The Added Value of Faith Actors in Localisation: Opportunities and Barriers in Humanitarian Action

Learnings from Afghanistan-Pakistan, Ethiopia-Kenya, Palestine and Mozambique

July 2024

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Glossary

Collaboration	In the context of this study, this refers to the collaboration between a humanitarian organisation and local actors. Local actors can be NGOs, CSOs, government agencies, the private sector, academia, and others with contextual expertise. Collaboration refers to the joint work of actors to "improve the response times and increase the welfare of the affected population" (Ertem et al., 2010).
Faith actors	Faith actors englobe a large variety of actors whose definitions and typology vary in literature and contexts. For the sake of this research, faith actors will refer to the following: faith-based organisations; religious bodies or networks; faith community; and religious leaders. (see section 2.1 for further details)
Faith-based actors	The term faith-based actors is used to englobe actors whose identity is not directly or officially affiliated to a religion, but who have close ties with a specific faith category and/or are strongly inspired by religious values
Faith-based organisations	Registered or unregistered organisations emerging from civil society, whose missions or objectives are inspired by religious values, beliefs, or identity, either explicit or not. FBOs' statuses / level of formalisation; geographic scales; and relationship to the religion; are understood as part of a continuum rather than binarily defined. (see section 2.1 for further details)
Faith community	"People who share common religious beliefs and values, and draw upon these to carry out activities in their respective communities."[1]
Faith Leaders	"Believers who play influential roles within their faith communities and the broader local community. They benefit from trust and exercise moral authority over members of their local faith community, and shape public opinion in the broader community and even at the national or international level."[2]
Grand Bargain	The Grand Bargain is an accountability mechanism and catalyst for sector-wide transformation. Signed in 2016 by 67 governments, NGOs, UN Agencies and RCRC movements, it was revised in 2021 and in June 2023.[3]
Localisation	There is no single definition of localisation. In humanitarian and development action, the term refers to the strengthening of local responders to lead and deliver response, in a "spirit of partnership [that aims to] reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities."[4] Localisation targets both aid and practice.
Partnerships	Partnerships are a formalised "relationship between international humanitarian actors (especially international NGOs) and local and national actors (especially local and national NGOs), whereby the international actors work with, support and resource their local and/or national partners to design and implement humanitarian preparedness and response programming."[5] The Humanitarian Advisory Group defines three level of partnerships in line with localisation[6]: ● Project level ● Transformative level ● Networks and collectives

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[1] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2014) Partnership Note on Faith-based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders.
[2] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2014) *Ibid*
[3] IASC (2023) The grand bargain beyond 2023
[4] IASC (2020a) "The Grand Bargain in Practice: Mercy Corps' holistic localisation benefits affected people in Syria."
[5] Action Aid et al. (2019) Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships - Recommendations for operational practices that strengthen the leadership of national and local actors in partnership-based humanitarian action globally.
[6] HAG and PIANGO (2019) Measuring Localisation: Framework and tools. HAG Intention to impact: localisation of humanitarian action

List of acronyms

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CICC	Coastal Inter-religious Council of Clerics
COREM	Council of Religions in Mozambique
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVE	Counter Violent Extremism
DFA	De Facto Authority
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
FA	Faith Actors
FBO	Faith Based Organisation
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
IFBO	International Faith-Based Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IO	International Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	Implementing Partners
IR	Islamic Relief
IRW	Islamic Relief Worldwide
JLI	Joint Learning Initiative
KII	Key Informant Interview
KMYA	Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (also referred as LGBT, LGBTQ)
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
PSS	Psychosocial support
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STRIDE	Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Acknowledgements

Cover photo: Sayedramin Sadat, Islamic Relief Afghanistan (Location: Kabul, Afghanistan)

Executive Summary

Introduction: Objectives & Methodology

Localisation - "a spirit of partnership [that aims to] reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities"[7] - is central to humanitarian and development aid and practice. **If properly implemented and accounted for, localisation represents an opportunity to deliberately shift towards empowering communities to shape responses tailored to their unique needs.** It acknowledges and addresses power imbalances, recognising communities' right to self-determination over their futures.

However, **localisation encounters challenges and scepticism to its realisation**: these include concerns about time, efficiency, capacity, fiduciary risks, and adherence to principles; alongside structural obstacles that include legal restrictions, strict compliance processes and funding arrangements that disadvantage local actors.

Against these barriers and in order to implement the localisation agenda, **humanitarian and development actors have developed mechanisms and tools to measure progress and ensure accountability**. The Grand Bargain, established in 2016 and revised in 2021 and 2023, sets commitments for its 67 signatories - governments, UN agencies and international organisations (IOs) - and serves as both an accountability mechanism towards these commitments, and a catalyst; using its platform for advocacy, funding, and mapping of actors.[8] Additional tools that aim to improve progress towards localisation are measurement frameworks such as those developed by the NEAR network[9], START[10] and the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG). Each of these frameworks includes criteria, indicators, means of verifications and, in the case of the NEAR measurement framework, replicable questionnaires. Localisation criteria are similar between the three frameworks, and include funding, partnerships, capacities, participation, coordination, complementarity, visibility, and policy influence. To operationalise localisation, the HAG further focuses on an intentional localisation design at three levels[11]: the project level, the transformative level, and at the level of networks and collectives.

This study delves into the space available for faith actors (Faith Actors) to support localisation by using these monitoring criteria and the three levels of localisation. Three research questions were formulated to guide the research:

How do humanitarian organisations currently engage with faith actors, and to what extent does it leverage their added value in line with the localisation agenda?	What are the specific challenges to engaging with faith actors and how can they be mitigated?	How can Islamic Relief Worldwide and other actors amplify the opportunities for collaboration with faith actors for the localisation agenda?

The research project builds on a detailed literature review complemented by primary data collection through an online survey and key informant interviews (KIIs) across several case studies including two cross border case studies: **Afghanistan-Pakistan** and **Kenya-Ethiopia;** and two national case studies: **Palestine** and **Mozambique.**

Samuel Hall and its national teams identified **209 relevant organisations based in the four case studies,** comprising local and international Faith Actors, secular partners, sectoral coordination leads, and local leaders, that were reached out to for the online survey and KIIs. Among them, 81 individuals responded to the survey, and 42 participated in interviews.

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[7] IASC (2020a) "The Grand Bargain in Practice: Mercy Corps' holistic localisation benefits affected people in Syria."
[8] IASC (2023) The grand bargain beyond 2023
[9] NEAR (2017) Localisation performance measurement framework
[10] Smruti Patel & Koenraad Van Brabant (2017) The start fund, start network and localisation. Global Mentoring Initiative
[11] HAG and PIANGO (2019) Measuring Localisation: Framework and tools. HAG Intention to impact: localisation of humanitarian action

KEY FINDINGS

1. Contrary to common misconceptions, most Faith Actors are non-missionary and their values align with humanitarian principles and values

Among 26 Faith Actors interviewed as part of the case studies, 20 *insisted* on a clear distinction: their values guide them but they do not preach or discriminate based on religion. Faith values (not beliefs) are translated in humanitarian and development action to contribute to a conversation centred on common values and mandates. Furthermore, faith values translate into humanitarian and development activities for a range of actors. Secular actors also have faith inspiration. In Mozambique, secular local organisations still uphold their owner or leaders' and staff's religious values. Being a secular organisation does not remove the individual religious identities or motivations of staff, while similarly, in the case of large international faith-based organisations (IFBOs), not mentioning their religious affiliation is also common to the point that other actors may have forgotten their religious inspiration.

2. Faith Actors provide considerable technical value addition in MHPSS, Migration, Climate and Social Cohesion efforts

The areas of collaboration between Faith Actors and other humanitarian and development actors reflect Faith Actors' value added. The delivery of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) becomes a natural area of collaboration, although the inclusion of faith in MHPSS has been often neglected.[12] Interviews revealed that Faith Actors are uniquely situated to provide MHPSS based on trust and belonging, community solidarity, and faith-based coping mechanisms. During crises such as conflicts, disasters or natural hazards, people often experience profound trauma and distress. FBOs, grounded in the religious principles of compassion and support, can play a crucial role identifying trauma, helping individuals speak through their difficulties, sharing their pain, and elaborating a way out of their pain and difficulties. Beyond immediate assistance, Faith Actors' ability to draw upon religious teachings and rituals can offer a path to resilience to communities and individuals grappling with the aftermath of crisis situations. The discussion on psychosocial wellbeing is closely related to the support that migrants and displaced communities need. Faith Actors' support is seen in the literature on durable solutions, and reintegration of displaced communities. As Rutledge et al. state: "faith moves with them"[13], referring to the mobility of faith in the trajectories and journeys of migrants. Faith allows migrants to build a narrative of their own suffering and decision-making, including the coping mechanisms they can put in place and use. The role of Faith Actors can also provide a continuum of care that is often disrupted by migration, being able to rely on the support of Faith Actors in transit and at destination. Respondents highlight that the provision of psychosocial support for reintegration purposes is key.

3. The lack of faith literacy among other actors limits Faith Actors' full potential

Cultural barriers are specific to Faith Actors' identity as such and affect all the localisation criteria. They are embedded in the language[14], tradition, and practices of faith and secular humanitarian actors. The lack of faith literacy and jargon of the sector, as well as thematic areas that raise resistance locally, are the main cultural barriers identified: while the majority of survey respondents (51.9%) say they have not encountered resistance or scepticism from community members or other stakeholders regarding faith-secular actors partnerships, qualitative data shows that specific issues brought in by humanitarian and development actors require additional communication and efforts to find a common ground with local actors; and cultural misunderstanding is the third most mentioned barrier in the online survey.

Yet, local Faith Actors have a privileged position and access to knowledge to mitigate barriers, especially cultural ones, given their proximity to communities and shared values and practices. Indeed, where certain cultural or societal norms may pose barriers to direct engagement, particularly in conservative or traditional communities, FBOs or leaders have the potential to significantly enhance humanitarian interventions by leveraging their knowledge, networks, resources, and the trust they hold within communities. Their involvement can thus foster culturally sensitive humanitarian efforts - including by helping IOs adapt their narrative

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[12] Winiger and Goodwin (2023) Faith-sensitive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Pluralistic Settings: A Spiritual Care Perspective, published in Religions 14 (10).
[13] Rutledge, Kathleen et al (2021) Faith and MHPSS among displaced Muslim women, Forced Migration Review
[14] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*.

4. Barriers to engagement primarily due to local Faith Actors' compounded challenges from faith identity and scale

Structural barriers encompass barriers specific to local actors (faith-based or not), due to the strongly hierarchical structure of the humanitarian system[15]; as well as barriers specific to Faith Actors. For the latter, they find their origin in the perceived distance between humanitarian frameworks and religious values and structure (affiliations, networks) of Faith Actors.[16] As a consequence, Faith Actors are seen as lacking capacities and unaligned with humanitarian principles, although the literature as well as our data shows a strong alignment with these principles.[17]

Yet, Faith Actors can also provide a longer-term view of localisation, such as in Palestine where the strengthening of civil society is put in peril by the war and the incapacity of the international aid community to intervene. Faith Actors worldwide however run the risk of losing their voice or being silenced by larger organisations or by structural and other barriers. This is where there is a need for Faith Actors to utilise platforms to speak louder and compel a general audience towards an agenda of solidarity and humanity.

5. Faith-based networks are the key strength of Faith Actors and provide solutions to align Faith Actors' engagement and their contribution to localisation

Faith Actors are strongest in their ability to build on existing networks and collectives, sustained by interfaith collaboration, across contexts, and by their influence on key decision makers and governments. Where traditional humanitarian actors are weaker, Faith Actors are strongest. They benefit from existing platforms in all our country cases studies, with partnerships across local, national and international organisations whose values are faith-inspired.

Interfaith networks play an essential role in supporting (1) the recognition of Faith Actors to mitigate cultural and contextual misperceptions; and (2) the engagement with and response to the needs of communities from different faiths. Networks increase the power of Faith Actors in decision-making spaces as Faith Actors' voices (1) come in through a larger and stronger platform; and (2) access spheres that Faith Actors alone cannot reach.

Findings clearly show that networks, especially faith-based ones, can facilitate access to funding. In a context where traditional donors increasingly scrutinise local actors and implement risk mitigation strategies that restrict their access to funding, two local faith actors and the local branch of an international Faith Actors who were interviewed shared that, indeed, most of their funding comes from religious networks they are part of. Data thus confirmed that religious networks can be efficient alternatives to traditional donors for local Faith Actors. However, the funds available through networks are limited in scale compared to traditional humanitarian fundings. While religious networks provide funding opportunities, access to this kind of funding only can thus be a limitation, as opposed to fund diversification. Networks can however facilitate the diversification by being intermediaries between traditional donors and local Faith Actors, as is the case for other respondents.

6. Partnerships with Faith Actors require flexibility and a gradual approach to encompass the variety, and the collective capacity, of Faith Actors

Experiences shared by Key Informants shed light on six (6) minimum requirements in partnerships with Faith Actors. These include the need for actors to abide by a code of conduct and safeguarding policy, and for due diligence processes to be adapted to the profile of the actor, to mitigate risks or concerns over a given partnership, on both sides: Faith Actors want to ensure their secular partners have similar values and do not negatively impact their credibility towards the community[18], and secular actors want to ensure that their faith partners align with risk mitigation policies. However, these processes' bureaucracy and heaviness can be a weight on the partnership, and prevent engaging with actors who don't have the institutional capacities to meet all criteria. Several respondents

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[15] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*
[16] Heather Wurtz and Olivia Wilkinson (2020) *Ibid*
[17] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*
[18] Key Informant Interview, Pakistan, 29/01/2024

indicated looking into reducing the requirements or developing gradual approaches that would enable the engagement with less formalised local actors, through adapted forms of partnerships.

Creating a common language and understanding emerges as an essential step to such a flexible and gradual approach. This means finding a common ground between religious and humanitarian narratives, facilitated by faith literacy: secular actors can build their own capacities to familiarise themselves with religious narratives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Donors and governments

- Develop their own faith literacy to revise negative perceptions towards Faith Actors
- Adapt requirements and revise conditions to facilitate contracting directly with local Faith Actors
- Support the formation and activities of faith-based networks and forums

2. Humanitarian sectors and clusters

- Build faith literacy at sectoral level to facilitate the identification of faith-based solutions and find a common language with Faith Actors
- Advocate for a better recognition of Faith Actors' value added and mitigate negative perceptions
- Develop guidelines to better work with Faith Actors, and adapt due diligence processes
- Develop a directory of Faith Actors with the support of IFBOs and religious networks
- Adapt coordination mechanisms to be Faith Actor-friendly

3. Partners: Intentional project design

- Build partnerships at the application level to design projects around each actors' value added
- Develop communications with Faith Actors and communities to build a common narrative
- Include Faith Actors in different phases of the project to improve relevance and appropriateness
- Partner with local Faith Actors to gradually increase their capacities and inclusion
- Adapt partnership requirements to facilitate collaboration with Faith Actors
- Build staff's familiarisation with Faith Actors to gradually replace delegation with trust

4. Faith actors

- Build networks and collectives, including by identifying Faith Actors and developing a 'faith sector'
- Build institutional capacities and develop the level of formalisation and compliance
- Monitor their results and impact to be able to show a good track record
- Maintain their relationship with local communities and ensure projects benefit them
- Engage where possible with aid coordination mechanisms

I. Introduction

Background: The localisation agenda and the role of faith actors

Localisation – "a spirit of partnership [that aims to] reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities"[19] – is central to humanitarian and development aid and practice. **If properly implemented and accounted for, localisation represents an opportunity to deliberately empower communities to shape responses tailored to their unique needs.** It acknowledges and addresses power imbalances, while recognising communities' right to self-determination.

However, **localisation encounters various challenges, and is often met with sceptical views regarding its feasibility and realisation**: these stem from concerns about time, efficiency, capacity, fiduciary risks, and adherence to certain principles; alongside structural obstacles including legal restrictions, strict compliance processes and funding arrangements detrimental to local actors.

