

Effective Inter-religious Action in Peacebuilding Program (EIAP)

Key Findings from Literature Review/'State of Play' Report

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Overall Goal - to foster more effective inter-religious action as an important contributor to broader peacebuilding and development processes.

Specific Objectives:

1. Increase the understanding of current practices in inter-religious action and the status of evaluation efforts for such work;
2. Develop, test and refine a new guide on appropriate evaluation tools and methodologies for inter-religious action;
3. Build a framework for developing, over time, an evidence base for effective inter-religious action; and
4. Advocate for policies that support effective inter-religious action in peacebuilding and development initiatives around the world.

Definition of Inter-religious Action & Peacebuilding

- Inter-religious action for peacebuilding is the engagement of religious actors, institutions, identities, narratives, and/or groups to support peace, whether or not the conflict involves religious groups or identities.

Scope of the Literature Review/'State of Play' Report

1. Religion's dual role in promoting conflict and peace
2. Program design, monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding
3. Typology of theories of change in inter-religious peacebuilding
4. Key partners in inter-religious peacebuilding
5. Key program activities in inter-religious peacebuilding
6. Gaps and remaining questions

Religion's Dual Role in Promoting Conflict and Peace

- This section draws on interviews, and academic literature to examine the relationships between religion, war, and peace. The “ambivalence” of religion – its ability to drive both conflict and peace – is due to its divine origin and values, its role in forming individual and group identities, and its organization, all of which can either undermine or support peacebuilding.
- Bringing peacebuilding into religion, and vice versa, is an opportunity to reach out to many people worldwide on a deeper moral and emotional level to promote peace.
- Beyond divine influence, religion's influence stems from three factors: its sacred ideals, individual and group religious identity, and religious organization. This framework enables inter-religious peacebuilders to think more strategically about why and how engaging with religion can support peace.
- Religious symbols, practices, and institutions provide access to these normative frameworks. Actors may use practices and traditions to legitimate or motivate people for violence or peace, like Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Boko Haram who use religious texts and interpretations to inspire violence. Simultaneously, religious actors can also use symbols, rituals and practices to build support for non-violence; for example, Gandhi built on the Hindu practice of fasting to promote respect and religious tolerance.

Program Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Peacebuilding

This section summarizes the prevailing literature on good practice in program design, monitoring, and evaluation.

- Common goals center around promoting mutual understanding and connections and resolving conflicts to prevent violence, including:
 1. Attitude change, connection and relationship-building across conflict (or religious) lines. Efforts may aim to deconstruct hostile perceptions, reduce suspicion, and build mutual understanding and cooperation.
 2. Inter-religious coexistence and cooperation on common issues that promotes “tolerance”, understanding, respect and ability to live together despite differences.
 3. Dispute resolution—reaching agreements (e.g., on land disputes), or “at least” ongoing dialogue to resolve differences
 4. Addressing deep structural factors that prevent reconciliation, such as poverty, exploitation, exclusion and social injustice. This reflects a sense among many faith-based practitioners, similar to more secular practitioners, that it is not enough to promote reconciliation through dialogue and training; concrete (joint) action and change in concrete issues of concern (such as poverty, violent extremism, unemployment, health, etc.) are needed to facilitate reconciliation.
 5. Reform and reintegration of ex-combatants, with a focus on correcting “negative images” through use of religious texts and “deprogram[ming] them from their tendency towards violence, to renounce violence.
- In addition, some purposes and goals emerged as particularly important and meaningful for inter-religious peacebuilding in EIAP Advisory Council and Berkley Center discussions:
 1. Healing and reconciliation. This is a core domain of work for religious peacebuilders, and a domain that many noted is a special responsibility and area of contribution for inter-religious peacebuilding. This includes both supporting healing both within one’s self and supporting acceptance of responsibility and forgiveness both individually and within and across communities.
 2. Solidarity, mobilization and making people’s voices heard. Protecting and “caring for the people” in the midst of violence, as well as advocating for their needs and making people’s voices heard (with government, in peace processes) on grievances, humanitarian concerns and other issues that affect them.
 3. Education for better choices in conflict—or as one practitioner has noted, “ to move from a position of ignorance to a position of knowledge” about different religions and issues that can trigger conflicts so that people can respond constructively, and not react, to provocations and manipulation based on “misinformation” about religious texts and beliefs.
 4. Hope. An important goal is to engender and sustain hope during conflict and in long and difficult peacebuilding processes—through education, preaching and praying to support and sustain people’s hope that things can get better, and sustain their support for a future peace.

