



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# RELIGION, CONFLICT & PEACEBUILDING



## AN INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMMING GUIDE

*Key Issues*

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Conflict is an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life, but in many places conflict turns violent, inflicting grave costs in terms of lost lives, degraded governance, and destroyed livelihoods. The costs and consequences of conflict, crisis, and state failure have become unacceptably high. Violent conflict dramatically disrupts traditional development and it can spill over borders and reduce growth and prosperity across entire regions. Religion is often viewed as a motive for conflict and has emerged as a key component in many current and past conflicts. However, religion does not always drive violence; it is also an integral factor in the peacebuilding and reconciliation process. Development assistance and programming does not always consider this linkage, nor does it fully address the complexity of the relationship between religion and conflict. As a main mobilizing force in many societies, proper engagement of religion and its leaders is crucial.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

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This Toolkit is intended to help USAID staff and their implementing partners understand the opportunities and challenges inherent to development programming in conflicts where religion is a key component. Like other guides in this series, this Toolkit discusses key issues that need to be considered when development assistance is provided in religious contexts and identifies lessons that have emerged from USAID's experience implementing such programs. However compared to other types of programming, USAID experience engaging religion and religious actors to prevent conflict or build peace is modest. Thus, recognizing that there is still significantly more to be learned on this critical topic, this toolkit contains summaries of four actual USAID programs that have successfully engaged religious actors. This tangible evidence of what is possible is provided to encourage others considering programming in this area. Lessons learned from these and similar programs are also included that can serve as the basis for more learning about this little understood and under-researched development topic, information for which there is a great deal of field interest and demand.

As Director of CMM, I am pleased to introduce this document on religion in the context of conflict and peacebuilding. The Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established to provide technical leadership on conflict-related issues to USAID Missions and our Washington based regional and pillar bureaus. I hope that readers will find the information contained herein thoughtful, innovative, and useful. We consider these toolkits to be "living documents" and would welcome your comments and observations to help us improve future iterations.



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## RELIGION, CONFLICT & PEACEBUILDING: AN INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMMING GUIDE

Connecting religion and violent conflict is easy to do. Many of the world's violent outbreaks, both present and past, are couched in religious terms, ranging from the 1st century Jewish-Roman War, to the 11th century Crusades, to 17th century Thirty Years War to the 20th century Irish civil war to contemporary conflicts in Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Iraq, and Israel/West Bank/Gaza. Connecting religion and peacebuilding is equally easy to do. Human history includes many examples where the religiously motivated acted in extraordinary ways to bridge divides, promote reconciliation, or advocate peaceful coexistence. It thus becomes clear that understanding the dynamics of conflict—both the sources of discord and the forces of resilience—requires an understanding of the connections between conflict, religion and peacebuilding. And yet sensitivities and uncertainties surrounding the mere mention of religion frequently stand in the way of that understanding.

This general discomfort with examining the religious dimensions of conflict dynamics poses problems for development practitioners at several levels. At the most basic, a lack of awareness of the religious context may adversely affect interventions or provoke active resistance, even when large scale violence is not a significant risk. Where the risk of instability is higher, inattention to religious identities or to the views and aspirations of religious leaders may result in mischaracterizations about what the conflict is actually about or how likely it is to become violent. And where violence is a reality, discounting the religious dimension or resisting engagement with religious actors may result in overlooking the many opportunities to tap into religion as a force for compassion and promoting peace.

The aim of this Toolkit is to help lower the discomfort of USAID staff in making the analytical and programmatic connections between conflict, religion and peacebuilding. The Key Issues section provides additional arguments for why development practitioners should—and can—address religion more directly. Special attention is given to clarifying the legal provisions governing engagement with religious organizations and detailing a nine-step process of due diligence to ensure that programming is both sensitive and effective. The Program Options section provides in-depth summaries of four USAID-funded programs that engage both religiously-grounded grievances and religious actors. Such an approach is a departure from other Toolkits, but given the agency's limited experience with this type of programming, in-depth treatments detailing objectives, activities, partners, and lessons learned seem more helpful and more likely to overcome the discomfort by demonstrating the possible. The Toolkit also includes valuable lessons learned and a list of organizations active in the nexus of religion and conflict that offer various resources to conflict analysts or development programmers.

The Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) recognizes that we are at an early stage understanding and addressing the nexus of conflict, religion and peacebuilding. Thus this Toolkit is a more of a starting than an ending point. To help advance this work, CMM has established a Religion and Conflict resource page on the USAID Intranet ([inside.usaid.gov/dcha/cmm](https://inside.usaid.gov/dcha/cmm)) that will be regularly updated with new project summaries and new resources. We also encourage questions, comments and suggestions by email to: [conflict@usaid.gov](mailto:conflict@usaid.gov).

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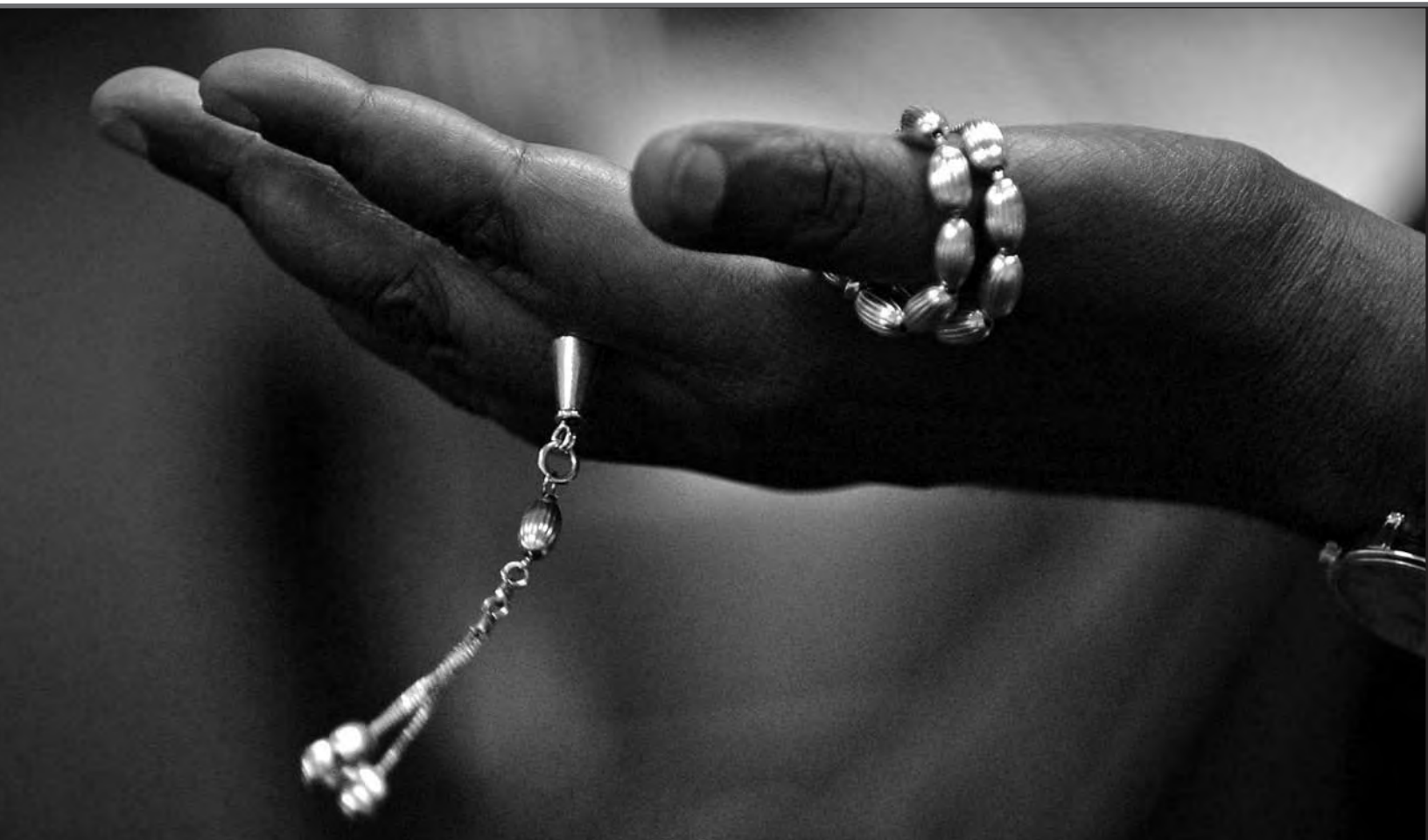
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# KEY ISSUES



*Religion and spirituality reflects a deeper sense of inner identity, reflecting a framework of beliefs and principles that inform and shape worldviews.*

## DEFINING RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS ACTORS

This guide focuses on the role religion plays in conflict and engagement with religious actors through conflict-sensitive (i.e., multi-sector approaches that take a “do no harm” approach), as well as direct conflict and peace-building programs. Though the term eludes any single definition, religion is a key component of individual and group identity. At a macro level, for purposes of this guide, the term “religious actors” refers to: mainstream and indigenous religious/spiritual leaders, institutions and organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and communities that identify with a specific religion or spirituality, as well as informal networks and youth groups. This includes faith-based, faith-inspired, indigenous religions, and other actors. These actors play an important role in many societies as a key stakeholder in communities where they are often trusted more by individuals than secular government actors. For this guide, “religious actors” will be used to encompass this wide umbrella.



