

Religion in Global Affairs

The Contributions of Religious Actors to Education,
Environmental Protection, Gender Equality,
Human Rights, Peace, and Well-Being

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Sustainable Development**

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Maps

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Foreword

We all go through crises. They are an existential experience that binds us together, regardless of where we come from, what we believe, or how we live. A crisis can shake the foundations on which we have built our lives and institutions. But it can also open a space for learning, for changing course, for growing, and for discovering a resilience we may not have known we had. A crisis confronts us with a choice about what we carry forward, what we leave behind, and what we are ready to create anew.

Around nine out of ten people in the world affiliate with a religion. It is a powerful source and ambivalent in many ways. No doubt. Religion aims to unite, yet it can be misused to divide and exclude. My way of life, inspired by a holistic spiritual wisdom tradition, has at times been a reason for people to discriminate against or even insult me. Yet at the same time, nothing else has given me so much wisdom, resilience, and hope. Religion not only mattered but helped me to endure difficult circumstances to imagine a different future. In the challenging situation in which PaRD, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, finds itself today, I feel that these very characteristics are needed.

We are living through a period of profound uncertainty. Wars and displacement, climate change and environmental destruction, inequality, hate and polarisation, human rights violations, and shrinking civic space are placing immense pressure on people and especially civil society. Barriers between people, communities, and institutions are becoming higher and more difficult to cross, even as our shared blue planet needs cooperation more than ever to flourish.



This is why the stories in this publication matter. They tell us something that can easily be lost when we talk about religion in abstract terms. **Religion Matters!** because people inspired by religious and spiritual traditions are contributing to solutions to some of the most difficult challenges facing our societies in manifold ways.

Consider Buddhist monks in southern Thailand who support people affected by conflict while helping to defend their human rights. Or religious leaders in Nigeria who are working to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and female genital mutilation. Imagine young women across Egypt, Kenya, Palestine, and South Sudan challenging old norms and creating more space for girls and women to live with dignity and exercise their rights – or volunteers helping displaced children carry the psychological burden of conflict, loss, and uncertainty with faith sensitive approaches. Picture a spiritual community in India transforming waste into energy and fertilizer. These real stories take us from grassroots initiatives from different religions, generations, and social and political realities to global conversations about the future of our planet and how religion matters in local and global affairs. They share something important.

Religion is not an abstract category that can simply be studied or politically instrumentalised. Religion is a source of action, trusted relationships, ethical commitment, and community engagement, often carried by people who give their time as volunteers. These stories show religious and spiritual actors accompanying vulnerable people through moments of suffering, creating spaces for dialogue and healing, and building bridges where mistrust has taken root. They allow us to move beyond generic claims about the importance of religion and religious actors and see the extraordinary geographical, religious, generational, and thematic diversity of their contributions to education, environmental protection, gender equality, human rights, peace, and well-being. They also remind us that religious actors existed long before they were described in the language of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda. Religious and spiritual communities have been caring for the sick, educating young people, supporting people in humanitarian crisis, feeding those in need, mediating conflicts, and protecting the vulnerable for generations. The 2030 Agenda did not create these contributions; it created a framework to recognise, connect, and strengthen the role of religious actors in global affairs.

Saying Religion Matters! is therefore not enough. The more important questions are: How does religion matter? Where does it make what a difference? What can we learn from these experiences? Making contributions visible is not about giving religion a privileged place. It is about recognising realities. It is about creating spaces in which religious, spiritual, and secular perspectives can meet without either side having to give up its own legitimacy. This has been at the heart of PaRD. Ten years of PaRD meant working between religious and secular worlds and across

continents, bringing together government entities, multi-lateral organisations, academic institutions, and religious and other civil society actors in a multi-stakeholder partnership. PaRD has demonstrated that the most meaningful partnerships are rarely created simply because institutions sign agreements. **True partnerships emerge when people meet each other, listen, build trust, discover new perspectives and ways of collaboration, and achieve results for the common good that they could not have achieved alone. PaRD itself is a testament to the power of such collective commitment.**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for its sustained support of PaRD. I also warmly thank all PaRD members and partners who have contributed to the partnership's establishment and expansion, not only through their financial support but also through substantial in-kind contributions. Their dedication, expertise, time, and trust have been essential to not only build PaRD but also bring this publication to life.

At a time when the world is becoming more fragmented, we need these kinds of spaces where people can encounter one another in a respectful way across the boundaries that increasingly separate us. We need them locally, where trust is built between neighbours and communities, and globally, where decisions taken in one place can affect the lives of millions elsewhere. We also need them because the way we respond to global challenges is changing. Unilateral approaches are gaining ground. But complex problems cannot be solved by a single people or nation. Weapons and technology – particularly algorithms and so-called artificial intelligence – cannot solve the existential and

ethical problems we face. Technology alone cannot tell us whether a particular path is worth taking, what kind of society we want to live in, or how power and responsibility are to be exercised.

We need ethical reflection and wisdom alongside technical innovation. We need spaces in which people can ponder not only what we can do, but if we should do it and how we can contribute to holistic well-being. Religious and spiritual traditions and actors have an important contribution to make here as becomes evident from the multifaceted experiences in PaRD. These traditions and actors carry centuries of reflection on human dignity, responsibility, compassion, justice, interconnectedness, and the relationship between human beings, nature, and the universe. They also remind us: **Crises do not determine our future. The response to the crisis does.**

This brings us to a decisive moment for PaRD itself. From 2027 onwards, the partnership's funding structure will change decisively. This marks the end of one chapter and the beginning of a new one. For PaRD, this is an opportunity to ask not simply how we preserve what has been built, but what kind of partnership we want to create for the years ahead.

PaRD is reaching the end of one chapter precisely as the world needs the kind of bridge-building that PaRD was created to enable. The question is therefore not whether PaRD is needed or can continue. The more important question is what PaRD can become in a changed world where more members, institutions, and partners take ownership of its future. That transformation cannot be achieved by single members or the PaRD Secretariat alone. It requires

the commitment and ownership of all members. It also requires support from beyond the PaRD family who see the value of connecting religious and secular actors to strengthen dignity, peace, social cohesion, and well-being.

The stories gathered in this publication offer reasons for hope. They show that change does not depend on large organisations or funding. It begins with people who have the courage to do the right thing with the right people when it is needed. These stories together form a picture of what becomes possible when people bring their convictions, relationships, knowledge, and resources to the common good.

The world needs less barriers between religious and secular actors, between governments and communities, and between global institutions and the people they seek to serve. The world needs bridges and bridgebuilders. We need them between generations, between traditions, and between people who do not always speak the same language. And we need people willing not only to build these bridges, but to cross them.

The wisdom of Sikhi reminds me that we have come into this world, this diaspora of ephemerality, to heal and unite and to return home to our common spiritual homeland. This sounds like a telling guiding principle in our future endeavours – for ourselves, for PaRD and for all global affairs.

Khushwant Singh
Head of PaRD Secretariat

Overview of initiatives

HEALTH

Faith-sensitive MHPSS for children on the move (PaRD Health Workstream)

SDGs: 3, 16, 17

Generates policy recommendations and good-practice resources for faith-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support for displaced children.

📍 Global

Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families, and Communities (Religions for Peace, UNICEF, and the Joint Learning Initiative)

SDGs: 3, 5, 16

Empowers religious leaders via the “Mind and Heart Dialogue” method to address child protection, female genital mutilation, child marriage, gender equality, and health.

📍 35 countries

Religious actors’ role in the COVID-19 pandemic response

SDG: 3

Profiles religious communities’ public health messaging, humanitarian relief, and pastoral care during the pandemic. Anchored in a global resource library.

📍 Global

GENDER

Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability (World Young Women’s Christian Association, and the Faith to Action Network)

SDGs: 5, 16

Builds religious and community leaders’ capacity on gender justice, gender-based violence, and positive masculinities.

📍 Egypt, Kenya, Palestine, and South Sudan

LEAP: Faith and Traditional Leaders for Ending Gender-Based Violence (Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace, and the Strength in Diversity Development Centre)

SDGs: 5, 16

Strengthens religious and traditional leaders’ role in gender-based violence response via accountability frameworks, byelaws, and awareness campaigns.

📍 Nigeria



EDUCATION

RiseWithDignity (Tikvah Center)

SDGs: 4, 5

Trains religious leaders in the “See, Judge, Act” method to support education re-entry and reintegration for young mothers.

📍 Kenya

Seeds of Hope & Action (Soka Gakkai International)

SDGs: 4, 13

Toured an exhibition and grassroots interfaith education initiative on sustainable development and climate action, integrating local religious volunteers to carry out the programming.

