

Conflict, Child Protection and Religious Communities

*A Review and Recommendations on
Enhancing Protection through Partnership*

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FINAL

Religions for Peace 

unicef 

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ACRONYMS

ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
CPA	Child Protection Advocates
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FBO(s)	Faith-based Organizations
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP(s)	Internally displaced person(s)
IFI	International Financial Institution
IRC	Inter-religious Council
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MA	Muslim Aid
MDG(s)	Millennium Development Goals
NGO(s)	Non-governmental organization
RLP	Refugee Law Project
UMCOR	United Methodist Committee on Relief
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WA IRCCC	West Africa Inter-Religious Council Coordinating Committee
WCRP	<i>Religions for Peace</i> (formerly World Conference of Religions for Peace)

Executive Summary

The changing nature of armed conflict over the past century has seen an increasing impact on civilians. It is estimated in most current conflicts that up to 80% of those affected by displacement, injury and death are women and children. Increasing attention to not only the impact of armed conflict on children, but an acknowledgement of their roles in armed groups has garnered great interest on the part of humanitarian actors, child rights activists and scholars, with an emerging consensus on appropriate approaches to protection.

The evolution in child protection thinking has also led to an increasing emphasis on more holistic approaches to humanitarian interventions for children in situations of armed conflict. There is increasing recognition of the multi-dimensionality of the individual child and that his/her corresponding needs and rights are located in a variety of equally significant domains. This necessitates an integrated approach to protection, which entails collaboration across disciplines and innovative models of partnership.

In situations of conflict, religious communities often have some of the few remaining structures, networks and services in areas ravaged by fighting and inaccessible to outside humanitarian intervention. Their humanitarian efforts are due to more than just presence, however. The world's major religions tend to place service within the contexts of broader callings towards peace making and community building. These efforts are so often under-reported, as they are the organic product of deeply held beliefs and worldviews.

Humanitarian actors, such as UNICEF and other child protection agencies, recognize the value of and rely on religious and inter-religious structures to promote child protection in situations of conflict. Partnerships have long been underway, often developed spontaneously in emergency situations. The nature, achievements and challenges of such partnerships, however, have not been well documented or analyzed.

Seeking to build on established work, as well as learn how to further elaborate successful approaches to collaboration *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF have come together in a unique partnership to explore the potential for enhanced engagement of religious communities in advancing child protection efforts in situations of conflict. *Religions for Peace* (formerly the World Conference of *Religions for Peace*) is the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition that works to advance peace, and UNICEF is the United Nations agency mandated to promote and protect children's rights. The two organizations have worked together since 1990 to strengthen the efforts of religious communities to fulfill the rights of children with advocacy initiatives.

The current program recognizes the need to strengthen documentation, and emphasize learning processes at all stages in order to build up this important literature. Feedback to this process has emphasized the important role that religious communities can and do play in child protection. There is much more to learn, however, about the nature of these partnerships to make fuller use of the potential these partnerships offer to improving the well-being of children affected by conflict.

Aliterature and desk review was an initial step in the program to examine the experiences and lessons learned to date about the collaborative work of religious communities and child protection actors by summarizing some of the available literature on the pertinent issues related to the program, much of which is comprised of internal documentation (*grey literature*). It is acknowledged at the outset that there is not a substantial literature on the subject, and little, if any rigorous evaluation or analysis. Primarily relying on resources produced by UNICEF and *Religions for Peace*, the review was far from exhaustive in its scope and its representation of the tremendous amount of work carried out. It served as the background paper for an expert Consultation held in New York in March 2010, which delved further in depth on the issues drawn out of this review and further contributed to the issues it highlights and recommendations for action. For the

program this sets a baseline of documentation that will be built upon through consultations, project monitoring, evaluation and analysis.

It is evident from the review that religious communities can play particularly effective roles in strengthening the protective framework for children's well being both through advocacy and direct service provision. They have enormous outreach capacities of the religious partners, as well as an authority and ability to translate child rights/protection concepts to members of their communities. For example, religious communities can play a key role in supporting changes in harmful social norms, and supporting and enhancing the protective roles of families and communities. In situations of armed conflict, where existing protective mechanisms may be weakened or no longer exist, religious communities are often in a desirable position to take up immediate efforts in the provision of needed relief supplies, family tracing for separated and unaccompanied children, psychosocial support initiatives and emergency education, among others. In these ways, religious communities are important partners in child protection.

The following are some the **key themes** that have emerged in the course of this review:

Language

There is recognition that child protection actors and religious communities have their own "vocabulary" and a lack of literacy in each other's languages is one of the main barriers to effective partnerships. It was acknowledged that child protection actors are often not comfortable with the language of religious communities, and thus cannot really understand their systems and structures, nor appreciate their diversity. Religious communities are also generally not comfortable or familiar with the language and concepts of children's rights and key international instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Even seeking to "define" what religious communities are is problematic. A general and tight definition is not appropriate or useful. What is needed is a general framework that accounts for the complexity and diversity of religious communities, perhaps identifying categories that are broad and clear without oversimplifying. Religious traditions are organized in different ways, and some religious communities form organizations/networks/instruments for specific purposes. Among these some of the most visible in humanitarian and development contexts are faith-based organizations (FBOs), but there are many more actors and structures comprising the full range of religious communities that should be better understood by child protection actors.

Values and Norms

Increasingly, child protection actors are acknowledging that in order to protect children they need a better understanding of the values and norms of their operational contexts, and that religion plays an important role in defining and shaping those. Child protection work is grounded in and informed by values that are widely shared by most religious belief systems, though they have tended not to be expressed in religious language. It is important to identify these shared values and come to mutual understandings of their role in child protection and religious life.

In understanding social norms as they relate to child protection, it is important for child protection actors to understand the distinctions between religious and cultural values, beliefs and norms, as these are often overlapping and intertwined in nuanced ways.

Partnership

Much more than a word, *partnership* is a complex concept that also requires a clear articulation of vocabulary, identification of shared priorities and values, and mutual respect for identity. From the perspective of religious communities, partnership is fundamentally about human relationships, and the importance of sincerity, transparency and mutual respect. While child protection actors agree with this perspective, the

institutional realities they are working in challenge them to act on these principles. Concrete steps need to be taken to articulate the specific roles, responsibilities and contributions of each actor, and ensure transparent, sincere, respectful relationships that seek parity in all aspects of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating partnership endeavors. This calls for creating new and flexible strategies of engagement that can address organizational challenges, seek common ground and respect human values.

Summary of Findings

Strengths and Resources Religious Communities Bring to Child Protection – What they are doing well

- The mandates and belief systems of most religious communities encourage their involvement in helping the more vulnerable members of their communities. The participation of religious communities often leads to interventions that are more organic and grounded in shared value systems.
- The fundamental values shared by most of the world's religions have informed children's rights. There is more common ground between religious and humanitarian belief systems than is often assumed, and the work of "translating" child rights concepts into the more commonly understood tenets and beliefs of religious communities has shown to have a very positive effect in grassroots child protection advocacy work.
- The processes of reflection and dialogue, which are inherent within much religious practice, provide opportunities for child protection actors to participate in the types of community processes that lead to concrete changes in attitudes and actions.
- Religious communities have deep and long-range philosophical frameworks that shape the call to service into long-term commitments; not necessarily driven by the short-term nature of humanitarian funding and assistance.
- Religious communities tend to see service to vulnerable individuals within larger commitments such as peace, justice and reconciliation.
- Religious communities tend to have well-established structures of authority in most environments that a child protection actor might enter.
- Most religious communities are already community-based service providers, providing care and support for vulnerable persons (e.g. foster and other care for children without adequate parental care; emergency support in crises—material, financial, spiritual), providing spiritual support and stability in difficult circumstances, which meet important psychosocial needs people have in the face of adversity.
- Because religious actors are able to enter the family sphere in a way most outside actors cannot, they can be a conduit of communication for social change and transformation.
- Religious communities are often integral to peace processes, as their moral authority and the trust and impartiality bestowed upon religious/spiritual leaders allows them to play significant roles in mediation and reconciliation.
- Inter-religious cooperation in conflict situations, particularly those in which ethnic and/or religious issues are points of tension, can be a powerful display of the positive and unifying power of religion for communities who have come to view differences as divisive.

Strengths of Child Protection Actors Working with Religious Communities – What they are doing well

- Child protection actors, such as UNICEF, can provide a bridge between government level policy initiatives and action/programming at the community level, putting child protection issues on

national development agendas, mainstreaming of child protection into broader initiatives, and effectively using the child protection framework to prioritize humanitarian interventions.