At a micro level, religion and spirituality reflects a deeper sense of identity, reflecting a framework of beliefs and principles that inform and shape worldviews. This framework can be interpreted on an individual level or a group level to inform individual and group decisions and actions. It is important to remember that the level of influence religion has on individuals and groups varies. As a result, careful analysis must be completed to understand the nuances and dynamics in each context.

## WHY DOES RELIGION MATTER?

When conflicts assume religious overtones, religious power-brokers can emerge apart from formal institutions and chains of authority. At the core of its nature, religion is a critical consideration for development programs, because it often transcends geographic boundaries and can be used to reach a wider network of followers. The result has both positive and negative implications for the world today, where it is estimated that more than two-thirds of the world's population identifies with a religion.

Religion can emerge as a key factor within conflict situations, whether they are primarily of a political, ethnic, intra-societal, or ideological nature, due to at least the following key reasons:

1. As mentioned earlier, religion is often a core *source of identity*. A religious landscape taps into a narrative which, similar to ethnicity, is historical and personal.<sup>1</sup> Both ethnicity and religion may exist interdependently. However, religion has the ability to transcend ethnic differences.

2. Actors in a conflict may employ religious authorities or religious language to *mobilize followers and widen their base of support*. This can occur at the political level, when leaders use religious discourse to garner

<sup>1</sup> Pearce, *The Rationality of Appealing to Religious Identity in Conflict*, 4.

popular support for specific policy aims or make space for their group that may feel discriminated and/or marginalized. Military or movement leaders may use religion in a tactical way, as a tool for recruitment or as a safeguard from defection. Religious actors engaged in peacebuilding can draw on a common worldview, theological language, and shared values by adherents to gain support for peace.

3. Religious teachings can provide *justifications for extreme action or peace*. This role is important to remember when in a conflict-zone with any or no religious overtone. As a powerful source of identity, the emergence of religion in a conflict dramatically raises the stakes of the conflict's outcome.

## ENGAGING RELIGION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

### OPPORTUNITIES

Engaging religion and key religious actors in conflict settings can provide unique opportunities to intervene in ongoing conflicts or to reduce the risk that violence will erupt. Religious teachings can provide important sources of:

- *Meaning, identity, and emotional support* that can increase resilience in coping with adversity and facilitate mobilization to overcome it.
- *Empathy and compassion* that can sustain reconciliation and problem-solving across divisions.
- *Values, norms, and motivations* that support nonviolent approaches to raising and confronting differences.

Religious actors frequently have a special relationship with the affected populations that can dampen conflict drivers, strengthening conflict mitigation efforts, or both. Specifically:

- Religious leaders and institutions are often considered *trustworthy and credible* by the local population due to their established roles in

*It's estimated more than two-thirds of the world's population identifies with a religion.*

**Peace conferences in Southern Sudan, sponsored by the New Sudan Council of Churches, aim to improve dialogue between parties engaged in the conflict and to mobilize communities towards local peace programs.**

- their respective communities.
- Religious actors may have a *shared and respected set of values* with different sides of the conflict. Values, including forgiveness and reconciliation, in religious texts and teachings can inspire communities to change attitudes and actions at a basic level and transform worldviews at a deeper level to understand “others” in the conflict positively.
- Religious actors may have *unique leverage* as spiritual leaders that allows them to influence and sway communities in ways that secular players in the conflict may not. This unique leverage increases the likelihood of expanding support for peace.
- Religious actors have a *deep understanding of the local context* giving them the ability to *work successfully at a local level*.
- Religious actors often have access to all levels of power—community, nation, and international—which gives them the ability to address conflicts on multiple levels.

In many settings religious organizations and their leaders, due to the trust and moral authority they hold from broad-based constituencies, are uniquely positioned to facilitate post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts.

- In West Africa, in response to civil wars in Sierra Leone and Guinea, and ongoing violence in Liberia, inter-religious councils—composed of representatives from Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic groups—provided leadership and resources to rebuild communities, and advocated for refugees.<sup>2</sup> These networks attempt to maintain requisites for building peace across national and regional boundaries.

In regions with histories of overtly religious conflict, long-term reconciliation programs may include

<sup>2</sup>World Conference of Religions for Peace, “Religions for Peace in West Africa.”

activities including intra- and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

- Peace conferences in Southern Sudan, sponsored by the New Sudan Council of Churches, aim to improve dialogue between parties engaged in the conflict and to mobilize communities towards local peace programs.
- In Kashmir, a program sponsored by the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy brings together Muslim and Hindu youths in Kashmir to interact with each other in an attempt to lay the foundations for long-term mutual trust and understanding. This initiative built support for the formation of an interfaith council.

Religious actors sometimes act in isolation, but often this is not the case. Religious actors may work in tandem with or in support of other tribal, civil society, or governmental actors. Development practitioners will need to determine the role that religious actors play in each context to capitalize on the resources that they bring to the table. There may also be circumstances where other traditional leaders perform functions similar to religious leaders, without some of the challenges listed below or where the challenges posed by working with religious and spiritual-based actors outweigh the opportunities for engagement.

## **CHALLENGES**

Engaging religious actors in conflict environments also poses serious challenges:

- Utilizing religion can exacerbate or create new social and political conflict without sensitivity and knowledge of local nuances and dynamics.<sup>3</sup> Careful conflict analysis that focuses on stakeholders, group dynamics, and the cultural context, such as the application of USAID’s revised Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF 2.0),

<sup>3</sup>Gopin. *Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution*.



is an important tool to mitigate the risk of inappropriate invocation of religious teachings or improper or ineffective engagement with religious actors.

- Engagement with religious leadership has implications on which voices are and are not elevated. While religious leaders can act as a unifier, rallying people around nonviolent action, they do not inherently serve in a unifying role. Therefore, USAID staff should understand whose interests religious leaders represent, as well as power dynamics between the role of leaders and community members.
- Motivations for engagement with USAID on the part of religious actors could be manipulative and used as a platform to impose power on weaker community members or groups. In addition, in some contexts, religious actors are not independent and can be subdued by the state. Careful analysis to understand actors' motivations is necessary to mitigate these risks.
- Religious communities often have a long history and established traditions. As a result, a shift in community consciousness can be slow. Patience is key, as is a focus on the small incremental steps that can build the path for positive change.
- Religious leadership is often male-dominated, having implications on gender dynamics and relationships. USAID staff should consider *all* religious actors in the local context including informal networks and unofficial leadership that may have better access or include female community members.
- USAID staff are often required to advance foreign policy objectives even in complex local contexts. For example, a development objective to increase girls' education may be considered a good long-term objective, but infeasible in the short-term due to the sensitivities in the local context and the need

*Patience is the key; even small incremental steps can build the path for positive change.*

## **LEGAL CHALLENGES**

One of the most significant challenges for USAID in engaging religious communities is the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In a 1991 decision, the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit concluded that the Establishment Clause (separation of church and state) was applicable to USAID grants under the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) program. As a result, USAID implements all of its programs overseas as if the Establishment Clause were applicable. This means that USAID will finance only activities and programs that have a secular purpose and which do not have the primary effect of advancing or inhibiting religion. Accordingly, USAID-financed activities and programs may not (i) result in government indoctrination of religion, (ii) define its recipients by reference to religion, or (iii) create an excessive entanglement with religion. USAID grantees and other recipients of funds must allocate assistance on the basis of neutral, secular criteria that neither favor nor disfavor religion, and such assistance must be made available to both religious and secular beneficiaries on a nondiscriminatory basis. USAID funds may not be used to finance inherently religious activities, such as worship, religious instruction, or proselytization. Thus, before development professionals "plunge into the thicket of Establishment Clause jurisprudence," as the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit stated in a non-USAID case, development planners in USAID should consult with their Regional Legal Advisor or with the Office of General Counsel in Washington to ensure that planning is consistent with applicable law.

***Cultural norms can color and infuse religion in each local context, greatly influencing religious values and practice. This is reflected in how religions are practiced or understood. For example, although many Indonesians, Albanians, and Egyptians are Muslim, their cultural norms and practices widely differ.***

to take the time to build trust in the community.

- Sensitivity to religion can be difficult for USAID staff working in the secular framework of the U.S. Government. This includes discomfort with the use of religious language, customs, and an overall lack of knowledge and experience. This can also be the case with Foreign Service national staff.
- Controversy related to the Establishment Clause and the complexities of Establishment Clause jurisprudence have scared some USAID staff away from programming attempts even if it meets legal requirements (See box on previous page).

## **ENGAGING RELIGION: A WAY FORWARD**

The programmatic and legal challenges to working with religious actors on conflict issues are many. Indeed, the additional sensitivities and legal requirements that such engagement requires has led some to question if development agencies are appropriate vehicles for dealing with the religious aspects of violent conflict.<sup>4</sup> However, the opportunities for engaging religion and religious leaders in support of conflict prevention and peacebuilding are also many, and in some cases, unique. This suggests a case-by-case approach that bases the decision about engagement on careful analysis and a sensitive and realistic weighing of the relative advantages and disadvantages of addressing the religious dimensions of conflict. Such a deliberation should include consideration of nine issues.

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<sup>4</sup> USAID is not the only development agency wrestling with these issues. The UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the Swiss Agency for Development, the United Nations, and the World Bank continue to struggle to articulate a clear understanding of the role of religion in development programming. Several studies sponsored by other donors are listed in the References section.

