

Faith actors in development

Developed by the Bond Faith in Development Working Group



Funded and Co-Chaired by:



BACKGROUND TO THE RESOURCE

Local faith actors are present in every community for the long term. They carry a legitimacy that is based on trusted relationships and moral authority. Evidence shows that they can bring a distinctive contribution to development, where they cultivate – but do not assume – certain qualities or mindsets. They can do this through tested approaches and enabling partnerships.

The evidence for their contribution has grown significantly over the last decade. It depicts a complex and nuanced picture that is context specific. Faith actors can use their power in good or negative ways – or not use it well enough.

For UK partners, funders and government, this presents both opportunities and risks. Local faith actors can be powerful allies in development, especially when aid cuts, polarisation, conflict and climate change make the quest for localisation and resource mobilisation even more acute. But they can also be undervalued, sidelined, misunderstood and instrumentalised. It is therefore important to understand and support the conditions needed to engage with them as partners, maximising their distinctive contribution and addressing the challenges.

Aim

This Theory of Change (ToC) aims to capture the distinctive contribution that local faith actors can make to development and advocacy. It also aims to articulate the approaches and changes that need to happen at different levels to do this. The Bond Faith in Development Working Group, launched in May 2025 and co-chaired by Tearfund and Islamic Relief, initiated this process.

The ToC does not try to capture everything that faith actors can do – but the evidence about how they can maximise their distinctive contribution.

CORE HYPOTHESIS



Local faith actors mobilise ongoing, locally led, lasting and holistic transformation with their communities, using local resources and working in partnership with state and civil society.

SUMMARY

This Theory of Change demonstrates that local faith actors in many contexts have **deep legitimacy, long-term presence** and **diverse networks and resources** which position them to influence significant social change, and to catalyse holistic and sustainable development.

Faith actors are diverse, however this Theory of Change identifies the three main approaches which are common to many faith actors.

1. **Transformative dialogue** enabled by faith-based reflections with technical inputs.
2. **Faith-informed power and context analysis**
3. **Mobilisation of faith group action** (at all levels) and resources (of all kinds)

These approaches bring about the conditions needed for change by

- shifting mindsets of responsibility
- improving inter- and intra-community relationships
- mobilising locally owned and managed resources

The approaches lead to faith actors' action and advocacy with their communities, accompanying and supporting them over the long term to bring lasting transformation.

This Theory of Change also provides a global contextualisation, articulating how partners in higher-income countries can support existing faith actors' work in their contexts.

Again, three main approaches for this are presented within the Theory of Change.

1. **Shifting the power** by providing flexible, long-term core funding aligned to a shared mission
2. **Connecting and convening** across diverse political, faith and higher income and lower income contexts
3. **Releasing assets** by supporting local asset-based approaches and innovative funding models



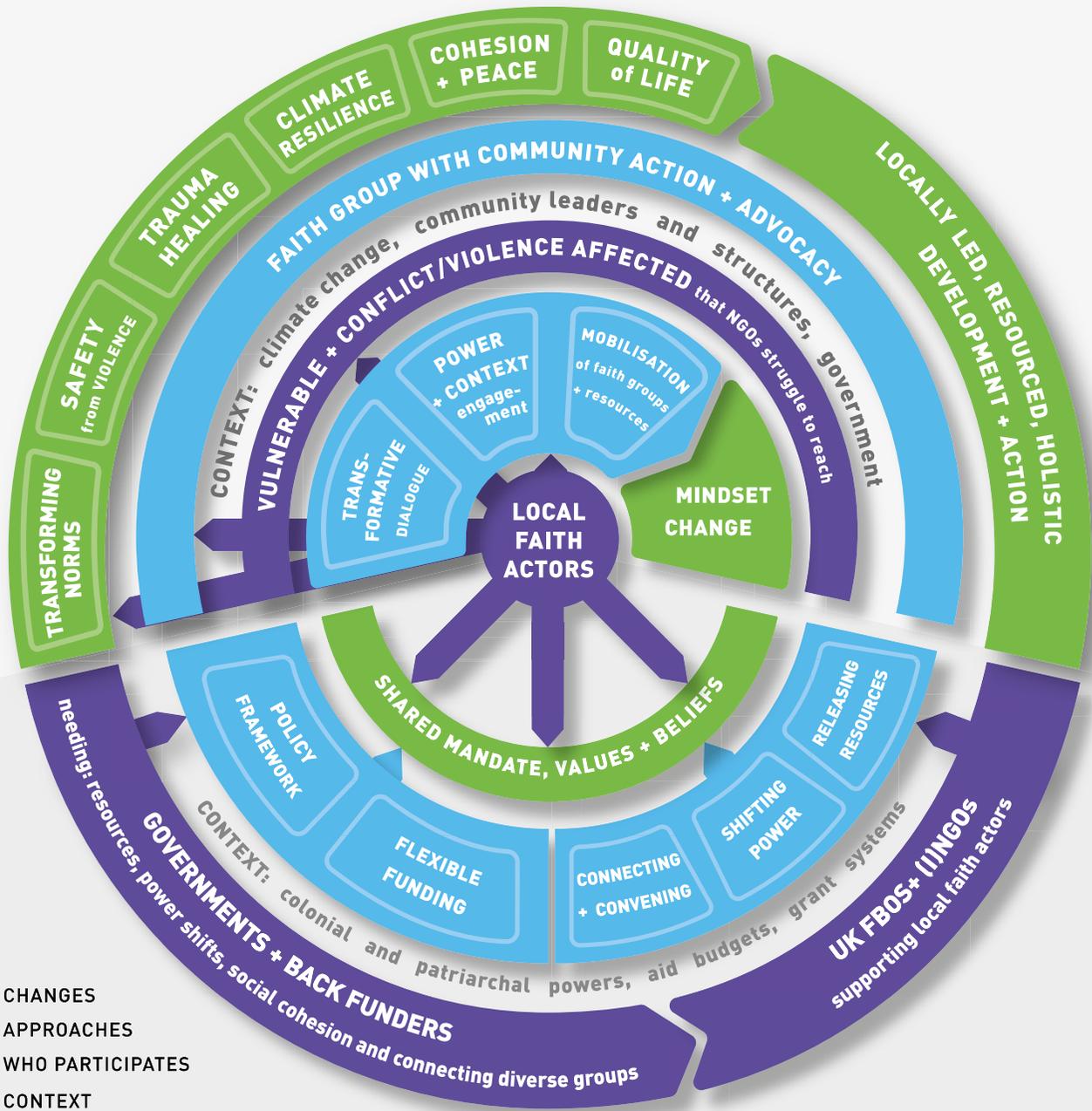
Imam Mahamadou speaks with his family. The Channels of Hope methodology of engaging faith leaders and faith communities can create change on sensitive issues of injustice, such as female genital mutilation. Islamic Relief has used the methodology to create pioneering work on women and child protection. Mali, 2020.