In order to overcome these barriers, **humanitarian and development actors have developed mechanisms and tools to measure progress and ensure accountability**. The Grand Bargain, established in 2016 and revised in 2021 and 2023, sets commitments for its 67 signatories – which include governments, UN agencies and international organisations (IOs) - and serves as both an accountability mechanism towards these commitments, and as a catalyst for advocacy, fundings, and the mapping of actors.[20] Additional tools that aim to track progress towards localisation include measurement frameworks such as those developed by the NEAR network[21], START[22] and the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG). Each of these frameworks includes criteria, indicators, means of verifications and, in the case of the NEAR measurement framework, replicable questionnaires. Localisation criteria are similar between the three frameworks, and include elements related to funding, partnerships, capacities, participation, coordination, complementarity, visibility, and policy influence. To operationalise localisation, the HAG further focuses on an intentional localisation design built on three levels[23]: the project level, the transformative level, and at the level of networks and collectives.

This study delves into the space available for faith actors to support localisation by using these monitoring criteria, and incorporating elements drawn from all three levels of localisation.

Faith actors' role in localisation

Faith actors have played a vital role in the shift towards localisation. Wilkinson et al.[24] explain how local faith actors are often the first and last responders in crises, operating in parallel to humanitarian coordination mechanisms from which these actors had long been excluded. Faith actors are individuals or organisations who are often deeply embedded in the communities they serve, belonging to and maintaining strong local networks. They are well-positioned to provide humanitarian and development assistance to those in need, as they often have a deep understanding of local contexts, cultural norms and traditions. They also tend to enjoy a high level of trust within the community, essential to building strong relationships and promoting sustainable solutions.

This research project – a collaboration between Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) and Samuel Hall – on the added value of *faith actors in Localisation: opportunities and barriers in humanitarian action* – presents a narrative account of the role of faith actors in localisation efforts, with a specific focus on developing and conflict settings. The research is supported by case studies across various geographies, and provides evidence-based research and analysis on the value addition of faith actors in the localisation process.

While the literature mentions faith actors, faith-based actors, and faith-based organisations, at times interchangeably, this research focuses on **faith actors (FAs) as a broad range of stakeholders** encompassing individuals, communities, and organisations. In their *State of the evidence in religions and development*[25], published in 2022, the Joint Learning Initiative (JLI) defines FAs as organisations, bodies and networks, and leaders. Both JLI[26] and UNHCR[27] include faith as well as faith-based actors in their typology. The multiple identifications (from religious to faith inspired), scales (from the local to the global), and types of actors (organisations, networks, communities, individuals) illustrate the diverse realities that fall under the broad categorisation of FAs. This research will explore this breadth to assess the roles of FAs in advancing localisation.

[19] IASC (2020a) "The Grand Bargain in Practice: Mercy Corps' holistic localisation benefits affected people in Syria."
[20] IASC (2023) The grand bargain beyond 2023
[21] NEAR (2017) Localisation performance measurement framework
[22] Smruti Patel & Koenraad Van Brabant (2017) The start fund, start network and localisation. Global Mentoring Initiative
[23] HAG and PIANGO (2019) Measuring Localisation: Framework and tools. HAG Intention to impact: localisation of humanitarian action
[24] Wilkinson et al. (2022) Faith in localisation? the experiences of local faith actors engaging with the international humanitarian system in South Sudan; the Journal of International Humanitarian Action.
[25] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) The state of the evidence in religions and development.
[26] UNHCR (2014) Partnership Note on Faith-based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders.
[27] *Ibid*

Objectives & Methodology

IRW is taking action to strengthen its approach and the effectiveness of its local partnerships, including through research. More specifically, and to increase its range of partners, IRW aims to enhance collaboration with faith actors (FAs). IRW commissioned Samuel Hall to undertake this research to produce evidence-based recommendations to leverage FAs' added value in localisation while mitigating barriers to partnerships with FAs.

> **Box 1. Localisation at Islamic Relief Worldwide and the STRIDE project**
> A signatory of the Grand Bargain, Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) prioritises localisation by actively seeking to foster genuine partnerships, amplify the voices of local communities, and build long-term resilience through capacity-strengthening initiatives. An illustrative example of Islamic Relief's localisation commitment is the STRIDE project.
>
> The STRIDE project (Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence) builds a "model of institutional capacity enhancement for disaster preparedness and local partnerships". Within this framework, local actors' capacities are enhanced according to their self-assessments, and they contribute to the needs identification and response design, in order to transfer the implementation from Islamic Relief to local actors. With this model, the project has demonstrated great progress towards localisation.

To reach these results, the study has three (3) specific objectives:

(1) **Map faith actors and activities** through case study;
(2) **Map existing areas of partnership and collaboration**, and entry points for further local engagement;
(3) **Understand the best practices and address obstacles** to the involvement of FAs.

In line with the research objectives, the following three research questions have been formulated to guide the research and this final report. The overall research matrix, including sub-questions, is available in the annex.

1 How do humanitarian organisations currently engage with faith actors (type and means of collaboration) and to what extent does this engagement leverage their added value in line with the localisation agenda?

2 What are the specific challenges to engaging with faith actors at the community, organisational (faith actors and humanitarian organisations) and sectoral level; and how can they be mitigated?

3 How can Islamic Relief Worldwide and other humanitarian actors amplify the opportunities for collaboration with faith actors in pursuit of localisation objectives, while mitigating or overcoming the challenges?

Methodology

The research project builds on a detailed literature review complemented by primary data collection through an online survey and key informant interviews (KIIs) across several case studies including two cross-border case studies: **Afghanistan-Pakistan** and **Kenya-Ethiopia;** and two national case studies: **Palestine** and **Mozambique.**

The case studies were selected based on two criteria:

Thematic focus: to cover key societal issues of our time, namely **displacement** (Afghanistan/Pakistan, Ethiopia/Kenya, Mozambique), **conflict** (Palestine, Mozambique), and **climate** (Afghanistan/Pakistan, Ethiopia/Kenya);

Diversity and representation covering different **religions** with a focus on both Muslim and Christian actors; and different **levels of integration in humanitarian action** (from a low level integration in Afghanistan/Pakistan, to medium involvement in Palestine, and strong integration in Ethiopia/Kenya and Mozambique); and finally the **diversity of profiles**, with local and international, formal and informal actors.

Samuel Hall and its national teams identified **209 relevant organisations based in the four case study locations.** They comprise local and international FAs, secular partners, sectoral coordination leads, and local leaders, that were reached out to for the online survey and KIIs. Among them, 81 individuals responded to the survey, and 42 participated in interviews. Table 1 summarises the total sample size. The mapping of FAs and non-FAs identified in the four case studies is available in Annex 2.

Table 1. Final sample

	Afg.	Pak.	Pal.	Eth.	Ken.	Moz.	Global	Total
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)								
Local FAs	1	2	2	2	3	2		12
International FAs	1	2	1	2	1			7
Islamic Relief	2	1	1	1	1		5	11
Secular partner		1	1		3	1		6
Local representative	1	1	1	1	1	1		6
Total KIIs	5	7	6	6	9	4	5	42
Online survey								
Total online survey	21	14	10	9	7	2	18	81
Total number of study participants								123

Limitations

Sampling and respondents' identification: This research relied on the desk-based identification of FAs and their partners in case study countries, a task complicated by the fact that many FAs, especially at local level, tend to be absent from the existing literature. Samuel Halls' national researchers carried out this identification with the support of Islamic Relief Worldwide and of Islamic Relief Country Offices, however the identification remained limited by this factor. As a consequence, the mapping exercise provided as part of this research is indicative only, and provides a starting point on which to further build knowledge and evidence.

Dependency on the availability and responsiveness of respondents: In addition to the challenges for the identification, the sampling was limited by the responsiveness of participants for both the online survey and KIIs. This was increasingly challenging for countries where respondents tend to be suspicious of researchers.

Concerns over the sensitivity of faith identities: Some actors, such as in the context of Afghanistan and Pakistan, were reluctant to speak openly about their faith-based identity, and preferred not to participate in the research.

Impact of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza: The level of violence and destruction in Gaza during the data collection period (January-February 2024) significantly impacted our data collection efforts in Palestine. The team, in consultation with our National Researcher, decided to focus on the West Bank and Jerusalem due to the inability to reach stakeholders in Gaza, except for a representative from Islamic Relief Palestine, who was interviewed after evacuating from Gaza to Egypt. However, the situation also affected actors in the West Bank and Jerusalem, due to (1) increased settler and military violence towards Palestinian in the West Bank and Jerusalem, (2) the prioritisation of emergency funding for Gaza over community development projects in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and (3) heightened scrutiny of local actors, including faith actors. This impacted the data collection as fewer actors were available, and all respondents and our national researcher were affected by the situation.

II. Who are the faith actors and why are they relevant?

A typology of faith actors

FAs englobe a large variety of actors whose definitions and typology vary across contexts. In the 2022 Joint Learning Initiative's (JLI) report, *the state of the evidence in religions and development*[28], authors present a state of the art account of three decades of research and define various terms to better understand the scope of FAs. The JLI categorises FAs through two lenses: **the type of actors** – namely organisations, bodies, networks and leaders; **and scale** – namely international, national and regional, and local.

The diversity of FAs has to be recognised. **Their definition cannot be based on a binary identification of status, scale, and relationship to faith, but rather on a continuum-approach and organisational self-definition**. The diversity of actors includes:

- **Faith-based organisations (FBOs):** registered or unregistered organisations emerging from the civil society, whose missions or objectives are inspired by religious values, beliefs, or identity, whether explicit or not;
- **Religious bodies or networks** that are officially attached to a religious institution - these can be bodies with a social purpose, worship communities (e.g. monasteries) or networks (e.g. councils). Interfaith bodies are part of this category if they are constituted of official religious institutions or representatives, rather than civil society actors;
- **Faith communities** are different from worship communities in that they are not part of the religious institution, but designate the larger community of believers and / or practitioners of a given religion; while they can be constituted as committees, they are not necessarily formalised and are an integral part of local communities;
- **Religious leaders**: individuals of influence in a community due to their role in or knowledge of religious tradition and practice.

Photo credit: Shaista Chisty, Islamic Relief Sudan

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[28] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*

Unpacking five common misconceptions regarding faith actors

The interviews reveal key misconceptions on terminology, on FAs' identity and on their role in humanitarian and development aid. This section reviews these misunderstandings and offers clarifications. It also serves as a stark reminder of the importance of reflexivity and vigilance when applying labels, in order to avoid assigning FAs to boxes that do not define them, their objectives and operations; and to contextualise the understanding of FAs' added value in localisation.

1. **The majority of faith actors are non-missionary**

Among 26 FAs interviewed as part of the case studies, 20 insisted on a clear distinction: **their values guide them, but they do not preach or discriminate based on religion.**

> "We use Islamic values as a guide. But we are not a religious organisation. We don't go around and preach. […] We are just a humanitarian and development organisation like any other organisation, but our work is inspired by Islamic faith." Respondent from Ethiopia, 01/02/2024

Most actors agreed on being referred to as a humanitarian organisation with a religious inspiration: in the survey (81 respondents), 36 identify as both NGO or donor, and faith, faith-based or faith-inspired organisation; vs 29 who identify as NGO / donor only; and 16 as faith, faith-based or faith inspired only (see graph 1). For international FBOs, their identification as INGOs comes first as their activities are non-faith-related**.**

2. **They are faith-inspired, not only faith-based**

Survey respondents nuanced their faith identities: when asked which category they belonged to, 32 survey participants described themselves as "faith inspired" vs 20 as a faith organisation, introducing nuances in applying definitions. In Ethiopia and Palestine, several actors did not identify as faith-based despite the use of religious terminology in their names, nor their belonging to religious networks.

Categories that correspond best to you or your organisations identity multiple answers possible)

- Both secular and faith-based
- Secular only (NGOs, UN, and/or donors)
- Faith or faith-based only
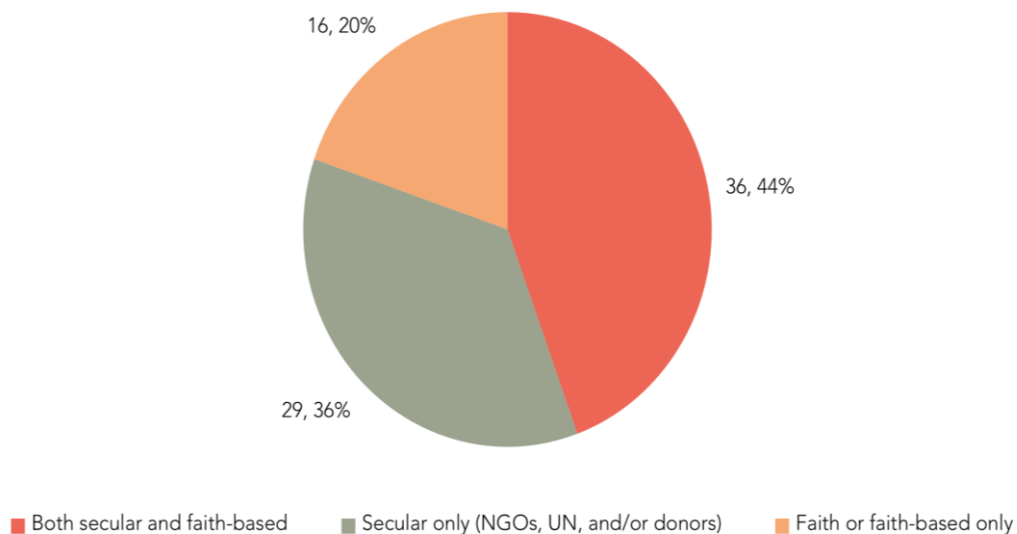
> "We should clarify what is meant by the term "faith actors"? We are heavily involved in humanitarian work, meaning organisations that provide humanitarian services, have a presence, uphold a commitment to ethical and humanitarian values, and strive to have a meaningful impact." Respondent from Palestine, 25/01/2024

However, some organisations are reappropriating their faith-based identities and calling on others to do so, insisting on their added values as FAs rather than secularising themselves to adapt to a given sector.

3. **Their faith values align with aid values, they do not dominate**

Faith values (not beliefs) are translated to humanitarian and development action to contribute to a conversation centred on common values and mandates. While a few (4) faith actors who participated in the interviews highlighted advantages of collaboration within the same faith, the majority of respondents (18 out of 26) insisted that the common values and mandates were the most important feature to identify partners. The priority is not to work within the same faith but to work across faiths and across a typology of both faith and secular actors:

> "We have no problem engaging with both secular and faith actors, […] this will depend on our values, if they align their values and they are like-minded, […] we have no problem engaging with either faith actors or secular actors."
> Respondent from Kenya, 22/01/2024

4. Faith plays a role in secular actors' work much as it does for faith actors

Secular actors are also inspired by faith. In Mozambique, secular local organisations uphold their leaders' and staff's religious values. Being a secular organisation does not do-away with the individual religious identities or motivations of staff, while similarly, in the case of large IFBOs, not mentioning their religious affiliation is also common to the point that other actors may have forgotten their original religious inspiration.

Faith values translate into humanitarian and development activities for a range of actors. Faith and secular actors can both have religious activities and/or use religious structures and hierarchies for their activities. Religious leaders and structures are used by all – across faiths and types of actors – to mobilise communities and gain access for interventions. This is particularly true for peacebuilding, climate and gender. In Kenya and Ethiopia, FAs approach climate from a theological perspective, using religious teachings to strengthen the impact and sustainability of environmental protection activities. A few respondents highlighted that secular actors, too, should familiarise themselves with religion to offer improved and more adapted responses:

> "Secular organisations often struggle to navigate religious dynamics, lacking clarity on how to integrate beliefs into their work. This can hinder their effectiveness, as they may inadvertently miss opportunities or fail to achieve their goals due to narrow-mindedness about religion, prioritizing relationships with donors over project outcomes."
> Respondent from Pakistan, 29/01/2024

5. The main difference is between international and local faith actors

The main difference is between international and local FAs, and the complementary roles they can play in localising humanitarian and development action. **Geography matters at two levels**: on the first, locally rooted FAs, such as religious leaders, hold significant power; at the second, international FAs are seen as enjoying privileged access to both global funding and capacities, and local access. This brings forward the conversation of the role that both international and local FAs can play, *together*.

Local FAs hold significant power as they are often the most credible and trusted institution, and are involved in different aspects of local and national politics. For example, among the advisors to the President of the Republic of Mozambique is a religious leader who is also the President of the Council of Religions in Mozambique (COREM). In some cases, secular actors are not well perceived – given that FAs work as intermediaries between communities and implement interventions, they can and have served as monitors for the activities led by IOs.