## **NATURE OF THE CONFLICT**

Conflict analysis using USAID's Conflict Assessment Framework, including careful attention to key actors, should be completed before program design and implementation. The analysis will be helpful to identify the extent to which religion plays a role in forming identities and the extent to which those identities influence perceptions of grievances and serve as a source of resilience. The analysis will also help clarify the role of religious actors in the conflict dynamic and determine the rewards—and risks—associated with working with them. A full conflict analysis will also provide the framework for addressing the other eight issues listed here.

## **2 CULTURE**

Cultural norms can color and infuse religion in each local context, greatly influencing religious values and practice. This is reflected in how religions are practiced or understood. For example, although many Indonesians, Albanians, and Egyptians are Muslim, their cultural norms and practices widely differ. In addition, special attention should be paid to general cultural norms and values outside of religion. For example, in some cultures, raising one's voice is a highly confrontational act, whereas in others, it is a normal part of everyday dialogue. USAID staff should strive to develop a foundational understanding of the culture or cultures in each given context.

## **3 GENDER**

Understanding local customs and traditions regarding gender roles and dynamics are critical to program design and implementation. In some contexts, programming targeting only women can be considered threatening.

An analysis of gender in each context will reduce the risk of designing programming that could be deemed too sensitive or create new conflict.<sup>5</sup>

## 4 NATURE OF HIERARCHY/STRUCTURE

In most contexts, religious leadership is hierarchical. As a result, lower ranking officials and sometimes the broader community will look to top leadership members to signal approval before engaging in programs. Steps should be taken to understand local hierarchal structures and to engage religious leaders at the beginning of the program design process.

## 5 GROUP DYNAMICS

Critical to any programming is an analysis of inter- and intra-group dynamics to uncover grievances, potential flashpoints for conflict, and opportunities for collaboration between groups through programming. Power dynamics between majority and minority groups can be exacerbated if careful analysis is not completed. Some programming efforts may engage both majority and minority groups while other programming options may be tailored to minority issues. Mixed group programming must be approached with caution to understand group motivations and strive to ensure majority groups will not use programming as an opportunity to dominate.

## 6 THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

Examining the role of religion in language will ensure program approaches understand specific terminology that could be perceived as suspicious or carrying an underlying agenda and utilize sensitive language.

<sup>5</sup> CMM's Women and Conflict Programming Guide can provide additional recommendations.

## 7 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

Do religious communities perceive the government as threatening through police harassment? Do religious leaders already partner with government entities on community projects? Do sanctioned religious bodies have a credibility gap in their communities? Understanding this dynamic relationship in each context is critical to successful program design and implementation. A distrusting relationship may provide a window of opportunity to bring parties to the table for dialogue to mend relationships, whereas a successful relationship may provide the government with a partner to improve social service delivery.

## 8 KEY HISTORICAL EVENTS

Key historical events can significantly shape identity, understanding of self and other, group dynamics, and remnants of tension between communities and government from previous conflicts. For this reason, USAID staff must be well-versed in and understand key historical events for each culture and context they develop conflict and peacebuilding programs.

## 9 CURRENT U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

What is the current position for U.S. foreign policy in the country and local context? Are there any prohibited groups or areas? Is the United States Government the best implementer for the proposed development objective? In some cases, it may be more appropriate for other donors, NGOs, and foundations to implement programming.

*Key historical events can significantly shape identity, understanding of self and other, group dynamics, and remnants of tension between communities and government from previous conflicts.*



# LESSONS LEARNED



PHOTO: THE INTER-RELIGIOUS COORDINATING COUNCIL

**The USAID-funded KEDEM project brought together Israeli Jewish, Arab Christian and Arab Muslim religious leaders to learn to work together. One lesson learned is that developing trust may take longer than a project's duration. A fuller description of the project, including additional lessons learned, may be found on pages 27-30 of this Toolkit.**

## UNDERSTAND THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS

Understanding must precede intervention in any setting where violent conflict is a risk or a reality. Part of that understanding must be a nuanced appreciation of the ways religion intersects conflict dynamics and the roles that religious actors play. Such understanding is important whether or not a decision is made to engage religion or religious actors directly. Religious teachings and practices can affect perceptions and responses to development programs ranging from health to education to economic growth to humanitarian assistance. Thus, in the interests of doing no harm, religion should become a routine consideration during country-level strategic planning in conflict settings and during particular program designs. USAID's revised Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF 2.0) provides guidance on how to analyze conflict situations in ways that give appropriate attention to religious actors.

## 2 ENGAGE ALL RELEVANT FAITH COMMUNITIES

Current USAID engagement of “religious actors” is overly narrow, focusing almost exclusively on members of the three Abrahamic faiths. USAID must widen its focus to consider religious traditions other than Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, otherwise, USAID programs will continue to overlook engagement with other religious groups serving as main stakeholders in conflict dynamics. The result is missed opportunities for conflict prevention, resolution, and peace-building.

## 3 GET BUY-IN FROM RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

Lower ranking religious leaders and community members frequently take their cue from higher ranking religious officials. Engagement with top religious leadership is critical to engagement at the local level. Without buy-in at this level, leaders at the local level may be reluctant to participate in the program even if they are interested and personally supportive of the program. As a result, organizing at the community level requires a great deal of groundwork and relationship building with senior leaders.

Building these relationships is especially important for programs seeking to empower women in religious contexts. Empowerment programs from a secular perspective and without the buy-in of religious leaders and male members of the community are often perceived as foreign, threatening, and carrying an underlying agenda. Successful gender programs in religious contexts will include buy-in from religious leadership, include male members of the community in the program, and avoid framing programs with language that could be perceived as imposing a foreign agenda. Buy-in from religious leaders is critical to

ensure lower ranking religious leaders and community members are given the green light to support the program. Additionally, excluding male members of the community by, for example, providing new livelihood skills for women in a post-conflict community may be perceived as threatening to male members of the community who are already struggling to find employment and support their families.

## 4 PAY ATTENTION TO INTRA- AND INTER-GROUP DYNAMICS

Neglecting intra- and inter-group dynamics can inflame and widen divisions. Intra- and inter-group dynamics can carry a history of power inequities when minority groups or issues of marginalization and discrimination are present. Every effort should be made to ensure programming provides equal footing for groups in contexts with a variety of religious groups. This should include, but is not limited to, printing publications and materials in all languages, incorporating all cultural traditions, and including participants from all groups present in the community.

## 5 FRAME PROGRAMS IN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

Framing programs in secular language in some cases can be perceived as threatening or carrying an underlying coercive agenda. Program designers should take their cue from the local community regarding how to frame programs in language that is careful to avoid terminology that is perceived negatively in local contexts. Programs should be framed in corresponding local language. Mirroring community language norms helps communities feel a sense of ownership and connection to program objectives and goals. Finally, gender programming should be framed in the respective context language to avoid being perceived as a foreign agenda.

*Buy-in from religious leaders is critical to ensure lower ranking religious leaders and community members are given the green light to support the program.*

*The legal and other challenges of programming with religious leaders and that address religious dimensions of conflict are significant, but can be overcome. There is room for creative and innovative programming.*

## 6 ALLOT TIME TO BUILD TRUST

Religious leaders may be reluctant or skeptical to get involved in USAID programming. Programming must be undertaken with extreme caution and attention to the sensitivities of the religious communities to mitigate feelings of suspicion and concern. This should include intensive efforts to establish confidence, trust, and build a partnership with religious actors. Efforts to build trust must begin from the outset and remain a top priority to ensure religious actors do not view the program as a covert attempt to interfere with religious institutions, communities, or beliefs. This could mean adopting a longer timeline before beginning programming that is USAID's customary practice.

## 7 EXPAND THE PROGRAMMING REPERTOIRE

At present, the range of programming that engages religion or religious actors directly is relatively limited. The legal and other challenges of programming with religious leaders and that address religious dimensions of conflict are significant, but can be overcome. There is room for creative and innovative programming. This Toolkit and other initiatives are intended to provide the analytical support and tools for designing effective programming that addresses the religious dimensions of conflict. CMM is also committed to providing a hub for gathering lessons and building good practice as work in this area expands. However, for that knowledge to develop and grow, monitoring and evaluation of religion and conflict programming must become more rigorous.

## 8 INVEST IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Much more analytical effort and rigor needs to be invested in monitoring and evaluating development program generally, but is particularly important for programming addressing religion and conflict because the current evidence base is thin and there are many who remain to be convinced that programming in this area can be effective.

Yet despite the need for rigor, most monitoring and evaluation methods in this area are rudimentary, relying almost exclusively on output measures (how many attended a reconciliation event), anecdotes and testimonials of results, and assertions of life-changing impacts. Improving the situation first requires a recognition that programming in these areas can—and must—be held to the same standards of monitoring and evaluation as any other development intervention. Second, it requires applying good monitoring and evaluation practice, including identification of one or more underlying theory of change, selection of the outcome indicators appropriate to that theory, and monitoring impact not only immediately after an event or a program, but several years after as well.<sup>6</sup> And third, it requires setting aside sufficient human and financial resources to support robust monitoring and evaluation.