LOCAL FAITH ACTORS IN DEVELOPMENT

DISTINCT CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL FAITH ACTORS

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- CHANGES
- APPROACHES
- WHO PARTICIPATES
- CONTEXT



HOW TO USE

TOC representation and terminology



This resource centres on the ongoing **role and impact of local faith actors**.



The diagram also highlights the **importance of the context at every level**, which every process must address to leverage greater and more sustainable change.



The resource works **upwards** to demonstrate why their contribution matters, and how and where it is distinctive. Then it works **downwards** to explore the enabling environment needed to support the change process.



The ToC intentionally uses the term **'faith'** rather than 'religious' to indicate that its **remit goes beyond religious institutions** to include more informal and diverse actors, practices and influences.



The diagram highlights that **change is not linear**, but a combination of different approaches, influences and relationships. There is **reciprocity of relationship** that needs nurturing between local faith actors, their global partners and the communities of which they are part.

FAITH ACTORS' DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION

Local faith actors operate in a complex context, where it is critical to analyse the power of different influences and influencers.

Internal context

Faith actors and their communities embody a complex landscape of beliefs, rituals, and practices that can either catalyse or constrain social change.

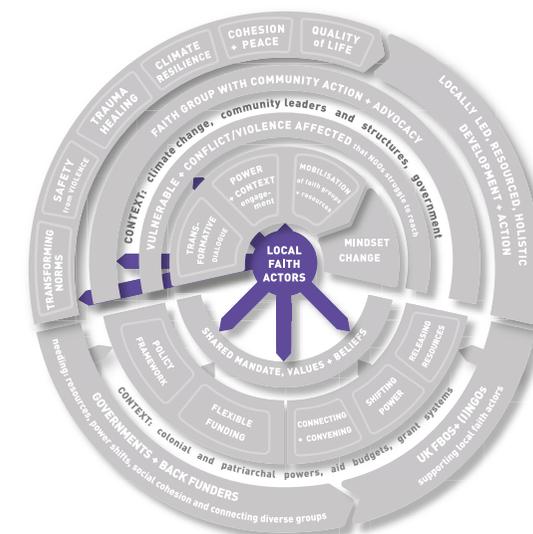
Some of these are specific to faith, as they may derive from **misinterpretation or misuse of sacred texts**. Their structures and systems may act as an asset in mobilising change on a wider scale or may reinforce harmful patriarchal and colonial attitudes and behaviours, such as marginalising the role of women and youth.

While faith leaders can carry trust and moral authority derived from faith, they may also feel alienated, fail to use that authority well or use it negatively. Mistrust and division can exist within and between faith groups, and between them and the wider community.

External context

While many of the influences are the same for faith and secular actors, faith actors can access other (potential) allies, such as religious voluntary networks, faith media and youth and women's movements. Faith actors can mobilise local assets in financial giving, skills and volunteering time.

They can also work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governments to release resources, but the interaction with those influencers may be different to others, depending on the context.



WHAT ARE THE DISTINCTIVE APPROACHES USED BY FAITH ACTORS?

Three foundational approaches are critical throughout the change process.

Transformative dialogue

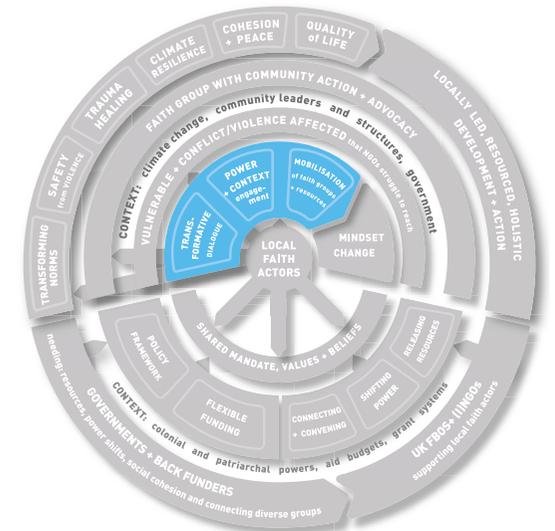
Combines facts/technical input with faith and emotional connection. Faith actors have the legitimacy to engage communities with the hidden beliefs and attitudes, creating a safe space to analyse complex, sensitive issues and to explore and reinterpret sacred texts through careful questioning and contextual knowledge.