📍 24 countries

Strengthening Girls’ Rights!(Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the National HIV/AIDS/STI/TB Council of Zambia)

SDGs: 3, 4, 5

Implemented a curriculum to bring health workers and religious/traditional leaders together to deliver youth-friendly SRHR and HIV-prevention education.

📍 Zambia

PEACE

Human Rights for Healer Monks (The Institute of Buddhist Management for Happiness and Peace Foundation)

SDGs: 16, 3

Trains Buddhist monks as mental health supporters and human rights defenders amid conflict in Thailand’s Pattani region.

📍 Thailand

Do No Harm for Faith Groups (World Vision International)

SDG: 16

Led conflict-sensitivity workshops helping religious actors avoid creating harm through their programming.

📍 11 countries

Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove)

SDGs: 16, 4, 17

Established a youth-led platform countering violent extremism via forums, local projects, and trainer programmes working with religious actors.

📍 49 countries

Freedom of Religion or Belief (PaRD FoRB Workstream)

SDG: 16

Brings together organisations with different religious backgrounds to ensure that Freedom of Religion or Belief is integrated as a human rights issue in sustainable development.

📍 Pakistan

CLIMATE

Clean Park (Brahma Kumaris)

SDGs: 7, 12, 13

Turns waste into biogas, fertiliser, and electricity across ten campuses of a spiritual organisation.

📍 India

The first-ever Faith Pavilion at COP28

SDGs: 13, 17

Established the first formal faith presence at a UN Climate Change Conference, including 65+ sessions, 70+ faith organisations, and an Interfaith Call to Action.

📍 United Arab Emirates



HEALTH

Religious Actors for Spiritual and Physical Well-Being

Religious actors contribute in many ways to health and well-being around the world. Often unnoticed, they deliver life-saving resources and care, strengthen public and private health services, and provide critical infrastructure to reach marginalised groups. The COVID-19 crisis showed how religious and faith actors contributed to resilience, pandemic preparedness and response, community education, vaccine rollout, spiritual care, and countering fake news. Mental health and psychosocial support are core competencies of religious actors and an area where they contribute significantly to people's well-being.

In focus

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for children on the move

Challenge: Nearly 50 million children worldwide are currently displaced by conflict and violence (UNICEF). 20 million of these children have crossed international borders in search of security, stability, and refuge. Some travel with family members or caregivers, others make the journey alone. These experiences of conflict and dislocation put forcibly displaced children at a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. MHPSS strengthens both the mental and physical health of children on the move. The experiences of practitioners show that holistic interventions that take the cultural and religious context into consideration are more effective.

Intervention: In 2020, several members of PaRD came together to advocate for faith-sensitive MHPSS for children on the move. Together with the support of the PaRD Secretariat, these members identified methods for integrating faith-sensitive MHPSS for displaced children and argued for its importance in international fora. A three-part virtual event series hosted by PaRD's Sustaining Peace and Health workstreams raised awareness about the need for faith-sensitive MHPSS. Policy recommendations were then developed in three online roundtables focusing on refugees from Ukraine, Syria, and Latin America.

At a glance

Faith-sensitive MHPSS for children on the move

- » **Timeframe:** 2020 – Present
- » **Key actors:** Arigatou International, International Dialogue Centre – KAICIID, World Vision International, United States Institute of Peace, Institute for Global Health and Development (IGHD) at Queen Margaret University, and the PaRD Secretariat
- » **Locations:** Global, with a focus on Latin America, the Middle East (Syrian refugee crisis), and Ukraine



Andrés Martínez-García (Joint Learning Initiative) in conversation at the session “Faith-sensitive MHPSS in Policy and Practice” at the PaRD 2025 Annual Forum in Istanbul



Mohammad Abo Hilal (Syria Bright Future) speaking at the meeting of “MHPSS for children on the move” at the PaRD 2025 Annual Forum in Istanbul

128 participants attended the exchanges, representing 54 organisations, including religious and secular NGOs, UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNDP, the governments of Lebanon and the USA, universities, and healthcare institutions. The third phase of the initiative is underway to map new, concrete, and replicable good practice.

Impact & Takeaways: These exchanges have so far provided the basis for two publications with an additional report and podcast series planned for 2026. The practitioner booklet (published in 2021) makes the case for including religious and faith-sensitive approaches to MHPSS for children on the move and presents good practices. Building on this policy framing and the results of the roundtable discussions, the policy brief was published in 2023 in English, Spanish, and Arabic. The eight recommendations for policymakers call for better collaboration with religious actors, increased funding and capacity building, and the meaningful participation of children and caregivers in designing MHPSS programmes. In the final stage of the initiative, a summary report profiling good practices from around the world will be published along with a multilingual podcast series featuring interviews with practitioners on the ground.

This initiative illustrates the strength of multistakeholder partnerships such as PaRD. This collaboration arose from connections made within PaRD and was carried out in conjunction with experts from the PaRD workstream on health. Faith-based and secular actors, who often do not have the opportunity to systematically work with each other on a long-term basis, engaged in multiyear collaborations. Together, they gathered evidence, shared good practices, amplified existing networks, and produced outputs that can be used by faith-based and secular actors to contribute to the well-being of vulnerable children. The documents provide adaptable, operationalisable recommendations for practitioners and policymakers across a variety of contexts when working with children on the move.

“Vulnerable and traumatised people, especially children, need the best possible support we can offer. Holistic, faith-sensitive approaches are key to bridge cultural gaps and increase the impact of programmes.”

Eleonora Mura, Arigatou International



Eleonora Mura (Arigatou International) speaking at the session “Faith-sensitive MHPSS in Policy and Practice” at the PaRD 2025 Annual Forum in Istanbul

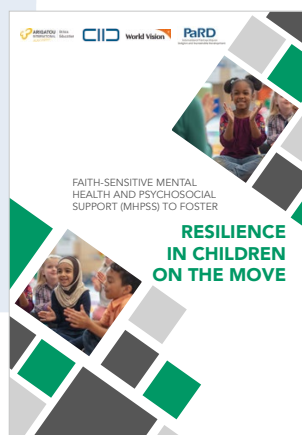
Further information

Booklet

- **Faith-sensitive MHPSS to foster resilience in children on the move, 2021**

Policy Brief

- **Strengthening faith-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support for children on the move, 2023**



In focus

Empowering community leaders to become changemakers in child protection

Challenge: Underage marriage, violence, child labour, and a lack of social protection endanger the well-being of billions of children each year. As of 2024, over 230 million girls and women have been subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) worldwide (UNICEF). This number represents an alarming 15% increase of cases since 2016. The health implications of FGM are lifelong, including severe obstetric complications, chronic pain and infection, sexual dysfunction, psychological trauma, and, in the most serious cases, death.

Religious representatives often have the moral authority within their communities to intervene in child protection issues, especially in regions where religion plays a crucial societal role. Strengthening the capacities of leaders could save children's lives and ensure their long-term well-being.

Intervention: The initiative “Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families, and Communities” (FPCC) empowers religious leaders and communities around the world to tackle issues related to child protection, gender equality, self-determination, immunisation campaigns, physical and mental health services, and peacebuilding.

At a glance

Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families, and Communities

- » **Timeframe:** 2018 – 2025
- » **Key actors:** Religions for Peace, UNICEF, and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities
- » **Locations:** Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, the Gambia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, South Sudan, Thailand, and Zambia, among others



“Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families, and Communities” (FPCC) Mind-Heart Dialogue training in Zimbabwe

“Faith-sensitive action saves lives. Especially of vulnerable people. Through the training with ZINGO, Zambia’s Interreligious Council, we have acted as health ambassadors. Our communities are now more conscious about sanitation and hygiene, and cholera cases have dropped significantly.”

Pastor Dorothy Mulilo,
Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia



Regional Advisory Workshop on Faith Actors for Child Rights and Wellbeing in Sri Lanka

FPCC was established by Religions for Peace and the Joint Learning Initiative – both PaRD members since 2016 – as well as UNICEF. FPCC utilises the “Mind and Heart Dialogue” method, a reflective learning approach which equips community leaders to lead change on health, protection, and social justice issues. This method has been used in regional workshops and national faith networks. In these trainings, religious leaders and community volunteers explore how to integrate messages related to health, social protection, and justice into preachings, sermons, rituals, and community outreach. This method increases the likelihood that interventions will be accepted and adopted long-term within their communities.

“Through PaRD, members, even of smaller NGOs, can connect with government entities, multilateral organisations, and development actors. This helps strengthen the impact, credibility and reach of initiatives like our Mind and Heart Dialogues.”