- Child protection actors and religious leaders have carried out some very effective advocacy on child protection, and child protection actors have helped religious communities build their community-level capacity to promote and respond to child protection issues effectively.
- In cases where child protection actors have developed strong relationships with religious communities over time, the work at the onset of emergencies is more efficient and effective.
- In some situations in which conflict is centered on or around religion, child protection actors can play a positive role in facilitating inter-religious coordination- by acting as a convener around child-centered issues and initiatives.

Challenges

There are also many challenges faced when religious communities and child protection actors form partnerships. These are as important to understand as the strengths partnerships bring, in order to further enhance collaborative work. A few such issues are noted below:

- Though to a great extent human and children's rights are fundamentally based on shared values of the world's religions, there can be tensions between perspectives and approaches (See Annex 3 for a discussion of one example).
- Coordination across faith/religious communities, as well as with outside agencies such as UN, INGO's, etc, is a constant constraint. Similarly, there is a lack of documentation and analysis of lessons learned and good practice with regards to issues like child protection, and collaboration with other services provided.
- Some child protection actors express a lot of frustration with religious communities around a couple of issues in particular; namely proselytizing and forced conversion (or aid dependent on conversion), and institutionalization of children. Proselytizing can be perceived to be imposing outside ideas, norms and values, and may undermine indigenous systems of care and protection. It is very important to note that proselytizing to others (non-believers) is a concern of many religious communities and multi-religious organizations, as well.
- Rigid ideological positions of some religious communities can affect the ability or willingness to deal with new, sensitive, emerging issues affecting children (e.g. drug use, issues of sexuality, new forms of families, etc.)
- There is a lack of gender integration, with recognition of women's capacity, contributions and structures. Their associations and networks are not always linked to formal inter—religious mechanisms, and their models and approaches not documented or visible - yet they have a proven track record of child protection through diverse networks – formal or informal
- Regarding inter-religious coordination, some members of religious communities or child protection organizations might consider the integrity of their own philosophies or belief systems challenged or diluted, and may not fully trust the intentions of the other.¹
- The very nature of partnership between large child protection organizations such as UNICEF/INGOs and CSOs, including religiously affiliated CSOs is characterized by power imbalances, as well as organizational cultures and approaches at odds with each other. This same dynamic exists between large international faith-based organizations and local religious communities.
- By nature of their positions, religious leaders and skilled members of the religious communities are often over-extended and taxed by the needs of their adversely affected communities. Outside child

¹ See Hovey and Saleem (2008)

protection organizations often place additional demands on these leaders, risking taking them away from the very critical roles that they are expected (and want) to play in their own capacities.

- There is great diversity amongst religious coordinating bodies in terms of size, structures, and operational and technical capacities. This presents some challenges for UNICEF and other child protection organizations that may approach these bodies in a uniform fashion. Likewise, religious bodies sometimes sense that child protection organizations do not understand their distinctive organizational cultures and structures.²
 - Child protection actors lack religious literacy and sensitivity, that is, they often do not speak the language of religious communities, inter-faith mechanisms and/or faith-based organizations.
 - Child protection actors do not often understand appropriate entry points for engaging with religious communities.
 - In emergency contexts, child protection actors often have a lack of knowledge of the prevailing religions/spiritual traditions of the contexts; for example, religious/spiritual dimensions of communities are not usually included in rapid assessments and stakeholder analyses.
 - A common belief among child protection actors is that the term “religious communities” in emergency situations refers to and is limited to faith-based NGOs. The grassroots element of religious communities may be overlooked.
- Some child protection actors express ambivalence about engaging with religious communities or organizations due to their own perceptions and beliefs about these communities, or sometimes, due to negative previous experiences. They also appear not to be interested in, or perhaps comfortable with, the spiritual dimensions of religious communities, or even children.
 - It is notable that even within the framework of this project, there is a persisting dichotomy between *religious communities* and *child protection actors*, inferring that persons engaged in child protection are not, themselves, members of religious communities or possessing religious or spiritual beliefs.
- There have also been observed gaps in communication and knowledge between the higher levels of religious coordinating bodies and the practical activities being taken at the community level. There also may not be adequate and equitable gender, age, and other types of representation; therefore the leadership is often predominantly male. Therefore, when child protection actors work only with the leadership, they may miss the participation of important community religious networks, such as women and youth.
- Access to funding is an ongoing challenge for many religious communities. Also, some smaller, community-based religious institutions may lack the organizational capacities to handle the influx of large amounts of money, or the administrative burden that comes with funds.
- In some cases, there is a lack of systematic code of good practice and appropriate/ethical conduct regarding children and child protection, particularly pertaining to emergency situations such as conflict. Also there sometimes can be priority placed on staffing programs with people who are respected in the religious community but may lack the technical expertise required for appropriate care and protection of vulnerable children.³
- Religion itself can become highly politicized, and be manipulated to meet the political or ideological needs of some, but not representing the larger consensus of believers. In this way, it can create or exacerbate conflict. Additionally, religious belief systems can be misrepresented or misused in ways

² Religions for Peace and UNICEF, *Study of the Response by Faith-Based Organizations to Orphans and Vulnerable Children*, report compiled by Dr. Geoff Foster, January 2004, p. 16.

³ Ibid, p. 17.

that actually harm children, rather than protect them (e.g. maltreatment of orphans, child labor, sexual and other abuse, etc.).

- There is little substantial documentation readily available that assesses, evaluates and analyzes the issues under investigation in this review.

As a more general issue that stands out in this literature review is the rather glaring absence of any substantive inclusion of gender analysis and child participation.

Recommendations

The *Literature and Desk Review* proposed some preliminary recommendations, which were further enhanced by the Consultation in New York. The following summarizes the priority recommendations that were outlined.

1. Multi-religious approaches to partnership with religious communities should be explored, as they have been shown to be effective in broadening the base of shared values upon which work is based. Such partnerships also model cooperative attitudes and behaviors that can impact and potentially improve community perceptions of religious and child protection actors.
2. More opportunities for dialogue between child protection actors and religious communities operating in conflict affected areas should be created in order to make explicit the common ground (i.e shared values, skills, experiences, competencies) and challenges they share in potential collaboration. These should happen at all levels.
3. It is essential for children's rights organizations and religious communities to have the adequate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively engage with each other in constructive ways - for example to understand each other's roles, working methods, and structures to help identify effective entry points for co-operation. To address this, the following specific actions are recommended:
 - The development of a substantial body of policy and good practice guidance material, specifically:
 - Rearticulating standards and policies on child protection that reflect the beliefs, values and identity of religious communities while being in accordance with agreed upon good practice principles of child protection. Both child protection actors and religious experts can provide support in this process.
 - Emergency assessment materials used by child protection actors to include key aspects related to religious communities and their resources.
 - Guidance materials and tools for child protection actors on how to engage with religious actors, including:
 - Basic information on religious communities and structures, with recognition of women's and youth networks and other organic structures within religious communities that are particularly well-equipped to promote child protection in conflict
 - Key questions to guide engagement with religious actors, including basic *do's* and *don'ts*
 - Ways to "simplify" and "lighten" demands they place on religious communities, particularly leaders, in partnerships (general partnership principles, broader partnership issues)
 - How to articulate child protection concepts and principles in ways that are relevant to religious communities
 - Integrating religious understandings of child protection in key policy guidance initiatives

- Guidance materials and tools for religious communities on how to engage with child protection actors, including:
 - Basic concepts and principles of child protection (international law, major principles and guidance documents, etc) and how they are relevant to religious communities and their belief systems
 - The range of roles different child protection actors play
 - How child protection actors have been engaging with religious structures and communities effectively
 - How religious actors can play roles in child protection in conflict
 - Common partnerships arrangements utilized by child protection organizations (e.g., contractual, non-contractual)

These materials need to be developed through representative consultative processes at global and/or regional levels to determine how to meaningfully interpret child protection standards into religious frameworks, policies and structures. Also, these guidance tools will need to have well-planned strategies for roll-out and dissemination in approaches that both raise awareness, as well as seek feedback and further explore the primary issues relating to partnership between religious communities and child protection actors. These should be planned at national, regional and global levels.

