



CONCEPT NOTE

Strategic Learning Exchange on “Religion, Development and Humanitarian Work”
Amman, 21st- 23rd March 2018

Partnering with Faith Organizations and Communities on the SDGs

Co-Sponsors & Co-Facilitators: The UN Interagency Task Force on Religion, International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development ([PaRD](#) – including [KAICIID](#) and [WVI](#)), The Humanitarian Leadership Academy ([HLA](#)) and the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization – [JHCO](#).

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

Nelson Mandela, Former President of South Africa

Overall Goal:

To develop the capacities of United Nations, governmental and partner faith-based entities to appreciate and enhance their programming, as well as the impact of delivery, through a realistic appraisal of religious dynamics in the SDGs with special focus on MENA region

BACKGROUND

There is a growing recognition in the international development and humanitarian community of the fact that religious agencies can be critical moral, social and political agents of human development. The resources they bring to the table (human, financial and spiritual) require study and honest appreciation from all of us working to serve the very same communities. Many of our organizations are now partnering with faith-based or faith-inspired service-delivery non-governmental organizations, local faith communities and religious leaders. These actors gathered a wide range of experiences and knowledge, which should be acknowledged as well as shared. However, the forms and scopes of engagement and the challenges inherent in them are not without valid concerns. Moreover, the various means of outreach need to be collectively reviewed and considered.

The Strategic Learning Exchange will bring together a range of UN staff members, with other PaRD members and partners who have experience in outreach with faith-based organizations and/or religious communities in the course of their respective work at senior programme and policy levels, the SDG areas.

The method used will be peer-to-peer learning and information sharing. The purpose of the Strategic Exchange is to explore the linkages between faith and the continuum of humanitarian to development work, and discuss the value-added of partnering and collaborating with faith-based organisations and local faith communities, including religious leaders, with a view to critical international intergovernmental decision-making fora. It will also consider the nature of development work as it intersects with religious issues, the specific challenges and best practices, all with human rights and gender equality as cross-cutting concerns. The SLE will bring in lessons learned from advocacy and service delivery work, at the programme design, implementation and evaluation phases. The main outcome is to enhance the 'how to' of dealing with, outreach to and partnering with faith-based organizations.¹

Several key faith-based representatives and resource persons will be invited to reflect on their partnership experiences with diverse UN staff (including policy advisers, Programme Officers), in service delivery, advocacy and capacity building. Participants are expected to bring their expertise on the linkages between religion and SDGs, focusing on conflict and peace building, security, education, health (including HIV and AIDS, SRHR), gender equality, poverty, environment and climate change.

In the Arab World, religion is quite an important driving force that continues to shape and influence the development of all aspects of life. Valuing the role religion plays in the region, FBO must be brought closer to the ongoing discussions on Development and Humanitarianism. Recent events have proven that the influence and existing structures -both formal and informal- are and can contribute to the actions of civil society organizations and broader civil society movements. This conference/ workshop does not intend

¹ Taken to include various sizes of faith-based or faith-inspired NGOs delivering services, religious leaders, as well as national, regional and globally-based networks.

to facilitate an interfaith dialogue, but rather an invitation to all influential structures to come together, discuss meaningful joining of efforts and plan in a coordinated manner to ensure prioritizing the best interest of all, with special focus on the most vulnerable in our societies.

Principles

- Based on peer to peer information and knowledge sharing;
- An activity of the members of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations for Sustainable Development (IATF-FBOs). As such, the SLE invites and involves UN colleagues, as well as multilateral partners;
- Representation will aim to be gender, regional and religiously balanced.

Criteria for Participation

- Participants should reflect a balance of the following **criteria**:
 - United Nations entities (regional and global), and governmental officials/staff, with experience in outreach with faith-based and faith-inspired non-governmental organizations (FBOs), and religious institutions, around development and humanitarian work.
 - FBOs and officials from religious institutions' already engaged with either the United Nations, and/or regional or national governmental entities/departments in advocacy or service delivery around development and humanitarian efforts.
 - Some representation of academics specializing in the study of religion and development in the Arab region, with research and data around the intersections between religion, development and humanitarian work.
 - All participants are required to have and share case studies of partnerships and/or brief descriptions of actual programmes around development and humanitarian work, which will be solicited beforehand, per a common template.
- Organizers reserve the right to decide on final participation.