Analysis of power and context

Faith-informed, deep contextual analysis identifies the actors and their influence, both positive and negative, and how trust/mistrust plays out within and between faiths, with communities and with government. It also identifies existing structures, systems and ways of working on which to build, both within the faith sphere and the wider community.

Mobilisation of faith groups and resources

The importance of faith leaders in development is well established, but faith actors have potential to release a more diverse range of resources in local knowledge, skills, materials and finances through their networks, structures and groups, as well as through wider community, state and civil society.



ONGOING COLLABORATION: FAITH ACTORS WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES

The foundational approaches encourage action by faith groups and their communities to address issues and advocate for change, in partnership with others. Increasing evidence shows that working with communities is more effective than working for communities.

Local faith actors are part of their community and therefore able to act with it and for it. They can help include and amplify diverse voices in local decision-making.

In these ways they can provide long-term accompaniment and role-modelling that inspires whole communities to keep going beyond or without external funding. They can support peer learning among and between communities. They can activate advocacy networks and follow up on policy implementation.

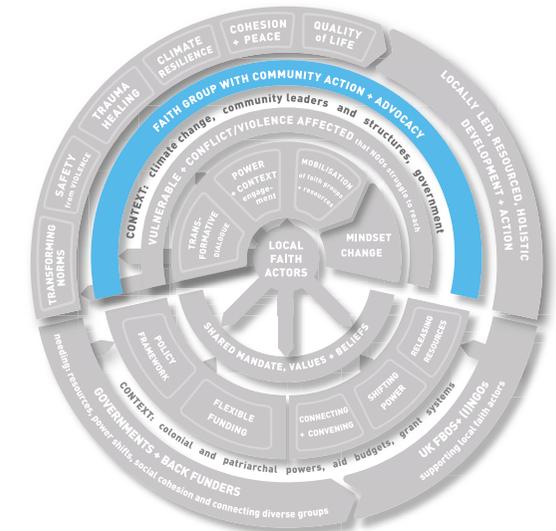
Many assume that faith actors focus solely on their own faith communities. In practice, evidence shows that faith actors often reach

people who experience multiple exclusions and vulnerabilities and conflict- or violence-affected people that NGOs struggle to reach.

Faith groups are especially able to engage with:

- those in the lowest-income communities who have been excluded from participating in projects designed to reach the most marginalised, including those with intersections of disabilities, HIV/AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children, widows, elderly, etc. Local faith actors are well placed to work with their communities to identify and support those left out by others.

- those whose needs result from harmful beliefs and practices, including child survivors of abuse, women affected by female genital mutilation (FGM) and gender-based violence (GBV), those with stigmatised conditions and those affected by misinformation including Ebola and COVID-19. Faith can either exacerbate or mitigate.
- people whose rights are restricted by governments. This includes freedom of religion and belief (FORB) which evidence shows can be driven by religio-politicised agendas or distorted to justify discrimination.



A note on geography:

Faith actors are often the only organised presence in extremely remote areas where governments and NGOs do not operate. This 'geographic ubiquity' makes faith actors essential partners. However, in these contexts, we must especially commit ourselves to avoiding instrumentalisation, instead pursuing equitable partnerships.

RESULTING CHANGES AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

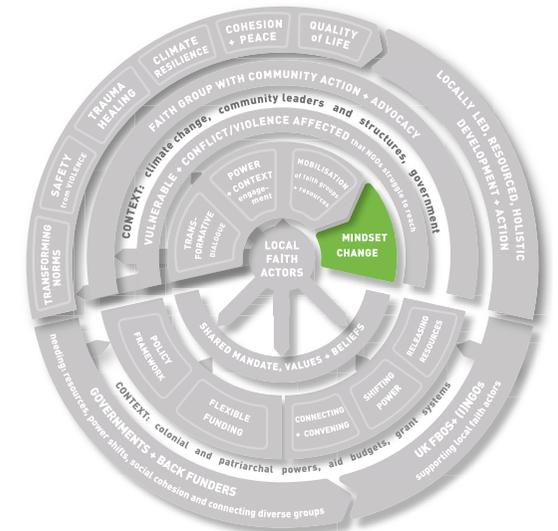
Changes within faith actors

The foundational approaches strengthen the following as necessary conditions for all changes:

- a. **'Faith literacy'** covers a deepened understanding and interpretation of sacred texts. It also describes the results of an informed analysis of the complex role religion and faith actors play in the local context, alongside other dimensions of power and influence.
- b. **Mindset (attitude and behaviour) change** – while these mindset changes may apply across quality work in both faith and secular contexts, faith can provide an ongoing reference point that sustains change.