4. Strategically link and engage with inter-agency networks and initiatives of religious communities, inter-religious mechanisms and child protection actors, to promote this work, document and disseminate lessons learned about good and promising practices, support capacity-building efforts and develop joint advocacy initiatives. Some of the key child protection networks would be the Child Protection Working Group at the global level and the Cluster working groups at the national and (sometimes) sub-national level, which bring together multiple child protection actors for coordination, development of policy and guidance and joint programming. Inter-religious mechanisms, such as *Religions for Peace*, mobilize representatives of many religious communities on national, regional and global levels and can facilitate coordination with child protection actors.
5. Further work should be done on understanding deliberative processes that change attitudes and behaviors, such as has been so successful in abandonment of FGM/C. Recognizing the important role of religious leaders in facilitating these processes, as well as in developing religious statements and edicts is a key to more effectively changing a range of attitudes and behaviors that underlie violations of children's rights. These processes can then strategically link with legislative work at national and international levels.
6. Keep *child protection* as the central focus of partnership programming. Partner assessment and selection should prioritize contributions that partners can make to enhance child protection, and more broadly the realizations of children's rights. This does not imply negating potential partners without specific experience or skills, but building in to the analysis identification of what benefits such partners bring, the potential they have for enhancing their own capacities, and specifically what capacity-building efforts are required (by all partners) for effective work, and then ensuring resources for such capacity-building.
7. The tensions inherent in partnership between child protection actors and religious communities (as well as all CSO partners), such as the differentials in power, resources, status and influence, need to be explored in a forthright and explicit manner. Concrete strategies to mediate the potentially negative impacts of these differences need to be delineated and implemented with strong oversight and self-critique.⁴
 - a. This applies as well within the broad spectrum of religious communities, necessitating concerted and systemic mobilization of religious communities from senior religious leadership to local community/congregation levels.

⁴ This is part of a larger set of recommendations for UNICEF and its partnerships with CSO, outlined in the evaluation of CSO partnerships, UNICEF (2007), pp. 57 – 62.

8. Purposeful efforts need to be made to systematically document the strategies and programmatic outcomes of partnerships between religious communities and child protection actors working in partnership in situations of conflict. Further, networks for disseminating, analyzing and building new methodologies from this learning need to be identified, or created where they do not exist.
9. Honest discussion is needed about the challenges of mainstreaming gender analysis and sensitive approaches, as well as child participation in work with religious/multi-religious communities and child protection actors (in conflict, as well as non-conflict settings). Clearly defined strategies must be explored, articulated and tested in order to effectively realize child protection.

1. Introduction

Increasingly, child protection actors are acknowledging that in order to protect children they need a better understanding of the values and norms of their operational contexts, and that religion plays an important role in defining and shaping those. Child protection work is grounded in and informed by values that are widely shared by most religious belief systems, though they have tended not to be expressed in religious language. It is important to identify these shared values and come to mutual understandings of their role in child protection and religious life, as well as to understand the distinctions between religious and cultural values, beliefs and norms, as these are often overlapping and intertwined in nuanced ways.

This review is a first step in a process in the design of a program that aims to explore the potential of enhanced partnerships between humanitarian child protection actors and religious communities, particularly inter-religious mechanisms, in providing protection for children affected by armed conflict.⁵ Such partnerships are not new, particularly in the development, health and education fields. Religious communities have always played a key role in providing basic services to members, in addition to pastoral and spiritual support. Humanitarian actors, such as UNICEF and other child protection agencies, recognize the value of and rely on religious and inter-religious structures to promote child protection in situations of conflict. Partnerships have long been underway, often developed spontaneously in emergency situations. The nature, achievements and challenges of such partnerships, however, have not been well documented or analyzed.

The process began with a desk review that summarized some of the available literature on the pertinent issues related to the program, much of which is comprised of internal documentation (*grey literature*). It is acknowledged at the outset that there is not a substantial literature on the subject, and little, if any rigorous evaluation or analysis. Primarily relying on resources produced by UNICEF and *Religions for Peace*, the review was far from exhaustive in its scope and its representation of the tremendous amount of work carried out. It served as the background paper for an expert Consultation held in New York in March 2010, which delved further in depth on the issues drawn out of this review and further contributed to the issues it highlights and recommendations for action. For the program this sets a baseline of documentation that will be built upon through consultations, project monitoring, evaluation and analysis.

Following this *Introduction*, the second section of the document will briefly address the basic concepts and terminology of the issues under consideration. The third section of the document will provide an overview of related work undertaken by *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF. Following, section four will provide examples of work undertaken by actors more broadly than the program partners, exploring both advocacy and direct service interventions. The final section of the main portion of the document is an overview of lessons learned and some preliminary recommendations for follow up. Four Annexes provide supplemental information on the *Religions for Peace* – UNICEF program, the *Religions for Peace Multi-Religious Declaration (Commitment to World's Children)*, an example of rights-based and traditional/religious perspectives coming into conflict in an advocacy effort to protect children in armed conflict, and finally a short exploration of the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of children affected by conflict.

⁵ See Annex 1 for background on the program.

2. Basic Concepts

There is recognition that child protection actors and religious communities have their own “vocabulary” and a lack of literacy in each other’s languages is one of the main barriers to effective partnerships. It was acknowledged that child protection actors are often not comfortable with the language of religious communities, and thus cannot really understand their systems and structures, nor appreciate their diversity. Religious communities are also generally not comfortable or familiar with the language and concepts of children’s rights and key international instruments, such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*(CRC).

One important aspect of this program is the opportunity to unpack some of the concepts, terminology and belief systems underlying the foci of the initiative, improving the literacy of different actors seeking collaborative engagement. Concepts such as *child, protection, religion, religious communities, inter-religious mechanisms, partnership*, etc., may be taken for granted by the respective partners. The operating assumption of this program, however, is that there are likely to be nuanced, if not fundamental cultural and organizational differences, in belief systems and frameworks of understanding that are reflected in the outward expressions in language, attitude and behavior of religious and child protection actors. These differences may disguise the immense common ground that actually exists in the respective belief systems, and therefore are deserving of reflection and analysis.

The original *Literature and Desk Review* presented definitions utilized by the program partners for the key concepts related to the program. For the most part, they were institutional definitions and as such represented a general consensus. Discussions during the Consultation indicated that some of the fundamental concepts were not “definable,” per se, and benefited from a more descriptive framework of elements, principles and practices that are broadly inclusive. This is particularly the case when utilizing the term *religious communities*. There was general agreement on the following definitions:

- **Child**, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, includes “every human being below the age of 18, unless under applicable law, majority is attained earlier.”
- **Child protection** is the term used by UNICEF to refer to protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse through both prevention and response actions.
- **Humanitarian Assistance**⁶ in this document refers to the provision of comprehensive needs-based resources and services, including but not limited to advocacy for human rights; community mobilization, capacity-building and information dissemination, and the provision of food and non-food items, shelter, water, sanitation, protection, health, and mental health and psychosocial support services.

Initially, UNICEF and *Religions for Peace* had developed the following definition of *religious communities* in their Program Framework document:

... men and women religious actors and structures within religious traditions and organizations at all levels – from local to global. These include grassroots and local communities, leaders, scholars, practitioners, youth groups, women of faith networks, faith-based organizations and denominational, ecumenical and intra-religious umbrella organizations and networks.

⁶ The term *humanitarian intervention* is commonly used, though it is replaced with *assistance* here so as not to be confused with military interventions which are also part of the conflict landscape.

In a session of the Consultation devoted to developing consensus on the term *religious communities* it was clear that a general and tight definition is neither appropriate nor useful. What is needed is a general framework that accounts for the complexity and diversity of religious communities, perhaps identifying categories that are broad and clear without oversimplifying. Child protection actors need to understand the complexity of the religious landscape, both in practical terms and with regards to the sociology of religion. Religious communities exist within a specific ideology (theology or philosophy) often starting with “congregations,” a term used in a number of religious traditions. From there religious traditions are organized in different ways. Some are very hierarchical, while others are not, for example. There must be room for religious communities to be understood in ways they themselves want to be identified.

Some religious communities form organizations/networks/instruments for specific purposes. Among these some of the most visible in humanitarian and development contexts are faith-based organizations (FBOs), but there are many more actors and structures comprising the full range of religious communities that should be better understood by child protection actors.

Religious communities may join together in networks and platforms that go beyond their own religious tradition. In these cases they bring their own beliefs to the table, while respecting the differences between religions. Such platforms may be useful entry points for public institutions to relate to religious communities and structures in a non-partisan fashion. These ***Inter-Religious Mechanisms*** are structures, formal or informal, that leverage the social, spiritual, moral, and other assets of different religious communities to align around common problems and accomplish positive change by harnessing their collective and complementary strengths.⁷

Perhaps one of the most challenging concepts of this project to define consensually is ***Partnership***. It is defined by the UN as “. . . voluntary and collaborative relationships in which all parties agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and to share risks, responsibilities, resources, competencies and benefits. During the Consultation it was again stressed that this is a term that defies a strict definition, and needs to be understood within a framework that outlines values and principles. Some principles of priority to the program partners are shared values, clear expectations, defined roles, specified contributions, joint decision-making, and mutual monitoring, evaluation and opportunities to learn.”⁸ Qualities and approaches to effective partnerships are further explored in Section 6 below.