Objectives Informing Methodology

Guiding Questions for this peer-to-peer SLE deliberations will feature the following:

1. *What are the linkages between faith and the SDGs?*

Increased understanding of the linkages between religion and SDGs in contemporary contexts with a view to intergovernmental dynamics (including globalization, political change, conflict, peacebuilding, climate change, economic and financial contexts and impact on aid effectiveness, social inclusion, cultural diversity, etc.).

2. *How do these interlinkages manifest in practical development endeavors at the intergovernmental as well as at field-levels?*

Identification of respective case studies highlighting opportunities and challenges of working with religious communities and faith-based organizations in development and humanitarian work; Challenges and opportunities internal to the cultures of development and humanitarian organizations, e.g. religion as part of the challenges behind – as well as responses to – social inclusion dynamics, climate change, and diverse political and economic conflicts.

3. *How can the UN, governments, development agencies, faith-based organizations, together with other civil society entities, realise coherent policies and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels??*

- Critical Assessment of challenges
- Exploring potential existing (as well as future) partnership moments
- Future needs and priorities for other platforms for exchanges on these issues.

Cross-Cutting Issues: human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment

Features

- An invitation will be made to members of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force, PaRD members and partners, including FBO and academic partners/co-sponsors
- In addition to UNFPA and UNAIDS as co-leads from the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion, the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, and the Humanitarian Academy, the King Abdullah Center for Dialogue (KAICIID) and World Vision International are also co-sponsoring and providing co-facilitation.
- Overall duration: 2-3 days (Arrival March 21st and departure on March 23rd, 2018);
- Location: AMMAN, Jordan.
- Peer to peer modality means that each participant, whether from the UN, governmental entities or the faith/interfaith organizations is, simultaneously, a resource person;
- The course is largely interactive and includes panels, workshops, debates and diverse reflection exercises;
- Different knowledge materials are to be made available from respective co-sponsors and participating agencies. Participants are invited to bring their materials;

Testimonies from Previous Strategic Learning Exchange Participants:²

Below are some testimonies from participants who range from UN Resident Coordinators to Programme Advisors and Specialists.

UNFPA:

"I have learned from our own colleagues, from the FBOs and from our other agencies. This has opened my eyes to so many issues of partnership, or trust building, of opportunities to confront very real taboos and social restrictions."

UNAIDS:

"Rarely does one get an opportunity to boast about one's work and still be also humbled by the work of other colleagues dealing with such challenges. What a rich experience – thank you and I am proud UNAIDS could co-sponsor this!"

WHO:

"Finally we can learn from each other on an issue we were not even allowed to acknowledge before – the power of religion in the lives of millions of people... Very pleased you also brought on board the FBOs so we are not preaching to each other only, but we actually have their own voices to inform us".

UNDP:

"This is seminal and timely and, frankly...courageous. We learn to appreciate not only the litany of complaints development can produce, but to actually realize concrete objectives and understand the know-how of changing behaviors, finding common ground with some of the most intractable forces in society... this kind of format lends itself to appreciating the dignity of the rights mandate we all carry...well done!"

UNICEF:

"Why did it take us so long to have this?! Some of us started already in the early 1970s to urge the international development community to undertake these kinds of partnerships...on reflection... perhaps this was the right time so we could think together on what we have already learned and how much further we need to go. This has been very helpful for me to realize what is perhaps the obvious, but then again, we need to be reminded of how to deal with the obvious".

World Bank:

"This kind of gathering actually vindicates what some of us in the World Bank have been trying to say for so long – albeit against the current: that faith is the single most important determinant of real change...I am pleased we could appreciate the innuendo and the methods together and I look forward to having more of my colleagues involved in future."

² This course is built on experience of an SLE co-provided by UNAIDS, UNHCR and UNSSC (UN System Staff College) since 2010, and the testimonials provided herein are based on those.