## 9 ESTABLISH INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

A lack of foundational knowledge and expertise will continue to hinder USAID's ability to program effectively in religious environments. Programming to

<sup>6</sup> CMM has a number of resources available to support effective monitoring and evaluation of conflict programming, including the religious aspects. More information is available from CMM's Intranet site ([inside.usaid.gov/DCHA/CMM](http://inside.usaid.gov/DCHA/CMM)).



date remains non-strategic in many cases and often tends to extremes on two ends. On one end, USAID sometimes omits or ignores the importance of religion in a given context when implementing programs. This has resulted in serious risks to local staff and community members, and in some cases, to programs being shut down or exacerbating tensions because consultations with religious authorities and related considerations were not built into planning and implementation. On the other extreme,

some USAID programs stray into entanglement with religion that result in the appearance of programs favoring certain religious groups or in the propagation of theological positions. Including critical analysis and consultations with local partners and community members will ensure USAID programs are strategic and build religious considerations into programming where necessary, and exclude them when not necessary.



# PROGRAM OPTIONS



PHOTO USA/D/G MANGANSKAN

**Grade 1 students in Mindanao, Philippines with new book bags provided as part of a USAID-funded project to strengthen the curriculum at private Madaris (Muslim schools). The new curriculum includes math, science, and English along with Arabic and religious subjects.**

This section provides project briefs on four USAID-funded programs that explicitly engaged religious actors to address the religious dimensions of conflicts in Albania, Israel/West Bank, Kyrgyzstan, and Nigeria. They are drawn from among the small pool of such programs to provide a sense of what can be—and has—been done. As such these programs should be seen as a stepping stone to what could be done in other conflict settings. We hope to be able to draw on a wider and deeper pool of program options in future versions of this Toolkit.



### RelHarmony

Benefiting Country: Albania  
Time frame of USAID Involvement: June 2004-March 2007  
Key Considerations Built into Program Design: Stakeholder analysis, nature of hierarchy/structure, key historical events, group dynamics, and relationship between religion and government.  
Cost: \$900,000-\$950,000

*Project Summary page 19*



### Inter-Religious Dialogue and Action towards Peace in Israel/Palestine

Benefiting Country: Israel  
Time frame of USAID Involvement: September 2005-December 2006  
Key Considerations Built into Program Design: Stakeholder analysis, gender, nature of hierarchy/structure, group dynamics, and role of language  
Cost: \$300,000-\$325,000

*Project Summary page 27*



### Interfaith Mediation Centre/ Muslim Christian Dialogue Forum (IMC/MCDF)

Benefiting Country: Nigeria  
Time frame of USAID Involvement: 2000-2004  
Key Considerations Built into Program Design: Nature of hierarchy/structure, group dynamics, role of language, and relationship between religion and government.  
Cost: \$400,000-\$450,000  
Numerous grants were awarded over the 4-year period. Most of the awards for workshops and training were between \$25,000 and \$30,000. Retreats and follow-up events were approximately \$15,000. Media activities received higher awards, around \$60,000.

*Project Summary page 23*



### Legal Education Program in Madrasas

Benefiting Country: Kyrgyzstan  
Time frame of USAID Involvement: since January 2006  
Key Considerations Built into Program Design: Stakeholder analysis, nature of hierarchy/structure, culture, role of language, and the relationship between religion and government.  
Cost: \$150,000-\$200,000  
Budget numbers estimated and include the total cost of implementing Street Law activities in public school, as well as madrasas. This does not include the indirect costs of salaries for full-time ABA staff, etc., which would make the total cost higher.

*Project Summary page 16*



# KYRGYZSTAN: LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

## BACKGROUND

During the approximately 70 years of Soviet rule in Central Asia, religious practice was highly circumscribed, including religious education. There were only two Islamic religious educational institutions operating in the Soviet Union. Both of these institutions were in Uzbekistan. Only a small number of those interested were able to study in the institutions, traveling from around the entire USSR, including Kyrgyzstan, to study. Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has relaxed some controls over religious practice. Although the new constitution and laws provide freedom of religion in the country, government structures may restrict this right at times. Observant Muslim groups and individuals in particular are often targeted for extra scrutiny and occasionally suffer from harassment by authorities.

Increasing concerns over the spread of extremism have resulted in an increase in what observant Muslims feel are acts of discrimination. Muslim students are sometimes targeted and occasionally subject to detention. Individuals who have beards or wear religious attire are more often targeted by law enforcement for document checks and routine searches. During checks, police spend time searching for the literature of banned extremist organizations, such as Hizbut Tahrir. Unfortunately, law enforcement personnel sometimes



PHOTO: CHRIS KRAFCHAK/ABA RULE OF LAW NIT AT VE

**This Street Law class in Nookat, Kyrgyzstan, like others provided through the Legal Education Program, offers classes in madrasas on democratic practice and religious freedom.**

confiscate other religious materials and personal property because they are not literate in Arabic nor sufficiently trained to distinguish extremist literature from other literature.

During meetings with religious leaders, USAID was able to identify needs of the religious community that USAID programming could address. The basic needs identified were:

1. Lack of knowledge among members of religious communities of their rights.

This lack of knowledge made individuals feel as though the secular state did not protect those rights. Due to continued harassment, students needed to be educated about their basic rights to be able to respond appropriately.

2. Better integration of religious communities into secular society in order to prevent them from becoming marginalized and susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups.<sup>7</sup>

## OBJECTIVES

The Legal Education Program in Madrasas provides access to a broader education for madrasa students so as to:

1. Give them knowledge of their basic rights, and in doing so,

2. Better prepare them to more fully participate as citizens of a secular democracy, and

3. Lessen the likelihood students will be influenced by extremists, and

4. Promote the development of a broad-based rule of law culture that includes religious communities.

<sup>7</sup> Although Kyrgyzstan has a Muslim majority, observant Muslims only constitute a small percentage of the population and tend to form a subculture within society centered upon madrasas and mosques.

# KYRGYZSTAN: LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

In an effort to address the needs of religious communities in Kyrgyzstan, USAID encouraged the implementer of its Legal Education (aka Street Law) Program, American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA/ROLI), to begin pilot lessons in madrasas in the South of the country. The initial pilot classes began in January 2006 and were an expansion of ABA/ROLI's existing Street Law program in secular public schools in Kyrgyzstan established in 2001. Street Law program activities include operating Street Law Centers, training local law students to be volunteer Street Law instructors, developing curricula, and teaching lessons on various legal topics.

### STREET LAW CENTERS

The Street Law Program operates through four Street Law Centers in the Kyrgyz cities of Osh, Jalalabat, Bishkek, and Karakol. The Centers were established initially to support work in public schools in these areas and have been expanded to also include work in religious educational institutions. Specifically for the work in madrasas, centers adapted the curriculum, recruited and trained trainers

interested in conducting lessons in the madrasas, conducted meetings with teachers and religious leaders, monitored progress of the program, and handled logistics. Local law students are chosen through a competitive process consisting of three stages: selection of the application forms, short presentations, and interviews.

Students are recruited from local universities and trained to conduct lessons in madrasas on religious rights and pluralist democracy and law, social norms, constitutional law, criminal law and gender rights. The majority of trainers in the program are law students, although some are students in other disciplines, particularly in Jalalabat which does not have a law faculty. In total, there were 64 trainers, with teams of two students each working in two schools during the 2006-2007 academic year. In most cases, trainers working in the madrasas also taught classes in public schools. The curriculum used in the madrasas was developed through a collaborative relationship with Street Law staff, imams, and madrasa teachers.

### IN THE SCHOOLS

Street Law courses are being taught to male and female students in Islamic institutes and madrasas, most of whom are between the ages of 15-18, although there are adult and some younger students as well. Full-time madrasa instruction is open to any student who has completed the compulsory nine years of basic education. Islamic Institutes in Kyrgyzstan serve students who have completed their secondary, as well as basic education. To date, the program has trained 126 students (90 male and 36 female). The program continues to grow and in February 2007 was given permission from religious leaders to begin teaching in additional madrasas. The program also began working in an Islamic NGO that provides Qur'anic instruction for adults.

Male and female students are taught separately following the prevalent custom of gender segregation implemented in Central Asian madrasas. Students work together in groups and actively participate in conversations, role play and other interactive activities about the topic at hand.

## MONITORING & EVALUATION

Street Law and USAID staff visit the madrasas on a regular basis to track attitude changes in students and monitor the quality of courses being taught. Staff continue to receive positive feedback from students who say the new subjects have given them the confidence they need to participate effectively in secular society and their communities. In addition, one participant mentioned they were no longer afraid of law enforcement officers or wearing their hijab in public. Some of the young men have said that they have asserted themselves when confronted by police and did not allow themselves to be harassed.

Regular meetings between religious leaders and USAID/Street Law staff help keep both sides in constant communication with each other. Based on meeting feedback, Street Law staff can make adjustments to the courses

and get a better understanding of the religious leaders' satisfaction with the courses. Findings from religious leaders, students, and trainers are gathered and used to continually fine tune the program.



# KYRGYZSTAN: LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

## LESSONS LEARNED

Through monitoring and evaluation activities, several lessons were learned:

1. Law student trainers who are not observant Muslims needed further education on the history of Islam and an overview of Islamic law and theology to engage effectively with students. It is extremely important that trainers are given a firm grounding in basic religious concepts they will encounter in order to understand the full context of students' questions and to be aware of their religious sensibilities. As a result, USAID and ABA/ROLI worked to develop a training course to provide background knowledge on Islam and issues that might arise during the course of their teaching. Courses were taught by Theological Faculty instructors from Osh State University.