⁷ Adapted from Religions for Peace, “Strategic Plan: Religions for Peace—Different Faiths, Common Action,” December 2007, p. 14.

⁸ UNICEF, *Review of UNICEF’s Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations*, UNICEF, New York, 2007, p. 6. Definition proposed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

3. Overview of related work by *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF

Within the *Religions for Peace* current *Strategic Plan* (2007 – 2011)⁹ is one of the key actions in its *Global Agenda*. Strategically, *Religions for Peace* outlines advocacy and capacity-building efforts to be prioritized, including those aimed at:

- *Confronting social and cultural violence*
 - *Implement global advocacy to confront and counter social and cultural conflicts, including explicit and hidden sources of violence manifested in gender-based violence and violence against children*
 - *Compile resources and develop best practices and tools to confront these issues*
- *Promoting the rights and well-being of children and families*
 - *Develop multi-religious warrants in support of children and be a global advocate on rights of children with emphasis on the family*
 - *Represent faith communities in international bodies, such as the UN Committee on Rights of Children*¹⁰

Religions for Peace has a long history of advocacy work with UNICEF on child rights and child protection at the international level. The collaboration began in 1990, at the time of the World Summit on Children. The two organizations co-sponsored a religious leaders' conference, held in Princeton, New Jersey, which produced the "World's Religions for the World's Children." This statement of advocacy and commitment on behalf of children highlighted the strong support of religious communities for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Throughout the world, *Religions for Peace* national affiliates have facilitated dialogue and action around myriad peace, justice, and human rights issues. Some of these important initiatives are detailed in Section 5, *Partnering for Advocacy*.

As the lead UN agency for the protection of children's rights, UNICEF has long recognized the significant cultural, moral and human resources possessed by religious communities.

*Religious leaders . . . have strong influence in society and guide the thinking and action of millions of believers. They possess the moral authority to influence social opinions and social behavior especially when it comes to marriage, family life and education of children. And they represent value systems and ethical standards which are older and deeper rooted in society than children's rights. In addition, religious institutions often provide social services to the poor and thus constitute an important actor in the practical realization of child rights. In fact, the role of religion in the sphere of national, international and intercultural dialogue – and conflict – has grown again worldwide in the past decade and so has its relevance for the promotion and understanding of child rights.*¹¹

The value UNICEF places on these partnerships is reflected in its "Child Protection Strategy" document, which states:

*Child protection interventions can be accelerated and maximized by leveraging the full potential of partnerships with United Nations agencies, IFIs, national Governments, civil society, the private sector and faith-based communities*¹².

⁹ Religions for Peace (2007), pp. 7-8

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 12

¹¹ Volkmann, Dr. Christian Salazar, "Why and how UNICEF cooperates with religious leaders in Iran," UNICEF, Tehran, February 2008. pp. 1-2.

¹² "UNICEF Child Protection Strategy," United Nations Children's Fund, Executive Board Annual session 2008, 3-5 June 2008, E/ICEF/2008/5/Rev.1, p. 13

Religious communities can play particularly effective roles in achieving some of the objectives of UNICEF's strategy by strengthening the protective framework for children's well-being. For example, religious communities can play a key role in supporting changes in harmful social norms, and supporting and enhancing the protective roles of families and communities. In situations of armed conflict, where existing protective mechanisms may be weakened or no longer exist, religious communities are often in a desirable position to take up immediate efforts in the provision of needed relief supplies, family tracing for separated and unaccompanied children, psychosocial support initiatives and emergency education, among others. In these ways, religious communities are needed partners in child protection, and UNICEF's other thematic areas.

In 2007 UNICEF conducted a mapping and analysis exercise of its work in 2006 with religious communities and organizations.¹³ The report highlights the broad geographic scope of partnership in all operational regions, as well as across a number of thematic areas. Most of the initiatives were in the areas of advocacy and provision of direct services, (and with regards to conflict-centered work these will be discussed in further detail below). Some of the highlights of the findings include:

- Work in the Middle East region focused strongly on partnerships with universities and Islamic centers of learning to explore child rights concepts within the scholarly and legal traditions of Islam. As applied learning, these efforts extended into social change initiatives around FGM/C and HIV/AIDS.
- In the East Asia and Pacific region, UNICEF partnered with Buddhist, Christian and Islamic communities and organizations. A significant effort in the Mekong sub-region involved religious communities in HIV/AIDS prevention and response activities. In the region there were also education initiatives, and some child rights work with non-state entities in the Philippines.
- Partnerships with religious communities throughout sub-Saharan Africa were primarily with Christian communities, and to a lesser extent Muslim and African traditional religious communities. Work focused on primarily on child protection, particularly of orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS, and prevention/response to violence, abuse and exploitation generally. Work in northeast Africa also centered on FGM/C.
- West and Central Africa saw concerted partnership efforts focusing on HIV/AIDS programming, as well as child protection with primarily Christian organizations. A strong element of all work was in community-based behavioral change communication, peer-to-peer work and support to community-level support groups.
- In the South Asia region, UNICEF worked mainly with Islamic and Buddhist (Bhutan and Nepal) religious communities. Areas of work broadly covered health, child protection, education and HIV/AIDS programming.
- In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, partnerships were with diverse Christian-based religious groups, including Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical. Child protection, child rights and HIV/AIDS programming were the areas of work of these collaborations.
- In Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, partnerships with Islamic and Christian faith-based organizations as well as with government bodies promoting interfaith partnerships focused on education and early childhood development.

In summarizing the strengths of these relationships, the report prioritizes the enormous outreach capacities of the religious partners, as well as their authority and ability to translate child rights/protection concepts to members of their communities. An update of the mapping exercise currently underway indicates UNICEF work with religious communities in over 60 countries, predominantly on the African continent¹⁴. Partners

¹³ Muzzi, Mariana, "UNICEF work with Faith-based organizations in 2006," unpublished report, UNICEF HQ, Child Protection, May 2007. This mapping exercise is currently being updated.

¹⁴ Conflict contexts are not separated out in the data.

identified in the mapping include governmental religion ministries, regional and national conferences and associations (including inter-religious mechanisms), community-level religious organizations/parishes, worship leaders, scholars, etc. Thematic areas emphasize health, education and protection of vulnerable children.

4. Religious communities and child protection

With their extraordinary moral authority, inter-religious mechanisms and religious communities are able to change mindsets and advocate for children's rights in their communities. Their leaders typically have the trust and confidence of individuals and communities. In many conflict-affected contexts, religious communities are also at the frontlines providing direct services and support to children and families. Religious communities commonly provide services such as education, material assistance to the most vulnerable in their community and care for orphaned or vulnerable children. They also provide other forms of support, such as spiritual guidance, community mobilization and organization, communication and dissemination of information, and the provision of information and guidance to members of their community.

The following section will highlight some examples of advocacy and direct service initiatives by religious communities, as well as in partnership with child protection actors.

Partnering for Advocacy

When religious leaders and religious scholars engage in national and international dialogue about different forms of interpretations of child rights they help to develop a deeper global understanding of the Convention from different cultural and religious perspectives.¹⁵

Religious communities are engaged in advocacy on children's rights generally, as well as protection in conflict situations in a number of ways. Religious organizations are members of international coalitions addressing conflict-related protection issues, such as the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA). Such groups influence legal reform at international and national levels, as well as shape the evolving normative framework of civilian protection in armed conflict.

These efforts reflect the alignment between deeply held religious and moral values and emerging consensus on principles of social and legal protection, typically extending beyond the boundaries of the humanitarian "law of war" perspective to a broader advocacy for peace and justice. For example, recognizing the absence of any systematic advocacy effort within the U.N. addressing the concerns of war-affected children of Northern Uganda, the Caritas and Quaker U.N. offices convened an ad-hoc steering committee that became the Northern Uganda Working Group. Through strategic alliances with U.N. member states, the initiative succeeded in raising awareness that eventually led to the creation of mechanisms to begin a substantial humanitarian response, as well as justice and reconciliation efforts (e.g. the inclusion of the Northern Uganda conflict in UN Resolution 1653).¹⁶

There are times, however, where the values and principles of religious belief systems and the social protection framework may come into conflict. Northern Uganda also provides an interesting example of this, as illustrated in Annex 3.

Examples of advocacy with Religious Communities

¹⁵ Volmann, p. 13.

