



United Nations Population Fund

Realizing the Faith Dividend:

Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030



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TECHNICAL REPORT



Religion, Gender, Peace and
Security in Agenda 2030



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Introduction from the Editor

According to a Pew Study in 2012, Eight out of ten people in the world profess to a particular faith/religious affiliation. Religious institutions (Churches, temples, mosques, etc.) are the oldest, deepest-rooted, and most widely connected human institutions known to human kind since time immemorial. History, architecture and heritage all attest to the durability, even physical, of these entities.

In a joint USAID and Capacity Plus Study, it is noted that

In many African countries facing severe shortages and poor distribution of health workers, faith based organizations (FBOs) provide between 30%-70% of health care services. Moreover, FBO facilities often serve remote and rural areas where governments have the greatest difficulty in attracting and retaining health workers. Yet FBO health workers frequently remain under recognized for their contributions and uncounted in national statistics. Members of FBO networks also provide a significant amount of preservice education and in service health worker training in African countries. In Malawi and Uganda, for example, FBOs provide 70% of nursing and midwifery training; in Tanzania and Zambia they provide between 30% and 55% of such training. FBO schools have a history of management flexibility and innovation and an excellent track record of training health workers that serve in rural areas.

While there are often disputations about how such data is gathered and questions abound around the veracity and accuracy, there are rarely figures about faith-based social services (or any other public health services in the developing countries especially), which are uncontested. In fact, the disputations rarely offer alternative statistics. In a random survey of a unit in one of the UN development agencies, 25 percent of the staff reported having gone to one religious entity or another either to worship, to study, to access health care, for psycho-social support or counselling or to be married. Some have gone for all of those reasons. The fact is, that hard as it may be to gather data, religious institutions, religious leaders,

¹ "The Key Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Strengthening Human Resources for Health" - http://www.capacityplus.org/sites/intrah.civicaactions.net/files/resources/FBO_overview.pdf. Accessed on March 10, 2015

community-based religious service providers, are permanent features of community life.

In 2012, in an article in *The Economist* entitled “The Catholic Church in America: Earthly Concerns” estimated that:

...There are now over 6,800 Catholic schools (5% of the national total); 630 hospitals (11%) plus a similar number of smaller health facilities; and 244 colleges and universities. Many of these institutions are known for excellence: seven of the leading 25 part-time law school programmes in America are Catholic (five are run by Jesuits). A quarter of the 100 top-ranked hospitals are Catholic ... annual spending by the church and entities owned by the church was around \$170 billion in 2010.²

From the perspective of the United Nations, given its mandate covering sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights, has a clear understanding of the role of faith-based entities. In an address one year after he took up his post as Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki Moon noted that “faith communities have a crucial role to play in fostering mutual understanding and in promoting consensus on common values and aspirations”³

For the United Nations Population Fund, engaging with faith-based organizations started in the 1970s, with the creation of a Center for Population Studies in the heart of the Sunni Islamic world’s largest and oldest university (and mosque and center of Muslim jurisprudence) – al-Azhar, based in Cairo. When, in 2007, UNFPA became the first development agency in the UN system to map out its own outreach with faith-based organizations, it quickly became clear that most of the UNFPA Country Offices (over 120 of them), actually worked with religious entities of one form or another (religious leaders, religious NGOs, and community based religious groups).

When the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development was established in 2010, UNFPA’s experience in religious

² <http://www.economist.com/node/21560536>

³ UNIS Press Release: <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2008/unisgsm058.html> accessed on March 10, 2016

outreach positioned it to coordinate the activities of the first inter-agency mechanism created in the UN system to simultaneously learn and inform policymaking around the religion-development-humanitarian nexus⁴.

In May 2014, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) for Sustainable Development, partnered with Norwegian umbrella organization of FBOs, Digni, the University College London and George Mason University, to convene bilateral donor representatives and common FBO partners. The purpose was to begin a hitherto new task of collectively assessing partnerships and emerging links **between religion and international development dynamics, keeping in mind the evolving global priorities for the post 2015 era.** The post 2015 priorities were based on the sustainable development goals' (SDG) agenda, which increasingly emerging through myriad UN and international processes covered a wide spectrum of issues - from governance and institution building to health and nutrition.

The discussions which took place at this consultation (which were carried out under Chatham House Rules)¹, recognized the unique constellation of actors around the table. This was the first time these distinct sectors: donors, the United Nations' agencies and FBOs, were discussing common actions and future global priorities involving religious matters and issues. One of the agreements that emerged among these critical developmental stakeholders, was an agreement to form a loose "Network of Peers on Religion and Development" to meet on a yearly basis, to review geopolitical developments, and to assess what the gathering of minds and institutions, can inspire for Agenda 2030's realization.⁴

In the meantime, the World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF, and several of the FBOs who participated – not to mention the EU and various academic sectors - have each undertaken various initiatives and consultations. both within their

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