2. Lessons must be developed with cultural and religious sensitivities in mind. This is essential for courses to be effective. Some of the more sensitive topics might not be appropriate under the mores of a madrasa. For example, classes on gender equality within the family were felt to be too sensitive and have not been included to date. However, the foundation for that topic can be laid out early on in classes. In addition, USAID decided to move courses on democracy and governance later in the curricula to allow more time to develop trust and

credibility with teachers and students. USAID continues to work to adjust the curriculum based on input from local religious leaders and course participants.

3. In addition to basic background knowledge on Islam, trainers need to be prepared for the environment and experience of working in a madrasa. As mentioned earlier, many trainers work as teachers in the secular and madrasa program where both experiences require different sensitivities. It was also recommended that trainers be careful with their word choice, be aware of their behavior and attire, and be sensitive to the vulnerability madrasa students feel under current conditions. The Street Law program is working to develop further training to prepare law students for what to expect during

their experience. USAID hopes the additional training will lead to a more relaxed and productive teaching environment.

4. Rights and civics education as it is provided in Street Law-like courses can also serve to cause increased frustration among program beneficiaries rather than reduce it if there are not outlets through which they can learn more about how to exercise those rights. Therefore, the next phase of the program will seek to ensure that madrasa students and instructors have access to legal information on specific issues that individuals face through increased access to legal resource centers and legal information, including referral to pro bono or paid legal representation if necessary.



PHOTO: ABA/RULE OF LAW N'T AT VE

**Understanding local gender sensitivities was key to the success of the Legal Education Program in reaching both male and female madrasa students.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The support of official religious leadership structures and government is also essential. Without at least implicit approval, the program would not have been able to move forward. Maintaining transparency in the program by informing the religious leadership and relevant government bodies of where the program was implemented and inviting them to provide input and assist in monitoring the program helped

alleviate suspicions and misinformation about the program. Efforts should be made during the beginning stages of the program to inform and, if necessary, gain formal approval. However, after the program begins, efforts to maintain these relationships cannot end. If the support of either religious leadership or the government is lost, it could be detrimental to the program and potentially halt further trainings.

2. Any program of this type should be built upon a broad-based approach to promoting legal literacy in the secular sphere, including in public schools. One reason USAID and ABA/ROLI were able to overcome suspicions about the program and begin working in the madrasas was the proven track record of the Legal Education Program since its inception in public schools beginning in 2001.



# ALBANIA: RELHARMONY PROJECT

## BACKGROUND

Until 1990, Albania was under Communist rule and suffered political oppression and international isolation. In 1967, Albania became the first atheist nation in the world and prohibited the practice of religion. The government imprisoned clergy, confiscated properties belonging to religious groups, and supposedly religious education and information were suppressed. After the fall of the Communist regime, religious institutions began to revive. With prior religious infrastructure completely destroyed, religious institutions abroad began building religious centers and training clergy in Albania.

Although Albania has not experienced religious conflict, concerns about the possibility of a conflict are growing. In June 2003 an informal survey of 2,110 people in 14 Albanian cities hinted that extremist religious views were growing in the country. Concerns over entry into the European Union and the possibility of destabilization in the Balkans led USAID to develop RelHarmony. The program was established in anticipation of increasing



PHOTO USAID/ALBANIA

**Religious leaders from Albania's four traditional religious communities meet at the South Eastern European Interfaith Conference held in Tirana, Albania in 2005. As a result of the conference, in May 2006, the leaders agreed to formally establish the National Inter-Religious Council, a key and lasting mechanism for fostering religious harmony in the country and for advocating on behalf of religious communities.**

tensions and includes trainings for religious leaders and journalists, establishing interfaith organizations, and organizing conferences.

## OBJECTIVES

The following objectives guide this program:

1. Providing the leadership of religious communities with the skills, tools, and capabilities they need to work together with other groups towards common goals;
2. Providing the leadership of religious communities with the skills, tools, and capabilities required to improve

dialogue within their community in order to reduce marginalization, factionalism, and radicalization;

3. Providing leaders of thought and media with increased ability to address extremist and intolerant views and become forces to combat them;

4. Giving all parties a clearer understanding of the causes and potential areas of intolerance;

5. Identifying and testing approaches and techniques that help the different faith communities to work towards solving common problems.

# ALBANIA: RELHARMONY PROJECT

## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

RelHarmony has focused on three main activity areas: training and exchange, small grant program, and media and dialogue related activities.

### TRAINING AND EXCHANGE ACTIVITIES

More than 14 different training and exchange activities have occurred over the 2½ years of the program. Most activities focused on equipping religious leaders and institutions with the skills they need to be serious stakeholders in interfaith activities. Leaders participated in leadership, community development, and conflict resolution training. Activities also included a youth interfaith summer camp and interfaith local youth meetings as well as an initial baseline survey examining attitudes towards other faiths in target areas. A final survey was conducted at the conclusion of the program. The survey measured the impact of RelHarmony programs, and change in views towards religious diversity, harmony, and pluralism. Some unique activities included:

#### *International Summer School on Religion and Public Life*

RelHarmony arranged for three Albanian activists in 2005 to attend the international, inter-religious summer school for two weeks. The focus was on inter-religious dialogue. The lessons learned there led to the creation of the National Interfaith Committee and an initial strategic plan for the Committee.

#### *The First Interfaith Youth Summer Camps*

Over 200 youth and religious leaders participated in summer camps in 2005-2006. Youth were selected by religious leaders in target cities. They participated in discussions and workshops on topics including conflict resolution, cooperation, and Albania's religious history. They also visited the religious sites of various faiths and participated in the religious observances of each

religion. There were many opportunities for informal sharing and learning about other faiths. One small group activity enabled youth to develop substantive project proposals to submit to a community project competition. The winning proposal received a small grant and implementation support from RelHarmony.

#### *South Eastern European Interfaith Conference*

RelHarmony assisted the World Conference of Religions for Peace to organize a three-day conference in Albania to bring together 50 senior religious leaders and representatives including participants from neighboring countries Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo to strengthen the role of religious communities in building peace and stability in the region. After the conference the Albanian leaders established a National Inter-religious Council (NIC) to foster religious harmony in the country and advocate on behalf of religious communities.

#### *Symposium on "Harmony and Interfaith Dialogue"*

In February 2007, the newly formed National Inter-Religious

Council organized a symposium entitled "Harmony and Inter-faith Dialogue." Four papers presented by representatives of the four main religious groups expounded theological approaches to religious harmony. Two hundred participants including top religious leaders, clerics from throughout the country, government representatives, foreign diplomats, and USAID representatives attended.

#### *Engaging Children through Art*

In the summer of 2006 RelHarmony partnered with a group of artists and educators to organize a Children's Drawing Contest. The organizers selected 40 children from various schools in Tirana based on their artistic talent. The organizers then led small group brainstorming sessions with the children to introduce the theme of religious harmony and to inspire the children's ideas and creativity. The compositions were then used to mount an art exhibit. A number of the images were selected from the exhibit for inclusion in a 2007 interfaith calendar that was widely distributed in Albania and overseas.



PHOTO USA D/ALBANIA

**A discussion session during an interfaith youth summer camp sponsored by the RelHarmony project. Over 200 youth from across Albania were exposed to conflict resolution skills and Albania's religious history.**

# ALBANIA: RELHARMONY PROJECT

## SMALL GRANT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

RelHarmony small grant program activities gave religious leaders and communities the opportunity to shape and lead interfaith objectives. Activities ranged from establishing interfaith women and cooperation centers to supporting an Interfaith Harmony Week and Solidarity Concert to raise public awareness on harmony, pluralism, equal rights, and justice. Small grant activities were developed from proposals of leaders and citizens applying for grants. Some of the most innovative activities included:

### *Interfaith Women and Cooperation Centers*

These centers were overseen by the interfaith project supervisory committees and provided a combination of practical skills training and discussion/awareness raising about interfaith issues aimed at creating a forum for relationships between members of diverse faith communities.

### *Interfaith Youth Program "Harmony"*

The winning youth proposal from the interfaith summer camp was developed into a youth program aimed at strengthening civic education, inter-religious cooperation, and interfaith joint initiatives among youth. The activities included an information center and offices, skills training, peer group discussions, a presentation series, and cultural activities.

### *Property Restitution Issues for Religious Communities in Workshop*

Thirty-nine representatives from religious communities and government officials participated in a workshop on property restitution issues. During the Communist rule, property owned by religious groups was seized. The workshop served to provide an opportunity for discussion, raise awareness, and resulted in proposals for future common action.

### *Drafting Agreements between the State and Religious Communities*

In Albania, no laws regulate the relationship between religious communities and the state. Instead, the constitution calls for the establishment of agreements to define state-religious relations. The State Committee on Cults (a government established group) received a grant to form an Inter-Ministerial Working Group to draft three separate agreements that faith communities signed as well as a template agreement that the state can sign with interested religious communities. The agreements will regulate the relationship between religious communities and the state in the fields of culture, education, property, taxes, customs, religious matters, and other key issues. Agreements have been approved by the Government of Albania and are awaiting formal approval through Parliament.