¹⁶ Religions for Peace, "Faith-Based Organizations Forum on Multi-religious Cooperation for Humanitarian Relief, Development and Peace: Report and Recommendations," report of a conference hosted by *Religions for Peace* and convened by Humanity First, Frankfurt, Germany, November 2008, pp. 19 – 20.

As noted earlier, *Religions for Peace* has a long history of inter-religious advocacy on issues related to conflict, peace building, human rights, and a particular focus on youth. The following are some examples of advocacy efforts on behalf of children and youth.

- On the occasion of the UN Special Session on Children in 2002, *Religions for Peace* convened a multi-religious forum with religious leaders from conflict and post-conflict countries. With high-level representatives from UNICEF, including the Executive Director, the group declared their commitment to advocate for a *World Fit for Children* (see full text of Declaration in Annex 2). The strength of religious communities to address the protection of children's rights, and the necessity of partnership in this endeavor is eloquently stated in the report of the consultation:

The instinct to care for children comes from deep within the teachings and spiritual vision of all religious traditions, which motivates people of faith to make the commitment to take practical actions for children. Fulfilling these commitments requires the collaborations of religious communities with each other, and with other partners, because these challenges cut across all religions and are too great for any one group to handle alone.¹⁷

- In 2004 *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF finalized a Joint Strategy for Advancing Multi-Religious Action for Children in recognition that religions have a key role to play in addressing the challenges facing the world's children. The strategy focuses on global advocacy for child rights; developing toolkits for religious leaders; engaging the religious media; and leveraging national partnerships with faith-based organizations. Follow up activities have included the development of training materials and sessions on partnering with faith-based organizations to address issues such as HIV/AIDS, conflict transformation, education, women's issues, etc.
- In response to the UN Study on Violence Against Children, the *Religions for Peace* World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan in August 2006 produced the "Multi-religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children." This charter outlines ways in which religious communities can work to reduce violence in line with the 12 overarching recommendations from the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children. As a follow up to the Declaration, UNICEF has partnered with *Religions for Peace* to develop a manual for religious leaders working to end violence against children (currently in production).
- On the national level, Inter-Religious Councils established and supported by WCRP have been involved in child rights/protection advocacy. On the International Day of the Child, 16th June 2007, *Religions for Peace* Inter-Religious Council of Kenya condemned the rising incidents of sexual and other forms of violence against children. In a powerful statement they called on all Kenyans to take action to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse. They said acts of violence hamper children's growth and deny them the opportunity to develop into healthy and wholesome adults. The statement was signed by Nairobi Catholic Archbishop Ndingi Mwana A 'Nzeki, Anglican Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi, Professor Abdulgafur El Busaidy of the Supreme Court of Kenya Muslims and Rashmin Chitnis of the Hindu Council.¹⁸
- In DRC, women religious leaders mobilized and supported by *Religions for Peace* are developing advocacy campaigns addressing violence against women and children throughout the country, including conflict-affected areas. The *Religions for Peace* Inter-Religious Council in Sierra Leone, which

¹⁷ World Conference on Religion and Peace, *Care, Commitment and Collaboration: The Role of Religious Communities in Creating a World Fit for Children*, The outcome report of a multi-religious gathering on the occasion of the United Nations Special Session on Children, New York, 6-7 May 2002, p 7.

¹⁸ Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, Statement, International Day of the Child, 2007

was active during the war years in advocating for the release of children abducted by rebel forces, continues to work with UNICEF in implementing child rights programming in the country.

- Since 2002 *Religions for Peace* has been advocating and mediating for peace in Sri Lanka. The particular risks to children in the conflict have been highlighted, such as the call to end recruitment of children into armed forces and groups made in the “Jaffna Declaration” in 2007.¹⁹ The *Religions for Peace* West Africa Inter-Religious Council Coordinating Committee (WA IRCCC) has also spoken out against the use of children in armed conflict in the conflict-saturated sub-region of West Africa, condemning such a practice as a violation of “the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Holy Scriptures.”²⁰
- In response to the recent conflicts in Kenya and Gaza, as well as the long-standing conflict in Mindanao (Philippines) *Religions for Peace* and its regional and country-level affiliates have issued statements condemning violence against innocent civilians and pledging inter-religious responses. Additionally, youth from these situations, and others joining them in solidarity have come together in the spirit of inter-religious cooperation, mediation and peace building. Advocacy statements and plans of action have emerged from these dialogues.
- Just two weeks after the occupation of Baghdad in 2003, *Religions for Peace* met with senior religious leaders in Iraq and laid the groundwork for their first face-to-face meeting in decades. During that meeting, Iraqi religious leaders requested that *Religions for Peace* help them build their own Inter-Religious Council. Although building this IRC proved challenging in such a fractured environment, Iraqi religious leaders—Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, and Christians—have since taken promising steps to advance desperately needed religious cooperation. *Religions for Peace’s* principled approach of multi-religious cooperation garnered the trust of the Iraqi religious leaders, who consequently convened even during the most difficult of circumstances, often at great risk to personal safety. To that end, *Religions for Peace* has organized and funded their discussions in more neutral venues in England, Jordan, Korea, and Japan.
- In 2009 the Inter-Religious Council of Burundi, with support from *Religions for Peace*, began organizing public forums on the issues of refugees, land and reintegration in order that religious leaders can contribute to ensuring effective settlements of disputes arising with the return of displaced populations to their areas of origin after the prolonged conflict. Religious leaders, representatives of the civil society organizations, local government officials and the citizens in local communities of Makamba province, Bujumbura Rural and Rumonge area of Bururi province, where most of the serious land tenure and re-integration issues are faced, has intended to ensure effective settlement of potential disputes. Religious leaders are also addressing the welfare of the returnees, including children in Rumonge and Bujumbura Rural to improve their conditions and promote harmonious co-existence.
- The Inter-religious Council of Uganda, with the support from *Religions for Peace*, engaged youth in peace and reconciliation activities in 2009. Youth in and out of school have been convened to share their experiences in peace building and reconciliation, as well as define their role in promoting peaceful coexistence. Some of the outcomes of this work include:
 - Youth peace clubs were established in selected faith-based schools that did not originally have the clubs.
 - Existing school clubs were strengthened by the sharing of experiences.

¹⁹ Religions for Peace, “Jaffna Declaration of Religious Leaders: Statement Issued at Conclusion of the International Summit of Religious Leaders on Peace in Sri Lanka,” Jaffna, Sri Lanka, 13 December 2007,

²⁰ From the statement issued by the West Africa Inter-Religious Council Coordinating Committee at the conclusion of the West Africa IRCCC Regional Consultation, Monrovia, Liberia, 2005.

- The young people came up with action plans to enroll as many students as possible as agents of peace and reconciliation.²¹

The Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) is a global inter-religious network exclusively devoted to child rights and other children's issues. Its membership and partners include a diverse group of religious leaders, religious organizations serving children, and development organizations. In November 2009, the Arigatou Foundation, which supports GNRC, launched the *World Day of Prayer and Action for Children (DPAC)*, meant to highlight the important role faith-based actors, in partnership with child rights organizations, can play to promote children's rights and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children is meant to take place each November 20- the Universal Children's Day. In 2009, *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF supported many DPAC related activities.

In 2006 the Philippine Interfaith Network for Children (PHILINC) was organized with assistance from UNICEF to bring together the different religious communities with the common goal of promoting child rights and child protection. In that same year, almost 200 religious leaders of different faiths attended a major dialogue on the Mindanao Island group with a particular focus on child rights and the peace perspectives of non-state armed groups. The National Democratic Front (NDF), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front participated in that dialogue, expressed their views openly on the protection of children and basically pledged their support to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) is an inter-faith forum comprised of leaders of the Catholic Church, Anglican Church of Uganda, Orthodox Church and Muslim communities in the districts of Gulu and Kitgum in Northern Uganda. Since 1998, ARLPI has worked towards the proactive peaceful resolution of conflicts in Uganda, primarily the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led conflict in Northern Uganda. Through mediation, advocacy (at local, national and international levels) and direct community support the organization has been instrumental in promoting social justice and human rights throughout one of the worst civil conflicts in modern history.

Children have borne the brunt of much of Northern Uganda's suffering, being the targets of the LRA's violence in multiple forms. Along with their parents, children have been killed in their own homes, forced into long-term displacement, and lacked access to basic services. Children also became a focus of the LRA's forced recruitment campaign. It is estimated that over 30,000 children were abducted and forced to become fighters, porters, camp supports and sexual slaves over the course of the conflict. ARLPI dedicated considerable time and resources to advocating for the release of abducted children and an end to the practice of abduction. The group also provided direct support to formerly abducted children through the provision of cleansing and reconciliation rituals that merge Christian, Islamic and traditional Acholi practices, as well as education and vocational training.