They are summarised as the **three Rs**:

- **Responsibility**
Faith, especially via sacred texts, provides a mandate and motivation to prioritise the needs of marginalised people, to pursue just and equitable societies, and to restore the environment, with impetus on one's local context.
- **Relationships**
Faith actors, like others, can nurture healthy and equitable relationships. More so, a faith mandate and religious rituals and practices can help address relationships with self, between genders and generations, within and between faiths, between faith groups and community, in the inclusion of the vulnerable and with the environment.
- **Resources**
Faith programming through scriptural reflection can provide a basis for increased agency, leading to shifts from colonial attitudes of dependency to self-sustained mobilisation of resources, including community volunteering time, skills, materials and finances, thus continuing and sustaining change.



Case study

The Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP)



If the NGOs and even the donor partners that come into our communities [if] they are in the driving seat, definitely, they may drive it in the wrong way because they do not know our problems. So the best way is, they leave us to be in front and whosoever wants to support us must come behind because it's our story, it's our problems and we know where we are coming from.

Pastor Christopher Nota, the Holiness Revival Church in William Village, Chikwawa, Malawi. Photo credit: Tom Price

The **Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP)** is a participatory development approach that equips local faith actors and their communities to identify and address their own needs using 'God-given', locally available resources. It begins by helping churches understand their biblical role in the community and then leads the church and community together through stages of description, information gathering, analysis and action.

CCMP supports people to take ownership of their development in a sustainable, holistic way – spiritually, socially and economically – reducing dependence on outside aid and fostering long-term transformation. Tearfund, World Vision, All We Can, The Anglican Alliance, The Mothers Union and several other organisations, use this methodology in diverse contexts around the world. Evidence indicates that £1 of external investment mobilises £7 worth of local resources and leads to £28 worth of social value.

CCMP (succinct overview)

1. **Envisioning the faith community (generally churches)**
The church is inspired, based on biblical teachings, to participate in holistic community transformation.
2. **Building relationships**
The faith group builds trust and inclusive relationships with the wider community.
3. **Community description**
The community describes its reality, identifying strengths, resources and challenges.
4. **Analysis**
Root causes of issues are explored from social, economic, environmental and spiritual perspectives.
5. **Decision and planning**
The community agrees on priorities and plans actions using local resources.
6. **Action**
The church and community act together to address agreed priorities.
7. **Reflection and learning**
Progress is reviewed, learning is shared, and actions are adapted or expanded.

CCMP in diverse contexts

SYRIA, EURASIA

Years of conflict, economic collapse, and humanitarian crises has led to 60 per cent of the population facing food insecurity, one in four unemployed, and 7.4 million internally displaced.

Offering hope through the local church

Despite these challenges, the people of Aleppo are reshaping their future. Deacon Ignatios Mansour, a respected church leader, shared how Tearfund-led CCMP training is transforming lives. *'This programme and its ideas completely changed our view of ourselves, of God, of others, and of creation,'* he said. *'It gave us hope and the tools needed for renewal and rebuilding.'*

This training, delivered through the local church for the benefit of all the community, is helping people recognise their own resources are 'God-given resources' which should serve others around them to bring sustainable change.

Working together, overcoming challenges

- **Need:** Education
- **Response:** Female retired teachers began offering affordable lessons for children, increasing literacy and creating income for the teachers.
- **Need:** Meaningful work
- **Response:** Skilled tradespeople formed groups to advertise job opportunities through the church, helping young people develop skills and find work.
- **Need:** Community conflict
- **Response:** Young people are now breaking down barriers and promoting citizenship, humanity, and community.

Lasting transformation in Syria

As people see transformation in their communities, hope grows. Deacon Ignatios said the programme has become a firm conviction that change is possible. This movement is gaining momentum, multiplying daily, and proving that even amid extreme poverty, local faith actors can be a powerful agent of transformation.

NIGERIA, WEST AFRICA

Kyenret, a 38-year-old petty trader and mother of six from, Plateau State, faced severe financial instability due to seasonal, inconsistent income. This made basic needs like food, healthcare, and education nearly impossible to afford.

The family's trajectory changed following the introduction of the **Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP)** by Tearfund Partner RURCON. Initially starting with Bible studies, the programme evolved to address the community's practical needs by providing entrepreneurship training, self-help groups, and modern farming technology. These initiatives enabled Kyenret and her neighbours to transition from 'seasonal suffering' to a mindset of self-reliance and consistent productivity.

The transformation was not merely economic but impacted her whole life. Kyenret shared that she has noticed a big increase in community commitment and a revitalisation of her domestic life. She has improvement in her marriage, stating that her husband now listens to and

values her advice. Today, Kyenret expresses profound happiness, having moved from the stress of poverty to a flourishing life where she can confidently meet her family's needs.



While this process includes men, women, faith and non-faith participants, our experience shows that women are often the drivers of transformation. Women are the most aware of the strengths, needs and realities of communities and therefore play an integral role in the transformation of whole communities.

Joel Asimwe

This programme and its ideas completely changed our view of ourselves, of God, of others, and of creation. It gave us hope and the tools needed for renewal and rebuilding.

Deacon Ignatios Mansour



Disaster Simulation in central Sulawesi Province, Islamic Relief.