> "When you have the minds of the people, when people think that you are the prophetic voice within the community, when you become the moral voice within the community, who can be more powerful than you?"
> Respondent from Kenya, 29/01/2024

International FAs are perceived as essentially benefitting from 'the best of both worlds', and their decentralisation efforts play a key role in the pursuit of localisation. They combine humanitarian and development action with faith values and principles, flexibility and collaboration. They are perceived as the right choice for equal partnerships, making use of their privileged seat at coordination tables, humanitarian clusters and collaborative platforms to advance localisation agendas. In parallel, IFBOs have branches and offices across countries, making them able to better understand various stakeholders present.

A key to dispelling common myths is to focus on the willingness of FAs to collaborate, partner and join forces, to identify their added value and align them with other actors in humanitarian and development practice. In this light, the collaborations between international and local FAs provide a key pathway to greater localisation throughout many contexts, whether single faith or multi-faith contexts.

By unpacking these misconceptions and taking into account the different geographies and identities of FAs, **the research identified five categories of actors with a role to play in humanitarian and development action**. Table 2 provides information on the spectrum of FAs, while subsequent passages reflect on the relationship and partnership potentials of FA's among each other and within the broader humanitarian-development space.

Table 2. The spectrum of faith actors

Religious leaders and communities	Religious institutions and networks	Local and national faith organisations	Local interfaith organisations	International faith-based organisations
While they are rarely official partners, their role and influence at local level increases their role in shaping narratives. Faith communities are mostly mobilised as participants in humanitarian and development activities.	Religious institutions can act as local or international FAs (depending on scale and network). They are formalised and have a strong community base.	Local, community-based FBOs with various levels of formalisation can be part of strong networks to increase their engagement. They are in a privileged position to understand, mobilise and respond to communities.	Local networks, councils or platforms with a network of faith leaders across religion play a key role in shaping narrative and practices, and privileged access to communities. Their inclusion in the sector varies.	International, formalised and recognised FBOs are included in humanitarian coordination mechanisms yet have access to local faith networks and community trust.

Photo credit: Rojy Joshi, Islamic Relief Nepal

Box 2. Specificities of faith actors in each case study

The mapping of actors conducted as part of this research (Annex 2) highlighted different trends in FAs' profiles depending on the case studies:

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, local FBOs constitute the majority of FAs identified (43 out of 62). The number of international faith actors was smaller, with a difference between both countries as more international actors are present in Pakistan; Afghanistan is the country where the most religious leaders were identified.

Ethiopia and Kenya have the highest number of religious institutions and networks (18 out of 41 FAs), as well as a higher number of IFBOs (15) than local FBOs (8). Both countries have interfaith platforms and actors report a strong coordinating role of the government. There are differences between the two countries, with FAs in Ethiopia hesitating more on their faith identities which was not reported in Kenya. In Kenya, the role of FAs is better recognised while a shift is necessary in Ethiopia to give more space and power to local FBOs in particular.

Palestine has a relatively small number of FAs, with 8 IFBOs, 4 local FBOs and 4 religious networks identified. It is the country with the most hesitancy when it comes to faith identify, which may be related to the strength and secularity of civil society organisations (CSOs), and to the increased scrutiny of international donors; leading to no Muslim FBOs being identified, despite some organisation having seemingly Muslim-based values.

In Mozambique, most FAs identified were international FBOs (8) followed by religious institutions and networks. While local FAs are challenging to identify, secular and faith actors alike recognise their importance in humanitarian action, highlighting that it is challenging to conduct any activity without engaging with local faith actors. Similarly to Kenya, the identification of faith actors is clearer than in other countries, and Mozambique has strong interfaith networks and forums.

Faith Actor's enhanced engagement in humanitarian and development action

This section focuses on the current state of collaboration between FAs and secular actors, outlining:

- Their common interests and values (*why*);
- The forms of engagement (*how*);
- The thematic areas of collaborations that build on FAs' technical added value (*what*).

Shared values and interests

FAs interviewed are guided by humanitarian principles, first and foremost. From their perspective, there is no difference between faith and other humanitarian actors. This is reflected in the perception of FAs as actors with common values and shared interests. The conversations and interviews clarified three fundamental aspects:

1. **Faith values are similar to humanitarian values.** By upholding core humanitarian principles, FAs align themselves with secular actors.
2. **Faith actors go beyond religion, race and gender to prioritise a shared sense of humanity and to focus on human interactions.** In the case of Islamic Relief in Ethiopia, the faith-based values of the organisation inspire the work at the ground level to better reach out to people in need and prioritise the most marginalised groups, irrespective of their religion, age, gender or social status[29].
3. **Faith values complement the values inherent to the aid sector more broadly.** Beyond the mutual commitment to contexts of fragility, and supporting populations at risk, FAs bring other fundamental human values. This has led FAs in some contexts to be perceived more positively than traditional aid organisations, as they are seen as being closer to communities and to the people.

The data collected highlights significant overlap and complementariness among the values of faith-based and other humanitarian actors, as seen in figure 2.

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[29] Key Informant Interview, Ethiopia, 01/02/2024

Figure 2. Overlap and divergences in values between faith and secular actors

VALUE OVERLAP

COMPLEMENTARITY

DIVERGENCE

Shared values: the humanitarian sector derives from both religious and secular values.

As a consequence, many values are shared between faith and secular actors:
- Human dignity and Humanity
- Compassion and Empathy
- Justice and equality
- Solidarity and Community, peace and coexistence
- Service and altruism
- Respect for Neutrality and Diversity
- Development and progress

Faith-based values add to the shared values more than they diverge from them. These additional values are context-specific and align with local communities', improving the perception of FAs vs secular humanitarian actors who are sometimes perceived as bringing a colonial agenda to transform traditional communities.

These values create opportunities:
- Financial opportunities e.g. charity, zakat, religious foundations/donors.
- Operational opportunities: material and human assets e.g. volunteers, infrastructures
- Transformative opportunities: faith-based solutions e.g. faith-based PSS, environmental theologies

The literature highlights the following value divergences:

- Conflict with principles of neutrality and impartiality.
- Risk of proselytisation or religious conditionality on aid.
- Contradiction between accountability vs forgiveness and amnesty.

However, the literature points to contradictory evidence on each of these points.
The data collected shows a quasi-unanimity of FAs embracing inclusive, non-discriminatory and non-missionary practices.

Sources: Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid;* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2014) *Ibid;* Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022), *Ibid;* Aaron P. Boesenecker, Leslie Vinjamuri (2011) *Ibid;* Heather Wurtz and Olivia Wilkinson (2020) Local Faith Actors and the Global Compact on Refugees. Migration and Society: Advances in Research 3 (2020): 145–161

Summary of the shared values

1. Human dignity and humanity

Working for and supporting humanity and humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

Both faith-based and secular organisations aim to provide aid based on need, without discrimination, prioritising the most vulnerable and needy, regardless of their identities or affiliations. Commitment to human dignity, respect for others and basic rights, and for the inherent worth and dignity of every individual, upholding and promoting the rights and well-being of all people, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Accountability and transparency, in the service to humanity, with honesty and integrity.

2. Compassion and empathy

Striving to alleviate human suffering, inequalities and addressing the root causes of social injustices.

Both faith-based and secular organisations provide non-partisan support to people experiencing poverty irrespective of the ethnic, political, faith, background of the people and communities.

3. Justice and equality

Creating a more just and equitable society, where everyone has access to basic needs, opportunities, and rights, regardless of their circumstances.

Both faith-based and secular organisations provide non-partisan support to all human beings without ethnic, religious, social or political discrimination; with the aim to inspire social justice, reconciliation and conflict resolution through the rule of law and human care.

4. Solidarity and community, peace and coexistence

With a focus on solidarity and community engagement, encouraging individuals and communities to come together, support one another, and work collaboratively to address humanitarian crises and promote social well-being.

Both faith-based and secular organisations promote peace and coexistence among society members with the aim to strengthen local capacities, empower local communities and build their resilience.

5. Service and altruism

Operating independently of political, economic, or military actors, both faith-based and secular organisations are motivated by a desire to help others and make a positive impact in the world. They often engage in acts of charity, volunteerism, and advocacy to address needs.

6. Respect for neutrality and diversity

Respecting the diversity of human experiences, beliefs, and cultures, the aim is to foster inclusiveness and promote dialogue and understanding across different religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

While it is often believed that FBOs cannot be neutral due to their religious identity and agenda, many prioritise maintaining neutrality in their operations.

7. Development and progress

Addressing the immediate survival needs such as food, water, and shelter of marginalised groups as well as long-term solutions to systemic issues that lead to marginalisation.

Both faith-based and secular organisations achieve this aim through education, scientific research and the promotion of knowledge; and through coordination with other organisations, governments, and communities to maximise the impact of their efforts.

Flexible forms of engagements

With the variety of FAs comes a variety of roles they can play when engaging in humanitarian and development action. FAs can take part as **(1) donors, (2) lead agencies, (3) implementing or operational partners, (4) facilitators, i.e. informal partners, relays or intermediaries; and (5) informants** (Table 3).

Table 3. Roles associated with different types of FAs

	International FBOs	Local and national FBOs	Religious bodies / networks	Faith communities & religious leaders*
Donors	Donors in the context of unilateral or multilateral appeals.		Provision of funds, particularly through charity / zakat pathways.	Provision of timely financial and in-kind resources, often in facilitator roles.
Lead agency	Formalised and globally recognised FBOs can leverage funds for unilateral interventions or as lead agency.	Local FBOs lead projects mostly when funds come from FAs as well (faith-based donor funding a local FA).	National bodies can be the intervention arm of international institutions; and/or channel funds.	
Implementing or operational partners	National branches of international NGOs are most often involved as implementing partners (IPs).	Formal FBOs can be contracted (implementing partners, subcontractors or grantees).	Cases of partnerships with religious bodies that leverage their human and material resources.	Faith leaders can be included as board members, or access formal partnerships through ministries.
Facilitators / unofficial partners or relay		Local FBOs, especially the less formal ones, as well as religious bodies / networks can be mobilised as facilitators for projects (with no formal partnership agreements), leveraging their resources (networks of volunteers and / or places of worship). Mobilising such resources may raise ethical questions.		Religious leaders are facilitators who convene key messages to the communities, play a role in awareness-raising and practical support.
Informants		Local FAs are included, however rarely, in the design phase of projects, or to overcome implementation challenges.		Religious leaders are involved as informants. However, this practice is not mainstreamed and is limited to projects with a participatory approach.

Both categories were merged for the purpose of this table as their role in humanitarian interventions are similar

Main areas of potential intervention and collaborations

The areas of collaboration between FAs and other humanitarian and development actors reflect FAs' added value. The mobilisation of religious assets, as well as the role of religious leaders and other FAs in influencing beliefs and behaviours are well documented,[30] alongside negative instances of abuse and conflict.[31,32] Leveraging FAs' influential role requires a strong and equal collaboration, alongside oversight mechanisms.

This section highlights the main areas of collaboration and sectoral entry points reported by respondents.

- ### Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

One key entry point to **working with FAs is the provision of psychosocial support – from community-based to individual approaches to support and care[33].** Although the inclusion of faith in MHPSS has often been neglected, the delivery of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) has become a natural area of collaboration.[34] **Interviews revealed that FAs are uniquely situated to provide MHPSS based on trust and belonging, community solidarity, and faith-based coping mechanisms.**

During crises such as conflicts, disasters or natural hazards, people often experience profound trauma and distress. FBOs, grounded in religious principles of compassion and support, can play a crucial role identifying trauma, helping individuals talk through their difficulties, sharing their pain, and elaborating a way to overcome pain and/or trauma. Beyond

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30 Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
31 Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
32 Le Roux, E. and Palm, S. (2021), Learning from Practice: Engaging Faith-based and Traditional Actors in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls (United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women)
33 LWF/IRW (2018) A faith-sensitive approach in humanitarian response: Guidance on mental health and psychosocial programming.
34 Winiger and Goodwin (2023) Faith-sensitive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Pluralistic Settings: A Spiritual Care Perspective, published in Religions 14 (10).

immediate assistance, FAs' ability to draw upon religious teachings and rituals can offer a path to resilience to communities and individuals grappling with the aftermath of crisis situations.

> "When the 2005 Pakistan earthquake hit our area, we all went to our local Imam for advice and sermons, which was relaxing us and helping us take the fear away from us. I have seen it in emergency contexts, in the Philippines where the fathers of the churches helped their communities, and children, to get out of that trauma. I have seen it in Malawi. I have seen it in Afghanistan. This is one of the aspects in which there is no structure but that is there. We consult our faith leaders for that kind of psychosocial support." Respondent from Pakistan, 23/01/2024

Ager et al. warn of some of the challenges of faith-sensitive psychosocial programming, as practices are often poorly documented, disseminated and developed. This re-emphasises the value of guidance on faith-sensitive psychosocial programming, as will be discussed in the recommendations[35]. To address this gap, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Islamic Relief jointly developed faith-sensitive guidance on the provision of MHPSS in humanitarian programming.[36]

- ## Migration, return and reintegration

The discussion on psychosocial wellbeing is closely related to the support that migrants and displaced communities need. **FAs' support is presented in the literature on durable solutions, and reintegration of displaced communities.** As Rutledge et al. state: "faith moves with them"[37], referring to the mobility of faith in the trajectories and journeys of migrants. FAs can provide a continuum of care that is often disrupted by migration, providing an entry point of support along migration routes, in transit and at destination.

Respondents highlight that **the provision of psychosocial support for reintegration purposes is key**. In Mozambique, the Peace Club Initiative[38] works at the forefront of developing and implement activities that integrate families and make them feel safe in their former or new communities[39]. In Kenya, the CICC[40] launched and carried out between 2018-2021 an intervention to counter the stigma facing rural returnees – especially women and youth – by working with them, individually, and with their communities and law enforcement agencies to reduce fears, or assumptions that returnees may bring back with them violence or extremism to rural communities. Safe spaces were set up to welcome back returnees, with clerics and law enforcement working closely together to ensure that returnees had someone to speak to and turn to, while at the same time sensitising law enforcement actors, for a sustainable change in mindsets and behaviours[41].

FAs can contribute to durable solutions as faith "contribute[s] to identity- and community-making in displacement".[42] Re-building a community through shared values and traditions is essential to recreate home[43], a process in which FAs play a key role by providing opportunities and communities of spiritual practices, values, and tradition; and by building bridges between host communities and migrants. Additionally, Wurtz and Wilkinson show that FAs can play a role in reinforcing self-reliance through solidarity and collective action.[44]

Box 3. Faith actors working with Returnee Populations in Mozambique and in Afghanistan

Mozambique Peace Clubs is working with RENAMO – the Mozambican National Resistance party – on the social reintegration of adult men, helping and facilitating their safe return and non-discrimination, as part of their peacebuilding agenda. Peace Club has also facilitated integration within men's families, directly accompanying them and ensuring they can be integrated into their communities of origin. Their activities include returning children to schools, ensuring access to hospital services without discrimination and without exclusion.

Afghan faith actors have been working with returnee populations coming back from Iran and Pakistan, and providing logistical help to promote their reintegration. Some of this requires **cross-border interventions and sharing of practices across actors in neighbouring countries,** such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Some organisations spoke about sending their programme or logistics officers to Pakistan to help Pakistani partners improve their departments' work when it comes to preparing and planning for return and reintegration. Faith actors have also been supporting IOM, UNHCR with providing humanitarian assistance to returnees from Iran and from Pakistan.

Faith actors highlighted their presence at border crossings, but calling for more investments into cross-border opportunities to inform, prepare, accompany and transition migrants from their host countries to countries of origin.

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[35] Ager et al. (2019) The case for – and challenges of – faith-sensitive psychosocial programming published in Intervention, the Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas.
[36] LWF/IRW (2018) A faith-sensitive approach in humanitarian response: Guidance on mental health and psychosocial programming.
[37] Rutledge, Kathleen et al (2021) Faith and MHPSS among displaced Muslim women, Forced Migration Review
[38] Local Interfaith actor In Mozambique
[39] Key Informant Interview, Mozambique, 24/01/2024
[40] Local interfaith actor in Kenya
[41] FAO / Samuel Hall (2023) Global Lessons Learned on Sustainable Reintegration in Rural Areas.
[42] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
[43] Charishma Ratnam (2018) Creating Home: Intersections of Memory and Identity, *Geography Compass* 12, nº 4
[44] Heather Wurtz and Olivia Wilkinson (2020) *Ibid*

● Emergency response & Climate response: Towards a nexus

FAs intervene as first responders in many situations of crises, emergencies and overall fragility.

