



**RESPECT LIFE**  
**RESPECT RIGHTS**

## **Islamic Relief**

### **Advocacy in Action**

Making an impact through  
social cohesion

# Introduction

Violent conflict has a significant and lasting impact on communities, often leaving gaping wounds in the fabric of society. The rise of protracted conflicts has greatly driven humanitarian need across the globe. Violence not only threatens peace and security, but also results in significant human and socioeconomic cost.

Conflict and non-violent insecurity have a significant impact on marginalised people in society, partly because they exacerbate other challenges, such as displacement, gender-based violence (GBV), protection concerns, and suppression of the voices of excluded groups. For example, young people and women are often perceived as either threats to peace and security, or passive victims who have no place at the decision-making table. This is often also true of people with disabilities, minority tribes, clan or religious groups, or indigenous people. The result is that these people may be targets of violence while being excluded from public debate and decision-making around peace and social cohesion issues.

Meanwhile, emergency needs are often rooted in pre-existing systems of inequality, violence, and injustice that increase the vulnerability of communities, while also reducing their ability to withstand and adapt to shocks. Responding to a humanitarian crisis is ultimately unsustainable if the root causes of the crisis are not also addressed. As the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated in his *Sustaining Peace* report, “We need a holistic approach which prioritises prevention and addresses the root causes of conflict by integrating peace, sustainable development and human rights.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the holistic approaches that has been suggested is greater synergy and collaboration across humanitarian, development, and peace actors working in fragile contexts. This is termed a ‘triple nexus’ approach. The triple nexus approach does provide the opportunity for a more holistic approach to meeting people’s humanitarian needs alongside longer-term developmental and peace goals. However, it is also important that the concepts and principles that underpin triple nexus approaches prioritise justice, equality, and inclusivity to ensure that no one is left behind.

Women are often under-represented in peace and reconciliation processes and overlooked when it comes to rebuilding social cohesion and managing disputes. Yet women’s inclusion in social cohesion and dispute resolution processes is essential for sustainable peace.<sup>2</sup> Despite strong evidence in favour of their inclusion, women remain largely invisible in, and sidelined from, formal dispute resolution processes and negotiations. In 2019, women constituted on average 13 per cent of negotiators, six per cent of mediators, and six per cent of signatories in major peace and dispute resolution processes worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, young people tend to be marginalised in social cohesion and dispute resolution processes that favour elite actors, but young people can play a very positive role in aiding social cohesion in societies recovering from conflict.<sup>4</sup> Ensuring the participation of women and young people in dispute resolution, social cohesion, and reconciliation is integral to building and maintaining peace. Engaging them as change agents not only facilitates sustainable peace, it also creates broader community ownership of dispute resolution processes and programmes.



# Supporting social cohesion through a triple nexus approach



Women involved in conflict transformation planning in the Philippines as part of Islamic Relief's triple nexus programme [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2020]

Islamic Relief's pilot triple nexus programme aimed to address some of the root causes of conflict in Kenya, Pakistan and the Philippines to promote social cohesion horizontally (across tribes, clans and villages) and vertically (between citizens and local government). The programme, implemented between 2018 and 2021, worked with local communities, governments, and customary authorities to strengthen dispute resolution processes, support women and youth-led community social cohesion, prepare communities for disasters, and tackle developmental challenges that were connected to conflict in each locality.

The programme focused on developing positive relationships and critical partnerships by creating an environment of mutual trust, confidence and collaboration for emergency response planning, social cohesion, and inclusive sustainable

development. Poverty and the compounding effects of weak governance, violent conflict, climate change, disasters, and Covid-19, had worsened living conditions for the most vulnerable communities and limited access to basic services like water. Against this backdrop, the programme aimed also to improve access to basic rights and resources, particularly for marginalised groups, and strengthen governance of resources, public services, and social cohesion.

Islamic Relief has tackled some of the underlying prejudices, stereotypes and conflict narratives in communities through women and youth-led initiatives such as Radio for Peace in Kenya, and Social Media for Peace and youth peace camps in the Philippines.