Safety from violence

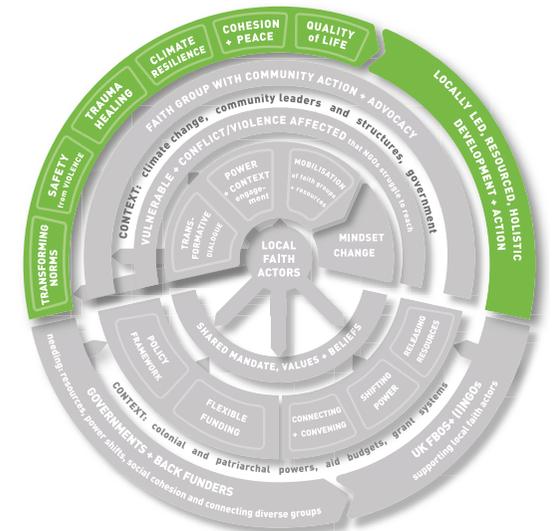
Faith actors can play a critical role in ending violence against children as many people draw their beliefs (and misinterpretations) about raising children from religious sources – and all faiths contain protective elements for children. Similarly, in tackling violence against women, dialogue that promotes reflection on sacred texts can challenge harmful norms and reinforce positive ones.

Trauma healing

Faith can help people develop sense-making and coping mechanisms, for example in trauma derived from displacement or climate shock. Faith actors often provide spiritual and emotional support which can aid people's recovery from crisis, but that is rarely integrated within existing approaches to psycho-social support.

Quality of life

Most development aims to improve outcomes in health, education, food security and livelihoods. Evidence shows faith actors bring a more distinctive contribution in health: they have considerable assets (institutions, skills, resources, and long-term presence) and can shape beliefs and behaviours that affect health, such as burial practices during Ebola.



Case study

Faith leaders influencing national disaster risk reduction policy in Indonesia



INGO:

Islamic Relief Worldwide

Local NGO partners/ collaborators:

Indonesia Ulema Council
PGI (The Unity of the Church of Indonesia)
PHDI (Hindu Dharma Council of Indonesia)
WALUBI (Representative of Indonesian Buddhists)

Government partner:

National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA)
Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesia



Where it took place:

Palu City and Sigi District (Central Sulawesi), North Jakarta City



Who participated in the intervention:

Faith leaders, their congregations, community members with extra vulnerabilities, and local and national level policymakers.

Theory of Change insight

By leveraging their moral authority and trusted networks, faith leaders have successfully influenced the national policy on disaster risk reduction. This demonstrates the distinctive contribution of faith actors in enabling communities take the lead in preparing for risks and use places of worship in emergency planning.

During disasters, places of worship are often used as shelters, coordination centres, and sources of psycho-social support. Yet most religious places do not have disaster preparedness and mitigation plans and religious leaders are excluded from disaster planning, and their congregations lack knowledge of risks and response measures.

The journey of change

Islamic Relief Indonesia, with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and

the National Disaster Management Agency, implemented the 'Deepening Role of Faith Leaders and Religious Place in Disaster Risk Management' (DROFLERD) programme, aimed at sharing knowledge with and between faith leaders and create a network of disaster-resilient houses of worship. The programme trained 500 religious leaders and co-drafted the 'Technical Guidelines of Disaster Resilient Religious Places'. Using this knowledge, coupled with their moral authority and community trust, faith leaders were able to increase local understanding of disaster risks and actions to take during emergencies. Two local faith leaders, Lauw Boeng, and I Ketut Suparta witnessed a shift in mindset – their congregations are seeing their places of worship not only as spiritual sanctuaries but also as safe spaces in times of crisis.



Facilitator training in Palu, Central Sulawesi (14–17 January 2025) brought together Muslim, Hindu, and Christian leaders to strengthen places of worship as centres for disaster preparedness

Changes embedded in national systems

Building on the positive outcome of the project, in January 2026, the National Congress of Interfaith Religious Leaders on Disaster Risk Reduction agreed to form the 'Forum Nasional Tokoh Agama untuk Pengurangan Risiko Bencana (FONTA-PRB)', a national platform for faith leaders to coordinate joint advocacy, share learning, and mobilise local assets such as skills, volunteers, and places of worship, with Islamic Relief providing technical guidance and dialogue facilitation.

Case study

Side-by-Side Movement in Nigeria: transforming faith and traditional leaders into agents of change



INGO: Christian Aid

Name of local faith actor partner:

Side-by-Side for Gender Justice Nigeria chapter (hosted by the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (CLSD))



Where it took place:

Kano and Benue States, Nigeria



Who participated in this intervention:

Christian and Muslim faith leaders, community members including those who are typically excluded, traditional leaders, religious bodies, youth and women organisations, policymakers.

Theory of Change insight

Faith and traditional leaders (FTLs) have a transformative role in advancing gender justice and climate resilience. When they gained practical tools to challenge harmful norms, support women's leadership, and engage with decision-making spaces, they were able to advocate for positive change.

2024 assessments in several high-risk communities across Nigeria showed that climate change places a heavier burden on women and girls – higher risks of gender-based violence (GBV), mental health stress, and economic loss. Yet many feel unheard and unable to influence decisions taken.

Journey of change

Through Gender Justice workshops organised jointly between Christian Aid and Side-by-Side for Gender Justice (Nigeria) held in Kano and Benue States, FTLs were trained and

sensitised with tools to challenge harmful norms linked to GBV, support women's leadership, and to engage in decision-making spaces. This empowered the FTLs to act as local change agents.

FTLs and members of the Side-by-Side Network from 10 states in Nigeria gathered for the 16 Days of Activism 2024 and mobilised members of the public, mosque and church congregations to join the 'Orange Walks', 'Gender Walks' and marches with the Nigerian National Assembly.