All respondents highlighted the importance of FAs in climate response - from emergency, to adaptation and mitigation. In the response to Pakistan floods, for instance, while traditional humanitarian actors took a month to secure access and operate, faith actors were able to immediately support affected communities.[45] Beyond emergency response, FAs support local adaptation practices to climate change. In Kenya, FAs are involved in blue economy projects, developing livelihoods that align with marine protection.

The engagement with FAs on climate is increasingly recognised, illustrated by the presence, for the first time, of a faith pavilion at the COP28.

Another key role for FAs has been on awareness raising, **integrating an environmental focus in their preaching**. In 2016, the World Council on Religions and Norwegian Church Aid gathered for a conference in Islamabad (Pakistan) about climate change and interfaith dialogue, where key national FAs committed to influence action, and religious leaders were recommended to preach about climate change, environment and conservation.

But faith actors' role in environmental protection goes beyond their influential role in bringing IO messaging or projects to the community. On the contrary, **faith and environmental protection intersect in terms of values, giving FAs a key role in (1) upscaling faith-based practices of environmental preservation, and (2) advocating for actions against climate change**. In Kenya, the interfaith platform CICC capitalises on faith-based practices to better preserve the environment. Faiths such as Hinduism or some of the African tradition have very close relationships with the environment which translates into practices of care and local knowledge that can be learned from.

Respondents highlighted FAs' active role in:

● **Water management, agriculture, and livestock**. In contexts such as Afghanistan, in addition to religious guidance, FAs have been responsible for digging water channels, building schools, and bringing water to those schools[46].

● **Climate change adaptation and climate action** through climate training initiatives across faiths. In Mozambique's KaNyaka island[47], for example, faith beliefs have emphasised the need to avoid cutting trees, to avoid fishing without the performance of a ritual, and to integrate traditional rituals in farming, fishing and harvesting.

● **Community resilience**, shifting from working with faith leaders as transmitters of advocacy or awareness raising messages, towards training them to create practices in communities that make them more resilient to crises, including climate change.

In addition, FAs' language on climate response is closely linked to the agenda on justice, a core value of FAs[48]. For example, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers[49] or the Christian Council of Mozambique, focus on the role of FAs in supporting women and girls in climate emergency response and adaptation, recognising the unequal exposure to risks and access to support of certain groups. Green Faith, in Kenya, uses faith to raise awareness on environmental risks and their unequal distribution.[50]

Illustration 1. People from a variety of faiths and groups march through Nairobi, Kenya, Sept. 4, 2023. (RNS photo/F. Nzwili)[51]

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[45] Key Informant Interview, Global, 29/01/2023
[46] Key Informant Interview, Afghanistan, 24/01/2024
[47] Mubai et al (2023) The sacred and climate change: local perceptions from KaNyaka island in Mozambique, in Climate Risk Management Vol 42.
[48] Salter and Wilkinson (2022) Faith framing climate: a review of faith actors' definitions and use of climate change, in Climate and Development, volume 16, 2024.
[49] The network for traditional and religious peacemakers (2022) Faith actors addressing climate emergencies impacting women and girls
[50] Earthbeat (2023) At African climate summit, faith leaders joins demands for climate justice - available here
[51] Earthbeat (2023) Ibid

- ## Social cohesion

The literature points to a mobilisation of FAs in peace and conflict interventions, especially related to social cohesion. Including FAs in social cohesion activities is recognised as a means to address the causes of conflict[52], whether at community-level or through interfaith approaches. This requires context-specific approaches as (1) the role and relevance of religion in peace and conflict depends on the context and factors at play, and can be positive and/or negative; and (2) FAs' inclusion in humanitarian social cohesion interventions can lead to them losing their added value because of the depoliticisation of their role and alignment with donors' agendas:

> "The concern, based on observation, is that part of what makes these networks effective and legitimate, namely their "prophetic" and disruptive actions for the cause of justice, and their informal nature, is lost as they become forced to operate as traditional [NGOs]."[53]

FAs in this research proved to have an added value on social cohesion and cross-faith collaboration. This is heightened when conflicts are related to faith and misconceptions around faith. In Mozambique, FAs have supported peacebuilding efforts and negotiations, including informally or under the table during the latest conflict.[54] In Mombasa, Kenya, the CICC, which mobilises faith leaders and other faith and interfaith actors on specific themes such as inter-religious dialogue or countering violent extremism, has played an essential role in moving from inter-religious tensions in the 2000s to acceptance and coexistence. They contributed to creating a common narrative between the represented faiths focusing on commonalities.[55] In Palestine, a local FA strengthens Christian-Muslim coexistence through interventions in schools and field visits with groups from both religions, in order to increase mutual knowledge and sense of belonging to one society.[56]

FAs have a role in reducing barriers between communities, building support and solidarity networks, and eventually strengthening community resilience. In the case of Ethiopia, in the wake of the Tigray war, interfaith solidarity increased as communities from different faiths, equally affected by conflict, received support from FAs regardless of their faith. In Palestine, solidarity between Christians and Muslims has increased as Israel's continued violence and oppression on the Palestinian people affect both faith communities. FAs, through their practices and narrative, contribute to developing community resilience and social capital.

While the case studies have shown the value added of FAs for MHPSS, migration, climate, and social cohesion intervention, the literature provides additional evidence of FAs' key role in other sectors such as health, education, protection, and human rights response.[57].

Photo credit: Mohammad Abdel, Islamic Relief Palestine

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[52] Heather Wurtz and Olivia Wilkinson (2020) *Ibid*
[53] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022)
[54] Key Informant Interview, Mozambique, 23/01/2024
[55] Key Informant Interview, Kenya, 26/01/2024
[56] Key Informant Interview, Occupied Palestinian Territories, 25/01/2024
[57] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022)

III. Localising aid and practice: Do current partnerships leverage faith actors' value add to localisation?

This chapter reviews the state of partnerships with FAs, revealing progress and limitations towards localisation.

Perceptions of and relationships with faith actors: Where are we now?

The conversation has evolved over time towards greater acceptance of FAs, and greater collaboration between and across categories of faith and secular actors. While faith actors have been traditionally engaged in social and humanitarian work, the data collected shows this engagement has started to evolve from informal operational support to official partnerships. KII respondents indicate that most of their partnerships are now official. Several local FAs in Kenya indicated that they would not enter partnerships that are not official. As one key informant explained, "ignoring faith actors in humanitarian action and development is a discussion of the last century": while progress is still needed to mainstream equal partnerships, the role of FAs in humanitarian and development interventions is increasingly recognised.

This increased interest and funding for FAs led 71 survey respondents (out of 81) to express having participated in partnerships between FAs, or between FAs and secular humanitarian actors. This was confirmed by KIIs in Kenya and Mozambique which highlight that donors are increasingly open to FAs as a result of their built experience, leading to the growing involvement and inclusion of FAs in programming and funding packages:

> ''What I'm seeing right now, this is the direction that most of the organisations are […]. Most NGOs and donors are intentionally identifying faith-based organisations and working with them." Respondent from Mozambique, 01/02/2024

Has your organisation been part of projects that involved partnerships

- Both (29, 36%)
- Yes, between faith and secular actors (22, 27%)
- Yes between faith actors (20, 25%)
- No (10, 12%)

This narrative shift is closely linked to the greater formalisation of FAs. Indeed, FAs have built processes and policies, internally or through projects with IOs, which increase their compliance with international requirements - although there is still room for improvement in this regard, as developed in section IV. These efforts have not only facilitated engagement and partnerships, which our data demonstrates clearly in Kenya and Ethiopia, and to a lesser extent in Palestine; they have also led to FAs being increasingly recognised as strong local partners with technical capacities to engage in humanitarian action.

> "We have been more modern, in terms of how we engage, we have come up with a lot of other processes around child protection issues, the issues around safeguarding, communities considering people who are vulnerable as right holders." Respondent from Kenya, 22/01/2024

The interest in working with FAs has increased in line with localisation - local FAs express a rise in interest coming from international organisations. The recognition of and quest for more indigenous-led processes, formalised by the Grand Bargain, pushed traditional humanitarian actors to develop more equal partnerships with local actors, including FAs. There is a growing sense from FAs interviewed that their added value is now being recognised. This is confirmed by the secular actors who participated in the survey: out of the 29 secular actors who responded, 22 consider that FAs have medium to good capacities, and 5 even consider that FAs have better capacities than most actors (Figure 3).

The narrative has shifted to supporting faith-based solutions to social issues. The shift seen moves from partnering for implementation (as implementing partners or downstream partners) to sharing resources, leveraging FAs' social and spiritual capital. In Kenya, for instance, the structure and solidarity levers of faith communities are mobilised in the prevention, response, and monitoring of trafficking. This influence of FAs on communities is recognised by UN agencies such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) which partner with FBOs to fight negative social norms.[58]
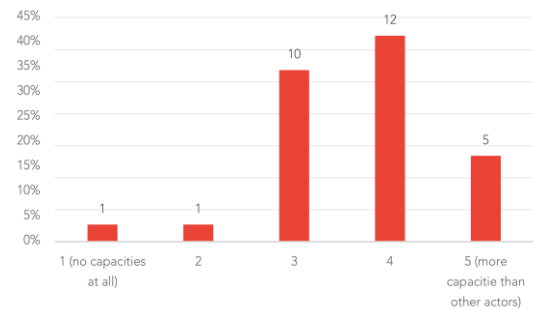
Respondents also reported a changing perception of FAs' humanitarian capabilities from communities. Communities realise that FAs are well equipped to support them, beyond preaching to humanitarian actors, and at times perhaps better than other actors. Informants revealed that community perceptions improved as they gained trust over time through their activities – and the way they delivered their activities: with a greater emphasis than secular actors on communication, information sharing, and feedback and complaint mechanisms.

Figure 3. Secular actors' perception of faith actors

> "They are no longer viewed solely as charitable entities but as strategic partners capable of contributing effectively to humanitarian efforts." Respondent from Pakistan, 30/01/2024

While numerous areas of interventions and collaborations with FAs exist, multiple actors, including civil society, private, and public organisations remain hesitant and face obstacles to working with FAs. Some **faith actors are regarded with suspicion**, from both humanitarian / development actors and communities, especially when religion is associated with events negatively affecting the country or region. In Kenya, for instance, **local FAs have suffered from discriminatory practices due to counter-terrorism regulations**. Besides these contextual factors affecting the perception of FAs, there is also a margin of progression for the sector to recognise local actors as equals; local FAs, as other local actors, are still considered by many IOs as grassroots implementers.

Existing forms of engagement at three levels

This section looks at the current forms of engagement of FAs based on the intentional localisation design framework. This framework is relevant for all scales of FAs: for local and subnational FAs, it showcases opportunities and means to be engaged with and relay the voices and interests of the communities; for national and international FAs, this localisation design formulates guidelines to better include local partners (faith-based or secular) as of project and programme design.

Figure 4. Three levels of engagements for intentional localisation design

1 Project

Immediate action allowing organisations to make decisions and take action quickly

Learning and experimentation through regular reflection with local actors

Information loops for improved and adapted organisational strategies

2 Transformative partnerships

Timeliness and Connectedness through established and long-term ethical partnerships

Opportunities to "Shift the Power" with collaborative terms of engagement that can make power dynamics explicit

3 Networks and collectives

Inclusivity and Cooperation (networks) for collective process and common vision

Influencing Change ie innovation, learning and policy advocacy

Bridging Global and Local Silos to avoid top-down approaches

Broader and Longer-Term View that addressed barriers to local leadership and sustainability

Project level partnerships – traditional modes of collaboration with faith actors

While same-level partnerships, such as joint projects, exist between IFBOs or between IFBO and secular IOs, most FAs are engaged in downstream partnerships where FAs are relied upon as subcontractors or implementing partners of international actors. The data reveals instance in all countries of:

Traditional type of downstream relationships between <u>international secular partners and local FAs</u>. Some of our respondents are involved in different phases of projects and listened to by donors, for instance when it comes to the needs identification and project design. However, when international partners are part of the project, they often take on a

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[58] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*

leadership role. This varies based on the size of the project and the entity bringing in the funding, as a respondent summarises:

> "Some governments give us an opportunity and we manage our project as an organisation, but other governments design what they want us to do." Respondent from Kenya, 29/01/2024

Downstream relationships with transfer processes, for instance in <u>international FAs' partnerships with local (faith based or secular) actors:</u> International FAs, especially IFBOs, resemble secular IOs in their processes. In the case of Islamic Relief, the organisation gives more power to local partners, however the level of transfer of decision-making and implementation varies across countries; in Palestine, for instance, Islamic Relief does not implement projects directly anymore. The transfer process is as follows:

1. The local partner submits an application following which Islamic Relief assesses their involvement in the community, reputation, and commitment to humanitarian principles.
2. For those who don't have the necessary capacities, they are strengthened by Islamic Relief.
3. There are in-depth discussions with the local partners, who come with their agenda, while Islamic Relief provides technical and in-kind support, as well as standards to operate through.
4. Then, the local partner is responsible for the implementation. This increases sustainability (local actors' activities continue after the project-bound partnership).

Due diligence matters to IOs who contract local FAs, but also to the governments. In Pakistan, local actors must be validated by governmental entities and/or charity commissions in the UK. International FBOs have to be very transparent about their work and that of their partners i.e., as soon as their partners fall out of grace, major FBOs exit partnerships in order to maintain reputation. In Palestine, due diligence processes were seen as a way to help build trust between actors: helping them transfer decision making and project management to local actors, to identify the needs in capacity strengthening and conducting it, increasing the efficiency and empowerment of local actors.

Longer term partnerships between <u>local FAs working with local community-based organisations (CBOs):</u> Long term partnerships exist in all contexts between local FAs and local CBOs, in which case local FAs remain the lead on the project. These partnerships with small CBOs are often informal and grow from grassroot initiatives such as women's or youth groups. In one example from Palestine, a long-term relationship turned into a partnership when a project opportunity arose, revealing the existence of networks ready to be revived:

> "It was from the grassroot that the contacts were established with partners from Hebron and Bethlehem country sides over the years [...]. Sometimes there are projects that are accepted and then we say we are going to work in 5 locality and countryside, and then for instance we know four women organisations already." Respondent from Palestine, 25/01/2024

Transformative partnerships – facilitating new ways of working

Transformative partnerships are established to overcome barriers and achieve different outcomes, mobilising resources, collaborating on implementation, and bringing novel solutions to pressing problems. They deliver system shifts and allow for changes in power structures or traditional ways of work by recognising that no one actor can solve issues alone, and valuing the role of local actors and local knowledge in this process. The term refers to the transformations these partnerships bring to the humanitarian and development fields; and to the local norms and behaviours.

Faith actors' roles in changing local norms and behaviours cover multiple sectors, such as child protection[59], gender[60], health,[61,62] and climate change[63,64]. In the East Africa Community (EAC) – comprising Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda – the sexual and reproductive health bill discussions was in part a result of the advocacy and collective action led by the Faith to Action Network.[65] Their involvement was critical in the legislative process, providing faith-based arguments on the draft bill. One of the key messages gained is that "laying the groundwork for policy change often starts with the most effective messengers delivering the right messages". [66]

FAs interviewed specifically discussed their role on gender transformation. Local FAs spoke of the need to work with them to (1) approach directly religious preachers **to address social norms** - as local FAs can identify narrative that reconcile religion and social changes (see Section IV on barriers and solutions); and (2) Work on sectoral interventions such as livelihoods and food security **to address the consequences of social norms.**

However, sensitive issues still create scepticism or opposition from FAs and communities, such as the topics of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), female genital mutilation (FGM) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), for which FAs and faith leaders in particular can contribute to

[59] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
[60] Norwegian Church Aid - Act Alliance (2018) Engaging faith actors on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) – Best Practices from the NCA Global GBV programme 2016-2019
[61] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
[62] Islamic Relief Worldwide (2015) Christian and Muslim leaders played "essential role" in tackling the Ebola virus.
[63] Key Informant Interview, Kenya, 26/01/2024
[64] CAFOD (2022) Keeping the faith: The role of faith leaders in the Ebola response.
[65] HIP (2023), strengthening partnership with faith actors in family planning: A strategic planning guide
[66] PRB (2021) Faith leaders as Agents of Change in Family Planning

transformation or reinforce the opposition. Respondents admit that gender remains a challenge to be addressed internally – an effort that some respondents are doing, such as in Kenya's CICC and KMYA, both working to address gender bias and SOGIESC within their structure. Islamic Relief, too, is tackling sensitive gender issues including advocacy and prevention of FGM.[67] On the contrary, in Ethiopia, a respondent indicated that as an organisation, they would not accept projects on SOGIESC related issues, and advocates against such projects, including through national media.[68]

Box 4: Faith actors engaged against discrimination based on SOGIESC

Religion, **in some instances, has been perceived to contribute to discrimination and violence against individuals with diverse SOGIESC.** Throughout our data collection, we noted hesitation within this thematic area, with some faith actors expressing opposition to projects that include a SOGIESC component. However, several respondents in Kenya indicated that they tackle this issue because it impacts people within their communities. Indeed, the assumption that individuals with diverse SOGIESC are non-religious is often false and people who belong to faith communities need the support - including psychosocial - that comes from belonging to faith groups, especially as they may struggle to navigate reconciling their identity with their faith. Rejection from faith groups creates isolation and loss that adds to the vulnerabilities and discrimination that these individuals are exposed to. FAs have an essential role to play to provide this community support.

