

SUMMARY BRIEF

Compendium of Good Practices on Conducting MEAL in Partnerships with International Actors and Local Faith Actors

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) MEAL Hub

JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE on
FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Photo: International Care Ministries, Philippines

MEAL and faith in the development and humanitarian sector

Faith actors have long been involved in initiatives aimed at improving the wellbeing and health of communities. While much of the international system continues to be characterised by secular approaches, there is an increasing awareness of the contribution of faith communities to development and humanitarian action, which goes hand in hand with a recognition that international secular approaches are not always suited for engagements with local faith actors. Other areas of faith and development/humanitarian action have received increased attention in recent years; however, we still know relatively little about Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL), and faith in the sector.

About the JLI MEAL Hub

The [JLI Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning \(MEAL\) Hub](#) convened in 2019 to better understand how activities related to MEAL are conducted in international-local partnerships where the local partners are from a faith-inspired organization, from any faith. The JLI MEAL Hub focuses on providing a space for learning exchange on current practices in MEAL with and for local faith actors in the development and humanitarian sector.

Tensions in international-local MEAL partnerships with a faith element

The inclusion of MEAL can, at times, lead to tensions in local-international partnerships. For example, there is often pressure by donors and international partners to add MEAL to partnerships with local faith actors, even though conventional MEAL activities can at times feel like a burden to local faith actors, who do not always see the value of collecting data in the ways and on the questions that institutional donors and partners expect. Sometimes, local faith actors lack the resources to implement MEAL to the standard expected by international donors, which may disqualify them from applying for funding, despite having long-standing experience and being deeply rooted in the local context.

Methodology

The JLI MEAL Hub therefore decided to compile an analysis of challenges and good practice examples of local-international partnerships on MEAL in which faith is an aspect. It is the intention that these examples are of use to a broad humanitarian and development audience. The compendium is based on case studies submissions by MEAL Hub members (and beyond) as well as 31 interviews with representatives of secular and faith-based international organisations, local faith actors, and academics. It showcases how 10 organisations working in the development and humanitarian sector in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Latin America approach MEAL in their local-international partnerships with a faith element.

[READ THE FULL COMPENDIUM HERE](#)



Photo: World Relief

Findings I: Opportunities and challenges of international MEAL practices in partnerships with local faith actors

Organisations working in international-local faith partnerships are motivated by internal and external drivers to include MEAL in their activities, with a mix of both drivers influencing most of them. Initially, the inclusion of MEAL is often required by an international donor or partner, but some organisations see significant value in the MEAL approaches and adopt them even when there are no funding-related requirements. Barriers to incorporating MEAL for local faith actors include a reliance on community funding that do not require MEAL, limited resources dedicated to MEAL, and faith/cultural factors such as a belief in divine guidance rather than secular notions of accountability, with some of these applying to both partnerships with and without a faith element. Moreover, the compendium underscores the specific contexts of securitisation, racism, and Islamophobia that impact minoritized faith actors in particular, such as Western-based Islamic and Buddhist international organisations.