The November 2024 'Gender Walk' to the office of the Inspector General of Police drew the police's commitment to establish a GBV desk in police divisions nationwide. By February 2025 qualified officers were appointed, and special training programmes were introduced to improve service delivery across Nigeria.



Credit: African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development CLSD

The involvement of male and female Christian and Muslim faith leaders helped ensure that messages were culturally appropriate and rooted in local realities. This led to the creation of safe spaces for discussions, such as in Benue State where Muslim women within the community of Wadata, Makurdi can talk about sensitive issues such as GBV and climate-related economic losses.

Scalable change

Knowledge sharing with FTLs was expanded across nine additional states in Nigeria, showing how working through faith and traditional institutions can deliver sustained, scalable change – beyond a single intervention.

ENABLING PARTNERSHIPS

The contribution that local faith actors make to development is valuable to UK partners, donors, and government – whether or not those institutions are themselves faith-based. Such partnerships not only advance shared missions; they also create opportunities to address pressing challenges of localisation, rising polarisation, and the need to sustain international work amid shrinking aid budgets. If they are to realise this potential, though, UK actors must engage local faith partners in ways that maximise their distinctive strengths, mitigate known risks, and move towards genuinely equitable partnerships, rather than instrumentalising them.

A shared framework for partnership

While a shared framework is essential for any partnership, some issues need particular attention when working with local faith actors.

All UK partners and funders need to understand how a faith identity informs the local actors' approach. This is not only about avoiding proselytisation, but about drawing on their distinctive strengths while ensuring their engagement remains open, inclusive, and non-coercive – for example, offering the option of spiritual practices within psychosocial support. How this identity and approach are expressed will vary across partnerships and for different funders.

UK faith-based organisations (FBOs) can further strengthen partnerships by exploring how shared values, beliefs and mandate can provide a healthy foundation for collaboration. All international non-governmental

organisations (INGOs) can form positive relationships with local faith actors, however these relationships are most effective when there is a shared faith between local and global actors. At its most developed, this could involve articulating a shared 'theology of change' that captures how faith shapes their relationships and work.

While each partnership will differ, global minority and global majority partnerships should at least involve reflection on:

- **a long-term, equitable and trusting relationship.** Faith-based partnerships often extend beyond funding cycles and can provide space and support for co-design and peer learning, and for more understanding between UK supporters and local communities.
- **the central tenets of a shared faith.** When faith is shared between a global and local organisation, this can form the foundations for a more equal and trusting partnership – and pave the way for constructive dialogue when disagreements arise.
- **a shared mandate for the vulnerable.** Rooted in sacred texts, this mandate helps to sustain motivation and compassion and to provide a shared basis for reviewing practice and for strengthening reach to left-out or marginalised people and communities.
- **accountability to community members' own faith.** Grounded in faith and not only compliance, articulating what accountability looks like in practice can reinforce mutual transparency, both in stewarding resources and in honest reflection about the effectiveness of the work.

PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES

Faith can add dimensions and assets to standard partnership approaches, making them easier to put into practice. These include:

Connecting and convening

Faith actors can broker relationships that may be harder for others to do. This may be seen, for example, in:

- **reach to the British public.** Involving underrepresented groups in government conversations; shaping public narratives through value-based dialogue, such as on immigration; and connecting UK communities with those in the Lower Income Countries.
- **convening across diverse contexts.** Creating safe spaces that bring together government representatives across the political spectrum, influential powerholders and ‘smaller voices’ such as from indigenous groups or youth and women’s networks.
- **advocacy and influencing.** Opening doors and amplifying marginalised voices through faith networks and their links to wider national and global platforms.

Shifting the power

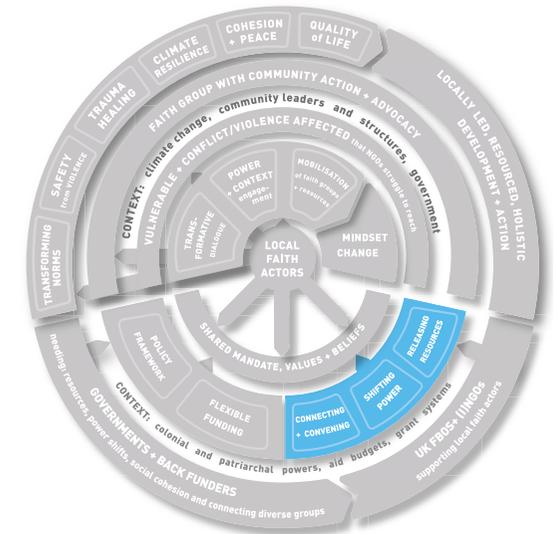
A shared faith-informed framework can help soften traditional power dynamics by centring on people and principles. Some ways this can be seen are in:

- **providing flexible, long-term core funding,** including small adaptive grants, that create space for trust, learning, innovation, volunteerism, and community ownership.
- **applying a faith lens to organisational strengthening and compliance** – enabling more change at the heart of the faith actor by connecting to beliefs and mandate – and supported by long-term accompaniment and peer learning.
- **supporting sustainability** of the work and of FBO partners, for example by allocating a portion of grants to organisational strengthening and long-term viability.