Despite the resistance they encounter among their members and at community level, the research identified FAs in Kenya who address the issue by providing protection and/or raising awareness:

(1) FAs provide protection and direct support to community members with diverse SOGIESC, either through the non-discrimination principle they apply - whereby they support individuals and groups regardless of their gender and identities - or through targeted support. On the latter, an IFBO has been implementing a 'safe space program' in Kenya since 2014 on empowerment of people of concern.

(2) FAs raise awareness by fostering internal and external conversations towards building a positive common narrative around SOGIESC. Two respondents in Kenya are tackling SOGIESC through intra-faith, inter-faith, and faith-secular conversations. They approach the topic by creating space for discussion among their members, rather than by imposing a certain vision. The literature also indicates that efforts by SOGIESC defenders to engage with faith leaders have shown some success, such as faith leader initially opposing SOGIESC who ended up joining the organisation, as well as results at community level including a reduction of hate from faith groups.

However, such positions come at a price. Faith leaders risk exclusions from the church or excommunication.

Source: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*; Arcus Foundation (2022) Faith-Based Efforts in East Africa to Combat Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; CWS (no date), Our Work (website page); Arcus Foundation (2022); Yes magazine (2021) How Relationships Can Turn Faith Leaders Into LGBT Allies; Key Informant Interviews, Kenya, 29/01/2024

Networks and collectives – The key strength of faith actors

Country-specific, cross-border, or regional networks and collectives, created or supported to further local practices, are the third level of localisation. This level of partnership does not require formal or contractual agreements, but a commitment to long-term change and coming together of a diverse range of actors, under a common umbrella and for collective action.

Quasi-absent from the literature, religious and faith-based networks and partnerships empower FAs. Our findings show that while there is considerable progress needed for the inclusion of FAs (especially local FAs) in humanitarian platforms, faith-based networks and collectives are central players in FAs' participation and impact. These networks increase FAs' access to funding, visibility, policy influence and capacity sharing (see Section IV). The Young Men and Young Women Christian Association (YMCA/YWCA) networks, for instance, integrate community-based associations as part of the global network and by doing so, increase their sustainability by quasi-guaranteeing them funding. The study reveals the presence of:

Well established interfaith platforms and networks:

Each of the contexts under review is home to networks that bring together international FAs, national actors and local actors. In Kenya and Ethiopia for example, platforms and networks include:

(i) **Global actors** such as Faith to Action Network, where members become each other's first level partners on projects and collaborations. The platform provides advocacy support to members, and acts as an intermediary that give FAs (its members) policy influence;

(ii) **International FAs** such as Caritas or ACT alliance;

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[67] Islamic Relief Worldwide (2018) One cut too many: Islamic Relief Policy Brief on Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting.
[68] Addis Standard (2024), News: Ethiopian Orthodox Church denounces 'Western influence on homosexuality', calls for government resistance

(iii) **National FAs** such as the African Council of Churches, Council of Charities, Inter-religious Council of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Interfaith Forum for Development, Dialogue and Action, a consortium of Christian and Muslim organisations; and

(iv) **Local level FAs**, bringing together a range of actors through existing networks of local institutions (e.g. churches and mosques), such as the network of local Catholic church satellites through which CRS Ethiopia works, creating a strong network for access; or the Coastal Interfaith Council of Clerics (Kenya) regrouping local religious leaders across faith.

Dedicated networks at the national level:

Mozambique exemplifies the strongest case of a network of FAs for peacebuilding and reconciliation. The country's FAs played a key role in the peace agreement of 1992, in election transparency and governance monitoring. For instance, the COREM brings together all the faiths that exist in the country (e.g. Hindu, Christian, Jewish and Baha'i communities) with the main objective to promote peace and reconciliation between the various religions and between people.

The network also works to highlight that although the wars have taken a religious aspect, their root causes are resource-related[69]. The network also tackles climate change, raising awareness on the need for equitable resource sharing, and also combats the impacts of past armed conflicts, such as on gender-based violence (GBV).

Network-based funding to address the needs of a faith community:

The Palestinian chapter of an international (Christian) religious network was able to address a specific religious groups' needs thanks to their access to the global network. While the FA serves local communities regardless of their religion, they target Christian residents of Jerusalem through affordable housing initiatives.

Indeed, restrictive planning policies applied by Israel makes it extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain building permits, affecting primarily the Christian population historically present in Jerusalem, and leading to a sharp decline in the presence of Palestinian Christians in the city. The lack of affordable housing is one of the main causes of the Palestinian Christian exodus from the city. Thanks to their access to faith-based networks, this local FA was able to specifically design a project for this particular faith group.

Photo credit: Gloria Kivuva, Islamic Relief Kenya

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[69] The network for religious and traditional peacemakers (no date) Strengthening Cooperation Between Peacemakers Network and Council of Religions in Mozambique - available here

Faith and faith-secular networks dedicated to humanitarian action:

Pakistan has a number of networks and forums that support FAs' engagement in humanitarian action, highlighting the need to have parallel but overlapping conversations across faith and humanitarian action. They also show the need to build on faith as an entry point for access in Pakistan, similar to the case of Mozambique, where FAs are key players to legitimise humanitarian action. The networks identified in Pakistan are:

(i) **Networks of both secular and faith actors** that offer joint conversations on the humanitarian landscape in Pakistan, such as the START network and the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum (PHF);

(ii) **Forums dedicated to Muslim organisations**, aiming to address challenges and enhance coordination and overall effectiveness, such as the Qatar Charity Forum, the Muslim INGO Forum (IMF), and the Forum for National Islamic FBOs - the latter needing revitalisation, according to some of its members;

(iii) **Thematic networks at national and international level**, such as the UK's Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) which gathers secular and faith actors; and **at the local level** with the faith-based Dukhtaranaj Millat Tarbiyya network, the Teacher's network and the Children's network, which are examples of networks that empower mothers to instil Quranic and Sunnah-based principles in their children's upbringing.

In conclusion, the research showed that while networks are a key strength of FAs, two limitations remain that affect FA's engagement in project design and transformative partnerships:

(1) **While we find examples of all types of FAs engaged with through formal partnerships, these examples are still rare for local FAs** - especially faith leaders. Local FAs rarely access formal partnerships[70].

However, a few nuances emerged as local FBOs in particular have access to both formal and informal partnerships. In this regard, inter-FA partnerships provide opportunities whereby international FAs bring light to their local FA partners, such as the Faith to Action Network giving visibility to local Muslim FA in Kenya otherwise at risk of stigmatisation. Additionally, informal engagement can have advantages such as facilitating involving FAs that are not structured, and can benefit from capacity strengthening through this approach.

(2) **Partnerships, when existing, are mostly operational, with only few examples of transformative impact on local practices (social norms) and humanitarian practices (inclusion of faith-based solutions).**

In line with the literature[71,72], **the data shows that collaboration with FAs rarely takes the form of a partnership where agency, agenda and power are shared.** FAs' potential to transform local and humanitarian practices is rarely fully leveraged.

However, we found positive progress in this regard with local FAs in several case studies - notably Kenya and Palestine - participating in designing objectives, agendas and activity plans at project level, and contributing to building positive narratives on social issues such as inter-religious relations. FAs' transformative engagement and power dynamics vary across contexts and actors.

Photo credit: Dina Khalifeh, Islamic Relief Lebanon

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[70] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*
[71] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
[72] Heather Wurtz and Olivia Wilkinson (2020) *Ibid*

Assessing Faith actors' added value in localisation in line with measurement frameworks

Localisation measurement frameworks such the START Framework comprise seven criteria: **Funding, Partnerships, Capacities, Participation Revolution, Coordination Mechanisms, Visibility, and Policy Influence**. Using these dimensions, this section highlights some of the key strengths and added value of FAs, synthesizing the information collected through this research and the literature review presented in the previous section.

Table 4. Faith actors' added value in localisation

Localisation criteria	Key findings
Funding $	- Faith networks facilitate access to faith-based donors - Interfaith collaboration provides access to Muslim and Christian donor networks - FAs can have access to funding through global religious institutions - FAs have their own indigenous capacity to raise funds and revenue at a local level through social financing. This ability can provide vital match funding and add value, contributing to sustainability. Examples include Zakat committees and similar community-based initiatives.
Operational independence	- Dialogue and promotion of social connections and capital - Peacebuilding and mediation roles - Network-based partnerships facilitate long-term relationships and multiple forms of engagement - FAs are also part of secular networks and coordination systems - Inclusion and recognition by faith and secular networks are essential to FAs' influence and recognition

Participation	- Community engagement is facilitated by
	  o the common culture and understanding between FAs and the community
	  o the proximity of FAs
	  o the trust in FAs, the first actor's community members go to in times of need
	- Knowledge of faith principles, values and language create a bridge and rallies (beyond "us vs them" binary)
	- Cultural sensitivity ensures finding common ground on sensitive topics and avoids confrontation
	- Local FAs act as a bridge and help stay connected with communities in the middle of crises and beyond (e.g. service continuity, adaptations)
	  o Allowing for ownership transfer to local communities and for sustainability
	- Community-based approach to counter decades of reliance on external support and aid, in contexts such as Afghanistan
	- Prioritising local knowledge and know-how

Policy influences and Advocacy	- Low profile approach to blend in and with communities, aligning with local customs and norms, to be able to challenge these same norms - Local FAs have an influential role to play at the community level, including through capacity strengthening, playing and informative and educational role - Gaining authorisations when other NGOs may struggle – e.g. in Afghanistan registering with the Ministry of Justice to improve access to the most exposed areas and communities - Partnerships with FAs can empower communities to contribute to policy making
Coordination	- Communication and cultural sensitivity to build trust and mitigate cultural challenges with faith leaders - Collective learning, sharing of knowledge - FAs are better placed to propose culturally adapted activities and increase projects' acceptance and impact

While the added value of FAs remains clear – as Table 4 showcases – FAs face barriers to realising the full potential of their added value. The following section details existing barriers and weaknesses, as well as solutions identified through our research. These inform recommendations that aim at leveraging the full potential of FAs.

IV. Towards an intentional localisation design with faith actors: Overcoming barriers & identifying solutions

While FAs present a clear added value for localisation, they still face barriers in accessing the humanitarian and development ecosystem as equal partners. Funding, capacities, and negative perceptions or cultural misunderstandings, constitute the main barriers that emerged from the research, be it related to organisation, context, culture or sector. This being said, FAs have characteristics that can offer solutions to overcome these barriers, which, if leveraged, can increase progress towards localisation. This chapter focuses on barriers and solutions to FAs engagement in line with localisation.

Common barriers

In this section, we propose to look at the main barriers to FAs' engagement in line with localisation, and we ask a question: are barriers specific to FAs or to local actors?

Figure 5. Barriers to collaboration between faith and secular actors

Barrier	Percentage
Limited or difficult access to funding	55.56%
Limited organisational and/or technical capacity	53.09%
Cultural misunderstanding	51.85%
Difficult coordination and communication	41.98%
Lack of complementarity	35.80%
Hindered policy influence	35.80%
Unequal partnerships	32.10%
Resistance or scepticism from community members	30.86%
Invisibilisation of partners	18.52%
Other	4.94%

The literature presents four types of barriers to working with FAs: (1) organisational; (2) contextual; (3) cultural; and (4) structural. These four barriers show that **local FAs face a dual limitation to engage in humanitarian action, as they have barriers related to their identity as FAs as well as barriers related to their scale as local actors.** The section below highlights how these types of limitations translate into barriers to localisation.

As indicated below, and bringing in learning from the case studies, we find that organisational and sectoral barriers, in particular, can be common with other local actors - although FAs face specific challenges; while contextual and cultural barriers tend to be specific to FAs, including international ones.

(1) **Organisational barriers** include the lack of registration and structure that abide by humanitarian standards; this varies greatly among FAs, including among local FAs. KIIs highlight that this is, indeed, not related to the identity of FAs as such. However, the formalisation of local actors requires investments that their faith identity can impact positively or negatively. Our data, in line with the literature, shows that Christian FAs are more structured, including because of historic investments in their institutional capacities[73]; while local Muslim FAs often do not benefit in the same way.

(2) **Contextual barriers** designate, mainly, "poorly designed regulations related to anti-terrorism legislation" that contribute to limiting fundings opportunities for Muslim FA, especially in South-West Asia[74] and Africa. Our findings demonstrate that these barriers can also affect secular actors when the designated risk is associated with a whole territory (e.g. in Palestine), however they corroborate that Muslim actors disproportionately face this challenge.

(3) **Cultural barriers** are specific to FAs' identity as such and affect all the localisation criteria. They are embedded in the different language[75], tradition, and practices of faith and secular humanitarian actors. The lack of faith literacy and jargon of the sector, as well as thematic areas that raise resistance locally, are the main cultural barriers identified: while a short majority of survey respondents (42 out of 81) say they have not encountered resistance or scepticism from community members or other stakeholders regarding faith-secular actors partnerships, qualitative data shows that specific issues brought in by humanitarian and development actors

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[73] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*
[74] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLI) (2018). *Ibid*
[75] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*

require additional communication and efforts to find a common ground with local actors; and cultural misunderstanding is the third most mentioned barrier in the online survey.

(4) **Structural barriers** encompass barriers specific to local actors (faith-based or not), due to the strongly hierarchical structure of the humanitarian system[76]; as well as barriers specific to FAs. For the latter, they find their origin in the perceived distance between humanitarian frameworks and religious values and structure (affiliations, networks) of FAs.[77] As a consequence, FAs are seen as lacking capacities and unaligned with humanitarian principles, although the literature as well as our data shows a strong alignment with these principles.[78]

Key weaknesses and threats to localisation

Focusing on the localisation criteria - funding, partnership, capacities, participation, coordination, complementarity, visibility, and policy influence - **survey respondents and KIIs identified the main barriers to collaboration between faith and secular actors as funding, capacities, cultural misunderstandings, and coordination. KIIs highlighted these barriers tend to be specific to local FAs, and common with local secular actors.** These barriers affect their access to partnerships, which despite being a localisation criterion was excluded from this list as it is instead an overarching theme - where barriers to other criteria affect access to partnerships.

● Funding

Many local FAs face challenges in accessing traditional humanitarian funding, including for emergency response; or in accessing sufficient funding to allow for the capacity and institutional development of their organisation. There is a difference between local and international FAs - as IFBOs have a better access to funds while local FAs face more rejections; indeed, only 13 of the 67 signatories of the Grand Bargain met or surpassed the 25% target of funding provided to local/national actors in 2022 , and it was not identified whether any of these local actors were faith-based.[79] This leads to unclarity on whether the barriers are due to actors' faith identity. Several KIIs indicate that faith is not a barrier to funds, but that their scale is - on the contrary, some respondents consider their faith identity as an advantage because of a positive perception by communities and, sometimes, donors; and of the existence of religion-based funds such as Zakat, Sadaqah, or charity, whose access is facilitated by networks. We are thus proposing to disaggregate barriers between those related to the scale of actors, and those related to their faith identity.