# Case study: Radio for Peace in Mandera County, Kenya

Islamic Relief has been supporting women and young people to lead community social cohesion since 2018 in Mandera County, where radio broadcasting has formed a key part of community outreach and mobilisation.

Radio talk show programmes are organised monthly to discuss emerging tensions involving elections, pastoral movements, drought or floods, Covid-19, climate change, and natural resource management. Radio broadcasts are also organised rapidly in emergency situations, such as when a violent inter-clan conflict occurs.

Speakers include subject matter experts (such as officials from the National Meteorological Department, Mandera County Cohesion Department,

or the National Drought Management Authority), women and youth group representatives, clan leaders and faith leaders. Each talk show lasts for 45-60 minutes, and all of the main local languages (Somali, Oromia and Kiswahili) are represented. Some shows are pre-recorded while others are live, allowing listeners to call in and ask questions or offer their opinion.

Having women and young speakers is an important feature of radio talk shows because their perspectives are too often marginalised in the patriarchal culture of Somali society.



## Abdi, 26

### Youth Peace Council representative

“We youth play a key role in the peace of our community. Peace work is now more our role than the elders’ role like it used to be, however, we still have a long way to go to convince our leaders and elders about our role in peace activities. I come from El Wak and I am now in Mandera town for the Garre-Murule inter-clan conflict resolution dialogue, representing young people from El Wak sub-county.

“The radio programme is critically important in our county. Our people are pastoralists and have little access to news updates using TV and other media, so the only way they can be reached is through radio programmes. Nowadays, people have cell phones and these are used [to listen to the radio].

“The youth air their message using their own language. When my fellow youth talk over the radio, I would prefer to listen to what they are saying rather than our elders. This is because young people can easily be convinced by their peers.”

# Case study: **Breaking the link between climate change and conflict**



*A drying waterpan in Banisa village, Mandera County [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2017]*

In many of the areas in Kenya where the triple nexus programme was implemented, climate change is a threat multiplier. Mandera County is an arid region which has seen more frequent extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, as a result of the changing climate. Water, arable land, and pasture are all shrinking resources. This, alongside the increasing enclosure of land, population increase, and deforestation for charcoal production, is putting extreme pressure on pastoral communities. Land loss and competition for control of water points, pasture, and arable land, combined with an influx of light weapons from Somalia's civil war and weak governance, has led to violence in the area.

In order to address violence and insecurity in this area, we must also support communities to adapt to the effects of climate change. Some communities have already been permanently displaced as the land they used to live on can no longer support life. Others are having to abandon pastoralism as a way of life and shift to alternative livelihoods. Islamic Relief's triple nexus programme aimed to strengthen local capacities for Natural Resource Management (NRM) to enhance fair and equitable access to resources in order to prevent competition and conflict. The radio talk show programme also raises awareness of climate change effects in Mandera County and works closely with local faith leaders and women's groups to plan for local adaptation and to prevent competition over shrinking resources leading to conflict.

## **Ladan, 28**

"I am a mother and young person living in Mandera town. I own 30 sheep and goats in my compound, and listen to the radio every day.

"Listening to Islamic Relief's radio talk show on peace helped me understand more about what is happening in our surroundings. For example, my parents are pastoralists like me and during dry periods they move out of their village to look for alternative pastures and water. Resources are scarce and many times I hear they have problems with their neighbouring pastoral groups. I know that for decades drought in our county has been affecting farmers. I know my father and mother both use cell phones and tune in to the local radio stations. I listen to the news and other important updates.

"Last month I was listening to Dawa FM where experts on climate change were educating the community on the impact of climate change and mitigation measures. This message reached hundreds of people and it helps. Compared to 10 years ago when we had little information, nowadays we understand our environment. Radio is an important platform for passing important information. Thanks to those involved in the programme."