Liliana Solomon, Religions for Peace

Impact & Takeaways: Since 2018, the FPCC initiative has worked in 35 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. In Mali and the Gambia, FPCC created inter-religious councils which enabled faith leaders to discuss key priorities and develop joint statements promoting child well-being. The FPCC also worked with the African Council of Religious Leaders and 32 interreligious councils in Africa to adopt a resource guide for faith leaders on preventing FGM and child marriage. Attendees from Mind and Heart Dialogue workshops in India and Panama in 2024 are now using the method in their own facilitation activities with religious leaders and volunteers. Religious actors in Zambia received training on disease prevention measures, and monks in Cambodia were trained on child protection measures.

Further information

Resource Collection

 **FPCC Resource Library**

Handbook

 **Mind-Heart Dialogue: Facilitators' Guide for Faith Engagement**

In focus

Religious actors' important role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

As the coronavirus spread, healthcare systems strained, misinformation and fake news were on the rise, and uncertainty pervaded daily life, religious communities responded to the challenges of COVID-19 in efforts that often went unnoticed by political decision makers and the media.

Religious actors played a vital role in public health messaging. Public health bodies relied on religious representatives and volunteers to build awareness and trust in pandemic response measures, such as vaccine campaigns and social distancing guidelines. Religious actors were especially important voices to overcome vaccine hesitancy, conspiracy theories, and mitigate fake news and misinformation, often drawing on divine revelations and texts to support official government messaging and measures.

Religious actors, including religious minorities, proved key figures in the humanitarian response as well. Sikhs, including volunteers from the organisation UNITED SIKHS UK delivered oxygen for critically ill patients, masks and personal protective equipment (PPE), and food relief in Canada, the UK, the USA, India, and Malaysia. Bahá'í communities in Uganda and the Philippines used radio to spread critical health information, educational programmes for children, and messages of hope. The Muhammadiyah opened 77 COVID-19 treatment centres in their hospitals in Indonesia. Religious places not only hosted testing and vaccination sites, but also became hubs for mutual aid, solidarity, and spiritual care.

Further information

Report

 [Southern Africa Regional Forum on Religion & Covid-19](#)

Resource collection

 [Responses to COVID-19 by Religious Actors](#)



Representatives from PaRD member organisations during the 2021 Annual Forum in South Africa



Food delivery in 2021 in the township of Soweto, South Africa

Religious and faith communities adapted their worship practices to slow the spread of the virus. Leaders and volunteers continued to serve the needs of their communities through social media and online gatherings, worship, spiritual guidance, and care as grief, isolation, and economic hardship placed extraordinary pressure on individuals and communities worldwide.

To document how religious actors responded to the crisis, a Faith and COVID-19 Resource Repository was established and has gathered over 1,000 online resources into one database. The repository is a collaboration of the PaRD Secretariat and the following PaRD members: the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University, the World Faiths Development Dialogue, and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities.

“*Pandemics show us all how vulnerable we are as human guests on this wonderful planet. They bring us closer together as one human family and remind us to work for the well-being of all, regardless of our background. The multifaceted contributions of religious organisations and volunteers during the Covid-19 pandemic showed vividly how important it is to work with religious actors and not against them.***”**

Mejindarpal Kaur, UNITED SIKHS UK

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Role of religious and faith-based organisations in the future

Religious and faith leaders and representatives have great potential to strengthen the spiritual, physical, and mental well-being of their communities. Religious organisations and initiatives often have the infrastructure to deliver healthcare services, from clinics and schools to community gathering spaces on a long-term basis. Furthermore, their ethical authority can be a powerful lever for behaviour change and community mobilisation. Religious leaders, volunteers, and organisations are therefore not only implementing partners, but also agenda-setters, advocates, and co-creators of interventions which directly contribute to the well-being of people and to social cohesion.



CLIMATE

Climate Justice & Environmental Sustainability

The climate crisis is becoming more urgent every year. Climate change ramifications are the main driver of food and water insecurity for 72 million people worldwide (Global Network Against Food Crises). Desertification, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events are causing forced displacement. In the past 50 years, natural disasters driven by climate change have claimed two million lives. 91 % of these deaths were in the Global South (World Meteorological Organization).

Long before climate change became a policy priority, religious and faith communities engaged in environmental protection and sustainability. Their understanding of humanity's custodial relationship to the natural world has motivated action across all levels, from international policy platforms to local initiatives.

In focus

Transforming waste into renewable energy

Challenge: 2.1 billion tonnes of waste was produced globally in 2023, only 62 % of which was collected at controlled municipal facilities; the remaining waste lands in unregulated sites or is irresponsibly treated, such as by burning. For example, 62 million tonnes of waste is generated per year in India, only 20 % of which is sufficiently treated (Energy and Resources Institute).

Inadequate waste collection and treatment are causing environmental and public health issues. Improper solid waste disposal contaminates water supplies. Decomposing organic waste emits significant amounts of methane which drives global warming and air pollution, the effects of which are linked to respiratory diseases and agricultural yield loss.

Effective waste treatment not only reduces these risks but also generates resources, such as electricity, gas, and fertiliser. Yet only a handful of facilities currently produce energy from waste, contributing just 1 % of India's total electricity output. The capacity is much higher if waste is properly collected and treated.

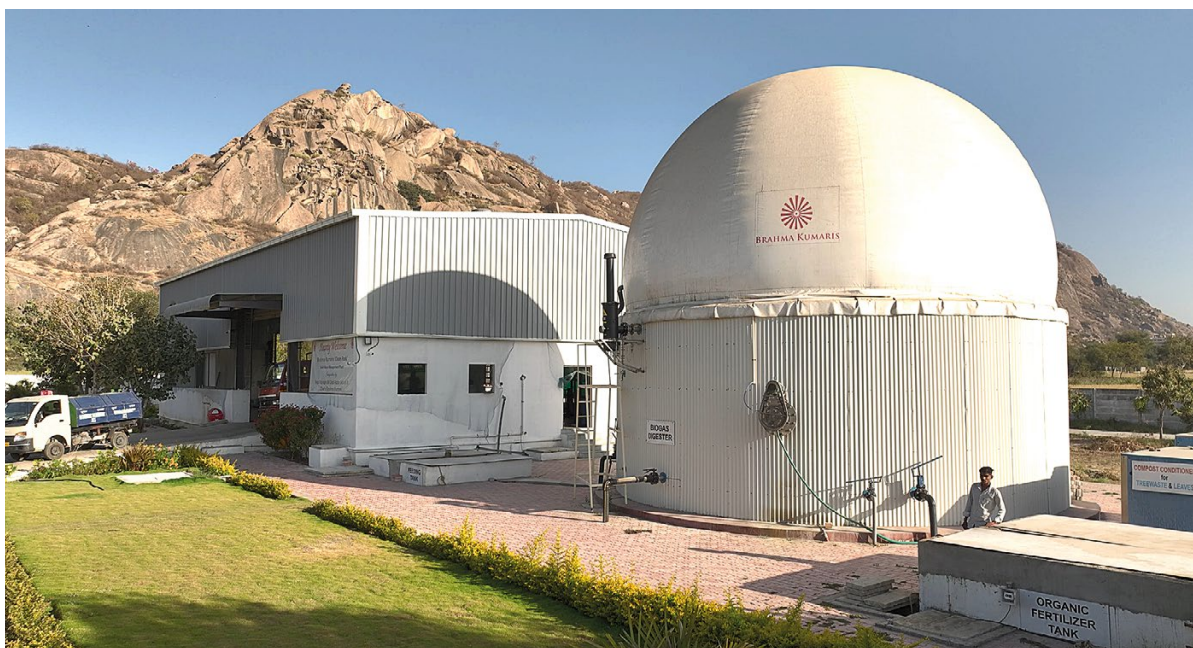
Intervention: To address these issues, PaRD member Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University implemented a solid waste management and biogas power generation plant in northwest India in 2022. At the 10 campuses of the Brahma Kumaris Clean Park in Rajasthan, waste is collected, segregated, transported, and processed into biogas and fertiliser. The biogas facilities can generate up to 52 kW, which can power essential appliances for more than 50 homes. The liquid organic manure produces 8,000 – 10,000 litres per day, or enough to cover one to two hectares of fields. Other types of waste are sorted into resources for recycling or controlled incineration. The plant generates not only power, but also employment for 15 – 20 local workers.