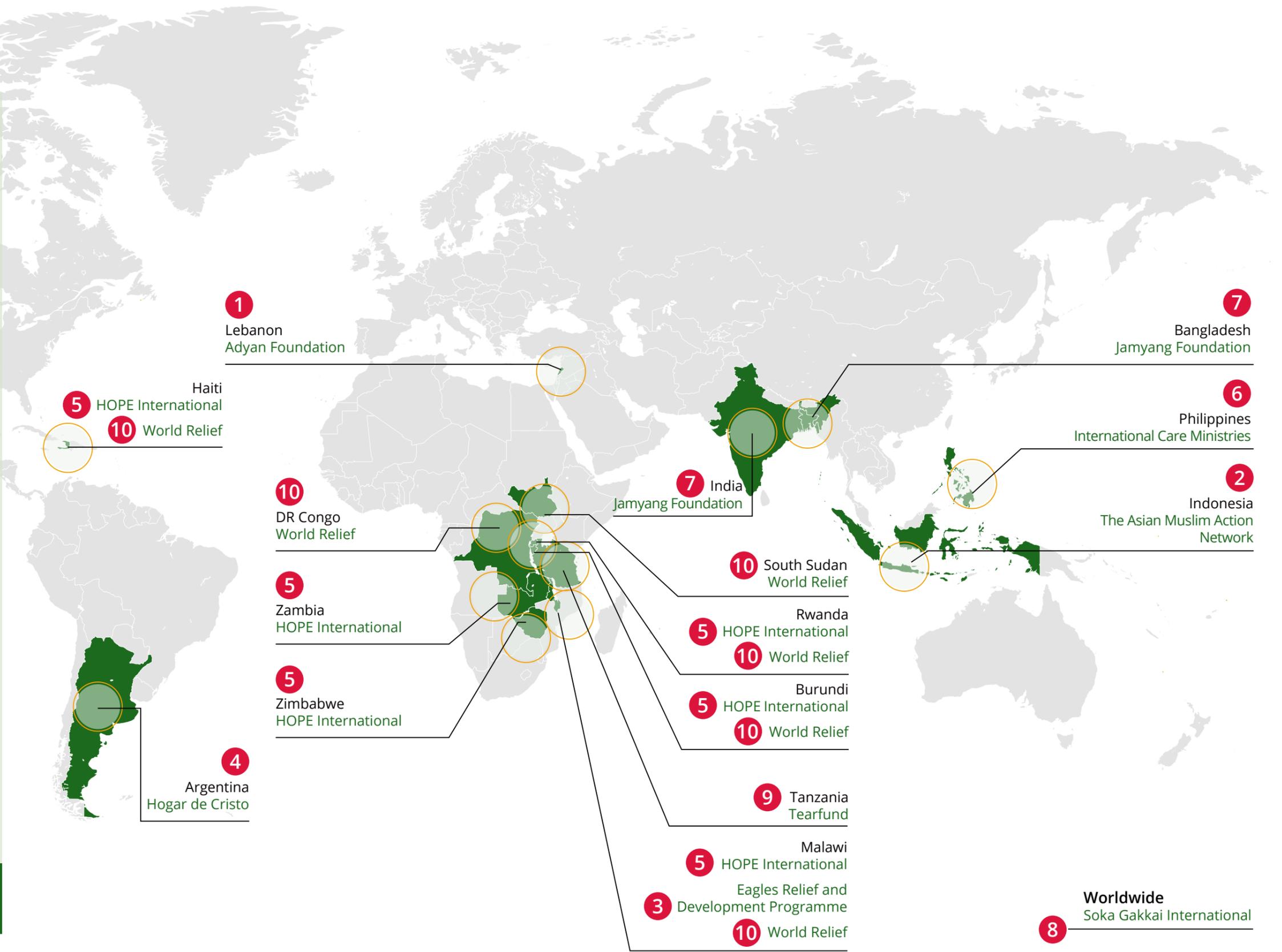
Findings II: Diversity of MEAL practices in international-local faith partnerships

The 10 stories of change included in the compendium highlight the diversity of practice of a range of organisations involved in international-local partnerships with/as local faith actors. Although Western and Christian approaches dominate many contemporary debates on MEAL and faith, the compendium extends these discussions by including cases of non-Western and non-Christian groups. The stories of change in the compendium illustrate the broad range of different approaches organisations adopt, including practices that go beyond Western MEAL. This part of the compendium raises important questions about participation, ownership, terminology, and the context in which MEAL and faith activities take place.

Findings III: A case for decolonised approaches?

While there is some evidence and collections of good practice as well as toolkits on faith and MEAL, many of these have been developed within Western frameworks. However, the compendium finds that not all faith actors in development and humanitarian aid practice Western forms of MEAL and not all see a need to change that, as they have developed other forms of accountability, learning, and the sharing of experiences that are rooted in their faith tradition. The compendium therefore not only shares the diversity of practices in the area of MEAL and faith in international-local partnerships, but also aims to contribute to a normalisation of decolonised approaches in the sector, with a view to unsettling existing power dynamics and helping redefine what is important and who determines it as such within the context of MEAL.

