



**RELIGION  
MATTERS**

**Contributions of Religious Actors to Sustainable Development**

# RELIGION MATTERS



# RELIGION MATTERS!

Around the world, people are devoted to sustainable development as a part of their religious and spiritual convictions. Their religion and belief shape their actions and provide orientation. They are committed to human rights, environmental and climate protection, and fighting poverty and inequality.

Religious actors provide essential civil society services and mediate in crises and conflicts when government services reach their limits.

## RELIGIOUS ACTORS PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Especially in the Global South, people trust religious actors, making their commitment essential for achieving the United Nation's 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the same time, caution about the influence of religion should not be underestimated. This becomes clear when religion is misused for political purposes, as a reason to exclude others, stir up violence, undermine the legitimacy of democratically elected governments, slow down reforms or even question health services like vaccinations. Precisely because of their diverse, wide-reaching influence, religious actors need to be considered and included in social change processes.

German development cooperation is focusing on dialogue and an increased cooperation with religious actors at international, national, and grassroots levels. Only with broad cooperation between politics, business, and religious and other civil society actors is sustainable change possible.

Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) recognised the importance of this cooperation and adopted the strategy, "Religions as Partners in Development Cooperation". The approach focuses on supporting the commitment of religious and traditional actors to peace, social cohesion, social security, political and economic participation, environmental protection, gender equality, demographic development and family planning.

## SUPPORT OF INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

The Sector Project Religion for Sustainable Development of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, supports and advises the BMZ with background papers, recommendations for action, by testing innovative project approaches, organising events and trainings, and developing tailored religious actor's mappings of possible cooperation partners.

The project aims to show the positive impact and the diverse contributions of religious actors to sustainable development and establish cooperative approaches in development cooperation. In doing so, the sector project intentionally goes beyond Germany's well-established cooperation with the country's two major Christian churches and works together with actors from all religious communities. It also supports existing projects and cooperates with international partners on various sustainable development issues. How successfully religious and other civil society and political actors cooperate to achieve the SDGs is highlighted by the examples shown here.



# TOGETHER AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM

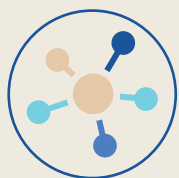
**EMPOWER PEACEMAKERS, PROMOTE MULTI-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

Violent extremism is a global problem, regardless if it is politically, ideologically, or religiously motivated. Prevention is most successful when the root causes are addressed, and social cohesion is strengthened. The experiences of young people from different cultural and religious contexts show how extremism can destroy families and tear apart social circles.

The unique model project iDove gives young people from Africa and Europe a safe space for dialogue. At iDove religiously motivated actors can exchange ideas and network. iDove, which stands for Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism, was launched in 2017

by the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate of the African Union and the BMZ through the GIZ.

An international network was created, made up of young practitioners, decision-makers, researchers, and media specialists who are committed to developing new ideas and innovative approaches for preventing extremism and working to strengthen social cohesion. Through iDove young people not only network but they also develop projects and jointly implement them. iDove continues to grow and is expanding its commitment in Asia.



# STRENGTHENING CULTURAL IDENTITY AND RESILIENCE

**EXPANDING NETWORKS & IMPROVING CAPACITIES OF RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS**

The genocide of Mayan descendants during the 1980s in Guatemala forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee to Mexico and destroyed many more communities and livelihoods.

In the Verpases region, which was affected, the human rights organisation ADIVIMA (transl. Association for the Integral Development of the Victims of the Violence of the Verapaces, Maya Achi) is committed to criminal justice and redress for victims. They work to restore the self-confidence and dignity of survivors to avoid a repetition of the crimes. Led by traditional and spiritual leaders and Mayan priests, an interdisciplinary team was formed to deal with the

legal and humanitarian aspects of the recovery, exhumation, and burial of thousands of the murdered Mayan descendants.

The team also offers psychosocial and spiritual support to survivors. Since 2015, the GIZ's Civil Peace Service has supported ADIVIMA with the "Human Rights, Historical Memory and Cultural Identity of the Maya Achi Project". It works with the Community Museum of Historical Memory and Cultural Identity to strengthen the Maya Achi's indigenous cultural identity and spiritual practices. It focuses on the traditional knowledge of the Maya and works through the history of violence in Guatemala to make it understandable for the following generation.