Further information

Video

🐦 [From Waste to Wonder – Brahma Kumaris Clean Park, Abu Road](#)

Brahma Kumaris Clean Park solid waste management site, Abu Road, Rajasthan, India





Brahma Kumaris Clean Park wet waste processing and biogas generation, Rajasthan, India

In this project, Brahma Kumaris mobilised faith in service of environmental stewardship and sustainable living. As a trusted organisation, Brahma Kumaris were able to bring together a wide range of stakeholders, including volunteer engineers, scientists, and management personnel from beyond the region to design and implement the treatment centre. Furthermore, the institution's moral reputation within the community helped build a base of local volunteers to carry out the project.

At a glance

Clean Park

- » **Timeframe:** 2022 – Present
- » **Key actor:** Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University
- » **Location:** Abu Road, Rajasthan, India

Impact & Takeaways: The Brahma Kumaris plant created a replicable model for sustainable waste management that works for communities of 25,000–30,000 people. These plants divert nearly all collected waste either to energy recovery or recycling. Reducing the amount of waste dumped in landfills improves sanitation as well as limits soil contamination, bettering local health outcomes.

Like other spiritual and religious actors, the Brahma Kumaris highlight that protecting nature and the environment is a spiritual act of love and respect for the Divine. They frame waste segregation as a practice grounded in the principles of compassion, custodial duty, sustainable living, and service to humanity. Such an approach bases behavioural change in conscious values and common responsibility, not as a top-down imposed regulation or an abstract high-level climate policy. In this way, drawing on spiritual values can be an asset in bringing about localised change to promote the protection of Earth and its inhabitants.

“Only together in our communities, we can protect Mother Earth. Every uphill task becomes effortless when we have unifying values, and a team that cherishes these values. Honesty, dedication, sincerity, and a persistent approach transform the impossible into the achievable.”

BK Yogendra Hingane,
Brahma Kumaris Clean Park

In focus

The first-ever Faith Pavilion at a UN Conference of the Parties (COP)

Challenge: According to leading scientific studies worldwide, global warming needs to remain below 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels to prevent dramatic loss of human, plant, and animal life. Numerous intergovernmental bodies have been created to address this challenge, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC's annual Conference of the Parties (COP) brings together representatives from governments, multilateral organisations, academia, industry, and civil society to negotiate and advance climate action. Until recently, religious and faith leaders had no or little formal presence at COP.

Intervention: The first-ever Faith Pavilion was inaugurated at COP28 in Dubai in 2023. Over two weeks, the Faith Pavilion hosted more than 65 sessions with over 300 speakers from 55 countries addressing a wide range of issues related to the Sustainable Development Goals, including discussions on the root causes of pollution, environmental protection and renewable energy initiatives,



Panel Discussion by Unity Earth

climate financing, sustainable land-use, community-led conservation, food security, and the role of women and youth in building climate resilience. Over 70 religious and faith-based organisations participated, including representatives from Bahá'í, Bodhi Dharma, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhi, and Indigenous traditions. The Faith Pavilion provided a global platform for dialogue, negotiation, and drafting of an Interfaith Statement, which calls for decisive measures to limit global temperature increase to 1.5°C.

Several key partners from the Faith Pavilion launched the initiative “Faith for Climate: A Call to Action”, outlining policy priorities and encouraging signatories to collaborate on a long-term basis. This document drew inspiration from the Interfaith Statement, launched at the Global Faith Leaders Summit and signed by Pope Francis, Ahmed El-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, and 30 other religious leaders and representatives from various traditions.



Divine Gurbani recitations at COP28, SikhiCouncil

Further information

Call to action

 **Faith Pavilion & COP28: Faith for Climate – A Call to Action – International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development**

Op-Ed article

 **At COP28, spirituality and faith showed they could be a beacon of hope | Euronews**



The main organisers of the Faith Pavilion with keynote speaker Sadhguru

Impact & Takeaways: The Faith Pavilion at COP28 created spaces for religions and faith-based organisations to strategically engage with policy discussions. The multireligious setting enabled speakers to combine ethical and spiritual insights with evidence-based, technical knowledge to advocate for concrete and implementable recommendations. A particular strength of these formats was their inclusivity, bringing youth, women, and indigenous voices to the table. The Faith Pavilion caught the attention of major media outlets, including the [New York Times](#), [Politico](#), and [Euronews](#). These articles amplified the message that religion plays an important role and that religious actors are contributing in multifaceted ways to environmental and climate action.

The success of this initiative was only possible under the broad coalition of secular and faith-based organisations listed in the project box below. The PaRD Secretariat and multiple members of the partnership were actively involved at the Summit and the Pavilion, including the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, ACT Alliance, Arigatou International, and the World Council of Churches.

“The Faith Pavilion is a major milestone. It vividly demonstrated why religion needs to be included in finding well-founded solutions to global affairs, especially when it comes to the protection of our planet.”

Dr. Iyad Abumoghli,
UNEP, Faith for Earth Coalition

At a glance

The first ever Faith Pavilion at COP 28

» **Timeframe:** 2023

» **Key actors:** Faith for Earth Coalition at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Muslim Council of Elders, Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, and the PaRD Secretariat

» **Location:** Dubai, United Arab Emirates

13 CLIMATE ACTION

Faith and Climate Justice

Many religious traditions regard environmental stewardship, intergenerational responsibility, and care for all creation as a key ethical responsibility. Religious actors are frequently present in the frontline communities most affected by climate change, including small island states, drought-prone regions, and displacement-affected areas. These people on the ground have direct experience with the adaptation needs and the disproportionate burden borne by those who have contributed least to the crisis. Climate justice demands action for these communities. To harness religion's potential for environmental protection, it is important to engage diverse religious voices and grassroots faith-led environmental action and movements.



GENDER

Religion and Gender Equality

Religion and religious actors play a significant role in shaping values, social norms, and community life around the world. While interpretations and practices differ across traditions and contexts, religious representatives have considerable potential to highlight the equal worthiness of people regardless of their gender. Religious and cultural conservatism can silence conversations on gender inequality, yet religious actors can equally work to promote gender justice, address gender-based violence (GBV), and advance sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). By building on their influence, community trust, and commitment to human dignity, engagement with religious actors can lead to greater gender equality globally.

In focus

Religion, women's empowerment, and gender justice

Challenge: From education to political participation to employment, women and people of diverse genders have still not achieved full equality with men. The global gender gap remains at 68 % – meaning that on average, women have only two-thirds of the rights and privileges that men experience (World Economic Forum). As of January 2025, women held just 27% of seats in national parliaments. Women's participation in the labour force remains on average 30 % lower than that of men; in South Asia, West Asia, and North Africa, the difference exceeds 60 %. Great strides have been made in educational parity, yet child marriage, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, conflict, and poverty prevent many girls from completing their schooling (see chapter on “education”, p. 40). GBV and SRHR issues lead to poorer health outcomes for women, such as the 4 million girls subjected to female genital mutilation every year (see chapter on “health”, p. 10). Women's empowerment therefore requires a multi-faceted approach that targets these root causes of inequality.

Further information

Website

 [Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability: World YWCA](#)

Report

 [Faith to Action Network Annual Report 2025](#)

Report

 [Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability Partners' Best Practices](#)



Young women from the YW4A Programme convene at the Global Conference on Women's Rights in Islam in 2024

Intervention: The World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA), a PaRD member, is tackling gender gaps and discrimination by empowering religious actors to take action. In the initiative “Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability” (YW4A) the World YWCA carried out projects in Egypt, Kenya, Palestine, and South Sudan. The programme created spaces for religious and community leaders to engage in capacity building, contextual theology, and interreligious dialogue. This resulted in public sermons challenging GBV, political advocacy for young women's empowerment, and shifts in community norms. In Egypt, YW4A worked with the Ibrahimia Media Centre and Evangelical leaders to conduct policy advocacy for more just personal status laws for women. Positive masculinities training in South Sudan equipped 176 men of faith to lead dialogues challenging harmful patriarchal norms (such as the bodily integrity of women and equal participation in decision making) and support women's empowerment.



Young women from Palestine and Egypt visit Geneva for the 56th session of the UN Human Right Council as part of the YW4A Programme

Impact & Takeaways: Since 2021, this initiative reached nearly 2,500 religious and faith actors through workshops and trainings, mobilising over 20 organisations in the four implementing countries. Through YW4A, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) in Palestine produced a book advocating for women’s leadership and ordination, reframing scriptural narratives. In Kenya, the National Independent Church of Africa (NICA) developed a dedicated Young Women department and created Gender Action Plans to advance gender justice. Engaging men and women on these topics enhanced the effectiveness of the interventions. While this project was

initiated at an international level and carried out across different countries, each intervention was implemented by community actors on the ground who tailored the programme to the local context.

“Reframing religious teachings in our congregation created a space where gender justice is understood as part of our faith and daily action.”