# Engaging women and girls in social cohesion

Engaging women and girls in community management of conflict and social cohesion can be difficult in highly patriarchal societies, where they are traditionally excluded from much public decision-making. For instance, when local government and traditional clan leaders were given a mandate to mobilise communities for inter-clan peace dialogues in Mandera County, Kenya, the process was not inclusive as women and young people were often left out. Clan leaders considered themselves to be gatekeepers and owners of these responsibilities and women and young people were not considered to be significant contributors. Active measures need to be put in place to ensure that women and young people are included in community dialogues, but this has to go beyond mere visibility. Having a seat at the decision-making table is unlikely to transform attitudes if women and girls are only seen but not heard. Islamic Relief supported more inclusive community reconciliation and dispute resolution processes in Kenya, which has helped to strengthen inter-clan relations, trust and peace agreements. As a result, clan leaders have started to change their perceptions around the benefits of women and youth participation in peace processes.

In Pakistan, Islamic Relief encountered significant community resistance to engaging women and girls in its triple nexus programme due to cultural sensitivities regarding the role of women in Pashtun society. Women and girls were not permitted to travel outside their villages to attend vocational skills training or social cohesion workshops, so the project activities had to be redesigned so that all engagement with women took place within their own villages.

Engaging with local faith leaders proved to be helpful in shifting cultural gender norms that excluded women and girls from participating fully in society. Female madrasa teachers could use their faith literacy to explain teachings from the Qur'an around the rights of women and girls to participate in dispute resolution processes. In Pakistan, these sessions were particularly successful in addressing the perception among community members that women and girls' engagement in social cohesion and development activities was a threat to existing cultural norms.

*An inter-tribe cricket tournament to foster inter-tribal trust and social cohesion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2020]*



# Youth for peace



*Young students in Maguindanao, the Philippines, participating in a training session on using social media for peace advocacy [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2020]*

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250: Youth, Peace, and Security has challenged the predominant narrative of young people being a threat to peace and instead highlights the importance and value of active youth engagement in peace processes and conflict prevention. In many societies, young people form a significant portion of the population and are keen to contribute. In Kenya and Pakistan, they represent over 68 per cent of the population.<sup>5</sup> Ensuring the inclusion and participation of young people in social cohesion is essential to long-term peace and development. When young people are provided with safe spaces to organise, they play a significant role in peace advocacy, conflict prevention, local dispute resolution, and mediation, as well as in the promotion of peace and social cohesion through peace education initiatives.

Islamic Relief has set up and supported community-based youth organisations and partnered with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to facilitate young people's leadership of community social cohesion initiatives. The triple nexus programme trained hundreds of young people on conflict prevention, mediation and local dispute resolution, as well as peace advocacy using multimedia platforms. As part of the development pillar of the programme, support was provided to help upskill young people, giving them access to vocational and entrepreneurship training, and enhancing their livelihood opportunities.

Young people often have a strong desire to improve their economic condition. When this desire is not met and the particular conditions are present, armed groups can take advantage of their grievances. Engaging young people in social cohesion leadership, alongside economic empowerment, can help mitigate their economic frustrations and build their sense of identity, confidence, and self-worth.



# Youth peace advocacy

As agents of change, young people have a significant role to play in promoting social cohesion. Following the dialogue, negotiation, and mediation trainings in Mindanao in the Philippines, youth peace and development facilitators have used social media platforms to advocate for peace and address disputes before they escalate.<sup>6</sup> Youth peace groups are also involved in community dispute resolution by bringing young people from different religious communities together to rebuild trust and social cohesion. Following their participation in an Islamic Relief youth peace camp with over 100 other young people, youth peace champions have challenged conflict-generating myths and stereotypes about Muslims, Christians, and indigenous people in their own communities.<sup>7</sup>

In Pakistan, youth groups continue to play an active role in dispute resolution around land demarcation, access to water resources, and other local issues. Following the imposition of Covid-19 movement restrictions, Islamic Relief helped the youth

groups to set up a WhatsApp group to maintain communication with each other. This has proven to be a popular and valuable tool for addressing local grievances and disputes before they escalate.

In Kenya, youth peace councils in Mandera County play an active role in peace advocacy and regularly use social media platforms such as WhatsApp to promote peace through their peer networks. They also work with local authorities to share information on escalating disputes before they result in violent clashes.

Islamic Relief's experience demonstrates that when they are supported, young people have an amazing capacity to mobilise their peers, advocate for peace, and manage social cohesion within their communities. Investing in youth engagement in social cohesion is integral to improving participation and preserving safe spaces where young people can actively contribute to peace within their communities.