It has been noted that this partnership of religious leaders "pools together moral authority, status and an extensive organisational anchor of churches, parishes and mosques."²² This author can speak to the

²¹ Examples from Iraq, Burundi and Uganda are extracted from *Religions for Peace* internal documents

enormous respect commanded by ARLPI, and has seen child protection INGO's and CSO's work in strong partnership with the organization.

In 2002, in the Molukus, Indonesia, where religious conflict had torn communities apart and created intolerance and distrust, a Muslim-Christian coalition of NGO's partnered with UNICEF to establish a Children's Parliament to give voice to children and create opportunities for children of different religions to interact. It was not only the first Children's Parliament in Indonesia, but also the first significant event to cross the religious divide. The initiative led to child rights workshops in different conflict-affected areas of Indonesia, and to peace building activities contributing to the peace initiative in the Molukus, including a peace education curriculum integrated into the provincial education system.²³

The United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict has long worked with religious bodies in advocating for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. Religiously affiliated non-governmental organizations are represented on the Special Representative's Advisory Group of Non-governmental Organizations, and historically the office has established relationships and consulted with bodies such as the World Council of Churches, the Holy See and local Catholic Church communities, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, to name a few collaborations.

UNICEF has also worked with specific religious communities in developing advocacy strategies and tools to advance children's rights and their protection. Most of the work documented has dealt with child abuse/violence, and typically has not been related to conflict situations.

Some of the best-documented UNICEF partnerships are with Islamic scholars, jurists and clerics to explore interpretations of children's rights in Islamic teaching and law, as well as to advocate on particular issues of concern. Some examples from non-conflict settings include:

- In Sudan, UNICEF has addressed issues of abandonment of infants and alternative family care by securing the support of prominent Imams. Significantly, in 2006 the Fatwa Council of Sudan issued a *fatwa*²⁴ stating the abandoned babies should be viewed as orphans within the Islamic context, and thus had the right to full State and community support. The *fatwa* also declared that pregnancy was not alone proof of adultery, and that mothers and their children should not be separated if they are in the judicial system, which had been a common practice. The program saw significant success in finding alternative community-based care for institutionalized children.²⁵
- Al-Azhar University in Cairo and UNICEF first collaborated on a child rights information and advocacy tool in 1405 Hijrah (1985 AD), with the publication of *Child Care in Islam*. The subsequent

²² Kasaija, Apuuli Philip, "Civil Society and Conflict Resolution: The Role of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in the Northern Uganda Conflict," paper presented at the 7th Annual Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) Bangkok Thailand, 9-12 July 2006, p. 6.

²³ UNICEF, *Adolescent programming experiences during conflict and post-conflict: Case Studies*, UNICEF, New York, 2004, pp. 37 – 46.

²⁴ A *Fatwa* is a religious opinion issued by an Islamic authority on different issues of Islamic Law and how they should be understood, interpreted or applied.

²⁵ UNICEF Sudan, "Technical Briefing Paper 1: Alternative Family Care," UNICEF, Khartoum, August 2007

20 years saw enormous progress in the evolution of children’s rights, with the near universal ratification of the CRC and other global developments. Therefore, in the year 1425 Hijrah (2004 AD), UNICEF approached the International Islamic Centre for Demographic Studies and Research at Al-Azhar University to update the analysis of child rights in the context of Islam. Experts from the fields of theology, medical science, psychology, sociology and education were convened to draft a document that was then discussed by international experts. The document addressed four major themes—child rights, child health, child protection and child education—from the perspective of practitioners in the various fields. These themes were then examined in the context of Shari’a, and supported by verses from the Holy Qur’an, with Hadiths from the Prophetic Tradition. The resulting publication, *Children in Islam: Their Care, Upbringing and Protection*, is a tool for theologians and imams, child rights and welfare workers, health care providers, educators, policy makers and others involved in promoting and protection the rights of children in the Muslim world.²⁶

- In Iran, UNICEF has been “fostering dialogue with religious leaders and stimulating research and thinking about child rights, hoping that this will lead to interpretations of Islamic principles and norms that are consistent with and supportive to child rights.”²⁷ This dialogue has included theological research and academic discussion to produce documents that interpret the articles of the CRC from Islamic perspectives. One product of this initiative is the book, *Disciplining Children With Kindness: A Shi’ite Shari’a Perspective*, which presents interpretations of Kuranic and Shia texts by prominent Iranian scholars discussing abuse, exploitation and violence against children. Similar work has been done on the topic of HIV/AIDS.

UNICEF has also worked with Kharazmi University to develop a Master’s Course on child rights, the idea for which came from Ayatollah Bojnourdi after his participation in the *Religions for Peace* 2006 conference in Toledo, Spain.

- In Egypt, data from programme evaluations indicate that religion continues to be a strong factor in the support of FGM/C, especially amongst men. In addition, in areas where attitudes are shifting there continue to be pockets of resistance, especially in Muslim communities. The national programme identified intellectuals and religious scholars against FGM/C and created an organized, national, religious anti-FGM/C group aimed at enhancing the progressive discourse of religious personnel, and reinforcing it through media interventions to reach out to the population at large promoting clear and consistent information. Religious leaders were involved as a group beyond the boundaries of villages and communities and this helped to enhance the public dialogue on the topic. Furthermore, in 2008 Al-Azhar Supreme Council of Islamic Research officially issued a *fatwa* explaining that FGM/C has no basis in core Islamic *sharia* or any of its partial provisions and that it is a sinful action that should be avoided. (Source: UNICEF 2009)
- A 2006 evaluation of UNICEF community-based child protection programming in Somalia highlighted the significance of religious teaching in child protection advocacy work with communities. “There was considerable evidence and feedback that Child Protection Advocates (CPAs) and Child Protection Committees (CPCs) found tools such as the use of Koranic verses and local proverbs relating to child protection to be helpful to engage communities and to stop harmful practices, such as FGM/C... the use of a resource booklet that highlighted relevant Somali and religious teachings that supported child protection was cited as an effective and accepted method to engage all sectors of the community to change harmful practices.”²⁸
- In Mauritania corporal punishment is widespread in Mahadras (koranic schools), secular primary

²⁶ Al-Azhar University and UNICEF, *Children in Islam: Their Care, Upbringing and Protection*, UNICEF, New York, 2005.

²⁷ Volkmann, *ibid*, p. 8

²⁸ Hassan, Tirana, “Community-based Child Protection Programme Evaluation and Review,” September – August 2006, pp. 6, 15

schools, as well as within families. It is considered a suitable and effective educational method of discipline. UNICEF Mauritania analyzed this widespread phenomenon in order to find the best way to address it. Given the pre-eminent position of religious leaders in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, a partnership with the Imams and Religious Leaders Network for Child Rights was deemed an appropriate entry point. This approach is also in line with the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, which urges close collaboration with community and religious leaders.

For its part, the Imams Network carried out a study to assess whether corporal punishment is allowed in Islam. The study concluded that violence has no place in the Koran and thus in Islam. The results of the study will now form the basis of a *fatwa* barring physical and verbal violence against children in the educational system, as well as in the home. "The evidence that corporal punishment is forbidden by Islam is clear and abiding for all of us," declared the President of the Imams Network, Hademine Ould Saleck. "We must apply Sharia (Islamic law), which fully protects children."

Although a similar study had been carried out in Shiite Iran, no such evidence existed within the Sunni environment. So, this comprehensive and unprecedented study will be widely disseminated in Mauritania (schools, Mahadras, Mosques, families), as well as promoted internationally to gain a consensus in the Islamic world and clarify once and for all the stance of Islam towards corporal punishment against children. (Source: UNICEF Mauritania Country Office, 2009).

Partnering for the Provision of Direct Services

In the midst of an armed conflict today an alliance between the Catholic Church and UNICEF is beginning to bear fruits. Children are happily studying, families are attending a school where they are recovering lost hopes and they become guardians of a place where they receive tools that can open the way to a better life for them.²⁹

The lack of documentation about religious communities' involvement in the provision of direct services for children affected by armed conflict belies the true extent of this work. Anecdotal experience reveals a great deal of involvement in a variety of contexts.