## MEDIA AND DIALOGUE-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Media and dialogue related activities focused on training journalists and using the media as an outlet for religious leaders to spread the message of religious harmony. Through public and media outreach, RelHarmony sought to increase general understanding of religion and Albania's tradition of religious pluralism. Leaders participated in a televised discussion with the State and intellectuals, as well as a roundtable on media coverage with journalists and professors. Activities included some non-traditional programs such as a student essay contest, children's drawing contest, and a documentary on religious harmony in Albania. In addition, one activity in particular from the media portfolio enabled USAID staff to keep up-to-date on important institutions and issues:

### *Developing Databases and Media Coverage Reports*

Staff developed several databases to use during the project including: a database of religious institutions and leaders in Albania; a database of governmental and non-governmental international and local institutions that deal with religious affairs and conflict prevention; a database of experts, researchers, and trainers of potential interest to the project; a database of local and international media institutions that work in Albania; and a bibliography of Albanian and international literature on religious affairs. The media database was used to produce media coverage reports which monitored media coverage of religious affairs and kept all RelHarmony staff informed on major developments on religious affairs in Albania.



# ALBANIA: RELHARMONY PROJECT

## MONITORING & EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation for this project took place through several mechanisms. For training programs, participants were interviewed and filled out surveys to provide RelHarmony with feedback on the activities. Staff evaluated the following levels of event and activity impact for participants: whether participants found the training enjoyable and relevant; what participants learned from the training; what skills, knowledge, and attitudes they used in their work; and

whether there were any changes in the organizations or services they provide. Events were evaluated based on acceptance and included roundtables, dramatic presentations, and documentaries evaluated based on acceptance. RelHarmony staff monitored the amount of questions people in the audience posed. Based on these observations, they decided the level of interest in the event taking place.

Surveys were used to evaluate the overall success of the project. A baseline survey and a follow-on survey to develop program goals and objectives was administered in eight target districts at the beginning and at the end of the project to measure impact of the activity. The surveys evaluated religious attitudes and feelings and involved open interviews with religious leaders/ practitioners.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. Developing conflict programming in a country without conflict can create skepticism. RelHarmony was the first project of its kind in Albania. When first presented, many people did not understand the need for the program since there was no conflict or visible signs of a possible conflict. They raised concerns that implementing a project like this could draw attention to the possibility of conflict and thought it would be better to leave the situation alone. Similar programs should be ready

to address critics and provide results on attitudinal and conscious shifts.

2. Religious leaders lacked experience with community development programs and/or NGO governance structures and management. Specifically leaders lacked knowledge and skills on how to best allocate funds, as well as how to enlarge pool beneficiaries. Capacity building efforts can provide these leaders with essential skills.

3. Some religious leaders were reluctant to participate in activities

with other religions or denominations. RelHarmony staff felt that some groups feared accepting other religions within traditional borders might make them lose their own values.

4. Sensitivity is vital for media reporting on religious events and issues. In one instance, a publication printed wrong results from the baseline survey, insulting a religious community. Intensive efforts were needed to rebuild trust with the community and get them involved again in RelHarmony's activities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Religious leaders should be consulted from the beginning of a project's development. They are vital players in the process and should have a strong say in creating program goals, objectives, and activities.

2. The media must exercise extreme sensitivity and caution when it comes to religious issues. One wrong article or lack of attention to sensitivity can spark conflict. At the same time, media activities provide a great opportunity to promote public discussion and media coverage that helps establish religious toleration and moderation. As a result, USAID program efforts should focus

on raising the awareness of the local media to the need for heightened sensitivity in conflict environments.

3. The relationship between projects like RelHarmony and religious leaders is political in nature. Religious leaders carry their own influence over specific communities and could flex their power to remind everyone who is in control if they feel threatened. A media reporting mishap sent one religious leader calling the U.S. embassy to remind them of his authority to decide when and where the project can work in his community.

4. In a new program, with not much experience to draw on, the program must proceed as a learn-as-you-go process. The program should be monitored and evaluated along the way with players and adjustments to program outlook should be made as needed. This approach requires flexible funding mechanism to adjust to changing dynamics.

5. Constant efforts are needed to build strong relationships with religious leaders and activists in the communities. Establishing trust with these major players is essential for the success of religion and conflict programs.



# NIGERIA: INTERFAITH MEDIATION CENTRE/MUSLIM CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE FORUM

## BACKGROUND

Competition among Nigeria's regions and ethno-religious groups for resources and political power has historically been fierce. In the predominantly Muslim north, the influence of extremist elements is of growing concern in some states. Additionally, poverty is deeply entrenched in the rural north and is attended by disproportionately high rates of child mortality, illiteracy and other social ills, the product of years of poor social services. Resource conflicts in the north, sometimes exacerbated by ethnic and religious tensions, have precipitated episodes of violence in which thousands of people have lost their lives. Youth unemployment is a major problem and ethnic/religious conflicts are on the rise, particularly in Kano and in Sokoto where Shia and Sunni in-fighting has increased violence in their states. Currently one-third of Nigeria's 36 states are ruled by Sharia law.

Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa, known as the Pastor and Imam of Kaduna, established the Interfaith Dialog Committee in 1995. The Pastor and Imam are products of the religious violence that



**Imam Muhammad Ashafa (left) and Pastor James Wuye jointly lead the Interfaith Mediation Center in Kaduna, Nigeria. Their work, partially supported by USAID, to promote dialog and reconciliation across faith communities is one example of how religion—and religious leaders—can be a positive force for peace**

made Kaduna notorious a decade ago. As active perpetrators of violence, the two met by chance at a government function in 1995, made peace and have since been working together facilitating interfaith dialogue and

encouraging co-existence. In 2000, USAID/OTI provided funding to the Interfaith Mediation Center and since 2002, USAID/Nigeria has supported the work of the Pastor and Imam in Kaduna, Kano, Taraba, and Plateau states.

## OBJECTIVES

USAID supports the efforts of the IMC/MCDF and the Kaduna Peace

Committee to: Address violence caused by communal, ethnic, religious,

or resource issues, all of which pose a major threat to stability in Nigeria.

## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

To address violence and obstacles to peace, IMC/MCDF works through youth and women's groups, inter-faith religious leaders, leaders of ethnic communities, traditional rulers, senior state officials, student union leaders, and members of the Sharia Implementation Committee. The groups/organizations

have received conflict management skills, including alternative dispute resolution. This multi-track approach builds conflict mediation organizations; creates networks between target groups that encourage peace on both sides; helps with media advocacy; and designs conflict resolution programs,

such as students' leadership training and trauma healing for women and youth. Programs are designed to meet the needs of target communities.

Since 2000, USAID has provided small grants to the IMC/MCDF to support the following activities:

PHOTO: INTERFAITH MEDIATION CENTER/NIGERIA

# NIGERIA: INTERFAITH MEDIATION CENTRE/MUSLIM CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE FORUM

## TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Training proved to be a good tool to de-escalate conflict, by exposing perpetrators to conflict mediation and peacebuilding perspectives. Training programs also helped channel youth energies towards practices that can promote democracy and complement government initiatives. Such programs provide the opportunity to understand conflict progression and consequences/dynamics of violent inter-ethnic, religious, and communal conflicts. In addition, workshops increased youth awareness of conflict management strategies.

Participants included major government and religious stakeholders, as well as parties of the conflict (i.e., violent religious groups). During the workshops, participants discussed types and causes of conflict; the escalation and de-escalation of conflict; conflict handling styles; communication and listening skills; forgiveness and reconciliation; understanding peace advocacy, lobbying, and networking; and strategic planning. Simulation exercises and role playing helped to solidify training in the minds of the participants.

To reduce the risk of increased tensions between conflict parties, an initial training for each group was conducted before groups participated in joint-trainings. Trainings resulted in overarching inter-faith communities between participants from conflict parties, and the establishment of youth inter-faith committees. Both committees served as platforms to support coexistence and peace through religious texts.

## PEACEBUILDING ACTIVITIES

*The Kaduna Peace Summit and Peace Award*

IMC/MCDF was given a grant to sponsor the Kaduna Peace Summit and Peace Awards in Kaduna to show case and consolidate the work of peace

makers. The summit acknowledged both the efforts of Christian and Muslim citizens promoting peace and harmonized the views and opinions of different stakeholder groups. One peace award recipient was Christian Youth Leader Sunday Oibe. Mr. Oibe, a Christian, who prevented a mob from killing an innocent Muslim man after he received training from IMC/MCDF.

*Retreat for Members of the Peace Declaration Committee*

The Kaduna Peace Summit and Peace Award laid the foundation for negotiating the Kaduna Peace Declaration (KPD), signed on August 22, 2002. In January 2003, USAID and IMC/MCDF sponsored a Retreat for the Peace Declaration Committee to develop strategies and activities for the implementation of the Kaduna Peace Declaration (KPD). A retreat was necessary for the Kaduna Peace

Committee (KPC) to gain further training to outline strategies for implementing resolutions, particularly as violence continued. KPC also hoped to expand their network to all three senatorial zones in Kaduna State, targeting peace and security stakeholders selected among local government officials, and religious, traditional, and youth leaders. KPC and IMC/MCDF also felt it was necessary to establish a core community Early Warning Structure to monitor, alert, and intervene in potential conflict situations.

