

JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE *on* **FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

Summary Report of Board Preparation Interviews

December 2016

Summary

The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) supports the full and appropriate engagement of the capacities of religious and faith-based groups in the achievement of the SDGs through effective partnerships with public sector and secular entities, as well as among religious groups themselves.

The JLI goals are to build cross-sector, multi-religious, interdisciplinary, collaborative learning platforms to gather robust evidence for capacities, activities, contributions and challenges of faith groups, to understand the drivers of attitude and behavior change for policy makers and practitioners re engaging with faith groups and to deliver smart communication to policymakers and practitioners transform the quality, effectiveness, and impact of partnerships between faith groups and the development community.

In preparation for the JLI's October 2016 Board meeting, there was a desire to better understand JLI's role in influencing policymakers and to determine the evidence requirements to be effective. To this end, 19 interviews were conducted in August and September 2016 with board and advisory group members, hub co-chairs and hub members.

This reports summarises the findings from these interviews. The opinions laid out in this report are drawn exclusively from the interviews.

Key insights

With regard to JLI's specific role, there is consensus around a continued focus on evidence aggregation. There is less unity around the broader roles the JLI could play, including convening or curating a living network of experts and practitioners.

Several clear recommendations surfaced in our discussions on outreach to policy makers. These include defining the audience for JLI's messages, understanding this audience's needs and tailoring communication to these needs. Specifically, there was a call to ensure messages are concise, compelling, creatively packaged and coordinated across member organisations.

On the nature of evidence to support these needs, a key priority is advocating for the generation of new information about the capacities, assets, activities and contributions—both positive and negative— of faith groups. Indeed, there is an opportunity to leverage JLI's credibility and network to raise the standards in measurement so that more robust evidence can be created. Partnerships, either with well-regarded independent institutions or with implementing organisations, were identified as an important enabler to building credibility. Finally, specificity on the unique advantages to be gained from working with faith networks and faith-based organisations is seen as essential in improving the value of the evidence.

The JLI would like to express its sincere gratitude to the interviewees in this process, who kindly contributed their time and thoughts to ensuring the JLI continues to have a positive and significant impact on the development community

Definitions

‘Religious and Faith-based organizations’ will be used throughout the summary to refer to religious leaders, congregations, faith communities and faith-based non-governmental agencies (NGOs), at both local and international levels. Abbreviated as FBOs

Contents

1 – Interview questions	page 5
2 – The role of JLI in influencing policy makers	page 6
3 – Key findings on evidence	page 12
Appendix – List of interviewees	page 15

1 - Interview questions

A. OUTREACH TO POLICY MAKERS

1. What will it take to influence policy makers to increase their dialogue and interaction with faith-based groups?
 - What can we learn from previous successful / unsuccessful interactions?
 - What else, beyond evidence, is required? Is it a lack of evidence?
 - To what extent can we influence the other factors?
2. What tools and resources should JLI develop to support this influence?
3. What examples have you seen in other policy areas that has worked well? What can we learn from this?
4. How can JLI support PaRD, Oxfam and other secular and non-secular intermediaries to better influence policy makers?
5. What are the big opportunities in the next 12-24 months for influencing policymakers? What do we need to make this happen?
6. Who are the specific policy makers that we should focus on influencing that would be most easily engaged (low hanging fruit)? Who should we focus on with the expectation that it will be a longer-term goal, but who can have significant impact?
7. How can local faith based leaders best position themselves to play a more active role in the localisation agenda?

B. EVIDENCE

8. What examples come to mind where scientific evidence has contributed to change in the development and humanitarian fields? What are examples of evidence-based decisions in the development arena (where evidence has been a driver)?
9. What faith and development research, what is the most compelling? Why?
 - What JLI research is most compelling?
10. What is the opportunity to reframe existing evidence on faith and development to make it more compelling?
11. What question/apprehension is JLI best equipped, from an evidence perspective, to address with policy makers?
12. Policy makers seem keen to understand models and mechanisms of engagement. What evidence around mechanisms and models of engaging faith based leaders/communities is most compelling? What is the best practice example?

2 – The role of JLI in influencing policy makers

i. JLI's specific role






“JLI cannot be everything to everyone – it cannot claim authority as an influencer, a convener, a researcher – it needs to choose its sweet spot”

Historically, JLI was one of the few conveners in the faith and development space. Several new entrants mean that JLI needs to find its niche to stay relevant. This created the impetus for our discussion with interviewees on the specific role the JLI should play in furthering collaboration between faith groups, governments and development organisations in reducing poverty.

Our interviews surfaced a broad range of views as to what JLI could and should be. These can be illustrated through five metaphors as shown in figure 1.