# COOPERATION AT ALL LEVELS

HAND IN HAND – CREATING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH PaRD



Religious insights and values influence the thoughts and actions of billions of people. Religious actors make a significant contribution to achieving the SDGs because of the important roles they play in their communities. To improve cooperation between government agencies and religious organisations, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) was created in 2016 under the leadership of BMZ. The partnership now has more than 160 members, including governments, multilateral entities, academic institutions, religious and other civil society organisations. The focus of PaRD is creating a conducive framework for a respectful dialogue. PaRD members meet around one table as equals, exchange information and ideas, learn from each other and face current global challenges together. PaRD promotes long-term

cooperation – also with existing initiatives and networks. The current priorities range from health, gender equality, peace, environmental and climate protection to Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB). Through various formats like conferences, expert workshops, and interdisciplinary working groups PaRD helps share successful approaches with the general public and high-ranking forums, including the G20 Interfaith Forum.







# SAVE WATER, PROTECT LIVES

STANDING UP FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE PROTECTION  
TOGETHER

Jordan is one of the most arid countries in the world. The consequences of climate change, a rapidly growing population, and the intake of many Syrian refugees puts additional strain on the country's already scarce water resources and its economic development. To raise awareness about efficient and environmentally friendly water use, imams and preachers in Jordan have been trained as water ambassadors since 2015. This is a promising approach in a country where around 94 percent of Jordanians and over 90 percent of refugees profess Islam. Because religious dignitaries enjoy high status within society, they are influencing public opinion.

Atika Almomany, a preacher, organises training courses and teaches women basic plumbing skills while also providing them with religious advice in everyday situations. In cooperation with two Jordanian ministries, the Fatwa Authority, Islamic studies faculties at Jordanian universities and the GIZ program Sanitation for Millions, the WASH Guide on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene was also created – a guide that describes different aspects of personal and public hygiene, good practices, and practical and interactive activities on efficient water use.





## FIGHTING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

**ENABLE EQUAL RIGHTS – PREVENT VIOLENCE, COMBAT DISCRIMINATION, STRENGTHEN ROLE MODELS**

Female genital mutilation is practised nationwide in Mali. The girls and women affected often suffer severe physical and psychological consequences. Strengthening preventive measures and to push back the harmful practice of female genital mutilation was the aim of a multi-religious cooperation project with Islamic Relief and World Vision in the Koulikoro region in 2020.

Based on the "Channels of Hope" approach, with a dialogue and faith-sensitive focus, religious actors were addressed and included as key for social change. The project succeeded in creating a safe space for religious and traditional authorities and community members, addressing social

grievances, dealing with one's religion, and questioning cultural norms. The pilot project results can speak for themselves: 56 religious and traditional officials (including 26 female officials) were trained, and 110 sermons related to genital mutilation and gender-based violence were held. At the local community level, 80 multipliers were trained, along with 60 mothers in child rights and the risks of genital mutilation. They, in turn, passed on their knowledge to 800 women. As a result, at least 370 girls were saved from circumcision. Mayors of the regions signed a convention to end genital mutilation, in which 56 practitioners pledged to lay down their knives.



## FIGHTING CORRUPTION TOGETHER

**NEW PARTNERSHIPS – BROADENING COOPERATION WITH RELIGIOUS ACTORS**

In September 2020, representatives of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) and the Global Leadership Summit (GLS), with the support of GIZ, joined forces with the Ugandan government to fight corruption in Uganda. During a multi-day workshop, the idea for an anti-corruption partnership between the IRCU and the government emerged. The theme of the partnership later became the title of a pastoral letter: Enhancing Voice and Action on Integrity and Ethical Conduct for Religious Leaders in Uganda.

As a result, Uganda's imams, priests and other religious leaders systematically addressed corruption from their pulpits. Many of their statements were based on the guidelines of

the pastoral letter. Through established religious networks, the anti-corruption message was brought to all levels of Ugandan society – from urban areas to the most remote villages.

The Inter-Religious Council consists of Uganda's seven largest religious communities and reaches an estimated 30 million Ugandans. The pastoral letter shows how religious communities and governments can support each other when they find shared values. With more than 98 percent of the Ugandan population reporting a religious affiliation, the IRCU's anti-corruption message had a much broader reach than the government's previous awareness-raising efforts.