- 1** Adyan Foundation - Lebanon
[MEAL and faith in highly sectarianized contexts](#)
- 2** Asian Muslim Action Network - Indonesia
[Amplifying the voices of women in interfaith settings](#)
- 3** Eagles Relief and Development Programme - Malawi
[From staff-based to community-focused MEAL](#)
- 4** Hogar de Cristo - Argentina
[When qualitative approaches work best](#)
- 5** HOPE International - Burundi, Haiti, Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
[Listening as ministry](#)
- 6** International Care Ministries - Philippines
[Representative long-term community phone surveys](#)
- 7** Jamyang Foundation - India and Bangladesh
[Covering MEAL basics under challenging circumstances](#)
- 8** Soka Gakkai International - Worldwide
[Beyond Western MEAL framework](#)
- 9** Tearfund - Tanzania
[Integrating the Light Wheel Approach into church and community mobilisation MEAL](#)
- 10** World Relief - Burundi, DR Congo, Haiti, Malawi, Rwanda, and South Sudan
[Quantitative household surveys led by local faith actors](#)



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ORGANIZATION	COUNTRY	INTERNATIONAL ELEMENT	LOCAL FAITH ELEMENT	LESSONS LEARNED
Adyan Foundation	Lebanon	International secular donor	Partnerships with local Muslim, Christian, and Druze faith leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working on sensitive issues
Asian Muslim Action Network	Indonesia	Internationally operating German Protestant faith-based donor organisation	Coordination by national Islamic faith inspired organisation, partnerships with Muslim and Christian local faith actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive and participatory approaches Gender dynamics
Eagles Relief and Development Programme	Malawi	International Christian donor	National faith-based Christian organisation, partnerships with local churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapting tools Terminologies Responding to resistance
Hogar de Cristo	Argentina	International research collaboration between Argentinian Catholic university, British university, and local Catholic NGO network	Evaluation of a programme run by local Catholic NGO network that provides an integral response to problematic drug consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative approaches Language matters
HOPE International	Burundi, Haiti, Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia and Zimbabwe	International non-denominational Christian faith-based poverty alleviation organisation	Involvement of local church partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning from listening Impartiality
International Care Ministries	Philippines	International Christian faith-based poverty alleviation organisation	Partnerships with local pastors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith engagement in a crisis The value of long-term relationships
Jamyang Foundation	India and Bangladesh	International Buddhist faith-based organisation specialising in women's and girls' education	Partnerships with local Buddhist nuns; education programmes, including secular and faith elements, aimed at local Buddhist women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity of practice within one faith tradition Disconnect between large donors and the grassroots Higher scrutiny of minoritized organisations Accountability Faith education
Soka Gakkai International	Worldwide	International Buddhist faith-based network working on peace, culture, and education	Network consisting of local Buddhist community groups Project country: Worldwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terminology Approaches beyond MEAL
tearfund	Tanzania	International Evangelical Christian faith-based emergency relief and development organisation	Partnerships with local church and community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging holistic thinking Adaptation to local needs
World Relief	Burundi, DR Congo, Haiti, Malawi, Rwanda, and South Sudan	International Evangelical Christian faith-based development and emergency relief organization	Partnerships with local churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer involvement Adaptation of existing approaches for volunteer-based projects



FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This project was implemented with the generous support of Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA). The views expressed herein are those of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities and shall not, in any way whatsoever, be construed to reflect the official opinion of IRUSA, its Islamic Relief affiliates, or its donors.

Suggested citation

Eggert, Jennifer Philippa (2021) 'Compendium of Good Practices on Conducting MEAL in Partnerships with International Actors and Local Faith Actors: Summary Brief' Washington DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities MEAL Learning Hub.

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