

Ethiopia and Nigeria

Pilot Project: Faith Actors Shaping the Future with People on the Move

The world has seen the highest number of refugees and movement of migrants ever as a result of conflicts, climate change, poverty, and a lack of prospects. Internally displaced persons and refugees are particularly at risk of falling victim to human trafficking and often struggle with social stigmatisation, especially after returning to their home. Religious actors play a decisive role in supporting these people. Not only do they offer practical help, they promote narratives of inclusion and social cohesion.

The project “Faith Actors Shaping the Future with People on the Move,” implemented by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), aimed to support religious actors and make their work with refugees, migrants, and returnees more visible. From October 2021 to November 2022, measures were implemented to positively influence societal narratives on the topic of migration in Ethiopia and Nigeria.

Results

As part of the project, 447 religious actors – 94 women among them – were trained on topics like psychosocial counselling and social reintegration with the goal of enabling them to provide more effective support to returnees and survivors of human trafficking. These actors, including Christian and Muslim leaders, passed on their knowledge, reaching 1,543 people (of whom 1,042 were women) with psychosocial counselling.

One of the central aspects of the initiative was the promotion of financial independence for returnees and potential emigrants. Entrepreneurial trainings were

Duration:	10/2021 – 11/2022
Implementation:	Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
Partners:	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission (EECMY-DASSC), Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN), Faith to Action Network

attended by 335 people, including 266 women. They received start-up funding to establish small businesses. In Nigeria, 80 % of participants have built a small business; in Ethiopia, the success rate of this intervention after just five months lies at 85 %. These businesses include bicycle rentals, soap production, and tailors.

The measures extended to the broader public as well. Many people were indirectly made aware of the dangers of irregular migration and human trafficking through the use of school events, sports competitions, and media spots. Religious actors made appearances on radio broadcasts, and interactive formats allowed people to ask questions and actively participate.

The project especially emphasised the key role that interreligious dialogues play in social cohesion. In three regional consultations, actors from the Christian and Muslim communities met to exchange their perspectives and experiences. The results of these meetings were presented at the international conference, “Shaping the

Published by

The Problem

More people than ever are being forced out of their homes due to populism and nationalism. The instrumentalization of religion in both the countries they flee from and those they flee to have often created a hostile environment for refugees, internally displaced persons, and returnees.

The Role of Religious Actors

As trusted people in public life, religious actors prove especially important wherever there is distrust between refugees and the communities they arrive in.

Future, Living as Neighbours” in Geneva, Switzerland, expanding the initiative’s reach further.

Personal stories reveal the project’s impact. A returnee from Libya reported, “After return, I became pregnant. The church provided me with hope and spiritual, moral and financial support. Today I have my own business and can provide for my family.” Another participant explained, “They empowered us today. What I asked for was that I want to be a fashion designer. They gave me things that a tailor would need to start off my fashion business”.

Challenges and Learnings

The project gave the LWF additional room to integrate Muslim actors into the programmes already in progress, and to include them in future programmes. Cooperation with other relevant stakeholder groups, including women and youth groups, those from the private sector or government agencies, has also proved fruitful. The inclusion of local actors in global platforms was made more difficult, however, because of visa requirements.

A further important area of learning was the use of large networks of partner churches. With millions of churchgoing members in Ethiopia and Nigeria, the measures could be firmly anchored. These strong roots in the community eased acceptance of the project.

Embedded in the “Symbols of Hope” initiative, the project’s sustainable security is assured. LWF plans to continue growing the programme and enhance it through new initiatives like “Living as Neighbours,” which places the focus on peace and coexistence.

Through the integration of religious actors and their multiplying impact, the project offers a strong foundation for tackling challenges in the areas of migration, integration, and social cohesion sustainably. A participant described the project’s impact as such: “It gave us the hope that we could have a better future.”

Published by:
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36
53113 Bonn, Germany
E ReligionMatters@giz.de
I www.giz.de/en/worldwide/128395.html

Project description:
Sector Project Religion for Sustainable Development

Responsible:
Timo Biank

On behalf of
German Federal Ministry for Economic
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Division G41 Churches, political foundations, social structural programmes
Dr. Berthold Weig
Berlin

Bonn 2025

On behalf of



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development