Releasing assets

Faith partnerships can mobilise undervalued or underused assets, by:

- **supporting local asset-based approaches** that maximise the distinctive contribution of faith actors and activate the whole system including government and other civil society organisations (CSO) partners.
- **providing solidarity funding** from UK sources, including the British public and funders, that is rooted in shared values and mandate, rather than traditional funding models.
- **exploring inter-faith and faith-local authority models** of funding and management that broaden ownership and strengthen collaboration.



UK PARTNERS/FUNDERS ENABLING CHANGE



We've worked with faith-based NGOs for a long time and we see their impact, especially on livelihoods. Religion is about humanity and compassion, which is why faith-based organisations can really drive development. For example, through interest-free business ideas that help people earn an income without falling into debt.

Aporna Biswas, General Secretary of a self-help group in Manirampur, Jashore, Bangladesh, supported by Islamic Relief Bangladesh, which delivers climate resilience training and provides interest-free adaptation funds to help communities respond to climate-related disasters such as floods.

Understanding and recognising the distinctive contribution that faith actors can make

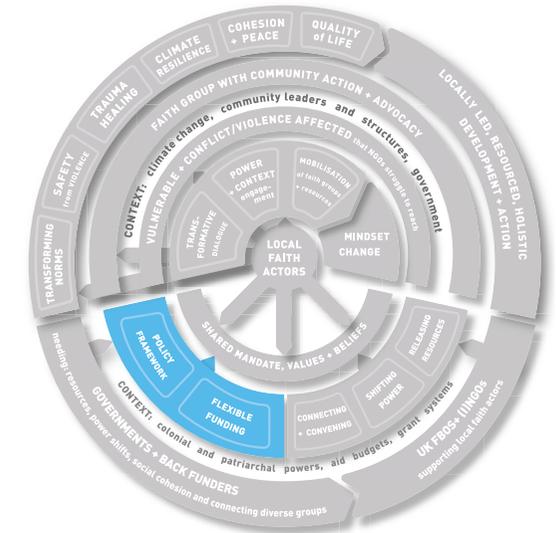
including participating in platforms and forums where faith and secular actors can engage in dialogue and learn together; developing staff's faith literacy in the diversity of actors and the approaches that can unlock their contribution and minimise risks; and engaging with faith actors as partners – not as tools – of social transformation.

Strengthening policies and frameworks for engaging with faith actors

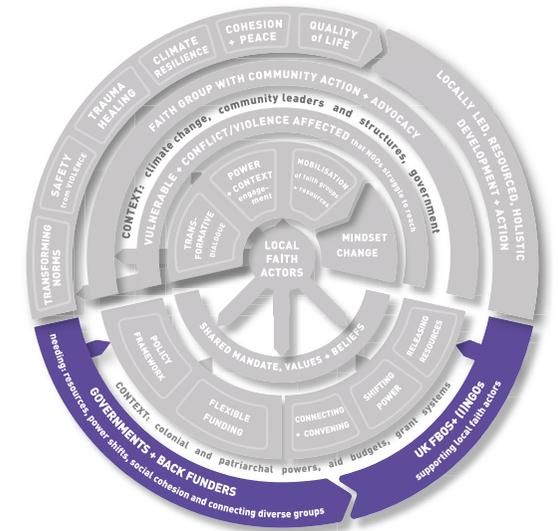
by integrating faith engagement in strategy and policy; and providing forums where faith and secular actors can co-design programmes that maximise their contribution.

Providing flexible, long-term funding and co-funding models

that minimise bureaucratic demands, that support long-term relational partnerships and approaches and that resource locally led asset-based initiatives and sustainability – rather than contracting faith actors to deliver pre-designed projects and programmes.



UK PARTNERS/FUNDERS AND THEIR CONTEXT



UK partners need to understand and address their own internal and external contexts if they are to maximise the effectiveness of their partnerships with local faith actors. This means recognising the barriers they face, as well as the assets and opportunities they can leverage. Some issues are specific to FBOs, while others apply to all NGOs supporting local faith actors.

Internal context

While a shared mandate and values can open the door to more equal partnership, this requires intentional work to translate into practice. UK NGOs may need to confront colonial and patriarchal power dynamics embedded in their institutional histories — including, for FBOs, legacies shaped by earlier forms of faith engagement, structures, and systems. Some local faith actors' approaches, such as asset-based and volunteer-driven models, can also challenge traditional grant management and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems, fundraising models and staff competencies.

External context

International institutions, such as the UN, World Bank and WHO have made progress in integrating faith into development frameworks. Yet many systems still treat faith actors as implementers, rather than co-creators of policy and solutions. Current debates highlight a tension between faith identity and securing donor funding or a 'seat at the table' with major actors. This can lead to local, community voices being muted and colonial systems prevailing.

At the same time, regional and international faith actors can also function as mediators between local faith actors and global processes and forums. They are often at the forefront of localisation, power-shifting, and different approaches to resourcing international aid.

Making climate change relevant locally

Partners

London School of Economics (LSE) Faith Centre, Egypt and Jordan, Christian and Muslim communities – Coptic priests, Anglican leaders, Al-Azhar University student preachers.

Insight

Change came from within – by framing the conversation to resonate with beliefs and lived experience, participants shifted understanding, began engaging meaningfully, and are more willing to take ownership.

Issue

In Egypt and Jordan, community engagement conducted as part of a research project by the LSE Religion and Global Society Research Unit revealed that communities initially rejected the concept of 'climate change', seeing it as a Western or political issue – there was little engagement or action on environmental challenges.