In the retreat, leaders proposed workshops to help targeted stakeholders acquire peacebuilding and conflict prevention skills. To ensure success, the workshops targeted Nigerians who were respected by religious and traditional leaders. They also helped to disseminate the KPD to



PHOTO: INTERFAITH MEDIATION CENTER/NIGERIA

**Townhall Meeting at the local government chambers in Jos-north. Religious leaders along with government officials and local community members participated in the discussion on “Building Bridges Across Segregated communities.”**

# NIGERIA: INTERFAITH MEDIATION CENTRE/MUSLIM CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE FORUM

the grassroots' communities; replicating the KPC in all local councils of Kaduna State; and developing a plan for monitoring and preventing conflict in Kaduna State.

## MEDIA ACTIVITIES

*Inter-Faith Media Advocacy in Kaduna*  
As part of the follow-up to the Kaduna Peace Declaration retreat, IMC/MCDF sponsored media outreach to popularize the Peace Declaration. Radio jingles (public service announcements) and call-in programs ran for six weeks. These helped to continue the momentum created by the Peace Declaration and the retreat while other workshops were planned.

*Planning Workshop on Preventing Violence during Ramadan in Kaduna and Kano*  
As Ramadan and Christmas approached, there were renewed threats of violence in cities of the northwestern part of Nigeria. A three-day reflection on potential conflicts and planning workshop was sponsored by IMC/MCDF bringing together the KPC and the Kano Inter-ethnic Forum to develop activities that could contain the situation. The group decided on a two-week inter-faith live television advocacy program. The television advocacy program, broadcast in both English and Hausa, featured selected members of the Kaduna Peace Committee, as well as the Kano Inter-Ethnic Forum, who

responded to questions related to conflict and the peace process during the Ramadan Fast. This project helped make the Kaduna Peace Declaration available to a wider section of the population of Kaduna State and allowed the Kaduna Peace Committee to reach out to both Christian and Muslim communities to identify potential conflicts during the holiday season. It also served to reinforce the message of peaceful coexistence and tolerance in Kaduna and Kano states. Twelve television jingles were also produced and broadcast six times weekly for two weeks.

## MONITORING & EVALUATION

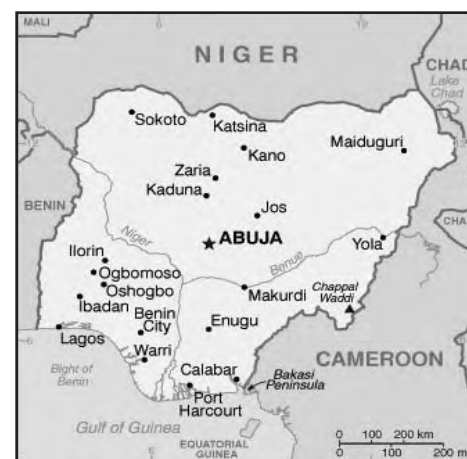
USAID conducted several participant surveys at the completion of these training workshops. Specifically during the Kano workshops, USAID completed a monitoring report, detailing the activities and outcomes of the grant. For the media outreach radio program, an external evaluation was conducted by an independent consultant to assess longer term impact of the program.

USAID utilized the SWIFT I Small Grants strategy, which was designed to address conflict quickly and appropriately. This tool was used by partners to train NGOs and others to increase their capacity to mitigate and manage conflicts. It also helped

partners, (i.e., IMC/MCDF) to learn to develop proposals, write reports, and create new grant agreement solicitations. The strategy promoted strong accountability, and was flexible enough to allow USAID, through IMC/MCDF, to respond quickly to conflict emergencies or windows of opportunity.

USAID continues to support IMC/MCDF and plans to provide a direct capacity building grant to IMC/MCDF to help increase its capacity to receive direct grants from USAID. USAID will help IMC/MCDF put systems in place, including a financial system compatible to USAID's. The proposed assistance

will also help IMC/MCDF become sustainable, an immediate issue that needs to be addressed.



## LESSONS LEARNED

1. *Local established partners are invaluable.* IMC/MCDF was attractive to USAID because it is a local organization already engaged in conflict resolution programming and had a good understanding of local nuances and dynamics, including ethnic tensions and local interpretations of Christianity and Islam. Without a local link, one

might inadvertently misunderstand the situation and increase tensions through poor programming. For example, issues of gender and equity had to be taken into consideration when training participants were selected. All members of the Sharia Implementation Committee, the Sharia Court Judges, and Sheiks are male; no female took

part in the training. This was due to both the religious and cultural context of Nigeria. IMC/MCDF's knowledge and sensitivity to local conditions was crucial to the program's success.

# NIGERIA: INTERFAITH MEDIATION CENTRE/MUSLIM CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE FORUM

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2. *Multi-pronged approaches within programs are more likely to reach all conflict parties and conflict-affected communities.* IMC/MCDF has used media campaigns and training workshops to accomplish their goals while engaged with both sides through a culturally-sensitive approach, utilizing the traditions of conflict-affected communities.

3. *In conflict areas, interventions facilitated away from the area of conflict can increase chances for success.* The Kaduna and Plateau groups were taken away from their communities to Lokoja to work on their peace plans. This isolation kept them focused on the work at hand, and allowed them a

place to reflect, encouraged interaction, decreased the risk for community pressure, and promoted emotional healing.

4. *Dividing the programs into stages can allow for communication, feedback, and evaluation in conflict settings.* Stages can be particularly helpful when in active conflict environments where suspicion and tension is common to ensure the 'do no harm' rule is upheld and programs are sensitive to change. A stage-based intervention allows interveners to create an enabling environment safe enough for conflict parties – be they direct or shadow parties – to fully unveil grievances and concerns. One way to do this is through the small grant strategy, which

was utilized in Nigeria. In Jos, initial negative responses were overcome by stages, which spread the difficulties out rather than allowing groups to destroy one activity. Additionally, when the situation deteriorated after the Miss World beauty pageant sparked Muslim protests, USAID was able to develop and implement programs that could continue the peace process within Nigeria. Developing further programs was possible because USAID had not committed to programs too far in advance and had money in hand for episodic conflicts.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A nexus built between government and relevant civil society actors is necessary for success in sensitive environments. This connection can enhance the quality of activities and demonstrate government support for the peace process to participants. In Nigeria, IMC/MCDF worked with state government officials to choose participants. By gaining the support of the government, IMC/MCDF was able to target participants who could best contribute to the peace process.

2. Capacity-building for youth networks is an important tool in environments where youth are direct perpetrators of violence. Networks can help reduce violence by engaging youth and giving them a sense of ownership during the peace process. They can also help to reduce violence if given the opportunity and can serve as a check and balance on government by raising their ability to influence policy and government programs.

3. Conflict programming should engage grassroots participation to reduce conflicts in target communities who have a stake in bringing lasting peace. This can ensure local buy-in and a sense of ownership, essential to building peace organically, and building a bridge to regional and national diplomatic efforts.



# ISRAEL/PALESTINE: INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND ACTION TOWARDS PEACE

## BACKGROUND

“KEDEM:Voices for Religious Reconciliation” was a systematic and substantive effort to bring Israeli Jewish, Arab Christian, and Arab Muslim local leaders together over an extended period of time to get to know one another and to learn to work together. Participants included Islamic judges (Qadis) and hard-line Rabbis, none of whom have traditionally been part of the peace movement in Israel.

The program, which started in 2003, was implemented in two major phases. The first two years were used to build trust through dialogue between religious leaders from the three faiths. USAID funded the third year of the program, which moved the program from dialogue to action. During this second phase, members of KEDEM continued to engage in dialogue/ encounter/study days and focused on carrying out the grassroots peace-building activities planned earlier in the program. KEDEM leaders upon their own initiative began to develop and disseminate conciliatory interpretations of inflammatory religious texts, provide opportunities for intimate dialogue to learn about the “other,” work with media outlets to influence Israeli society, and work to mitigate and prevent violent conflict.



PHOTO: INTER-RELIGIOUS COORDINATING COUNCIL

**Two of the founding members of the KEDEM project, Rabbi David Stav (left) and Sheikh Kamal Riyan.**

It should be noted that in mid-2006, KEDEM project organizers, the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), and the Inter-religious Coordinating Council (ICCI) in Israel, requested an extension of the original end-date from the end of September, 2006 to the end of December, 2006. They stated that the program had not been able to fulfill its goals during

the original time period due to logistical and security concerns. These concerns are discussed in greater detail in the “Lessons Learned” and “Recommendations” sections.

## OBJECTIVES

Program objectives for KEDEM are:

1. To bring grassroots religious leaders together from Israeli Jewish and Arab communities to meet one another, learn about each other’s religions and enter into dialogue on core issues of the conflict.

2. To create a ripple effect whereby religious leaders mobilize people in their communities to participate in peace-building activities.

3. To demonstrate that religions and religious leaders can be positive forces for peace and reconciliation rather than inciting violence and terror.

4. To show that dialogue alone is insufficient without concrete programs that affect individual and community consciousness, and to create a new atmosphere for the possibilities of peaceful coexistence.

The overall goal of the program is to catalyze its participants to develop new ways in which religious leaders on the local level can become voices for peace and reconciliation.