Theories of Change

- Theories with the strongest evidence – **Healthy Relationships, Cooperation on Mutual Interests, and Trauma Healing** – focus primarily on individual-level change but do not address how broader societal-level change will emerge from them, and thus require complementary approaches to translate the individual changes to the socio-political level.
- The **Pressure for Change, Building Networks and Alliances, and Legitimate Intermediary** theories of change rely on case study evidence and would benefit from meta-analysis to draw broader lessons. Other theories have gaps in evidence.
- Inter-religious peacebuilding has focused **relatively little on institution building**, a pattern that deserves exploration. Another area for investigation is understanding in what ways and in what circumstances religious leaders are willing and able to **effect different changes, especially across faiths**.
- Overall, there is relatively little research specific to inter-religious peacebuilding theories of change, but even less on evaluation of inter-religious action.

Key Partners in Inter-Religious Peacebuilding

The following includes a special focus on three groups commonly identified as implementation partners: religious leaders, youth, and women.

1. Religious Leaders - the most common partners in 15 of 25 programs reviewed, religious leaders can lend legitimacy, authority, and provide an entry point to religious institutions and communities. Various programs leveraged leaders' positions and influence in sharing information, conducting trainings, and providing leaders with more skills and resources to mediate, negotiate or prevent conflict. With their moral authority, religious figures can also lead by example, interacting with those of other faiths to demonstrate the acceptability, and necessity of tolerance and peace.
2. Youth – the second most common target groups for programs. 8 out of the 25 programs focused on youth. Based on the relationship between low levels of education and employment, and higher levels of violence, as well as the “youth bulge” theory, that a high percentage of youth, particularly men, precedes conflict, youth are a key constituency to engage in peacebuilding. Siobhan McEvoy-Levy argues that working with youth is critical as many are active in conflict, are the primary perpetrators and victims of post-settlement violence, and their involvement shapes societal attitudes and behaviors in the future.
3. Women - As formal religious hierarchies often do not include women, peacebuilders have begun to actively work to engage more women. Women are also peacebuilders, but generally operate on a more local level, rather than the national or international, and with less recognition. A trainer on nonviolence in Nicaragua spoke about how, speaking with other peacebuilders from the Middle East, "We also talked about the fact that men have manipulated religion to exercise and justify violence against women. However, religion can also provide a ground for men to learn to respect women and to promote a world of peace." Nonetheless, working with women does not mean excluding others. In implementation, USAID suggests that integrating women necessitates first integrating religious leadership in men, otherwise leading men and leaders to see the program as threatening.

Key Program Activities in Inter-religious Peacebuilding

1. Dialogues
2. Training/Capacity Building
3. Mediation/Negotiation
4. Media Programming
5. Single-Identity Work

Gaps & Remaining Questions

1. Religion does provide unique access points and benefits in peacebuilding. The identity-forming aspects of religion as well as its ideals and organization can provide added value to peacebuilding.
2. If religion or religious identity is directly invoked in the conflict, addressing the driving narratives and identities is necessary to build peace.
3. Divine influence and transformational experiences cannot be disregarded as a potential source of change. Religion is a key way many people engage with and interpret the world, shaping norms and behavior, and as such can be a powerful force to build social cohesion and trust in support of peace.
4. Religious actors have been less inclined to engage in institution-focused approaches to peacebuilding. Most commonly, they have called for transitional justice, but have not focused on building institutions themselves. While this may reflect the separation of religion from the state in many countries, there is little research into how religious actors view the value and practice of institution building work, and why they do not focus on institutions.
5. Research has not examined in what ways religious actors are most effective at contributing to peacebuilding, particularly across faiths. The influence of religious actors is assumed in many programs, but the effects of organization and hierarchy, ideology, political context, and personal skills on the kinds of change religious actors can support goes unexplored.
6. As the field of inter-religious peacebuilding develops, program design, monitoring and evaluation must develop alongside. Few evaluations explicitly examined the inter-religious aspects of programs or religion's added value. We need to ask - What are the differences in monitoring and evaluating inter-religious versus secular programs, such as in content, focus, and approach? What are the most accurate ways to trace individual versus cumulative level effects of an intervention? What is the effective way to negotiate and approach the inherently divine aspect of inter-religious work?