Members clearly have divergent opinions on the role of JLI. There is extensive support for a continued role as evidence aggregator and curator (the librarian). However, there is less consensus around the extent to which the JLI should be more of a “living” system of knowledge, experts and implementers, as the brain or hive metaphors might be. Some more tenured members extolled the original purpose of the JLI as a safe space for experimentation (the laboratory). Others raised the question of a greater role in advocacy, but there is limited support for this incarnation as it is seen undermine the position of JLI as a neutral voice. Given the breadth of aspirations for the organisation, there is scope for the board to better define JLI's approach and purpose.

Figure 1 - Metaphors for JLI's role

 <p>Laboratory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A safe space for experimentation Has the right environment & equipment to allow research to happen 	 <p>Librarian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A curator of knowledge Has access to large volume of information Acts a matchmaker between knowledge and knowledge seekers 	 <p>Brain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A living system A series of interconnected nodes Information flows across the nodes Collectively decide the best course of action 	 <p>Amplifier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amplifies messages to make them heard more broadly Takes ideas and concepts from others and reproduces for a wider audience 	 <p>Hive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A living system “Out there” gathering pollen Comes together in a structured manner to make honey from the pollen
<p>“JLI is now seen as an information platform, a thought broker where you can present evidence”</p> <p>“JLI should be focused on bringing together FB leaders and academics in the pursuit of 2 things: deepen self-based understanding of truths and provide objective evidence to influence policy/action”</p>	<p>“Continue with evidence creation – but make it crisp”</p> <p>“Evidence aggregator – developing consumable evidence for specific touch points”</p> <p>“Should focus on creating the evidence base”</p> <p>“Should support improvements in the quality of evidence – both its content (making it more robust and credible) and in how it’s presented”</p>	<p>“JLI’s strength is to convene knowledge and bring together expertise”</p> <p>“JLI should serve a network function that connects people, provides evidence, surfaces the tough questions and works with the network to identify solutions; it needs to be highly curated – not based on meetings or conference calls; enables tough dialogue and matches people/organisations and evidence.”</p>	<p>“Work more in partnership with big implementation agencies – to be a campaigning tool”</p> <p>“Whilst research is the number 1 job, educating needs to be the 2nd job – especially the internal structures of UN and government entities”</p> <p>“Should it continue to be research focused or become more advocacy focused?”</p>	<p>“Focus on developing and proliferating scientific tools/frameworks for impact measurement”</p> <p>“Should support improvements in the quality of evidence – both its content (making it more robust and credible) and in how it’s presented”</p> <p>“Focus on developing and proliferating scientific tools/frameworks for impact measurement”</p> <p>“Ultimately, JLI should keep focused and be a convener of research and training on the “how”</p>

Development needs

Interviewees provided a number of other recommendations for JLI as a whole, beyond the specific scope of the interview questions. We have summarised these below.

- JLI should become more globally representative, both to gain credibility as the voice of different faith groups and to respond to the needs of development partners who work across the globe and across religious boundaries
 - This includes becoming more inclusive of minority religions (eg Buddhists, Hindus) and strengthening interfaith credentials, beyond Christian groups
 - It should ensure **greater “southern”** representation (i.e. Latin America, Africa & Asia), particularly in hubs;
 - It should publish research in different languages, to convey as many truths or “lived narratives” as possible
- JLI should separate the efforts for demonstrating **the impact of working** with Faith Networks and FBOs and getting more funding for these groups as the latter may conflict with the aims of some of JLI’s academic or institutional members

Impact to date

“The question is no longer whether we should work with faith groups. We’re beyond that. The question now focuses on how, and that is largely thanks to the JLI’s work”

Our interviewees celebrated the contributions of JLI. Many felt that there been significant progress in development organisations working with faith groups, that there has been a noticeable change in perceptions of religious groups during the time since JLI came on the scene as the importance of these groups is now clearly recognized and donors provide a lot more support to them.

Giving the example of the UK government, whereas previously, faith leaders were largely ignored, over the past 2 years they have been involved in comprehensive discussions on issues such as FGM, sexual abuse and gender-based violence in conflict, early childhood marriage.

JLI is seen as an important part of the faith-based agenda, even as a one stop shop for some. It is emblematic that the issue of working with FBOs is taken seriously

ii. Approach to Engagement

Outreach to policy makers

Sharing evidence with key stakeholders, including policy makers, practitioners and academics, is one of the JLI's goals. As such, this was an important focus of the interviews, exploring a range of issues, including "what does good look like?" and "what should JLI focus on?" Three recommendations came out of our discussions.

a) Define the audience

"We need to be part of the mainstream conversation"

The first step in influencing the conversation around working with Faith Based Organisations and Faith Networks requires an understanding of who the key stakeholders are. There are many potential consumers of JLI's outputs, and these can broadly be broken down by organisation, role and country.