Rev. Salma Khoury, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), Palestine

At a glance

Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability (YW4A)

» **Timeframe:** 2021 – 2025

» **Key actors:** World Young Women’s Christian Association (World YWCA), and the Faith to Action Network

» **Cooperating partners:** faith-based organisations including Ibrahimia Media Centre, Egyptian Family House, Evangelism One Accord, and Christian Agency for Peace and Development; and religious actors including the Evangelical Church of Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church, National Independent Church of Africa, Kisii Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and many local churches

» **Locations:** Egypt, Kenya, Palestine, and South Sudan

In focus

Combatting gender-based violence in Nigeria

Challenge: One in three women worldwide has been subjected to physical and /or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime (UN Women). This number doubles in humanitarian contexts, where women are especially vulnerable to violence, including trafficking and exploitation, female genital mutilation, child marriage, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, rape, and femicide.

In Nigeria specifically, conflict and displacement, as well as prevailing social beliefs that normalise GBV, are threatening the dignity and long-term well-being of women. One in three Nigerian women experience physical violence before the age of 15 (UNFPA). Particularly in the Northeast of the country, abduction, child marriage, and assault are acute problems.

Intervention: In response to these challenges, the Inter-faith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) and Strength in Diversity Development Centre (SDDC) initiated the LEAP project. This initiative strengthened the role of religious and traditional actors in responding to violence against women across four Nigerian states (Benue, Bauchi, Kaduna, and Ekiti). IDFP and SDDC worked at local, state, and national levels to shape responses to gender-based violence (GBV) from a faith-based perspective.

The LEAP project hosted forums to co-develop state-specific GBV accountability frameworks and an index of faith-based actors working on prevention. Further faith-based community parley sessions led to the drafting of GBV prevention byelaws by local municipalities. These were brought to high-level advocacy visits to government institutions to promote survivor-centred policy. National and local media campaigns sought to raise public awareness of GBV via radio, rallies, and in the digital sphere.

Further information

Website

 [Strength in Diversity Development Centre](#)

2025 Community Parley for gender-based violence prevention byelaws in Makurdi, Benue State





2024 National Rally on the prevention of gender-based violence in Nigeria

Impact & Takeaways: LEAP worked with religious actors to connect with communities in the most affected areas and mobilised over 330 religious and traditional leaders to create GBV accountability frameworks and resources. The initiative produced a national compendium of faith-based GBV prevention actors and created prevention networks on Social Media channels. Furthermore, LEAP engaged

churches and mosques to develop faith-based reinterpretations of harmful norms and to bring forward conflict mediation and resolution. These interreligious efforts resulted in the adoption of three community byelaws which worked to anchor GBV prevention at the local level. LEAP drew on resources and networks from within PaRD to engage the support of UN agencies in this project.

“Faith is not just a personal conviction – it is a powerful tool for justice and transformation. By working together across our beliefs, we’re not only preventing gender-based violence. We are healing our communities!”

Imam Shefiu Abdulkareem Majemu,
Strength in Diversity Development
Centre (SDDC)

At a glance

LEAP: Faith and Traditional Leaders for Ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV) by Advancing Advocacy, Policy & Social Norms Change

- » **Timeframe:** 2024 – 2025
- » **Key actors:** Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP), and the Strength in Diversity Development Centre (SDDC)
- » **Cooperating partner:** UN Women
- » **Location:** Nigeria

5 GENDER EQUALITY

Religious actors for gender equality

Religious actors and faith-based organisations occupy a uniquely influential position for advancing gender equality. Faith leaders can serve as powerful advocates against violence by reframing these issues in ways that resonate with local values. Religious institutions also operate extensive networks in education and healthcare that shape girls' and women's access to vital services.

At the same time, this potential is not automatically realised. Religious doctrines and convictions can be used to support gender justice or to justify women's oppression. Realising religion's potential for gender equality therefore depends on deliberate partnerships. As outlined, amplifying interpretations that strengthen the dignity and well-being of women and girls, engaging female and male religious leaders, and creating space for dialogue can lead to gains in gender equality. These opportunities are most likely to be realised when engagement is grounded in mutual respect, contextual understanding, and long-term collaboration with diverse religious actors. Such partnerships can strengthen locally owned approaches and foster sustainable social change for gender justice.



PEACE

Peace, Social Cohesion, and Human Rights

Out of a global population of eight billion, nearly one billion people live in fragile and conflict-affected situations (World Bank SDG Atlas). Civilian casualties in armed conflicts have risen in recent years, especially those of women and children (UNDESA). Efforts toward peacebuilding and social cohesion are acutely needed in conflicts around the world. Religious actors have historically played an important role in peace, mediation, reconciliation, and post-conflict dialogue. Religious representatives often boast legitimacy and trust that state or international actors lack, particularly in contexts where governance institutions have been weakened or discredited by conflict.

In focus

Buddhist monks for human rights in Thailand's Pattani region

Challenge: Thailand's five southern provinces – historically called the Pattani region – are home to a majority ethnic Malay Muslim population inside a predominantly Buddhist, Thai-speaking state. The Malay separatist insurgency in the region dates back to 1948 and has intensified since the early 2000s. Led primarily by the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), the movement combines demands for political recognition, cultural and linguistic autonomy, and redress for decades of assimilationist policy. Attacks have targeted security forces, state officials, and, increasingly, civilians and religious symbols on both sides. Over two decades the conflict has claimed roughly 7,000 lives, and 2026 has seen a marked escalation, including large, coordinated bombings.

Intervention: The Institute of Buddhist Management for Happiness and Peace Foundation (IBHAP), PaRD member since 2023, is supporting monks in Pattani to respond to this crisis. In 2024, IBHAP created a four-day training programme to empower Buddhist monks as mental health supporters and human rights defenders for all those impacted by the conflict. The training, called “Human Rights for Healer Monks”, consists of lectures and workshops on mental health, counselling, and human rights with a particular focus on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and assisting people in need. The training is designed to help monks offer mental and moral support for those affected by violence.

At a glance

Human Rights for Healer Monks

- » **Timeframe:** 2024
- » **Key actor:** The Institute of Buddhist Management for Happiness and Peace Foundation (IBHAP)
- » **Location:** Pattani, Thailand

“This human rights programme harnesses Buddhist values and the close connections monks have with their communities. It exemplifies how spirituality and religion can be leveraged to create lasting impact for human rights.”

Venerable Napan Santibhaddo
(Thawornbanjob), IBHAP Foundation



Buddhist Monks at the July Workshop “Human Rights for Healer Monks” in Pattani, Thailand

Impact & Takeaways: A key result was to activate monks’ understandings of themselves as change agents, particularly in translating government policy into practical action. These interventions helped create sustainable change by empowering local leaders with long-term commitments to their communities. The project established a collaborative network between participants, including Buddhist monks, human rights commissioners, NGO members, scholars, and volunteers.

Further information

News story

📖 [How a Buddhist Monk is Bridging Faith and Human Rights in Bangkok](#)

In focus

“Do no harm” in peacebuilding

Challenge: Development and humanitarian assistance, however well-intentioned, can inadvertently exacerbate conflict. Sometimes peacebuilding efforts reinforce inter-group tensions, feed war economies, or shift local power balances. The same applies to religious actors. Religious framing of interventions may inadvertently privilege one confessional community over another, entrench sectarian divides, or be perceived as proselytising under the guise of aid. All of these outcomes undermine social cohesion rather than build it. A “Do No Harm” (DNH) approach – a continuous, conflict sensitivity analysis that reflects on all possible outcomes from an intervention – helps avoid such pitfalls. Yet few religious actors have the chance to acquire training in these principles.

“We can now handle difficult situations well because we understand the principle of Do No Harm.”

Venjohn Nuñez, DNH Philippines participant

Intervention: To address the need for DNH principles among religious actors, World Vision International (PaRD member since 2016) partnered with the University of Leeds to design the workshop “Do No Harm for Faith Groups”. Taking place over three days, these workshops introduce a group of 25 participants to the fundamental principles of DNH and draw connections to teachings from their own religious traditions. Since this project’s inception in 2017, trainings have taken place in 11 countries (see “at a glance”) bringing together CSOs and faith leaders from different traditions within each community. In Burundi, participants came from Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim traditions while in Sri Lanka, participants identified as Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian.

Impact & Takeaways: After the workshops, participants stayed in touch via chat groups and social media, at biannual meetings, and through reflection videos shared by World Vision. Many groups began joining peacebuilding initiatives in their communities after completing the training.