One of the few documents found in this literature/desk review that most directly addresses the role of religious communities in child protection in armed conflict is the report of the 2002 *Religions for Peace* Women's Program consultation of women religious leaders convened in Cordoba, Spain. The various presentations of the consultation summarized in the report stress how, as both *women* and *religious* persons, religious women have many resources to offer children, and their communities at large in situations of armed conflict. Religious women already tend to be a part of organizing networks and can mobilize those affiliations in emergency responses, examples range from financial and material support, to education, as well as social and individual support. Importantly, religious women bring indigenous knowledge of female culture, shared concerns with women and children as some of the most vulnerable persons in conflict situations, and can assert a social status that may give voice to women's concerns and facilitate a greater involvement of women in service provision.³⁰

In Iraq, complementing its multi-religious advocacy efforts from the outset of the conflict, *Religions for Peace*

²⁹ Latin American Episcopal Conference and UNICEF, "Working for the Children: Some Stories about Our Joint Efforts in Latin America," undated, p. 23. Describing the more than 160 schools for children displaced by armed conflict in Colombia.

³⁰ Religions for Peace, *Religious Women, Children, Armed Conflict: Multiple Challenges, Unique Opportunities*, WCRP Women's Program, New York, 2002. p. 69

equipped local affiliate partners to help war-injured Iraqi children, including sending the most critically injured to Korea for reconstructive surgeries. In addition, 20 Iraqi doctors, chosen jointly by the leaders of the different religious communities, were sent for specialized surgical training in Korea, where they learned how to treat the specific injuries children can sustain in armed conflict. While such humanitarian efforts have their own inherent medical value, they have an even larger symbolic impact, demonstrating the real possibility and benefit of multi-religious harmony.

As discussed in their article in *Forced Migration Review*,³¹ in 2006 during heavy fighting in Eastern Sri Lanka, The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Muslim Aid (MA) were both supporting an influx of IDPs from Muslim communities into a predominantly Sinhalese area. There were already significant ethnic/religious tensions between these groups. Few other NGOs were working in this area and UMCOR and MA found themselves quickly working together to provide relief services. They soon realized that their cooperation had benefits beyond the immediate facilitation of logistics and aid delivery.

Both agencies worked in coordination with their respective faith and community leaders and councils to coordinate the mobilisation of thousands of volunteers who brought food and non-food relief items to the IDP camps and distribution centres. MA engaged with the Imams, the coordinating council for Muslim theologians and communities, discussed the impartial nature of humanitarianism with them and vouched for UMCOR staff's neutrality. Discussions centred on the imperative of both faiths to serve humanity and reduce the suffering of the disadvantaged. This was language which people could understand and relate to. UMCOR did the same through local Methodist priests in Christian areas – and with Hindus whom the priests knew. Soon those villages where UMCOR workers had been held at gunpoint and attacked by villagers a couple of weeks previously welcomed both UMCOR and MA staff.³²

The partners also worked with Buddhist community leaders who joined in the inter-faith relief effort. UMCOR and MA eventually formalized their partnership at the international level and continue collaborating in inter-faith relief efforts. They have summarized some of the key attributes of the collaboration that benefited the overall effectiveness of their assistances:

- Their ability to work collaboratively in an insecure environment, as NGOs representing different faith communities had a calming effect in many of the communities.
- The common belief in serving humanity contributes to the ability to work together and can largely eliminate the competitiveness over resources in relief and development.
- The ability to quickly connect with expansive religious, social and cultural networks facilitated efficiency.
- By working with religious leaders they found a greater impact on sustainable programming and empowerment of vulnerable members of communities.
- The common religious emphasis on peace, reconciliation, respect and understanding influenced community cooperation for the common good.

Both MA and UMCOR have acknowledged challenges in the work, with some their own organizations' members worried about the possible loss of their religious identity, and the loss of religious leaders' time for their usual responsibilities when they are heavily engaged in humanitarian activities. UMCOR and MA feel that they can be sensitive to and mitigate the potential of these concerns, and that the benefits of their inter-religious humanitarian collaboration outweigh the challenges.³³

³¹ Hovey and Saleem (2008).

³² Ibid, pp. 66.

³³ Ibid, pp. 66 - 67

The “common belief in serving humanity” mentioned in the example of the UMCOR and MA partnership is noted in numerous child protection program reviews and evaluations as one of the primary reasons why collaboration with religious communities in conflict and other emergencies is such an effective approach. In a UNICEF evaluation of emergency assistances for women and children in Ivory Coast in 2003, it was noted that religious communities were very active in assisting vulnerable women and children on their own initiative, and could be of further support with some financial and material assistance. Religious structures such as churches and mosques were used for humanitarian efforts that ranged from medical assistance for physical and mental health issues, to providing activities for children, accommodation and transport. Both Christian and Muslim organizations and associations also partnered with humanitarian NGOs in their emergency assistances.³⁴

In addition to their inherently humanitarian mandates, child protection actors see religious communities as valuable partners due to their decentralized presence in areas that were not always easily accessible to UN agencies or NGOs. Anecdotal information provided by child protection specialists in countries such as Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sierra Leone, Colombia and others featuring highly insecure and, often, remote environments state that they relied on the networks of religious communities that nearly always remained present. For example, refugees in a remote area of Western Uganda have found religious communities such as churches and a Muslim youth group to provide some of the only support they have. In addition to offering shelter, they provide education, financial and other assistance where few, if any other services exist. A study conducted by the Refugee Law Project and Save the Children Uganda, refugee children in Ntoroko County found that:

Religious organisations are one of the only opportunities for non-school-based activities for children, and children identified religious institutions as ‘safe places’ in focus group discussions. Moreover, religious institutions provide a forum for different groups to intermix. Sharing a common faith has helped refugees and nationals to overcome possible differences. As one Ugandan man said, ‘The refugees have helped us spiritually.’³⁵

A child protection specialist who had been involved in reintegration of children associated with armed groups in Burundi reports that she relied on the Catholic Dioceses in many districts to facilitate the programming in the communities of return. Some of these had the legal status of NGOs, called “Bureaux Diocésains de Développement.” Many of these were well-staffed, trained and experienced in all aspects of project management, and other requirements of international organizations and donors. In addition, it was noted that the moral authority they carried in communities and their belief systems were significant reasons they were chosen as partners. They could avail themselves of a wide grassroots network of parishes, and they were promoting the same values of child protection, reconciliation, and community empowerment as UNICEF.³⁶ These statements were echoed about the role of the Catholic Church in child protection by a researcher working in the DRC.³⁷

Further on the issue of reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, the

³⁴ UNICEF evaluation, “Crise Ivoirienne: Situation des Enfants et des Femmes Affectees et Reponses Humanitaires,” unpublished report, 2003, pp. 28 – 29.

³⁵ Refugee Law Project, “Child Protection in the Context of Displacement: Ntoroko County, Bundibugyo District,” Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 13, authored by Christina Clark with support from Save the Children in Uganda, Kampala, December 2004, p. 24.

³⁶ Personal interview with former UNICEF staff, September 2009.

³⁷ Personal interview with child protection specialist, September 2009.

importance of cultural and religious leaders in community reintegration has been noted in many contexts, particularly African.³⁸ Save the Children Alliance cites this as a key aspect of the process work with the community that takes the form of:

*an ongoing dialogue with parents, children and community members, in particular those who have roles of duty bearers and **are influential in important spheres of cultural and religious life**. The quality of the relationship that agencies are able to develop with communities will be crucial for the successful integration of children.*³⁹

A recent inter-agency initiative explores the various roles played by community child protection mechanisms and key attributes of their effectiveness.⁴⁰ The study reviewed evaluations of over 150 interventions in both conflict and non-conflict affected areas, so while the findings are not solely addressing the unique dynamics of conflict situations, they are significant and general enough for applicability in mostly conflict settings. The findings highlight many of the attributes already discussed in the examples above, reinforcing the moral authority and legitimacy of religious communities to act decisively and effectively, the reach and organic nature of their networks, and the sustainability of the networks. Additionally, the report found that the level of community “ownership” of child protection mechanisms strongly influenced their effectiveness and sustainability. It noted that the “highest level of community ownership of child-focused community groups was in faith-based groups working with children affected by HIV/AIDS” (p. 13). In addition to exploring all of the positive attributes of assistances in which religious communities have played a leading role, the report states “numerous evaluations attributed programs’ limited effectiveness to their failure to work in partnership with religious leaders and important cultural resources” (p. 13).

In the overall analysis of the effectiveness of child-focused community groups, the study presents seven key attributes:

- Community ownership
- Building on Existing Resources
- Support from leaders (non-formal and formal)
- Child participation
- Management of Issues of Power, Diversity and Inclusivity
- Resources
- Linkages with formal and non-formal systems

As described in the report, at least five of these key elements can directly relate to the roles of religious leaders and the influence of religious communities on the wider population. This role speaks to the enormous influence these leaders wield in provision of child protection service delivery.