Local FAs have a harder time mobilising resources due to a limited structure (limited institutionalisation of local FAs, including processes and policies) that disqualifies them from funds. This is particularly true of local religious institutions such as churches and mosques, however it also applies to local FBOs who may access funding, but often as last implementers or subcontractors where they end up with a limited budget to implement most of the projects' activities:

> "Most of the work is left at the local level, but the budget that reaches us is very small because the budget is used for global organisations. You have so little and so much to do, there is a disproportionality between what's given and what's expected." Respondent from Kenya, 29/01/2024

This limits their ability to develop their own capacities, adapt to budget changes - which can come from inflation, for instance - and build their track records, thus preventing further funds applications. While this barrier comes from the capacities of the FAs, it is also telling about the sector's practices and culture whereby "larger organisations with broader impacts"[80] are prioritised. This in turn leads some local FAs to not seek fundings as they anticipate rejections from donors.

On the other hand, and contradicting the experience of some FAs, **faith-related barriers can be cultural or contextual**. There are still donors who prioritise secular actors, either due to their own principles or values, or to negative perceptions of FAs - especially Muslim ones, in a global context of negative perceptions on Islam. On the side of FAs, the resistance to some thematic areas such as gender (including SOGIESC) can limit the funds they apply to. As for contextual barriers, we find most represented clauses and restrictions related to risk of terrorism. In Palestine, however KIIs revealed that the latter was affecting all local actors equally, regardless of faith. This includes secular, Christian, and Muslim actors, as they face criminalisation for refusing to sign anti-terrorism clauses. Similarly, risk-related restrictions to cash transfer, as it is the case in Afghanistan, equally affects faith-based and secular organisations. With this nuance, other cases highlighted that this was disproportionately affecting Muslim FAs, especially local ones.

● Capacities

Contradicting the perception that FAs, especially local ones, lack capacities, the data collected for this research show that they have great technical capacities grounded in their context and experience of intervention. **However, their institutional capacities are limited and in turn reduce their access to traditional humanitarian partnerships**. Indeed, they often do not

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[76] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*
[77] Heather Wurtz and Olivia Wilkinson (2020) *Ibid*
[78] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*
[79] Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W. and Manji, F. (2023) The Grand Bargain in 2022: an independent review. HPG commissioned report. London: ODI - available here
[80] Key Informant Interview, Palestine, 24/01/2024

have the structure and policies to pass due diligence processes or meet often rigid requirements. There are efforts to strengthen the capacities of the local FAs, such as from the Aga Khan Foundation, ACT Alliance, or the Faith to Action Network - among others. While secular IOs invest in this capacity strengthening as they do with secular local organisations, structured and/or international FBOs seem to be more likely to help build the structure and capacities of local FAs, including religious leaders. In Mozambique, for instance, a structured national FA developed a guide for religious leaders to better engage in humanitarian action.[81] IFBOs, indeed, can be an essential intermediary as secular actors are still hesitant to invest in local FAs.

Capacity-strengthening opportunities are limited, however, and **the funding landscape is a central barrier as it limits funds for running costs and follows bureaucratic procedures that are not adapted to local, less structured, FAs**. It prevents local actors, including FAs, from growing, hiring qualified staff, and developing their institutional capacities to ultimately apply for further fundings and partnerships.[82] While it is not a faith-specific barrier, FAs are increasingly disadvantaged by the hesitancy of secular actors to invest in them.

As a result, FAs, especially local FAs, often remain informal partners, preventing their visibility and growth.[83] In cases where actors - often IFBO or formalised national FBOs - are investing in local FAs, they engage with them as beneficiaries - this is especially true for religious leaders. In Kenya, for instance, the CICC builds the capacity of religious leaders, who become more than trainees - trainers themselves, and contributors to the FBO's activity plan.[84] However, although it supports local FAs' capacity strengthening, it does not allow yet a shift towards their engagement as formal partners. Stakeholders such as Islamic Relief have been investing in local FAs capacities, supporting the transfer of some activities, however most of the decision-making is still in the hands of the IFBO. This shift takes time and requires strengthening capacities and investing in FAs, but also for the IOs - including IFBOs - to develop their own capacities around partnerships with local FAs, which requires understanding the community and agreeing to compromise towards building common grounds.

- ● **Participation**

FAs are strong facilitators for the "participation revolution" that localisation aims to achieve, notably due to their understanding of and proximity to communities, allowing for local adaptation and ownership of interventions. However, there are barriers to this participation, including to the participation of local FAs as community representatives or intermediaries, notably due to cultural differences and/or resistance. Opposition to certain terminologies, thematic areas, or values, from communities and from FAs, is the main barrier to their participation in humanitarian and development projects. These can be context-related - for instance, in Palestine, the concept of "living together" used by a local FA as a step beyond inter-religious acceptance, faced scepticism due to its inaccurate association with the normalisation process with Israel. Efforts were made to clarify the concept to gain acceptance from local Palestinian stakeholders, including communities, organisations, and government entities.[85] Until it was accepted, there were challenges to getting meaningful participation of these stakeholders, limiting the real localisation of activities. Other terminology or thematic areas raised barriers across the case studies; this is the case for gender and related topics (SOGIESC, SRHR, FGM). This resistance is two-fold: first, it is related to a value clash whereby certain practices are not accepted by religion; second, gender is considered by some communities and in some contexts (Afghanistan, Palestine) as a colonial value or agenda that transforms local society:

> "There are Issues related to LGBT and others, we are not forced to accept this. [...] We don't want to compromise our stance and our belief with the western culture and views." Respondent from Ethiopia, 07/02/2024

Additionally, as FAs highlighted, **secular actors too lack adaptation and knowledge, which reinforce cultural challenges**. Biased negative perceptions towards FAs, especially Muslim FAs, are a central barrier to participation. In Kenya, governmental restrictions related to counter violent extremism (CVE), that target Al-Shabaab affiliations in particular, affected local FAs and indirectly the community they are serving. Beyond negative perception of FAs, secular actors' lack of faith literacy can increase the cultural challenges where such literacy could instead be a solution.

- ● **Coordination & visibility**

Both the data and the literature point to a lack of inclusion of FAs, especially local FAs, in sectoral coordination mechanisms. In the four case studies, only IFBOs - Muslim and Christian, at least - are included in the national humanitarian sector and its working groups. While this reflects the lack of inclusion of local actors beyond faith identities, additional barriers are excluding local FAs. These barriers include practical issues such as language and the timing of meetings - a global respondents cited challenges such as coordination meetings coinciding with Friday prayers. In addition to these very concrete barriers, the different work cultures can exacerbate challenges, leading to frustrations among local FAs due to the time-consuming nature of coordination efforts. This exclusion from coordination mechanisms reduces FAs' visibility and access to partnership and funds that the sectoral coordination fosters, leading to missed opportunities for

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[81] Key Informant Interview, Mozambique, 23/01/2024
[82] Key Informant Interview, Kenya, 22/01/2024
[83] Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid*
[84] Key Informant, Kenya, 26/02/2024
[85] Key Informant Interview, Palestine, 25/01/2024

both FAs and secular actors: given FAs' proximity with local communities, they are well placed to identify people in need, for instance, while IOs may miss this information and distribute aid unequally.[86] Against this lack of inclusion of local FAs, IFBOs are often the ones that reach out to them for partnerships. However, the case studies gave examples of local-level coordination mechanisms that facilitate contacts between local FAs and other actors - this is the case, for example, of county-level coordination in Kenya.[87]

- ## Policy influence & advocacy

FAs' policy influence varies depending on contexts and thematic areas; overall, **FAs, especially faith leaders, are very influential at the local level and often at the governmental level, however, their recognition by IOs is limited**. In several case studies, governments recognise the value add of FAs and include them in needs identification and sometimes beyond. In Ethiopia, this is formalised through a multi-stakeholders platform led by the government, in which FAs participate, which facilitates the government's awareness of the needs and, ultimately, influences policy. However, their influence varies depending on topics. Moreover, the influence beyond the local and governmental level, especially in humanitarian and development policy-making, is limited and disproportionately low compared to their knowledge and preferential position to identify needs and solutions.

The policy influence of FAs strongly varies between the case studies. In Mozambique, FAs have a level of influence that position them as facilitators: (1) for political dialogue - e.g. the Catholic community brought various political parties and actors to the negotiating table, directly influencing policy[88]; (2) for inter-religious dialogue, including unofficial dialogues during the conflict[89]; and (3) for project implementation as humanitarian actors can face barriers if they do not have such partnerships.[90] In Afghanistan and Pakistan, on the other hand, FBOs typically do not engage significantly in policy-making or advocacy efforts. Additionally, in Afghanistan, the authorities closely monitor the activities of various organisations, including FAs, operating in the country, including recruitment and procurement activities.

Photo credit: Noor Muhammad, Islamic Relief Somalia

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[86] Key Informant Interview, Afghanistan, 29/01/2024
[87] Key Informant Interviews, Kenya, 22/01/2024 and 26/01/2024
[88] Key informant interview, Mozambique, 09/02/2024
[89] Key informant interview, Mozambique, 23/01/2024
[90] Key informant interview, Mozambique, 09/02/2024

Box 5. Muslim Organisations

Muslim organisations face additional barriers and challenges related to their faith identities. This is particularly true in comparison with Christian FAs, as highlighted by the literature: Christian FAs being more structured, and more easily recognised by the sector "because of a greater familiarity on the part of Western NGOs with Christian structures and hierarchies". Barriers to inclusion are thus two-fold: on the one hand, they are related to the international context of negative perceptions towards Islam; on the other hand, Muslim actors face challenges due to the absence of historical inclusion and investment that Christian actors benefit from.

Islamophobia and unjustified association with terrorism: Islamophobia is emerging as one of the biggest challenges at the moment, especially related to acceptance and collaboration, affecting both local and international Muslim FAs. As a consequence, they face greater scrutiny than other actors, as well as concrete restrictions on banking and financial transfers. For instance, because of Boko Haram in Nigeria, or because of Al-Shabaab in Kenya, local FAs are strongly monitored and can see their activities restricted, sometimes unjustifiably. At community level, they can face resistance and hesitancy from non-Muslim communities who perceive them as proselytising or prioritising Muslim communities. Due to increased Islamophobia, Muslim FAs are extremely cautious and constantly strive to prove their commitment to humanitarian principles. This leads Muslim FAs to invest in awareness raising, demonstrate their adherence to humanitarian principles, and limit their activities to avoid being accused of preaching. For instance, although religious practices are recognised as beneficial for psychosocial support and positive coping mechanisms, Islamic Relief in Darfur could not implement the community request for a mosque, while Oxfam could because they were not facing the same scrutiny.

Overall, this leads to:

- Loss of funds and opportunities due to governmental restrictions
- Hesitancy to partner due to negative perceptions of Islam globally
- Hesitancy or negative perceptions from communities
- Self-censorship and avoidance of faith-based activities, such as religious coping mechanisms

Lack of historical inclusion in the sector: While the historical presence and recognition of Christian FAs contributed to their institutional development and formalisation, as well as their inclusion in international networks and coordination mechanisms, Muslim FAs didn't benefit from such investments. Christian organisations have a history of structuring themselves and their local branches and institutions to facilitate partnerships; in addition, the inclusion of Christian FBOs in the sector date back to the beginning of the sector, in line with their civilisational heritage. Despite the long history of "Muslim charity ethos", their formal engagement with humanitarian and development action is recent, and many Muslim FAs lack structure, reducing their opportunities to access fundings and partnerships.

Source: Wilkinson et al. (2022) *Ibid,* Key informant interview, global, 29/01/2024

Common enablers and solutions

Against these barriers, **this research identifies characteristics of FAs that can act as enablers and solutions**.

As the survey results showed, FAs can act as **facilitators** between international actors and local communities at many levels (Graph 6). They can indeed contribute to developing **local trust** and credibility (identified as an opportunity by respondents), **network-based** implementation, **community** mobilisation, and **peacebuilding**.

Looking at the most agreed-upon opportunities, FAs' cultural and physical proximity with communities, as well as their influential role, stand out as key enablers. This aligns with qualitative data showing that FAs' proximity and influence are crucial for finding solutions, particularly in fostering participation. In addition, the case studies highlight that faith-based networks are essential in overcoming most of the barriers.

In this section, the identified solutions will be classified as: solutions based on FAs' proximity and influence in communities; network-based solutions; and additional good practices.

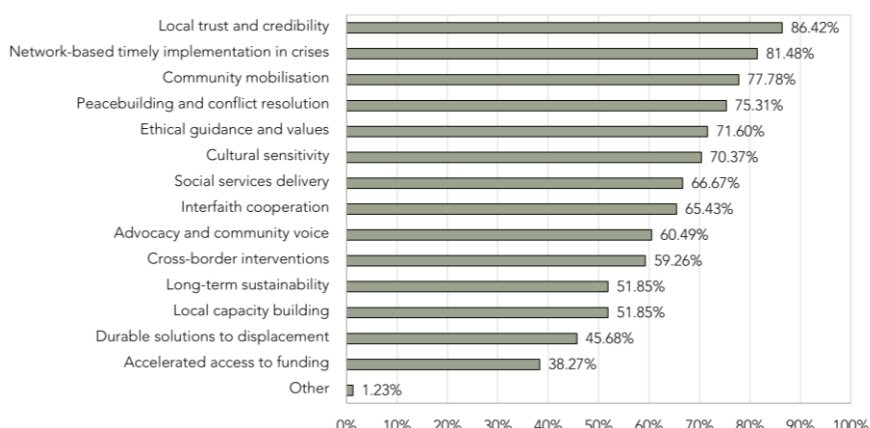## Figure 6. Areas where faith actors represent a positive opportunity

Area	Percentage
Local trust and credibility	86.42%
Network-based timely implementation in crises	81.48%
Community mobilisation	77.78%
Peacebuilding and conflict resolution	75.31%
Ethical guidance and values	71.60%
Cultural sensitivity	70.37%
Social services delivery	66.67%
Interfaith cooperation	65.43%
Advocacy and community voice	60.49%
Cross-border interventions	59.26%
Long-term sustainability	51.85%
Local capacity building	51.85%
Durable solutions to displacement	45.68%
Accelerated access to funding	38.27%
Other	1.23%

Table 5. Summary table of FAs' barriers and solutions

	Barriers	Solutions
Funding	• **Organisational**: limited structure of local FAs • **Contextual**: risk mitigation policies • **Cultural**: negative perception	• **Networks**: facilitated access to traditional and religious-based fundings
Capacities	• **Organisational**: lack of structure to access capacity strengthening in the first place • **Structural**: lack of investment & running costs	• **Networks**: knowledge exchange • **Other**: Investments from IFBOs and other IOs in local FAs' capacity-strengthening
Participation revolution	• **Cultural**: hesitation/restriction regarding a few sensitive thematic areas • **Organisational**: lack of faith literacy of secular actors	• **Local FAs**: building common narrative • **Local FAs**: relay to include communities in project design • **Other**: improving faith literacy among humanitarian actors
Coordination & visibility	• **Cultural**: limited recognition of FAs and perceived divergence • **Structural**: coordination mechanisms not adapted to local FAs (language, time of meetings, etc.)	• **Networks**: coordination and visibility through faith-based platforms
Policy influence	• **Cultural**: lack of recognition of FAs • **Structural**: government scrutiny	• **Networks**: facilitated access to global advocacy platforms • **Other**: increased partnerships with governments

## Overcoming barriers to participation through local FAs

- ### Engaging with communities in decision-making

Local FAs can play an intermediary role to strengthen the participation of communities in humanitarian and development action. Indeed, local FAs have a continuous relationship with communities as they are part and parcel of them - this is heightened for faith leaders and faith CBOs. Local FAs are in constant contact with community members through their activities, and this engagement gives the community a voice in FAs' activity plans - for instance, a respondent in Palestine identified a new focus on mental health and trauma based on feedback from community participants. This influence of community members can go beyond the informal and project-bound needs identification, and get formalised by including active members in the organisation's board.[91] By engaging with local FAs, secular and faith-based humanitarian actors can thus better include communities' voice in their agenda. Beyond ensuring that activities are culturally sensitive and responsive to community needs, local FAs can serve as bridges for the empowerment of community members and their inclusion in decision-making. This is reflected in survey results (Graph 7), as 51 respondents (out of 81) consider that FAs contribute to better involving crisis-affected populations in decision making.