Group work in the workshop “Analyzing Connectors and Dividers in the Community” in Mindanao, Philippines

Further information

Website

[Do No Harm for Faith Leaders](#)

Research article

[Far beyond a tool: Do No Harm as spiritual \(trans\)formation for interfaith cooperation and action](#)

Video

[Do No Harm for Faith Groups Training](#)



Final day of the “Do No Harm for Faith Groups” training in Sri Lanka

The project was accompanied by researchers from the University of Leeds, coordinated by the Hidden Peacebuilders Network. The research found that these interventions were an effective tool for promoting interfaith tolerance and collaboration. In particular, the DNH workshops were effective in mobilising religious actors to reflect on their role within fragile communities and take action to promote peaceful coexistence. The secular principles of DNH and lessons from religious doctrine and convictions came together to create a strong narrative for community protection and peace.

At a glance

Do No Harm for Faith Groups

- » **Timeframe:** 2017 – Present
- » **Key actors:** World Vision International, and the University of Leeds
- » **Cooperation partners:** Hidden Peacebuilders Network, Network for Traditional and Religious Peacemakers, University of East London, Joint Learning Initiative for Faith and Local Communities, Islamic Relief, Ateneo de Manila University, and Rema Burundi
- » **Locations:** Burundi, Central African Republic, El Salvador, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mali, Philippines, and Sri Lanka

“By understanding divisions at the family and local level, we can better engage with conflicts.”

Nawshada Hanoon, DNH Sri Lanka participant

In focus

Countering violent extremism through youth interfaith dialogue

Challenge: Violent extremism continues to pose a world-wide challenge. Certain regions in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are acutely impacted, with 70 % of all terrorism deaths worldwide occurring in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Nigeria, and Pakistan (Global Terrorism Index). The latest data on youth radicalisation is particularly troubling; not only are the numbers on the rise but the radicalisation process is also unfolding more quickly, taking on average just a few months for a person to become radicalised.

Intervention: To address these problems, the Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove) was established by the African Union Commission’s Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (AU-CIDO) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). In 2023 the Network for Religious & Traditional Peacemakers took over the iDove Secretariat from GIZ, which continues to fund the initiative.

iDove brings together young people committed to preventing and countering violent extremism. The platform consists of 150 members aged 18–35 from 49 countries across Africa, Asia, and Europe. iDove is based on the understanding that prevention of violent extremism requires a comprehensive soft power approach focusing on the root causes of violent extremism. Bottom-up, innovative, community-based, and youth-led approaches help foster mutual understanding between different ethnic, social, and religious groups.

iDove undertakes several activities. The annual Intercontinental Youth Forum brings members together to exchange knowledge and new perceptions on emerging issues. iDove also supports small projects on the ground led by local organisations to ensure timely and effective youth-led responses to violent extremism. Lastly, the “Training of Trainers” equips iDovers with skills and tools to build cohesive communities and to deliver iDove trainings themselves.



Art competition on the prevention of violent extremism in the DRC



Participants at the 5th International Youth Forum “iDove All Stars” in March 2022 in Addis Ababa

Further information

Website

[iDove Peacemakers Network](#)

Report

[ToT Manual: Youth Preventing Violent Extremism in their Communities](#)

Testimonials

[Young People Building Peace](#)

Impact & Takeaways: Since 2018, iDove has supported 24 small-scale projects in as many countries, reaching over 13,000 people. In Sri Lanka, iDove partnered with three local civil society organisations (CSOs) to train 280 iDove ambassadors and implement 85 interreligious activities, covering 24 districts across the country. In Kenya, iDovers contributed to the development of county-level policies in Kwale, Kilifi, and Garissa, and were appointed as members of official county-level forums, ensuring that youth perspectives were shaping policy. In the Mtwara region of Tanzania, sustained interfaith dialogue, supported by iDove, led to the growth of one of the region's largest peace networks, bringing together Christians and Muslims committed to maintaining harmony. Through its intercontinental reach and local impact, iDove demonstrates how youth leadership and interfaith cooperation can counter violent extremism and build resilient, peaceful societies.

At a glance

Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove)

- » **Timeframe:** 2018 – Present
- » **Key actor:** The Network for Religious & Traditional Peacemakers
- » **Founding organisations:** African Union Commission's Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (AU-CIDO) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- » **Locations:** 49 countries across Africa, Asia, and Europe

“iDove has given me the courage to continue my work. No matter how hard it may be at times, through iDove I know that there are lots of young people on all continents working very hard for peace and dialogue and overcoming extremism.”

Agatha Lydia Natania, ASEAN Youth, Indonesia



Profile: What does GIZ do?

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH is one of the largest agencies for international development cooperation in the world. Together with its governmental, multilateral, civil society, and academic partners, GIZ aims to sustainably improve people's lives. Through its networks in around 120 countries and with approximately 1400 projects, GIZ turns international agendas into local action.



Strengthening local skills and capacities in Zambia

In focus

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Context: Attacks on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a global problem on the rise. Religious groups, especially minorities, face harassment by governments and private actors in 192 of 198 countries and territories (Pew Research). This is up from 152 countries in 2007 when the study first began. Religious minorities in 76 % of countries face physical harassment, including property damage, assaults, detentions, displacement, or killings. Religious freedoms are also curtailed in many countries by laws against blasphemy and apostasy – leaving the inherited religion. Religiously motivated attacks affect not only minority religions and faiths, but also those who are religiously unaffiliated, such as humanists, agnostics and atheists.

Further information

Event summary

► [PaRD at Wilton Park](#)

Report

► [The German Government's Third Report on the Global Status of Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)

“The FoRB Capacity Building trainings transformed my understanding of advocacy. Solution-oriented advocacy, positive diplomacy, and relationship-building are key. Lasting change comes through offering constructive solutions with hope and integrity. The training inspired me to pursue advocacy for persecuted vulnerable minorities.”

Benjamin Daniel, Daniel Khokhar Foundation

Freedom of Religion or Belief is a key area in PaRD's work, highlighted at the Interfaith Opening of the 2024 Annual Forum in Brasília





Youth fellows in the Peace Link Fellowship at University of Peshawar, Pakistan in 2024

Intervention: The PaRD FoRB Workstream brings together organisations with different religious backgrounds to ensure that the cross-cutting human rights issue of FoRB is integrated into sustainable development cooperation. Operating on the basis that human flourishing must include the right to express one's religious beliefs, PaRD has foregrounded the importance of FoRB in high-level policy discussions. Members of PaRD's leadership attended the Wilton Park Conference and the following International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief, hosted by the UK government in 2022. Others have engaged in bilateral policy dialogues with FoRB representatives in the German government and EU.

PaRD's FoRB Workstream is also working on the ground to promote human rights. In 2025, PaRD members, such as the World Evangelical Alliance, and partners including the Evangelical Alliance of Pakistan, created a series of

capacity-building activities for religious actors. 150 participants participated in trainings across five areas: faith-based advocacy, coalition-building, engagement with political and religious leaders, access to legal aid, and interfaith dialogue. A training conference in Rawalpindi, Punjab brought together 75 Christian leaders to explore solution-oriented approaches to peacemaking and advocacy. During a visit to the Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement, participants met families denied justice or protection to see firsthand the impact of these violations. Meetings with foreign diplomats and the Minister of State for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony gave participants direct experience of applying these advocacy principles at the political level. An interfaith forum in Abbottabad convened 45 representatives from Muslim, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, Anglican, and Evangelical communities.



The 2025 interfaith forum in Abbottabad, bringing together 45 religious representatives from Muslim, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, Anglican, and Evangelical communities

Impact & Takeaways: The PaRD FoRB Workstream's work has led to both high-level advocacy and applied outcomes. In policy meetings at Wilton Park in 2022, PaRD leadership and FoRB Workstream members argued that securing basic human rights, including FoRB, is fundamental to sustainable development. In 2023, the PaRD Secretariat contributed to the German Government's Third Report on the Global Status of Freedom of Religion or Belief. The report documents the global state of FoRB and profiles good practices, including from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The PaRD FoRB Workstream's work in Pakistan led to concrete outcomes supporting human rights in the country. The Minister of State for Religious Affairs & Interfaith Harmony publicly committed his Ministry's involvement in 20 new Peace Committees which will be trained in early intervention for emergent conflicts. Several Christian denominations, including two representing more than 700 churches, expressed their interest to join the Evangelical

Alliance of Pakistan, marking concrete progress towards the larger, unified multifait community. Participants acquired new tools in the capacity training to promote peaceful coexistence in the country and have reported using these methods in their subsequent advocacy work. These tools can be adapted and used in other country contexts and were shared within the PaRD FoRB Workstream.