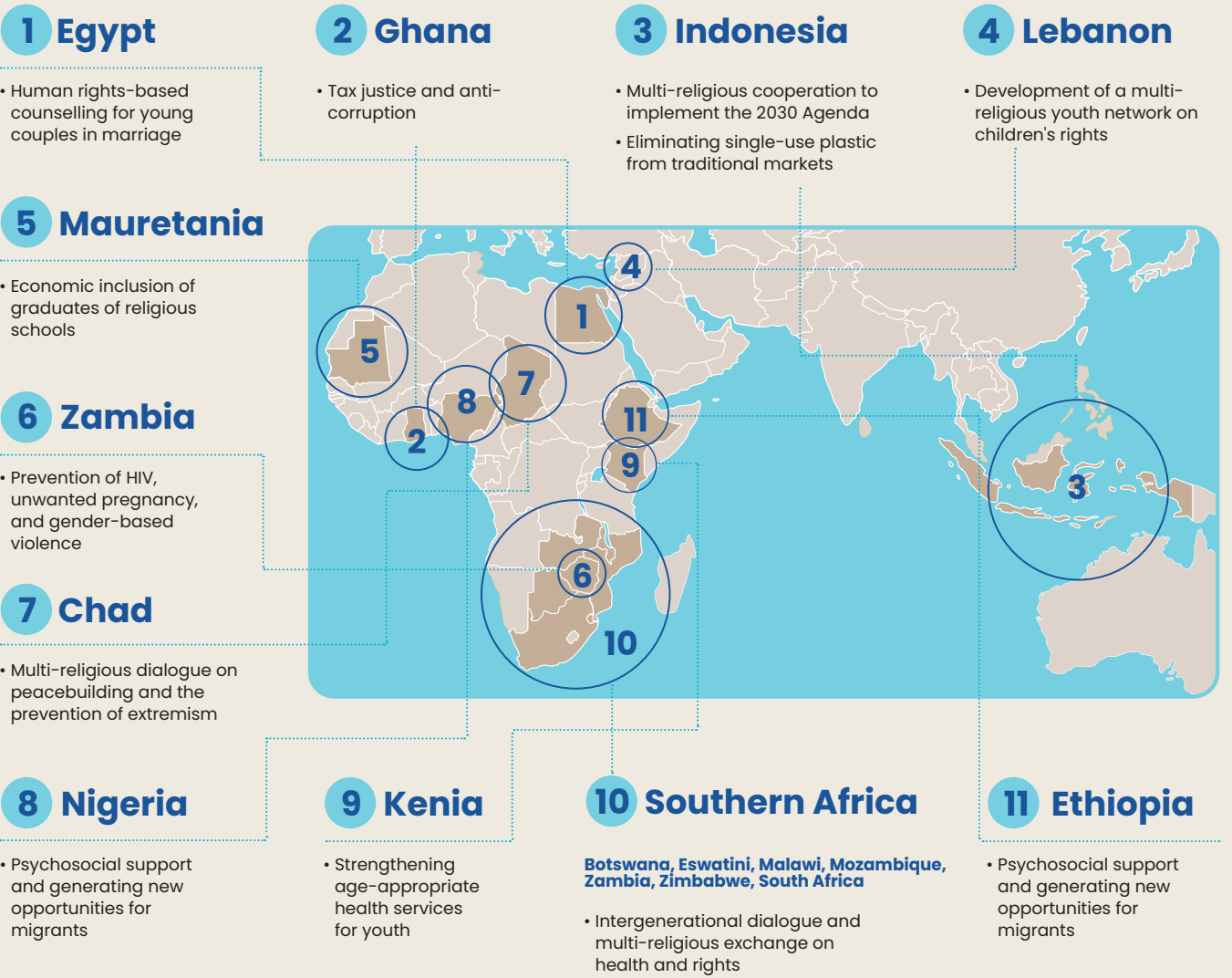
# RELIGION MATTERS

More than **4 out of 5 people** **worldwide** feel connected to a religion.



**Without religious actors the goals of the 2030 Agenda cannot be reached.**

## Selected Projects in German Development Cooperation with Religious Actors



## Positive effects of religions

The ongoing cooperation focuses on the contributions of religious actors to peace, social cohesion, social security, political and economic participation, environmental protection, gender equality, demographic development and family planning. As illustrated in different contexts, and by multifaceted approaches and projects, the involvement of religious and traditional actors in implementing the 2030 Agenda is positively affecting the world.

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