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[91] Key Informant Interview, Palestine, 25/01/2024

Additionally, **FAs' continuous engagement with the community can help them identify local solutions which may not have been identified by traditional actors**: 64 respondents think that partnership between faith and secular actors allow for innovation and experimentation. Among the innovative solutions proposed by local FAs, we find religious-based climate advocacy: in Kenya, coastal actors are identifying religion-based practices of environmental preservation to scale up local development solutions (preservation, adaptation, livelihoods) that come from the communities themselves. Local FAs knowledge of the context, actors, practices and solutions is invaluable for partners' project design and for the sustainability of projects. Thus, FAs' local knowledge, if well mobilised by IOs, enables localised responses rather than one-size-fits-all activity plans.

Figure 7. Faith actors' participation in solutions
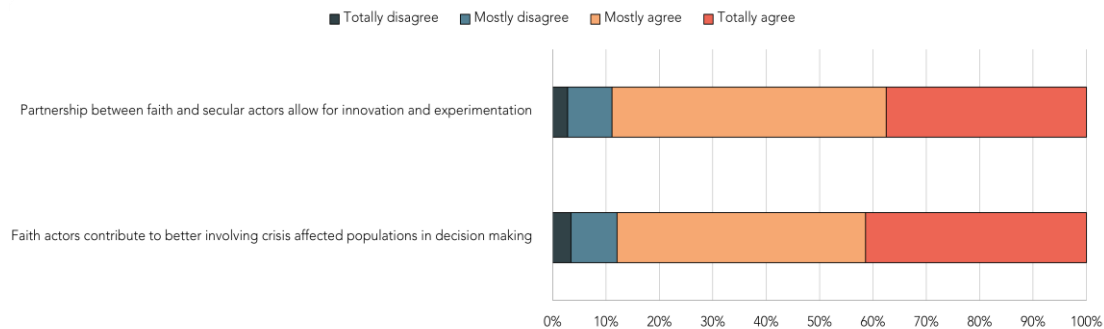
● Building common and positive narratives

Local FAs have a privileged position and access to knowledge that allows them to mitigate barriers, especially cultural ones, given their proximity to communities and shared values and practices. Indeed, where certain cultural or societal norms may pose barriers to direct engagement, particularly in conservative or traditional communities, FBOs or leaders have the potential to significantly enhance humanitarian interventions by leveraging their knowledge, networks, resources, and the trust they hold within communities. Their involvement can thus foster culturally sensitive humanitarian efforts - including by helping IOs in adapting their narrative.[92] This is particularly true of gender, gender-related issues, health, and other thematic issues that require a shift in social practices. While foreign narratives are often met with resistance, integrating religious teachings in awareness campaigns can improve results at the community level: "framing the message within religious teachings can resonate more deeply with individuals."[93] Case studies gave examples of FAs, especially interfaith actors, who use their platforms to approach sensitive topics such as gender in a faith-sensitive way by (1) adapting their own structures to better include women's voices[94]; and (2) building intra-faith, inter-faith, and faith-secular conversations to create a positive and harmonised narrative around these issues.

As much as FAs can be key to overcoming cultural challenges, **they can also play a role that may lead to issues like gender inequalities or resistance to SRHR[95]; it is thus essential to build a conversation between faith and secular actors to build a common narrative and foster the positive role of local FAs.** This requires humanitarian and development projects to adapt, by (1) including FAs in the design of programs[96]; and (2) developing their own faith literacy. Against a trend whereby "organi[s]ations prefer to build religious partnerships over building their own religious literacy"[97], developing organisational faith literacy can help build a common narrative with FAs, thus facilitating their positive and sustainable engagement and the one of the communities. It can also aid in identifying solutions rooted in religious beliefs. This is sometimes necessary for FBOs themselves, as the alignment with humanitarian requirements can secularise organisations, thus necessitating an investment by the FBO to 're-learn' faith literacy, an investment that Islamic Relief has made, according to a global KII, by opening a specific position and developing a framework to assess the faith sensitivity of their interventions.[98]

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92 Key Informant Interview, Pakistan, 04/01/2024
93 Key Informant Interview, Pakistan, 04/01/2024
94 Key Informant Interview, Kenya, 26/01//2024
95 Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
96 Key Informant Interview, Mozambique, 09/02/2024
97 Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
98 Key Informant Interview, global, 24/01/2024

> **Box 7. Mobilising faith leaders on gender: challenges and good practices from Palestine**
>
> A secular local organisation who partnered with religious leaders in Palestine provides a helpful case of overcoming barriers to participation in gender interventions through faith literacy.
>
> This local actor implemented a project that aimed to train religious leaders on gender issues, which requested an agreement with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. While the Ministry agreed, it requested that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) would not be mentioned as part of the training - as mentions of the CEDAW raises strong opposition in the society. The local actor accepted but as it moved forward with the training, faced barriers and threats from conservative groups and preachers.
>
> Because of its religious literacy, the local actor was able to develop a culturally sensitive and appropriate approach, backing its training on religious teachings: "*Our strategy involved presenting a humanitarian approach wrapped in a religious framework*". Indeed, theological approaches to gender interventions have proven to be an efficient tool at the intersection of religion and gender. In this case, not only did this mitigate the barriers to conducting the training, but it raised the interest of religious preachers to request further training, including on CEDAW, which they successfully asked the Ministry of religious affairs to authorise. This partnership led to a transformation from resistance to gender interventions, progressing towards acceptance, referrals, and bridging between the actors; and culminating in the establishment of a gender unit within the Ministry.

Faith-based networks as a solution to funding, coordination, visibility and policy influence barriers

As indicated in Section III, FAs have access to different types of faith-based and secular networks, be it at local, national, or international level. These networks play an essential role in identifying solutions to the barriers to FAs' engagement. Faith-based networks, in particular, are of great support for local FAs who, through the networks, get engaged with global donors, implementers, and advocates. This subsection highlights the enabling role of networks for fundings, capacity strengthening, participation, coordination, and policy influence.

Funding: Local FAs indicate that **networks facilitate their engagement in humanitarian and development action as they give FAs greater visibility and access to network-based funds**. While this is true of sectoral coordination mechanisms - IFBOs highlight that their participation in the sectoral coordination increase their access to traditional fundings - for local FAs, it is mostly religious networks that help them gain this access. Across countries, many local FAs are part of international networks through which they get their fundings, including religious-based fundings (zakat, charity, etc.). Christian local FAs benefit from international networks more than other faiths - due to the structure of the religion whereby churches and church-related NGOs are organised in global networks accessible to local branches or partner organisations. There are also examples of Muslim FA's networks that give them access to international and national funding, including from charitable organisations, traditional donors, and community-based funding.[99]

Two types of network-based funding emerged from the case studies:

(1) **Religious funding**: the local FA is part of an international faith network whose fundings are mostly religious based; the network funds projects across its members, making the process direct and simplified for local FAs. In this case, due diligence processes take place as part within the network, with requirements that vary. This case was found in different instances, particularly in Palestine (see box 8).

(2) **Secular funding**: the local FA is part of a local or international network that facilitates their access to non-faith-based funding. The network may apply for funding for its members, facilitating the vetting and due diligence process as the network itself undergoes vetting. Networks can facilitate access to funding for local FAs otherwise excluded, while reducing the risk for international donors by acting as a warrant. This is particularly the case with interfaith platforms, as in Kenya. In one specific instance, a local Muslim actor shared that the intermediary role of interfaith networks allowed them to access funding at a time where scrutiny over Muslim actors had increased.

Networks-based support to access funding is especially helpful in situations of disproportionate or unjustified scrutiny over local FAs, who would be excluded from international funding because of poorly designed regulations, but would successfully pass the due diligence conducted by faith or interfaith networks. Network-based fundings are not a solution to every funding limitation, but instead one possible mitigation against intentional or unintentional discrimination against local FAs.

A few limitations need to be highlighted. First, not all faith networks facilitate access to fundings; some of them focus on visibility or learning and don't have the capacity or status to get funds for its members. Second, there are cases of competition between networks meaning that membership in one network can serve as a barrier to accessing others and their funding sources. Finally, additional data would be required to document the manner in which faith and interfaith

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[99] Key Informant Interview, Pakistan, 19/01/2024

networks conduct due diligence themselves among their members. As a consequence, data shows that network-based fundings are particularly valuable when combined with other types of fundings.

> **Box 8. Can religious networks provide a sustainable solution against FAs' funding restrictions?**
>
> The case study in Palestine explored the extent to which faith networks can facilitate timely response through accelerated fundings and network-based implementation in the context of colonial conflict. While data did not allow us to identify a specific opportunity for network-based implementation, **we did come across examples to show that networks, especially faith-based ones, can facilitate access to funding**. In a context where traditional donors increasingly scrutinise local actors and implement risk mitigation strategies that restrict their access to fundings, two local faith actors and the local branch of an international FAs who were interviewed shared that indeed, most of their fundings come from religious networks they are part of.
>
> **Data collected also compels us to believe that in certain contexts, religious networks can be efficient alternatives to traditional donors for local FAs**. One Christian actor shared how religious networks enabled them to address a very particular housing challenge facing specifically by Christian communities in Jerusalem - although the other local actors were targeting all communities regardless of faith.
>
> **However, the funds available through networks are limited in scale compared to traditional humanitarian funding**. While it does provide a solution, it can also limit the number and scale of activities that local FAs who only have this type of funding can implement. Moreover, it can lead to misperception from communities or partners who overestimate the amount of fundings that local FAs have access to, leading to unrealistic expectations: *"People here, knowing that we are Christian organisation, think 'oh, they have access to all kinds of church related funders in the West, so, they may have more funding than other organisations'. Of course, that is a major issue for people here, and for [partnership with] the ministry"* (Key Informant Interview, Palestine, 25/01/2024). While religious networks provide funding opportunities, access to this kind of funding only can be a limitation, as opposed to fund diversification. Networks can however facilitate the diversification by being intermediaries between traditional donors and local FAs, as shared by many respondents.

Capacities: Networks, including faith-based ones, can help build the technical capacities of FAs. **Knowledge sharing is the main way in which capacity strengthening happens as part of networks**. Indeed, networks organise formal learning sessions and allow for informal exchanges between members; they often facilitate the exchange of tools and resources.[100] Through these exchanges, network members can identify thematic shifts within humanitarian action and sector, such as an increased focus on climate change, that help them adapt their agendas and build expertise. This, in turn, enhances their access to partnerships. Finally, FAs inclusion in networks' projects which have a capacity-strengthening component can very concretely contribute to developing FAs, including their institutional capacities.

Participation: **Interfaith networks play an essential role in supporting (1) the recognition of FAs to mitigate cultural and contextual misperceptions; and (2) the engagement with and response to the needs of communities from different faiths.** Although FAs do not discriminate based on religion, cases of dispute between faiths can lead to resistance from communities and/or cultural misunderstanding. In such situations, interfaith platforms are decisive in mitigating the challenges. In Kenya, the CICC shared the example of a land dispute between two faith communities, where their networks of faith leaders allowed them to identify an intermediary to facilitate the dialogue and resolve the dispute.[101] In the case of a Muslim faith actor who faced resistance and scrutiny because of perceived association with violent religious groups, the visibility and engagement they got from an interfaith platform was the main solution to gain recognition and continue engaging in humanitarian and development activities.[102]

Coordination: **Networks' role in coordination is twofold**. First, at network-level, it facilitates coordination between network members who can better identify each other's activities and strength, increasing their complementarity and opening collaboration opportunities for FAs. Second, as networks are better integrated into the humanitarian architecture, they can be a bridge between local FAs who are part of the network, and humanitarian action, providing referrals for further partnerships.

Policy influence and advocacy: **Networks increase the influence of FAs in decision-making spaces as FAs' voices (1) come in through a larger and stronger platform; and (2) access spheres that FAs alone cannot reach**. Indeed, networks' access to coordination mechanisms gives FAs a space to bring in their knowledge, needs identification, ideas, and funding needs, to the table. This increases their influence at national level, through sectoral and / or governmental coordination, as well as at supra-national levels. International faith and interfaith networks can also relay FAs' voices in regional and international forums, such as the Southern African Development Community.[103] Additionally, religious networks can advocate to foreign governments in order to raise awareness and fundings to respond to local issues:

> "As a faith-based organisation within the humanitarian sector, you have unique access to advocacy networks. [...] This affiliation allows you to reach out to thousands of individuals within the church community on a global scale,

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[100] Key Informant Interview, Ethiopia, 02/02/2024
[101] Key Informant Interview, Kenya, 26/01/2024
[102] Key Informant Interview, Kenya, 29/01/2024
[103] Key Informant Interview, Kenya, 29/01/2024

enabling you to amplify your advocacy efforts. This dynamic is particularly evident in the case of Palestine, where solidarity visits gather financial support and subsequently contribute to influencing local policy decisions."
Respondent from Palestine, 24/01/2024

Additional solutions & best practices

Besides the solutions provides by (1) local FAs' cultural and physical proximity with and influence in communities, and (2) faith-based networks and platforms, the data highlighted two additional good practices: investment in FAs' institutional capacities, and partnership with governments.

● Investment in FAs' institutional capacity strengthening

FAs and partners' efforts to build the institutional capacity, or 'professionalise' FAs, help overcome barriers to partnerships as the actors are in a better position to pass due diligence processes and meet donors' requirements. This includes investment from secular actors or international FAs, especially IFBOs, to strengthen the capacities of local FAs; IFBO can become key enablers as they are enticed to engaging with local, less formal FAs, yet have processes aligned with global standards that they can train local FAs to. Some IFBOs, including Islamic Relief, are prioritising this approach in an effort to localise their interventions through local FAs, recognising that capacity strengthening is necessary.[104]

On their end, local FAs themselves invest in their capacities and structure to better align with requirements. Indeed, among FAs interviewed for this research, many had adopted the language, principles, and sometimes processes of humanitarian and development actors. FAs, including local FAs, insist on their non-discriminatory practices - a quasi-unanimous principle among respondents -, common values and culture, partnership experience - contributing to building a culture of partnership within the organisation -, and solid systems and procedures for the FAs who have already built them. These aspects, especially the inclusivity and solid systems - financial system, compliance mechanisms, policies, code of conduct, PSEA, etc. - are essential facilitators to enter partnerships.

However, this professionalisation needs to be mindful of the risk to lose FAs' main value add through a "NGO-i[s]ation of their activities"[105]. For instance, FAs' networks of volunteers are one of the reasons why local FAs can respond quickly to emergencies and access hard-to-reach areas. While strengthening the capacities and technical skills of volunteers can be a positive approach, as volunteers may not be available indefinitely, there is a need to build sustainable structures and mechanisms.[106] These investments, in turn, risk to reduce the flexibility required to work with volunteers. There is a thin line between positive institutional capacity-strengthening, and loss of FAs' identities and added value.

● Partnerships with governments

The data showed variations in the role of governments, which can either limit or increase FAs and other actors' policy influence. FAs' relations with local and national governments take different forms:

(1) **Coordination through platforms and projects lead by the government**: the county action plan in Mombasa, Kenya, led by the local government[107]; and community care coalitions in Ethiopia, led by the ministry of women and social affairs[108], both engage with local FAs among other actors, although they have a limited role in policy influence and rather act as IPs.

(2) **Continuous engagement and programs validation**: FAs have continuous relationships with the government including to align their agendas with the government's. This can present challenges as the government may want to impose an agenda without taking into account FAs' expertise or knowledge of the needs, sometimes tying FAs' hands.

(3) **Project-based partnerships**: in Palestine, a local FA built a partnership with the Ministry of Education for a project on interfaith education; despite the unequal power dynamics, funding for local FAs increases their influence.[109] In another example in Palestine, a partnership between a local secular actor and faith leaders through the Ministry of Religious Affairs led to institutional transformation with the creation of a gender unit at the Ministry.

Engaging with the government can facilitate or hinder partnerships - in the data collected, it is mostly a hindrance. In Mozambique, proximity to the government can frighten some partners.[110] In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the strong hand of the government on actors, including FA, can negatively impact partnerships either because the organisation is affiliated with the government, leading potential partners to refuse engaging; or because certain types of partnerships are negatively perceived by the government - this is the case of partnerships between FBOs from different faiths in Pakistan.[111]

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[104] Key Informant Interview, Afghanistan, 25/01/2024
[105] Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (eds) (2022) *Ibid*
[106] Key Informant Interview, Global, 23/01/2024
[107] Key Informant Interview, Kenya, 26/01/2024
[108] Key Informant Interview, Ethiopia, 05/02/2024
[109] Key Informant Interview, Palestine, 25/01/2024
[110] Key Informant Interview, Mozambique, 23/01/2024
[111] Key Informant Interview, Pakistan, 19/01/2024

Box 9. Learning from cross-border initiatives involving faith actors

Our Afghanistan-Pakistan and Ethiopia-Kenya case studies looked at the opportunity that FAs represent for cross-border interventions, especially in emergency response related to migration and climate. Different findings emerged from this:

Cross-border learning and exchanges are more frequent than cross-border interventions.