At a glance

Freedom of Religion or Belief

- » **Timeframe:** 2025
- » **Key actors:** Evangelical Alliance of Pakistan (EAP), World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and the PaRD Workstream Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)
- » **Locations:** Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Abbottabad, Pakistan

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Belief in the potential for peace

Religious leaders frequently command moral authority that cuts across otherwise divided communities, allowing them to act as intermediaries where secular diplomacy comes up short. Religious actors have convened dialogue between opposing sides, de-escalated inflammatory rhetoric, and framed reconciliation in terms that resonate with local values and belief systems. Thus, development and peacebuilding actors increasingly recognise religious and faith-based organisations as strategic partners rather than peripheral actors in fragile and protracted conflict settings.



EDUCATION

Religious Actors in Education

While great strides have been made in increasing school access, ensuring quality education for all remains a global goal. An estimated 84 million learners, or 5% of children, will still be out of school in 2030 (UNESCO / Global Education Monitoring). Educational quality – not just access – also poses a challenge. One in five primary schools worldwide lack electricity, drinking water, and sanitation facilities; half of schools do not have access to computers and internet (UN DESA). Religious institutions have long served as bastions of knowledge, learning, and education. Many of them use their multifaceted experiences in service of reaching SDG 4 – quality education for all.

In focus

Education re-entry for young mothers in Kenya

Challenge: Young mothers often have their educational careers cut short. Caring responsibilities and health complications make attending educational institutions more difficult. In Kenya specifically, nearly 13,000 girls drop out of school each year due to pregnancy (UNFPA). In some cases, unmarried single mothers are shunned from their communities and prevented from continuing their studies. Despite wide-ranging re-entry policies for young mothers in the country, such efforts are often limited by individual school expulsion decisions and harmful rhetoric at the community level.

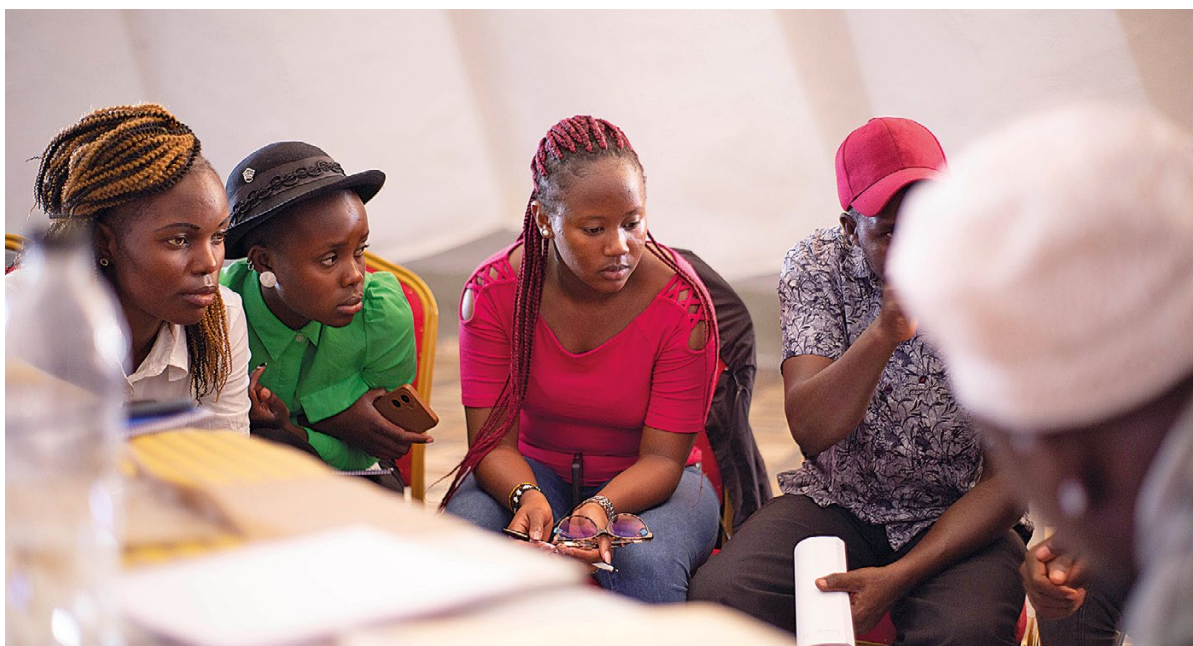
Further information

Website

 [The Tikvah Center](#)

Intervention: To counter these exclusionary practices, the RiseWithDignity Project was inaugurated by the Tikvah Center, a faith-based non-profit based in Kenya which has been a PaRD member since 2024. The RiseWithDignity initiative trained religious leaders in Siaya County, Kenya to support the integration of marginalised young women in their communities. The intersectional See, Judge, Act method teaches leaders to look past taboos, promote justice-oriented teachings, and put them into practice. The approach draws on religious scripture, African moral traditions, and philosophy of ethics to foreground the dignity of those who have been mistreated. Since 2023, this project has focused on creating safe spaces, leading advocacy campaigns, and providing re-entry support for young mothers. On the local level, such individualised support includes restoring family relationships and facilitating access to services, including health and educational institutions. Rooted in Christian liberation theology and contextualised faith practices, the SJA method empowers religious actors to move beyond stigma and silence to serve all members of their community, especially young women and girls.

Young people engage in group work during a workshop with faith leaders on sexual and reproductive health



Impact & Takeaways: The RiseWithDignity Project reached over 2,000 people with their community dialogues that brought together clergy, youth, parents, and the elderly. 79 religious leaders were trained in faith-rooted youth mentorship and sexual and reproductive health rights education. Furthermore, seven interfaith peace-maker teams were formed to heal rifts within communities and address the harmful exclusion of young women. Through the project, the Tikvah Center directly supported 120 women with their educational journey, including providing scholarships, mentorship connections, life skills training, and seed capital for small businesses. Brenda, one beneficiary from the project, has gone on to pursue an undergraduate law degree and is now leading See, Judge, Act sessions in her own church.

Many of the relationships between organisations that facilitated this work came about through PaRD's facilitation. At the 2024 PaRD Annual Forum in Brazil, the Tikvah Center connected with the Maxfield Family Foundation, which later provided funding for RiseWithDignity. PaRD also enabled exchanges with the Christian Connection for International Health and the OMNIA Institute, both PaRD members based in the USA, which provided much of the project's theological resources and interfaith models.

At a glance

RiseWithDignity

- » **Timeframe:** 2023 – 2025
- » **Key actor:** The Tikvah Center
- » **Cooperating partners:** OMNIA Institute for Contextual Leadership, Interreligious Council of Kenya, Council of Luo Elders, Ministry of Education, Anglican Church of Kenya, Derek and Shelaine Maxfield Family Foundation, and Christian Connections for International Health
- » **Location:** Siaya County, Kenya

“ *The staff and volunteers of the Tikvah Center didn't just pray for me. They paid my school fees, gave me pads, and told me how worthy I am. That changed everything!*”

Brenda, 19-year-old beneficiary and peer mentor



An evaluation during a workshop on the “See, Judge, Act” method



A 2023 SDG community training in Zimbabwe

In focus

Awareness and education on sustainable development

Challenge: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interconnected global targets adopted by UN member states in 2015 to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity and peace for all by 2030. Yet ten years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, progress towards the SDGs remains uneven, fragile, and far off track. Only 18% of SDG targets are predicted to be achieved by 2030, while a further 17% are only making moderate progress (UNSD). Nearly two-thirds of the goals have stalled, regressed, or are advancing too slowly, underscoring the need for accelerated and collaborative action. While important gains have been made in areas such as access to education, digital connectivity, and reductions in maternal mortality, advances have been slowed or reversed by conflict, climate change, economic instability, rising debt burdens, and persistent inequalities.

Compounding these challenges is a lack of knowledge about the SDGs. Despite their importance, only 50% of the global population is aware of the SDGs (UNSSC). Therefore, alongside the SDG 4 goal of quality education for all, there exists the need for education about sustainable development issues more generally. Greater awareness is necessary not only to increase support from international and multistakeholder cooperations, but also for individuals to engage with these goals in their everyday lives.

Further information

Article collection

🔗 [Seeds of Hope & Action Exhibitions in India](#)

Website

🗑️ [Seeds of Hope & Action, Soka Gakkai International](#)

Intervention: PaRD member Soka Gakkai International, together with Earth Charter International, developed a travelling exhibition to educate people about the importance of the SDGs and inspire local action. Surrounding the exhibitions, SGI conducts workshops, seminars, and advocacy events to emphasise the power of individuals to create change. Since its inception in 2021, the exhibition has been shown in 24 countries on five continents and translated into ten languages: Chinese, English, French, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Portuguese, Spanish, and Thai. Through the national offices, Soka Gakkai mobilises local actors, including youth guides, schools, and religious groups, to educate their communities about the importance of contributing to the SDGs.

