

# Evaluating Religious and Interreligious Peacebuilding: Meeting the Challenge

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## Definition

Faith-based peacebuilders (both practitioners and participants) believe in a form of spiritual reality that transcends the material world, and that belief can have a profound effect on the way that they do peacebuilding.

# What makes faith-based peacebuilding unique?

Fuzzy boundaries of the interreligious peacebuilding field, but values and faith of the participants or/and practitioners:

- a. Analysis of the causes of conflict: **“God caused it”**
- b. Perceptions of role of conflict structures and systems (economic, political, social, etc.) **“secondary or earthly”**
- c. Spirituality is essential for intervention (prayer, fasting, social justice, etc.
- d. Criteria of Success are spiritually framed: **“Blessed by God; Becoming better Muslim/Christian/Jewish/Buddhist/Hindu). “Achieving good peace”**
- e. Emphasize deep personal transformation: **Individual spiritual growth and development is emphasized**
- f. Majority of faith groups are **subject to hierarchal system**: weakness and strengths in terms of Peacebuilding (design, process, monitoring evaluation, and follow up : **“The bishop/imam can decide and deliver!!”**

## Why monitor and evaluate interreligious peacebuilding?

- Accountability, not only towards donors but rather **responsibility** to the stakeholders and actors directly affected by peacebuilding processes
- Ensure that **needs are met**, projects are adjusted to address alterations in needs in the rapidly changing conditions in fragile contexts, and that peacebuilders adhere to the 'do no harm' principle
- Learning how to be more **effective** in achieving change, throughout the duration of the project cycle to analyse the situation at different points in the project, allowing for managing risks and making adjustments.

Share findings of the final evaluation for development in the field

**“FAITH IS NECESSARY, BUT ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH” TO INSURE EFFECTIVE INTERRELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING.**

# Manipulation of Religious Identity and Context

- Foundation for the growing interest in this area is unfortunately based on a **wider attention to the role of religion in violent conflicts.**
- Manipulation of religious identity by both certain politicians and religious agencies -> open public debates and ideological conflicts on the role of religion in peace and violence.
- Clear recognition among governments, donors, and secular peacemakers that religious and faith agencies have to be engaged in the processes of **resolving these violent conflicts and their consequences.**

# Engagement of policy makers with religious leader and MACRO impact

- Often policy makers call for further engagement with religious leaders to confront and solve social and political problems. **NEED AN EVIDENCE**
- Policy makers tend to rely on written results that are evidence-driven and action-oriented. Subculture of religious and interreligious peacebuilding tends to be oral, anecdotal, and relationship-oriented → **challenge in communicating their message and importance of their work to policy makers.**

Monitoring and evaluation as an essential step to effectively communicate the message of religious agencies to the public

Measuring the outcomes and impact of religious and interreligious peacebuilding is key to:

1. Influence policy makers or donors,
2. Persuade the public that religious identity is not a source of violence and exclusion
3. Provide clear proof that religious identity and actors can be influential keys in unlocking societal stalemates and in promoting social cohesion in divided societies.

Many questions that interreligious field has to address in order to be able to present a coherent evaluation framework to be utilized by practitioners and donors: **EMERGING PROFESSIONAL SUBFIELD**

- 1) What are current methods of evaluation being utilized by the practitioners? **MAPPING**
- 2) What are the challenges that face an evaluator in this field of religious and interreligious peacebuilding? **Are these different from other fields?**
- 3) What are the **most effective tools and criteria** that can be used by evaluators and practitioners to both monitor and evaluation interreligious interventions?

## EMERGING PROFESSIONAL SUBFIELD

- 1) Do evaluators need **new – unique – methodologies** and frameworks in carrying out their design in the context of religious and interreligious peacebuilding?
- 2) What are the main **research themes and gaps** in the field that need to be addressed in order to further advance the monitoring and evaluation in this area?