With regard to organisations, these naturally include UN bodies, the primary UN funding nations and bi-lateral donors. Interviewees also mentioned the increasing importance of large private foundations who are exerting a growing influence over policy, through lobbying of Western governments and through control of funding in recipient countries.

With regard to roles, interviewees acknowledged the importance of high-level strategic decision makers and those who set broad country-level policies, whose influence has far reaching effects. However, they were at pains to underscore the value of people in more operational roles, those who design and oversee implementation of projects and the technical advisors within development agencies.

In terms of which countries JLI should be focusing on, there was a plea not to overlook middle-income countries and recipient country governments. Middle-income countries, including the burgeoning donors of the AU, may be more open to discussing different approaches reducing poverty than their Western counterparts, who may be suffering from message fatigue. Recipient countries, for their part, can influence and direct how some of their resources are deployed and are therefore critical partners in furthering the JLI's mission.

Finally, beyond specific organisations, individuals or nations, our conversations emphasised the need to "be part of the mainstream conversation". Whilst there is value in shared learning from convening groups of people who already support the JLI's mission, "preaching to the converted" will not broaden the audience for the JLI. Thus, the JLI should strengthen its participation in industry-wide, secular events, to ensure the case for working with faith groups is heard.

There was no clear consensus around which group, if any, the JLI should specifically target. The breadth of points of view collated through the interviews indicates a

concurrence that the diverse stakeholders each have a role to play in helping achieve JLI's goal.

b) Understand the needs of decision makers

“Numbers alone won't change attitudes”

Once the audience has been identified, a second, critical step, involves understanding their needs. What are their concerns? Where are their gaps in knowledge? What is preventing them from working with faith-based organisations and faith networks?

There are some very tangible needs that can be fulfilled with evidence. For example, assurance around making an investment, including demonstrating impact, value for money, return on investment. Other needs involve understanding how to go about working with FBOs and FNs, including the mechanics of interaction or how to scale up pilots.

Some needs are more abstract and will not be addressed through case studies and research papers. Some partnership decisions are made for geopolitical reasons. Certain people are persuaded not by evidence, but by conversations with knowledgeable people.

It is therefore essential to understand the mind set and position of the individuals the JLI is seeking to influence before determining the best approach.

c) Tailor the message

“The challenge today is that there is too much evidence, and people quickly become overwhelmed”

The interviews surfaced extensive recommendations on how to improve the digestibility of evidence and package it to make it more accessible to a broad range of audiences. These can be summarized as:

Concise messages. Messages need to be sharp, pithy and provocative. Robust evidence must be distilled for a broader audience. The learning hubs should follow the 1-3-33 formula, creating a 1 page summary to grab attention, a 3 page detailed policy brief showing how this could be implemented, and a 33 page detailed evidence pack for the business case. The JLI should continue to create policy briefs, but they should have a bias to action, with 3 clear recommendations.

“Policy makers have a narrow attention span – they need 2 pages, not 10 pages”

Compelling stories. The evidence needs to be conveyed through moving, people-based stories. A narrative demonstrating “here's what we accomplished – 2 families that would otherwise have.... Now are able to” is much more accessible and memorable than facts and figures.

“The importance is in finding the quantitative evidence but also in developing a strong narrative”

Creatively packaged. The information should make creative use of different communication media, including infographics, videos and videocasts. Multiple channels could be used for the same topic to reach different audiences and to reinforce messages.

“I received several reports on Ebola from different FBOs; they ranged from 35-60 pages – no one had time to read them. World Vision’s came with an infographic that contained key facts; this was quickly circulated and made it to the weekly meeting of Africa Leadership”

Coordinated. The JLI could amplify the impact of its messages by ensuring coordination of key messages across its members and by working closely with other inter-faith groups to develop common PR and communication strategies

3 – Key findings on evidence

Collating and consolidating evidence has been a core function of the Joint Learning Initiative from its inception. However, there is a feeling that the evidence is not currently used to great effect and we set out to understand how this could be changed. Our interviewees identified 4 actions in this area:

a) Focus on evidence generation

“Too much evaluation, not enough evidence”

The JLI should support the generation of new evidence as opposed to evaluation of existing evidence or literature reviews. Literature reviews are not enough to sway policy makers – they require “serious research”. The JLI should work through its member organisations to identify opportunities for new research.

b) Raise the bar on measurement of impact

“Evidence exists, but what is missing is the scientific measurement of impact”

JLI has the opportunity to increase the quality of research. It should provide guidance on what good evidence looks like, and build capacity among member organisations for generating robust evidence. The focus should be on measuring the impact of the work of faith networks and faith-based organisations in humanitarian crises and in development.