“We are determined to create an era of sustainable human behaviour and drive reforms from the bottom up for the well-being of future generations and our planet.”

Vishesh Gupta, Bharat Soka Gakkai (BSG) India

Impact & Takeaways: The exhibition proved replicable across regions and contexts and has served as a versatile tool for schools, community centres, and public venues. In India, 208 exhibitions were held in 20 cities and 213 schools and universities, which led to launching SDG clubs in 36 schools. The exhibition inspired individuals to create their own sustainability initiatives, such as rainwater harvesting and organic waste treatment. Many local youth guides for the exhibition went on to lead their own educational SDG initiatives in their communities.

Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist movement, drew on its strong network of members and international partners at the grassroots level through decades of religious engagement. Participation in the PaRD Annual Forums and its Water, Environment and Climate Action (WECARE) workstream provided inspiration for Soka Gakkai International’s interfaith work, such as in this initiative.



Seeds of Hope & Action exhibition in Thailand

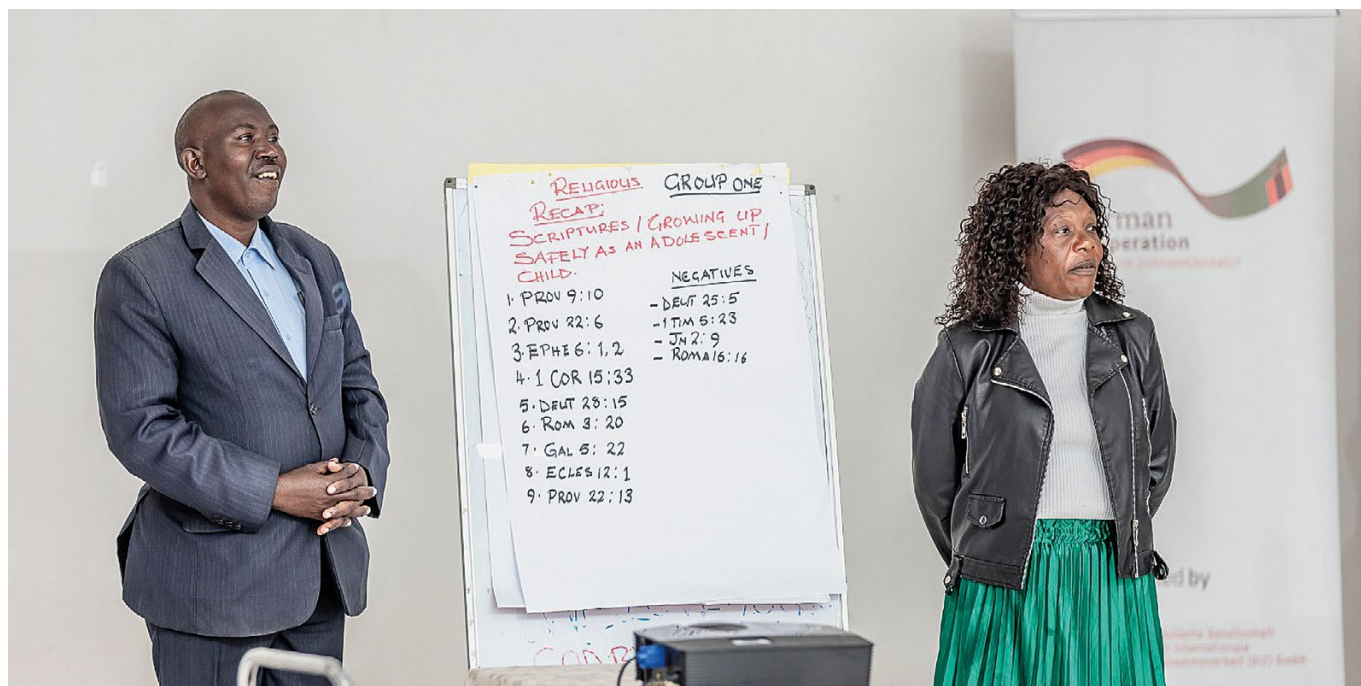
At a glance

Awareness and education on sustainable development

» **Timeframe:** 2021 – 2025

» **Key actors:** Soka Gakkai International and Earth Charter International

» **Locations:** Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Philippines, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Togo, UK, Uruguay, and Venezuela



Religious leaders presenting on young people's sexual reproductive health rights

In focus

Reproductive health education in Zambia

Challenge: HIV, unintended pregnancy, and gender-based violence remain widespread and interconnected challenges facing young people today. An estimated 41 million people are living with HIV worldwide, with over one million new infections each year (UNAIDS). Despite this, only one in three young people globally have accurate knowledge of HIV prevention (UNAIDS), a gap in information that leaves them vulnerable not only to HIV, but to unintended pregnancy as well. Nearly half of all pregnancies worldwide are unintended, with adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries facing an estimated 10.5 million unplanned pregnancies per year (WHO/UNFPA). These same gaps in health information and support also leave young people, and girls in particular, exposed to gender-based violence and child marriage, which remain acute problems for millions of women and girls annually (see chapter one on “health”, p. 10 and chapter three on “gender”, p. 24).

These conditions are shaped by a common underlying factor: limited access to accurate, age-appropriate health information. Just 37 % of young people in sub-Saharan Africa know about HIV transmission and prevention (UNESCO). Comprehensive sexuality education addresses this gap, providing young people with knowledge and skills appropriate to their context and stage of development.

Further information

Brochure

🔗 [Partnering for Change](#)



A joint dialogue between young people and religious and traditional leaders, highlighting the challenges differently abled youth face in accessing health services

Intervention: GIZ inaugurated the initiative “Strengthening Girls’ Rights!” in 2018 to support the Zambian government in ensuring that young people have access to high-quality, youth-friendly, and gender responsive educational services. The project developed the course “Join-In Circuit on AIDS, Love, and Sexuality”, an interactive method that allows young people to talk openly and learn about HIV, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence. The Join-In Circuit trainings bring local health workers and religious and traditional actors into dialogue to strengthen sexual and reproductive health education offerings. These exchanges improved services by helping find common ground between religious, traditional, and secular institutions. GIZ aims to train a further 1,500 community actors on age-appropriate sexual health curricula by the end of 2026.

At a glance

Strengthening Girls’ Rights! Reproductive Health and HIV prevention for young women and girls in Zambia

- » **Timeframe:** 2018 – Present
- » **Lead organisations:** GIZ, and the National HIV/AIDS/STI/TB Council of Zambia
- » **Location:** Lusaka Province, Luapula Province, Southern Province, and Eastern Province, Zambia

“Dialogue helps save lives. The dialogues on HIV, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence have changed my leadership and me, especially the way I approach young people. It’s important to be respectful, honest and direct with them, instead of avoiding sensitive topics or giving vague answers.”

Jethro Mandeva, Village Headman

Impact & Takeaways: Over 56,000 people have been reached directly by the “Join-In Circuit” (JIC) between 2022 and 2025, including young people with disabilities, parents, religious and traditional actors, and other community leaders. Over 450 professionals and youth have been trained as JIC trainers, and the JIC has been introduced in more than 20 districts across Zambia. The University of Zambia, and two nursing and midwifery colleges have integrated the JIC into their curricula. Young people in these regions now have better access to sexual health education and counselling services.

The intervention has also been linked to closer collaboration between religious and traditional actors and health-care workers. According to the National HIV/AIDS/STI/TB Council of Zambia, religious and traditional leaders now participate in District HIV/AIDS Committees, health workers are providing services through church platforms, and local leaders are collaborating with district authorities on responses to gender-based violence. This initiative helped streamline referral pathways for young people by facilitating dialogue between religious, traditional, and health-care actors. GIZ found that a strength of the project was involving influential women not often included as religious actors, such as wives of chiefs or religious leaders. These women helped bridge the gap between religious actors delivering the courses and young women in the community.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Quality education for all

Religious actors have played a key role in providing education for thousands of years. Schools, madrasas, and spiritual and religious training centres have often filled gaps in access to education, especially in places where public authorities fall short. Historically, this extensive reach of faith-based education was linked to patterns of coerced conversion and national assimilation programmes. Now, many religions are using educational resources to promote human flourishing for the most marginalised, regardless of their faith. The importance of religious actors in providing educational opportunities is growing as the rate of public spending for education is decreasing worldwide (UNESCO). In this way, religious actors are fulfilling a virtue shared across traditions – to illuminate the world through the sharing of wisdom and knowledge.