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## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

USAID funded two key components in KEDEM's third year:

### DIALOGUE/ENCOUNTER/STUDY DAYS

Dialogue/encounter/study days were organized with Israeli Jewish and Arab religious leaders. These bi-monthly meetings focused on personal interactions, study of religious texts, discussions on core issues of the conflict, and reflections about personal and group action projects. Three core groups were developed over the five years of the project. The first core group of seven Israeli rabbis and seven Arab Muslim and Christian leaders began meeting in 2003.

### COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECTS

During the third year, the first core group engaged less frequently in dialogue sessions and engaged more heavily in carrying out the following action projects that they designed during the first phase. These action projects promote a culture of moderation, pluralism, and mutual understanding.

#### *The KEDEM Institute for Learning and Reconciliation*

Core Group I created the Institute for Learning and Reconciliation to research and prepare educational materials to counter inflammatory

Jewish and Muslim texts that concern "the Other." Arab partners identified a researcher to develop materials for use by Arabs in Israel. The Jewish researcher conducted research and prepared sample curricular materials for use in selected Jewish high schools.

*Family Encounters/KEDEM Women*  
Family Encounters and groups of women were engaged to spread the message of KEDEM beyond its immediate participants. One event held at a kibbutz brought KEDEM families together. In addition, a new group of women composed of 14 Jewish and 14 Arab (Muslim and Christian) women who were wives, daughters, or friends of wives and daughters of the religious leaders was established to create space for women to join the effort. The group met ten times. One emotional meeting, which was dedicated to the personal experiences of the women and their families during the recent war, inspired the group to develop action projects. Another KEDEM women's group called "Women as Catalysts for Peace" was formed and met in dialogue sessions during September 2006 through December 2006. Composed of Jewish and Arab women from West and East Jerusalem, this group worked to develop a plan for sharing Jerusalem.

*Educating About the "Other"*  
Two members of KEDEM who live

in the Galilee region helped create a teachers' manual to help both sides of the conflict learn more about each other's religious/national narrative. The manual highlights events in Biram, where Christian Arab villagers were uprooted in 1952, and Gush Etzion, where Jews were massacred in 1948. Exposure to the manual will help both Jews and Arabs living in Israel understand that both sides have encountered suffering.

*Educating About the "Other"- Lecture Series and Teacher Training Courses*  
After developing the curriculum, KEDEM members took steps to speak at high schools and teach courses for both Jewish and Muslim teachers. A full-year course was taught at a teacher-training college in the Religious Zionist sector of Israeli Teacher Training Colleges, covering Jewish texts on "Relating to the Other" and relations between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in Israel. A course for college faculty titled "Dialogue and Tolerance in the Culture of Islam" was taught for two months at a college in an Israeli Arab town.

#### *Media Outreach*

With the help of media consultants, KEDEM members established a media response team. The team was trained in media skills and prepared/issued press releases, interviews, and op-eds on issues that arose during 2006.

## MONITORING & EVALUATION

A two-day workshop provided KEDEM staff with evaluation tools. Staff interviewed KEDEM members about their experiences and hopes for the future, in order to understand KEDEM's impact on participants and inform future planning. Despite coming to the program with stereotypes and prejudices held about their counterparts, KEDEM participants have

experienced substantial changes in the way they understand each other both at the cognitive and emotional levels. A participating Qadi reported that it had taken approximately two years to build a level of trust strong enough to begin dialogue with the hard-line rabbis, but that now they are able to pick up the phone and call one another when a significant conflict event occurs.

This personal transformation is also evidenced by the continued level of participation among KEDEM members; core groups I and II stayed involved throughout the year.

Success for the third year of the project was determined by mainly achievements in the area of education, joint statements published in the

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Israeli media (but not in Arab media sources), and in the small number of limited community projects. These community action projects built upon KEDEM members' personal transformations and aimed to foster a broader, communal transformation. Unfortunately, while rabbis reported

spreading the program's influence both into the formal and informal realms, Arab participants did not cite having had any formal influence on their communities. Arab participants, however, did report on spreading KEDEM's message within their close personal circles of relationships,

driven by the curiosity of friends and relatives. These action projects have also strengthened the capacity of local Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders to engage cooperatively in reconciliation and peace-promoting activities.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. *KEDEM-like programs should anticipate and build in time to account for the impact of potential different cultural political environments and circumstances in conflict environments.* External events can delay or even threaten to end programs. The conflict in northern Israel and southern Lebanon during the summer of 2006 produced physical and psychological damage that affected KEDEM. Participants on both sides felt that the war set back KEDEM's progress. In particular, the Jewish side was very upset about expressions of Israeli Arab support for Hezbollah over the summer, which led some rabbis to question the whole purpose of KEDEM. Much of September and October 2006 was devoted to rebuilding relationships and planning, instead of continuing action projects. Likewise, the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in late summer 2005 negatively impacted KEDEM's progress.

2. *Religious actors may be the best stakeholders to engage in highly sensitive and religious contexts.* For example, KEDEM program staff pushed to implement a joint social action youth project in the socio-economically disadvantaged city of Lod. However, the Lod project did not move beyond the planning process, due to the lack of KEDEM member commitment to this project versus the other educational projects with heavy involvement of religious actors. Programs like KEDEM

in highly religious contexts should only push social action projects if there is demonstrated local interest in them and support from religious leadership.

3. *Extending the message of reconciliation beyond firsthand participants in KEDEM-like programs is not an easy task.* A planned field trip that was supposed to bring the Jewish students enrolled in the "Relating to the Other" teacher-training course to meet with Arab students at the Al Hiwar Dialogue College was cancelled at the last minute. While the project's primary leaders have bought into the message of KEDEM, changing community consciousness is a slower process.

4. *Groups on either side of the divide may not be able to work at the same pace.* Due to asymmetries in power, support structures and other mitigating circumstances, some projects were slower in getting started and progressing on the Arab side. Program staff should anticipate such asymmetries and factor in some flexibility while in the planning stage and should not assume that one group's slower pace is reflective of a lesser desire to meet the program's goals. Recognizing that different groups may experience difficulties particular to them and working to correct imbalances is important when implementing programs.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Evaluation metrics for similar programs in conflict environments must correctly reflect the type of engagement (with religious actors) and the environment (conflict setting). This includes the earlier recommendation to measure long-term impact, as well as providing space for changing dynamics and difficult circumstances. Metrics in a generally peaceful country will look very different from metrics in a conflict environment where change is much slower and incremental.

2. It is important for conflict mitigation programs to ensure that both groups are equally involved and that participants are able to stay fully engaged. In this case, Arab participation was not at the same level as Jewish participation. Although partner implementers claimed “cultural differences” explained slower Arab follow-through, the problem may be that the program did not recruit leaders who had the requisite time to stay directly involved in the program. For example, Arab leaders were more involved in activities to secure livelihoods than the participating rabbis were. Similar programs should ensure leaders are respected in their communities and be able to commit to

the program. If leaders central to the program encounter capacity-specific problems that hinder full engagement, programs may consider providing additional support instead of canceling projects.

3. Group meetings were only conducted in Hebrew. Not being their native tongue, Hebrew-only discussions hindered Arab participants from expressing themselves as easily as the rabbis. Also, a newsletter about KEDEM activities was sent out a few times during the program’s implementation, updating all members of KEDEM about ongoing projects. However, the newsletter, as well as the final project evaluation, was only published in Hebrew. Because different sides in a conflict often speak different languages, even when they share citizenship, programs should strive to ensure that all individuals involved are able to participate in their language of choice. Provision of translation services for participants can correct this imbalance. Program documents should be published, at a minimum, in all groups’ languages. As a general rule, it also is helpful to provide copies in English in order to keep donors informed.

4. While the program does involve Christian Arab leaders, the focus of KEDEM has appeared to be primarily focused on reconciling Muslims and Jews. Better incorporated/integrated Christian participation, at an earlier stage, would have improved Christian participants’ experiences. For example, partly due to their later involvement, Christians did not experience personal transformations at the same level as the other participants. Programs should strive to involve complete representation of all sides in a conflict, including minority groups, and be sensitive to intra-group dynamics.

5. Timelines for programs should take regional and local customs into account. Planning must account for when religious observances take place. Because the Jewish holidays fell in September and Ramadan fell in October 2006, the action phase of KEDEM could not be finished by September as originally planned.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The Religion and Peacemaking Program at the United States Institute for Peace has a variety of publications, reports, and courses available to practitioners highlighting the intersection of religion, conflict, and peacebuilding. <http://www.usip.org>
- The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding also has a variety of publications and tools for practitioners related to conflict resolution, peace education, and highlighting current religious peacemaking efforts. <http://www.tanenbaum.org/>
- The International Center for Religion and Diplomacy has several project reports and some research papers on the role of religion in diplomacy efforts and foreign policy. <http://www.icrd.org>
- Catholic Relief Services's Peacebuilding Division is known for producing useful publications with lessons learned and case studies from experiences in the field. <http://crs.org/>
- The Center for Strategic and International Studies' Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project has published *Mixed Blessings* on the role of religion in foreign policy in 2007. Following the publication, the project continues to hold events and publish event notes on the topic. <http://www.csis.org>
- The Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics Unit at the World Bank explores the relationship between faith and development. The Unit website has a variety of web link resources, as well as publications. <http://go.worldbank.org/HH5UDBBLZ0>
- The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University developed a database available through the Center's website with organizations, events, and publications related to the intersection of religion and development. The Center also conducts research and publishes articles more broadly on the role of religion in foreign affairs. <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/home>

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