Development of ethical and theoretical evaluation frameworks and procedures for religious and interreligious peacebuilding is an important step towards:

- Strengthening programmes and projects in the field,
- Advancing scholarly and professional recognition,
- Communicating and engaging with policy-making circles and other agencies who influence the process of social change.

# Challenges and implications for IRD and Peace Building

1. **In and out group boundaries** can be “stricter”; “More costly”; “How much risk to counter the ingroup” -> Success criteria should be viewed differently in terms of change.
2. Change can be “existential meaning” affect all parts of life. Collapse of **meaning system** -> Evaluation instruments sensitive to such gradual shift: “the insensitive question of: how did this workshop change your way of practicing your faith?”
3. Fear of **conversion** as a result of IRD/PB -> Carefully addressed or tackled in the evaluation
4. Religion is perceived as a **source of violence and causes war** (by conflicting societies) -> EVEN some/many evaluators themselves have this perceptions. Religious Violence focus minded-Set. Stronger pressure to seek causal links to defuse this perception (donors, public, beneficiaries, and implementers)
5. **Global context** of religion and violence and its impact on IRD/PB: ISIS/Al Qaeda/ Myanmar; Palestine/Israel -> Bring this factor into the evaluation tools (do not neglect it)

# Challenges posed to M&E in interreligious peacebuilding

1. Dialogue and interreligious peacebuilding are **not rapid** processes
2. **Skepticism** on the need of evaluations, as well as the evaluators involved may hinder the development of monitoring and evaluation processes and limit data collection
3. Evaluation **practices used for traditional peacebuilding** projects and programmes are **not** always a good fit for interreligious peacebuilding projects
4. There is a risk of **instrumentalization** of religion as well as **downplaying** the importance of religion
5. There is the risk of **overemphasizing** religion and losing focus on addressing the root causes of conflict
6. There is a significant **lack of literature** regarding monitoring and evaluation practices of religious and interreligious peacebuilding and dialogue
7. **Recognition** within the field of evaluation

## Lessons learned on M&E in interreligious peacebuilding

1. Field has expanded but need to tackle even basic challenges such as developing base line studies, increasing investment on long-term programme designs and thereby evaluations, the need to incorporate evaluation from the beginning stages – during the development of the programme design – rather than simply to placate donors.
2. More “case study harvesting” will also be necessary.
3. Access to women in many faith groups is more challenging.
4. Need for the development of a greater number of innovative models and frameworks.

## Lessons learned on M&E in interreligious peacebuilding

5. **Integrating spirituality in the process of evaluation** (team, design, etc.) allow you to further access and smooth entry points
6. **Classic and traditional tools of evaluation** (data collection: survey; reports and desk review; quantitative analysis; etc.) might be limited in certain cases in capturing the inner dynamics of faith based peacebuilding.
7. **Overcoming initial resistance and perceptions of relevancy of M&E** in interreligious peacebuilding context require more **careful and nuanced approach than other areas.**



## CONCLUSIONS

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In this global context in which religious institutions are under attack and major questioning of their role, evaluation of interreligious peacebuilding is no longer a secondary priorities in the process of intervention, but it is essential step in the process of effectively communicating the message of the religious agencies to the public.

## Resources in the field

- “Evaluating Religious and Interreligious Peacebuilding: Meeting the Challenge”, Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Renáta Katalin Nelson, De Gruyter – Academic publishing, 2021
- “New Directions in Peacebuilding Evaluation”, edited by Tamra Pearson D’Estrée, Chapter *Challenges in Peacebuilding Evaluation: Voices from the Field*, Mohammed Abu-Nimer - Rowman & Littlefield, 2020
- “Making Peace with Faith”, edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Michelle Garred - Rowman & Littlefield, 2018
- Search for Common Ground: <https://www.sfcg.org/tag/ilt-toolkits/>
- DME for Peace: <https://www.dmeforpeace.org/resource/faith-matters-guide-design-monitoring-evaluation-inter-religious-action-peacebuilding/>
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