*Village youth groups collaborating to erect disaster signage as part of Islamic Relief's triple nexus approach to conflict prevention in Indonesia [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2019]*



# Case study: Noraisa, peace development facilitator and peace advocate



Noraisa is in her early 30s and is a community peace and development facilitator and peace advocate. She works in the Philippines with a group that engages women in learning from one another with the support of a trained facilitator. It is organised through the SIDA-funded triple nexus programme. The group is mostly composed of young women who regularly meet to discuss pathways to peace within their communities.

"I know that even as a young woman, I have something to contribute that could benefit our community. So I am involved in various organisations as their local counterpart to handle different project activities at the community level. Before, I wasn't allowed to participate, but now I have become one of the organisers in encouraging and mobilising women, youth and religious leaders towards peace.

"I'm thankful to see the youth enjoying themselves and participating in community activities. Before, women and young people just observed. Especially

women because they think that because they are women, they are incapable of doing things. Now many of those [women] participate actively. Because of my advocacy #NoPeaceWithoutWomen, these women were encouraged to participate because they have something to contribute as women."

Noraisa also hosts a radio programme, Kalilintad (Peace) on Air, where she promotes peace and social cohesion, discussing a wide range of topics including women and youth inclusion in social cohesion.

"We need to fight for our voices to be heard in social cohesion and dispute resolution processes. Youth and women can also contribute towards solving problems in our community, especially women who are the first teachers of children."

# Conclusion



*Psychosocial training for health workers in Indonesia to support community mental health in the event of conflict and natural disasters  
[Photo: Islamic Relief, 2019]*

Protracted crises are here to stay as the world deals with the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, and conflict. The fallout has made women, young people, and other already marginalised groups more vulnerable, with limited access to jobs, healthcare, education, and political engagement. It is now more important than ever that we engage the people most affected by crises in response planning and crisis prevention. As agents of change, women, young people, people with disabilities, and minority groups play a crucial role in conflict prevention and peace advocacy.

Continuing with 'business as usual' is no longer possible in this context because humanitarian aid alone can no longer meet the scale of need. It is time to significantly scale up investment in crisis

prevention. The triple nexus offers an opportunity to address the complex needs of individuals and communities living in protracted crises. It provides collaborative opportunities between humanitarian, development, and peace actors to share knowledge and create synergies that can help to address compounded risks in fragile contexts, and enhance local capacities for peace. However, the nexus will only deliver better assistance if it is financed properly. Long-term flexible investment is essential to the successful delivery of triple nexus programmes so donors should explore how to maintain independent, needs-based humanitarian funding while encouraging much greater use of multi-year flexible financing for integrated programmes.



# Recommendations:

## **Long-term flexible financing for triple nexus programmes**

Donors should increase their financial support for integrated triple nexus programmes that are carefully designed to work with communities on holistic crisis prevention and response. Triple nexus funding must be flexible and long-term so that programmes address structural drivers of crisis while also responding to emergency needs and rapidly changing contexts.

## **Embed peace advocacy within conflict prevention and peace programmes**

Civil society organisations, UN agencies, and governments should commit to ensuring that inclusive peace advocacy is a key pillar of conflict prevention programmes and other peace programmes. Peace transitions need the support of the majority of citizens, not just elite political or armed leaders. Building this support entails significant investment in community outreach, and discussion around all of the political issues involved in conflict. Women, young people, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups make excellent peace advocates at every level and should be supported to lead peace initiatives.

## **Support women and youth-led social cohesion programmes**

Civil society organisations, UN agencies and governments should support the Women Peace and Security and Youth Peace and Security agendas by financing women and youth-led social cohesion programmes, including through triple nexus approaches. This includes removing barriers that hinder the participation of minority women and young people, as well as those with disabilities.

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**Islamic Relief Worldwide**

19 Rea Street South  
Birmingham  
B5 6LB  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 121 605 5555  
Fax: +44 121 622 5003

[irw@irworldwide.org](mailto:irw@irworldwide.org)  
[www.islamic-relief.org](http://www.islamic-relief.org)

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