Change journey

Facilitators created bespoke spaces where participants could discuss real-life environmental challenges through the language of faith, making the issues directly relevant. Faith-based language where concepts such as stewardship in Christianity and khalifa in Islam was used, encouraging participants to reflect on their relationship with the environment through the lens of their faith, rather than as externally imposed ideas.

Civic space and democratic participation

Partners

CAFOD, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the European Union.

Insight

With the Church's ability to act across multiple levels at once and the trust it has with communities, it was able to turn public concern into coordinated action and create pressure that state institutions could not ignore.

Issue

By 2016, President Kabila sought a third term, in violation of the DRC Constitution. Citizens had little recourse, and democratic processes were at risk.

Change journey

The Catholic Church, led by the Conférence Épiscopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO), mobilised citizens and helped set out a political transition roadmap. The steps taken included issuing a pastoral letter to rally public support and engaging regional and international actors, including SADC, the World Council of Churches, the European Union, and UK civil society partners. The Church established credibility in the electoral process through voter education, mobilising voluntary monitors of polling stations and carried out parallel vote tabulation.

Social behavioural change and freedom of religion

Partners

Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA) – Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, seven focus countries (Nigeria, Ethiopia, Mali, Indonesia, Iraq, Uganda, Kenya), Christian and Muslim communities.

Insight

By helping faith leaders reconnect with their core religious teachings and creating opportunities for communities to work together, harmful narratives are dispelled and trust can begin to rebuild.

Issue

Communities were disconnected from their own faith traditions' teachings on pluralism and coexistence. Misinterpretations of religious texts by Christian and Muslim leaders divided communities and pushed people apart.

Change journey

Faith leaders explored theological foundations for pluralism, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence to challenge harmful narratives. Through theological dialogues and everyday interactions like joint business ventures and community projects, community trust was built and this led to relationship changes over time. Muslims and Christians are now working together, attend each other's religious events and visit places of worship. Final evaluations evidenced reduced conflict, improved inter-community relations, and capacity to manage differences peacefully.

EVIDENCE AND ASSUMPTIONS

Over the last decade, the evidence base for faith engagement in development has grown significantly in both depth and nuance. The main gap now lies less in the volume of evidence and more in its accessibility and use. Nonetheless, the literature highlights some areas needing further work:

- A more balanced picture that captures not only successes but also failures and more challenging dimensions of faith engagement.
- More and larger-scale, longitudinal studies that compare approaches within faith actors to avoid assumptions about the contribution they can make.
- Evidence generated in a wider range of languages and contexts (not only English language based), including more on local, informal forms of faith actor engagement.
- Greater representation of faith traditions beyond Islam and Christianity, which dominate existing research.

The main evidence referenced in this resource includes:

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8. **UNICEF, Religions for Peace & JLI (2019)**. Faith and Positive Change for Children (FPCC) – Theory of Change. https://jliflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Theory-of-change_SBC_UNICEF_09082019_high-res_digital-copy.pdf
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IMPLICATIONS FOR UK FAITH ACTORS AND THEIR PARTNERS

Implications include:

- a. Improve the quality of work**
Maximise the distinctive contribution of local faith actors by identifying and working with local partners to review the evidence about approaches and changes to which they can contribute, and analyse where to build on that learning.
- b. Strengthen partnerships with local faith actors**
Co-create a framework that translates shared values into action, dismantles barriers to equity, and optimises the implementation of the three enabling approaches.
- c. Shape and challenge the prevailing narrative**
Continue to work as an inter-faith cohort to convene gatherings from a value-based perspective, alive to the specific context and opportunities of government and funders and analysing where the faith lens can unlock power bases, attract influencers and use assets strategically.
- d. Strengthen faith literacy**
Use the ToC to develop staff, funder and parliamentary understanding of: who 'faith actors' are; the advantages of recognising and building on their existing role and contribution; and the approaches and conditions that will maximise their impact and manage risks.
- e. Deepen the evidence base**
Collaborate with The Joint Learning Initiative (JLI) and other partners such as LSE to review gaps in the evidence and extend/deepen research in identified areas.



A peacebuilding and conflict prevention project in then newly merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, c. 2021



Naz Shah MP and The Very Reverend Andy Bowerman stand outside a damaged church in Jaranwala, Pakistan on their visit with Islamic Relief, 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many contributors have been instrumental in this resource.

Alongside the listed organisations on the right, we are grateful for the review and edits completed by Joel Asimwe, PhD, previously Congo Initiatives.

With increased resources, a more locally led version of this resource could provide even greater understanding.

However, the purpose of this resource is to consolidate and communicate prevailing evidence and practice knowledge.

This value proposition has utilised existing research, in large part made possible because of the work of the Joint Learning Initiative.



A mosque surrounded by destruction caused by tsunami. Islamic Relief's faith-based approach means the organisation can connect with communities around the planet. Banda Aceh, Indonesia, 2005

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Anglican Communion
All We Can
CAFOD
CBM UK
Christian Aid
Comic Relief
Embrace Middle East
Faith in VAWG Network
London School of Economics, Faith Centre
Islamic Relief
MAP Action
Mothers' Union
Muslim Aid
Tearfund
World Jewish Relief
World Vision UK

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Published March 2026

Developed by the Bond Faith in Development Working Group



Funded and Co-Chaired by:



tearfund