communities with link to UNICEF website for updates** - The All Africa Conference of Churches circulated letter about COVID-19 to communities with links to UNICEF website for updates, as well as a helpline number for victims of abuse and domestic violence
- **Distribution of food and supplies** - The Interreligious Council in Kenya has started an effort to raise funds for relief and distribute food and resources to communities

Uganda

- **Donation of materials** - The Interfaith Network donated food to government for dissemination
- **Youth peer support to affected youth** - Youth leaders have coordinated to reach out and talk to affected individuals
- **Multi-media communication by Interfaith Network** - The Interfaith Network has promoted social media and faith-based radio and TV stations to push messages and information

South Africa

- **Presidential Addresses** - The President offers daily updates, which help to address stigma and discrimination around COVID-19
- **Door-to-door awareness-raising** - Individuals and health workers in communities are doing door-to-door visits to inform communities
- **Monthly inter-faith devotionals promoting “Culture of Care”** - There have been monthly interfaith devotionals promoting love, generosity, compassion, and responsibility towards each other

Main Issues and Challenges

- **Resistance against closing houses of worship** - People are upset about the ban on congregational gatherings and have shown some resistance
- **Heavy handed response** - The guidelines and directives have been state led and have taken more of a security sector response hence the need for more humane and rightful treatment of citizens to encourage adherence.
- **Managing Rumours and Misinformation** - Greatest challenge is to send out the correct messages, manage misinformation, and combat rumours, there is a flood of information coming out and keeping pace is a challenge
- **Increase in sexual abuse of children** during COVID-19 lockdown regulations
- **Conflicts linked to limited and insecure access to food access**

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 reach out to communities
- Particular request for how to explain the severity of COVID-19 in the context of the resistance to church closings
- **Coordinating with Religious Leaders** - Religious Leaders are working on getting appeals from every Archbishop in South Sudan → UNICEF might be able to facilitate/coordinate
- **Support for inclusion of less established faith and traditional groups** - Continuing to bring less-established faith communities and traditional groups to collaborate with RfP and UNICEF
- **Addressing food security issues** - Need to improve addressing food shortages/ food insecurity
- Uganda is confronted with food security combined with economic repercussions