



Religions for Peace  JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE on FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES  unicef

Religions for Peace -UNICEF **Multi-Religious Faith-in- Action** Regional Webinar in the Caribbean **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 the Caribbean (convened in English)

Participants: Ms. Jennifer Dewar, Dr. Kerida McDonald, Rev. Clement Joseph, Ms. Deepika Singh, Rev. Kyiochi Sugino, Jean Duff, Mr. Elias Szczytnicki, Ms. Jennifer Dewar, Indrani Rampersad, Martin Schade, Indrani Rampersad, Humberto Jaime, Dennis Christian Larsen, Pablo Jimenez, Pedro Ivo Alcantara, Rev. Emerson Boyce

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

Haiti

- **Promoting new ways for religious practice** - Religious Leaders across various faiths have been working together to pioneer new ways for religious practice
- Many pastors are taking time to help motivate people to fight the virus
- **Advocacy with civil society** - *RfP* has been working with civil society actors and women to educate them about the risk of domestic violence and how to best prevent and respond to it
- **Collaboration between Religious Leaders government and other organizations** - Religious Leaders have been working with the public health ministries, various faith organizations, and inter-religious platforms to encourage the fight against COVID-19

Guyana

- **Increase in providing correct messaging** - IROG revealed a press release in March 2020 calling all Religious Leaders to deliver the message of physical distancing
- The IROG message was translated shared on multiple media platforms, emphasizing on physical distancing and the occurrence of a curfew

Trinidad

- **Religious practices in the virtual world** - Religious groups have been hosting online sessions for congregations as they provide new ways to practice one's faith for their communities
- **Government acknowledgment of religious efforts** - The Prime Minister brought together all faiths and religions to announce a National Day of Prayer

Indo-Caribbean Angelico Alliance of the Caribbean

- Pastors and church leaders have circulated correct COVID-19 advice through social media in hopes to reduce the spread of the virus
- **Promotion of proper health and government regulations** - Church leaders are in agreement with the Caribbean government and are advocating to close churches and continue virtual education
- Providing virtual programs for youth, adults, and families
- **Assistance for mental health** - Offering free webinars on how to deal with mental health issues such as anxiety, fear, and depression

Main Issues and Challenges

- **Need for actionable guidelines** - Religious Leaders are requesting a platform where they can have access to clear guidelines
- **The spread of misinformation** - Misinformation and unclear messages sent out by local political parties
- **Fear that individuals won't listen to health regulations** - Concern that people will ignore messages and continue to congregate for religious ceremonies and rituals
- **Lack of inclusion** - The lack of recognition and inclusion of non-traditional religions
- Vulnerable populations are at higher risk and endure more stigma and discrimination
- **Fear of virus contamination** - unclear contamination prevention methods and messages due to corrupt political practices

Priority Needs and Asks of UNICEF

- **Support for inclusion for less established faith and traditional groups** - More inclusion and recognition towards non-formal faith traditions
- **Increase in youth and women participation** - Youth and women groups should be brought together with Religious Leaders to enhance efforts
- **Balanced messaging with science and religion** - The need to balance science and religion in order to spread correct messages throughout communities (religious scholars & religious leaders)
- **Evidence gathering** - More inter-religious advocacy with theological support is needed