In addition, the JLI could lead the way in defining standardised criteria and metrics for measurement of impact – what should be monitored and how the information should be collected. This is a particularly challenging issue in the sphere of spirituality, as it goes against general religious beliefs that good deeds need to be measured and reported.

c) Build credibility through partnerships

“The Lancet partnership really enhanced JLI’s credibility”

The JLI should continue to pursue collaborations with respected, independent validators and experts – people “without a vested interest”. This will not only provide a rigorous analysis of JLI’s work, but also improve JLI’s standing as a knowledge provider and expert.

Further, JLI could adopt the role of independent validator by partnering with NGOs and governments to facilitate the generation of evidence. JLI’s role could be that of independent evaluator, accompanying the implementation of a programme and ensuring the appropriate scientific process is in place to enable measurement of impact (for a fee).

This would demonstrate the value-add of JLI's network of experts in this field and draw on JLI's unique ability to convene know-how on this topic.

d) Get specific about the advantages of Faith Networks and FBOs

“Our approach is often cheaper and more effective”

“We are doing the kind of work that gets to more people, more effectively”

There is a need to articulate how international development and humanitarian organisations can work with Faith Networks and Faith Based Organisations and the benefits and impact on communities of such partnerships. Specificity should extend to individual countries and organisations – for example, having national coverage and a clear organisational structure may help a faith network be highly effective in a given country, whilst operating a number of schools and hospitals may help a faith based organisation mobilise rapidly in the event of a humanitarian crisis.

The JLI should describe the unique value-add of Faith Based Organisations and Faith Networks and elucidate the exact role local players could play. Partnerships will not be appropriate in every situation, but being explicit about the advantages of FBOs or FNs means partnerships are more likely to be successful when they do occur.

Interviewees highlighted a range of attributes of FBOs and FNs, including

- A holistic approach to reducing poverty
- Authoritative – evidence from the field demonstrates that ceasefires are achieved through faith leaders
- Effective – in DRC, the church is playing a major role in moving towards peace and elections
- Able to instil values and change social norms
- Ability to rapidly mobilise as already have existing structures in place
- Often the only trusted organisations in humanitarian crises

The JLI needs to continue to showcase examples where major national government actors and international development partners have engaged with faith leaders and where it has worked. Equally important, the JLI should not shy away from presenting evidence of things that have not worked – to ensure that stakeholders can learn from and build on these experiences.

of JLI's knowledge-----**Learning Hubs –the engines**

The JLI is structured around a small number of topic-specific learning hubs. These hubs draw together expertise from academia, practitioners and international organisations to identify knowledge gaps in their topic area and work to address these. Given the crucial role they play in evidence, they featured prominently in our interviews.

There was consensus that the limited lifespan of a learning hub helps to drive focus. It was felt that they can be highly effective when they have strong, active leadership with frequent interaction across members, but that this was not true for all Hubs. Looking ahead, there was excitement around a number of hot topics on which Learning Hubs could be created, including:

- Migration and human trafficking
- Countering violent extremism/ security
- All of the sustainable development goals
- Early childhood education
- Universal access to health care
- Health more broadly – Malaria, HIV, Ebola response

In addition, there was a suggestion for the Hubs to become less topical and more focussed on crosscutting themes, for example, mechanisms for engagement with local faith communities.

Appendix – Interviewees

Mike Battcock

Governance Coordinator, Inclusive Societies Department, Department for International Development (DFID)

David Boan

Co-director of Humanitarian Disaster Institute, Wheaton College

Mark Brinkmoeller

Director, Centre for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, USAID

Rachel Carnegie

Co-Executive Director, Anglican Alliance

Jonathan Duffy

President, Adventist Development and Relief Agency

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

Co-Director of Migration Research Centre, University College London

Matthew Frost

Co-Chairman, JLI

Nigel Harris

CEO, Tearfund

Azza Karam

Senior Culture Advisor, UNFPA

Anwar Khan

CEO, Islamic Relief, USA

Katherine Marshall

Senior Fellow, Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs

Ruth Messinger

President, American World Jewish Service

Ulrich Nitschke

Head of Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development

Head of International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)
Secretariat

Jill Olivier

Research Director, International Religious Health Assets Programme, University of Cape
Town

Ray Offenheiser

CEO, Oxfam America

Charles Owubah

Partnership Leader, Evidence & Learning Unit, World Vision International

Helen Stawski

External Relations & Advocacy Manager, Islamic Relief UK

Isis Sunwoo

Humanitarian Policy and Learning Advisor, World Vision International

Adam Taylor

Lead, Faith Based Initiative, World Bank

For more information, please visit the JLI website (<http://jliflc.com>) or contact the JLI Coordinator, Jean Duff at jeanduff@pfaithdev.org or Knowledge Manager, Stacy Nam, at stacynam@jliflc.com.