In Kenya and Ethiopia, respondents mention participating in regional religious conferences where good practices are learned; in addition to few examples of religious leaders or communities' visits to a neighbouring country. Religious leaders from Pakistan and Afghanistan, too, have met to find solutions and collaborate on peace initiatives for the region, including to resolve conflicts between the two countries.

Cross-border interventions are rendered complex by the political landscape.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, government policies and regulations restrict the ability of organisations to operate across borders, particularly when collaborating with faith-based actors. There are concerns about national security, sovereignty, or diplomatic relations that prevent such cross-border collaborations from taking place. For instance, an aid shipment to Afghanistan required specific approval from the Pakistani government.

Cross-border interventions on peacebuilding and local adaptation to climate change.

Two FAs in Kenya had been implementing cross-border peacebuilding work, particularly relevant because of the presence of conflict at the border. For climate interventions, they do include emergency response (e.g. emergency appeal to respond to the Horn of Africa drought) as well as cross-border Disaster Risk Management.

Beyond cross-border interventions, projects in bordering regions can have impacts on neighbouring countries, due to circular movements or to movements enticed by the project. For instance, opening a health facility near a border can trigger movement due to service accessibility.

Lessons on minimum requirements to partnering with faith actors

Key informants shed light on six (6) minimum requirements that can form the basis of strong and meaningful partnerships with FAs:

(1) Technical experience and skills in the sector of intervention

The majority of respondents agree that the quality of the work and technical skills of FAs is more important than their faith identities, as it shows actors' capacities to implement the project. There is often a lack of awareness among IOs about the impact of initiatives led by local FAs in particular, while they can bring about significant positive changes within their communities. However, due to the lack of visibility and understanding, their efforts may go unrecognised by larger organisations and donors. Indeed, 70 of 81 survey respondents estimate that FAs need technical skills training, while qualitative data points to great technical skills of FAs - whereas their institutional capacities are more limited - showing misperceptions around FAs' skills. FAs' track record.

(2) Complementary profiles and skills to engage in all levels of localisation

Building from the trust in FAs' technical skills in their area of expertise, actors highlight that partners should provide complementary skills. This complementarity, identified at the partners identification phase, facilitates a division of tasks that benefit all, rather than hierarchical forms of partnerships. For example, relying on faith actors for MHPSS interventions or relying on faith actors' greater access to communities can be enablers of greater localised and efficient action.

(3) Aligned values, including inclusivity (non-discrimination principle)

Most respondents - faith and secular actors alike - highlight that value alignment is the main criteria to building partnerships. An aspect which emerges from the research is the need for all partners, including FAs, to be inclusive and abide by a non-discrimination principle, which the quasi-unanimity of FAs interviewed do. One respondent highlighted a project where they do prioritise a specific religious community, because they face a specific challenge due to their religion; this shows that a certain flexibility can be provided to this principle when needs are specific to a given group.

This principle, however, can lead to self-censorship of FAs who do not want to be perceived as getting involved into religious practice, which limits leveraging FAs' added value in identifying faith-based solutions to build community resilience or positive coping mechanisms. FAs' inclusivity should not lead to their secularisation.

(4) Abide by a code of conduct and safeguarding policy

While FAs, especially local FAs, may not have their own policies, KIIs insist that a code of conduct and safeguarding policies should be applied to ensure the protection of people of concern. To allow for partnerships with FAs that are less

structured, respondents in Kenya insist on the importance of prioritising formal partnerships whereby the contract binds all partners to abide by these policies.

(5) Adopting due diligence processes adapted to the profile of the actor

Due diligence processes are necessary to mitigate concerns over the partnership - both from the side of the FAs who want to ensure their secular partners have similar values and do not negatively impact their credibility towards the community[112], and from the side of the secular actor who wants to ensure that their faith partners align with risk mitigation policies. However, these processes' bureaucracy and heaviness can be a weight on the partnership, and prevent engaging with actors who don't have the institutional capacities to meet all criteria. Several respondents indicated looking into reducing the requirements or developing gradual approaches that would enable the engagement with less formalised local actors, through adapted forms of partnerships.

(6) Effective communication needs to happen from the onset of projects to build a common language

Creating a common language and understanding emerges as an essential step to partnerships, especially to mitigate cultural challenges that could otherwise come up. This means finding a common ground between religious and humanitarian narratives, rather than imposing one or the other - i.e., donors and international partners should learn to hear the side of local FAs. This can be facilitated by faith literacy: secular actors can build their own capacities to familiarise themselves with religious narratives. This step not only facilitates the partnership, but it can also help designing projects that are adapted to local contexts.

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[112] Key Informant Interview, Pakistan, 29/01/2024

V. Way forward: Recommendations to leverage faith actors' value add

Faith actors' further engagement in regard to localisation: what did we learn?

Faith actors across our case studies promote strong examples of localisation in practice.

FAs are strongest in their ability to build on existing networks and collectives, sustained by interfaith collaboration, across contexts, and by their influence on key decision makers and governments. Where traditional humanitarian actors are weaker, FAs are strongest. They benefit from existing platforms in all our countries serving as studies under the present research, with partnerships across local, national and IOs whose values are faith-inspired.

FAs leverage their rootedness within communities, the trust that they have built, to expand on that access to support local leadership – through their psychosocial interventions, their peacebuilding efforts, their contributions to education, health, livelihoods and a range of interventions that populations in fragile settings require.

FAs are able to bring individuals and community members along in a collective approach built around dialogue including on some of the most sensitive or polarising issues – whether regarding gender or climate change and its impacts. As a collective, in contexts such as **Kenya and Ethiopia**, FAs debate their localisation priorities and discuss progress through continuous interfaith dialogue.

FAs can influence change at the policy level. This was exemplified in our report in the case of **Mozambique** where FAs are a force to reckon with, either for establishing operational presence or for advocating with the government. It was also seen in **Afghanistan and Pakistan**, where FAs can bridge global and local silos, or move beyond national deadlocks due to political disagreements. FAs can help maintain humanitarian principles and standards in situations of shifting leadership as seen in both of these countries since 2021.

FAs can provide a longer-term view of localisation, such as in **Palestine** where the strengthening of civil society is put in peril by the war and the incapacity of the international aid community to intervene. FAs however run the risk of losing their voice or being silenced by larger organisations or by structural and other barriers. This is where there is a need for FAs to utilise platforms to speak louder and compel a general audience towards an agenda of solidarity and humanity.

While this report highlights many areas of evolution in the recognition of FAs' role in the localisation agenda and more broadly in humanitarian and development aid, there is still much that needs to be done to address the barriers that still constrain their action, their visibility and their independence.

The recommendations are targeted at addressing the barriers identified in this report.

Photo credit: Oumarou Binomi, Islamic Relief Niger

Recommendations

1. Donors and governments

Develop their own faith literacy to revise negative perceptions towards FAs: Donors should invest in their own capacities to combat misperceptions of FAs and recognise that including FAs would contribute to improving the sector. This requires raising awareness of their staff and building their own faith literacy to shift the work culture in a way that builds a positive basis towards approaching FAs.

Adapt requirements and revise conditions to facilitate contracting directly with local FAs: Conditions and clauses to access fundings should be revised to allow for smaller actors to engage, including by revising unjustified risk mitigation clauses that indiscriminately impact all FAs. In addition, specific funding opportunities should be proposed, tailored specifically to smaller FAs, for which requirements should be made more accessible - for instance, using compliance to donors' policies for FAs who do not have their own, and requesting smaller track records.

Support the formation and activities of faith-based networks and collectives: Given the role of networks and collectives in mitigating barriers faced by FAs, donors should invest in these networks to leverage the solutions they provide. This includes encouraging the formation of new networks, especially interfaith, at local and regional level; developing their institutional capacities, including vetting processes for members; as well as funding existing faith networks to help diversify their funds and indirectly support networks' members who can be discriminated against by poorly designed regulations.

2. Humanitarian sectors and clusters

Build faith literacy at sectoral level to facilitate the identification of faith-based solutions and find a common language with FAs: The sectoral coordination need to train its members to improve their faith literacy, in order to (1) facilitate their collaboration with FAs as they will be able to speak a common language and mitigate cultural barriers; and (2) identify faith-based practices to respond to identified issues and needs, e.g. faith-based positive coping mechanisms or community resilience.

Advocate for a better recognition of FAs' value added and mitigate negative perceptions: Advocacy at sectoral level should target misperceptions around FAs and render visible FAs' contributions to humanitarian and development action, in order to encourage partnerships with them. The sector should indeed increase engagement and dialogue with FAs rather than isolating them.

Develop guidelines to better work with FAs, including guidelines to adapted due diligence processes: The sectoral coordination should work towards developing guidelines to engage with FAs at coordination level and at project level, to ensure that this engagement is adapted. Such guidelines should include ways to adapt requirements and due diligence practice, including by encouraging a gradual approach whereby requirements and forms of engagement would be adapted to FAs' level of formalisation; as well as guidelines to include FAs in project design and monitor the engagement.

Develop a directory of FAs with the support of IFBOs and religious networks: Mapping faith-based stakeholders and their area of expertise, and making this mapping available to the whole sector, will help identify and connect different actors. Ultimately, it will facilitate forming complementary partnerships.

Adapt coordination mechanisms to be FA-inclusive: Sectoral coordination, including meetings, should be adapted to the needs and practices of FAs in order to facilitate their inclusion; this includes adapting the language of relevant meetings and making sure the time is adapted to FAs' practices - e.g. avoid meetings on Friday to help Muslim actors participate.

3. Partners: intentional project design

Build partnerships at the application level to design projects around each actor's value added: Partnerships should start by identifying the strengths and core competencies of each partner and build the project around these, in a spirit of complementarity and horizontality between actors.

Develop communications with FAs and communities at the early phase of projects to build a common narrative: The communication is essential to create a common ground between FAs and communities on the one hand, and secular actors on the other hand, especially around sensitive issues. This communication should be horizontal whereby no partner imposes its vision, and continuous throughout the project, to facilitate the implementation and avoid creating resistance from either partner.

Include FAs in different phases of the project to improve relevance and appropriateness: Local FAs' proximity with and knowledge of communities should be leveraged throughout the project. This requires a shift from including FAs as instrumental partners only (due to their influential role) to recognising them as equal partners who bring in essential information. Given their privileged position and knowledge, FAs can capitalise on local and religious practices to identify innovative and adapted responses and facilitate the implementation.

Partner with local FAs that lack experience or structure to gradually increase their capacities and inclusion: Partnering with local, less structured FAs can be a win-win for the local FAs and their partner as it can provide an opportunity to strengthen the capacity of the local FAs; while increasing community mobilisation and access to hard-to-reach areas

Adapt partnership requirements to facilitate collaboration with FAs: Stakeholders should lighten requirements and allow for more flexibility in the selection criteria of their partners to make space for local FAs.

Build staff's familiarisation with FAs to gradually replace delegation with trust: a cultural shift is necessary whereby partners do not delegate tasks they've designed to FAs but instead develop horizontal decision-making processes and transfer interventions to local FAs. This requires building trust through interactions and familiarisation.

4. Faith actors

Build networks and collectives, including by identifying FAs and developing a 'faith sector': FAs should ally and regroup their strengths by building collectives and networks to increase their visibility, access to fundings, and influence, as well as coordinate to better respond to crises. Such networks and collectives can be interfaith to bring together the growing number of local FAs that can be engaged with for humanitarian and development action, and leverage their strength and potential.

Strengthen institutional capacities and develop the level of formalisation and compliance: FAs, especially local FAs, need to make an effort in terms of professionalisation and compliance to increase engagement, which means willingness to invest in and develop their institutional capacities. The development of, or at least training on policies such as safeguarding and protection policies, remains a requirement for partnerships; in addition, the non-discrimination principle should be applied, if not done yet.

Monitor their results and impact to be able to show a good track record: As the track record is a criterion for partnerships, local FAs should put processes in place to monitor and track the results and impact of their projects to be able to showcase their experience when applying to fundings.

Maintain their relationship with local communities and ensure projects benefit them: Despite strengthening their institutional capacities, FAs should maintain their relationship with communities as it constitutes their main added value, including by cultivating their credibility, trust, communication, and proximity to these communities.

Engage, where possible, with aid coordination mechanisms: While coordination mechanisms need to evolve to be better adapted to FAs, they provide great resources to facilitate engagement, including forums to collectively learn and strengthen capacities, information sharing, funding mechanisms, and visibility.

Photo credit: Hiba Siddiqui, Islamic Relief Pakistan

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Annex 1 – Research framework

Research question	Sub-question	Desk review	Online survey	KIIs
Assess the role of faith actors in advancing localisation through a comparison of four distinct country case studies				
Taking stock of faith actors' involvement and their value-add → FA partnerships assessment				
How do humanitarian organisations currently engage with faith actors (type and means of collaboration) and to what extent does it leverage their added value in line with the localisation agenda?	Who are the faith actors and to what extent do their values, mandates and activities overlap with the ones of humanitarian and development actors?	X	X	X
	What good practices can be learned from, scaled up or systemised to improve the work with faith actors?	X	X	X
	How do humanitarian organisations partner with faith actors and are these partnerships intentional, equal, and sustainable?	X	X	X
	How have perceptions of faith actors evolved?	X		X
Learning from challenges and best practices to partnering with faith actors				
What are the specific challenges to engaging with faith actors at the community, organisational (faith actors and humanitarian organisations) and sectoral level; and how can they be mitigated?	Funding: What are the funding opportunities and barriers to partnering with faith actors?	X	X	X
	Partnerships: What are the characteristics of faith actors, including values and structure, that contribute to or hinder their role in humanitarian response and partnerships?	X		X
	Capacity: What are capacity gaps or capacity value add to improve engagement with faith actors?	X	X	X
	Participation revolution: How do faith actors ensure the participation of crisis-affected communities?	X		X
	Complementarity: To what extent are faith and humanitarian actors working in a complementary or redundant way?	X	X	X
	Coordination mechanisms: What factors facilitate or hinder the inclusion of faith actors in sectoral coordination?		X	X
	Visibility: What are the barriers to faith actors' roles, contribution, innovation and achievements being recognised?		X	X
	Policy influence: How can faith actors influence policy decisions and render certain causes visible to donors and other actors?	X	X	X
Produce evidence-based recommendations for strengthening the engagement of faith actors in localised responses				
How can Islamic Relief and other humanitarian actors amplify the opportunities of collaboration with faith actors for the localisation agenda, while mitigating or overcoming the challenges?	Project based: Do existing partnership modalities with faith actors contribute to the aims of localisation and improving humanitarian outcomes in specific project modalities?	X	X	X
	Transformative partnerships: What opportunities exist to increase transformative partnerships with faith actors, thus improving progress towards localisation?	X	X	X
	Networks and collectives: What examples of network-based or collective approaches can be learned from to facilitate positive engagement with faith actors and improve their role in localisation?	X	X	X
	Monitoring engagement: What minimum requirements and frameworks can Islamic Relief and other humanitarian actors implement when engaging with faith actors?	X	X	X

Annex 2 – Actors identified in the case study countries

		Afg.	Pak.	Pal.	Eth.	Ken.	Moz.	**Total**
Faith actors	International faith organisations	3	10	8	6	9	8	**44**
	Local faith organisations	22	21	4	2	6	1	**56**
	Religious institutions and networks			4	10	8	3	**25**
	Religious leaders and communities	6					1	**7**
Non faith actors	Secular organisation who partner with FAs		6	14		3	2	**25**
	Sectoral coordination	7	15	11	5	7	7	**52**
	Total	**38**	**52**	**41**	**23**	**33**	**22**	209

ABOUT SAMUEL HALL

Samuel Hall is a social enterprise that conducts research, evaluates programmes, and designs policies in contexts of migration and displacement. Our approach is ethical, academically rigorous, and based on first-hand experience of complex and fragile settings.

Our research connects the voices of communities to changemakers for more inclusive societies. With offices in Afghanistan, Germany, Kenya, and Tunisia and a presence in Somalia, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates, we are based in the regions we study. For more information, please visit www.samuelhall.org.

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