³⁸ See Verhey, Beth, “Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating,” Africa Working Papers No. 23, The World Bank, November 2001.

³⁹ International Save the Children Alliance, *A Fighting Chance: Guidelines and implications for programmes involving children associated with armed groups and armed forces*, London, 2004.

⁴⁰ Wessells, Mike, “What Are We Learning About Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms? An Inter-Agency Review of the Evidence From Humanitarian and Development Settings,” draft inter-agency report, July 2009. For the purposes of the report the term “child-focused community group” is used to refer to a range of mechanisms such as Child Protection (or Welfare) Committees, Community Care Groups, Community Watch Groups, etc.

5. Partnership: principles, practice and challenges

Partnership is a complex concept that defies a singular definition. The UNICEF study cited in the previous section on *Basic Concepts* notes that the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) – including religiously affiliated organizations – which participated in the evaluation, concur with UNICEF’s definition of *partnership*. This analysis went beyond defining the word, to identifying qualities of partnership, and highlighted the priority expectations that CSOs have in their partnerships with UNICEF. Given the focus of enhancing partnerships between religious communities, particularly inter-religious mechanisms (many of which will be part of civil society), these expectations are worth noting herein:

- a) Evolve progressively into collaborations akin to communities of practice;
- b) Strengthen CSO capacities as change agents, individually and collectively;
- c) Commit to joint monitoring of, and learning from, partnership processes and results;
- d) Lead to positive, measurable and sustainable realization of the rights of children.⁴¹

The qualities highlighted above indicate that partnership is clearly understood to be a mutually reinforcing inter-relational process. The evaluation indicated, however, that CSOs do not always find these qualities in their partnerships with UNICEF and other UN agencies. The inherent power differentials between UN and CSO agencies often create relationships lacking trust, transparency, shared risk-taking, mutual accountability, fair credit sharing and shared investment, among other deficits.⁴² CSOs complain that they often feel their partnerships with UNICEF are distilled down to transfer of funds and outsourcing of service provision. But there is clearly avision of what is possible:

CSOs feel that partnership with UNICEF and other agencies works better when focusing on shared strengths rather than simply on funds. For most, the principal partnership conditions were time, mutual commitment and complementary abilities to act. UNICEF recognizes CSOs’ power to influence public opinion and shape global public policy and CSOs recognize that UNICEF brings unmatched access to governments, country and global presence, technical capacity and convening power. Generally, both recognize that together they can best ensure children’s rights. Expert opinion, UNICEF staff and CSOs all agree that partnership should achieve a ‘third way’ - positive change in organizations themselves and in how they address their mutual agendas.⁴³

In synthesizing the lessons of the evaluation, UNICEF reiterated its commitment to partnerships and collaborative relationships, and articulated a strategic vision, framework and guiding principles for enhancing future approaches to partnership.⁴⁴ The lessons learned highlight the added value that partnerships bring to programming for children rights, including:⁴⁵

- Stronger advocacy for children’s rights
- Enhanced contributions to the development and positive transformation of societies (e.g. access to children’s education, participation of indigenous groups, gender mainstreaming)
- Greater aid effectiveness
- Introduction of more innovative approaches to programming

⁴¹ UNICEF (2007), p.6

⁴² Ibid, p. 33

⁴³ Ibid, p. 31.

⁴⁴ United Nations Children’s Fund, *UNICEF strategic framework for partnerships and collaborative relationships*, report to the Executive Board Annual Session 2009, 8 – 10 June 2009, E/ICEF/2009/10. For the purposes of this section, the term “partnership” includes formal partnerships as well as collaborative relationships.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 8 – 10.

- Exchange of knowledge and expertise around children’s issues leads to a strengthened knowledge base
- Attracting additional resources for children’s programming

In light of the analysis of its partnerships, the following are some of the guiding principles that have been outlined in the UNICEF strategic framework and resonate with the findings of this report:⁴⁶

- Engagement in partnerships will focus on providing **clearly defined added value** on delivering results for children and **promoting children’s rights**.
- Partner selection criteria will stress commitment to the core values of UNICEF, the UN and the CRC, including **transparency, accountability** and sound financial management.
- Partner selection will also seek to bring **specific skills, resources and abilities** that complement UNICEF core competencies.
- Activities of partnerships are to be aligned with and complement donor and national development policies, contribute to **sustainable development**, and foster national and local **ownership and capacity building** to realize children’s rights.
- Objectives and activities of partnerships should be fully **transparent** and involve **mutual contributions as well as shared risks** and benefits for all partners.
- The **integrity and independence** of UNICEF shall be maintained in partnerships.
- Partnerships stress **cost-effectiveness**.

Religious communities have been exploring their roles in partnering with each other, as well as with secular humanitarian organizations to achieve common goals. The *Faith-Based Organizations Forum on Multi-Religious Cooperation for Humanitarian Relief, Development and Peace* has been convened by *Religions for Peace* since 2008. The purpose is to explore questions about the potential for multi-religious cooperation to add to the quality of humanitarian and development efforts. Their discussions have raised strikingly similar concerns, priorities and principles as raised by the broad array of CSOs in the UNICEF partnership evaluation.

Observations about Partnerships⁴⁷

1. Partnerships are more binding than occasional cooperation projects.
2. Forms of partnership include strategic alliances, common approaches to common goals, joint resource mobilization efforts, and joint communication efforts.
3. Partners need to identify the advantages and disadvantages that are involved in partnership between “insiders” and “outsiders.”
4. Partnerships have greater impact when they:
 - a. are based on a clear set of principles (e.g. transparency and mutual respect, trust and confidence)
 - b. are formed with all parties “at the table”
 - c. recognize and value what each group brings to the partnership
 - d. recognize the contexts in which the other partners operate
 - e. identify the advantages and disadvantages in partnerships between “insiders” and “outsiders.” are practical and value-orientated
5. Coordinating bodies should be more on the facilitating side and not demanding control.
6. Elements of strong partnership agreements may include written document, defined terminology; joint strategies; shared resources.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 17 – 18.

⁴⁷ *Religions for Peace*, “Faith-Based Organizations Forum on Multi-Religious Cooperation for Humanitarian Relief, Development and Peace: Report and Recommendations,” report of a conference convened by Religions for Peace and hosted by Humanity First, Hamburg, Germany, November 2008, p. 16.

In exploring a set of agreed to principles to guide multi-religious partnerships, as well as those with secular organizations, the Forum agreed that the fundamental principles of the Global Humanitarian Platform⁴⁸ could appropriately apply to all humanitarian organizations, including those that are religiously affiliated. In summary:

- Equality
- Transparency
- Result-oriented approach
- Responsibility
- Complementarity

Additionally, it was agreed by the Forum that the five guiding principles of *Religions for Peace* provide additional guidance for multi-religious cooperation:⁴⁹

- Respect religious differences
- Act on deeply held and widely shared values
- Preserve the identity of each religious community
- Honor the different ways religious communities are organized
- Support locally led multi-religious structures

Most of what is presented above was reiterated in the Consultation. *Partnerships* much more than a word; is a complex concept that also requires a clear articulation of vocabulary, identification of shared priorities and values, and mutual respect for identity. From the perspective of religious communities, partnership is fundamentally about human relationships, and the importance of sincerity, transparency and mutual respect. While child protection actors agree with this perspective, the institutional realities they are working in challenge them to act on these principles. Concrete steps need to be taken to:

- articulate the specific roles, responsibilities and contributions of each actor;
- explicitly state the shared values and commitments implied in the partnership;
- ensure transparent, sincere, respectful relationships that seek parity in all aspects of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating partnership endeavors;
- identify the social-political-economic context that will be affected and jointly defined by partners.

All of the above calls for creating new and flexible strategies of engagement that can address organizational challenges, seek common ground and respect human values. It is essential to recognize that there are different ways to build relationships with religious communities by respecting diversity and identity, while establishing solidarity around common values, such as the protection of children. The current partnership program between *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF offers a significant opportunity to test approaches and develop creative and sustainable partnership models.

⁴⁸ The Global Humanitarian Platform a network of humanitarian NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the UN and other international organizations linked around the shared responsibility to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action. <http://www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/ghp.html>

⁴⁹ *Religions for Peace* (2008), p. 17.

6. Summary of Lessons Learned and Recommendations

There is some clear consensus about the strengths that partnerships with religious communities bring to child protection work, both in conflict and non-conflict affected environments. While much more has been documented about the work of religious communities in response to HIV/AIDS and its impacts on children, there is increasing acknowledgement and documentation on the role of religious communities in providing child protection advocacy and direct services to children affected by conflict. This documentation is also beginning to outline some of the challenges faced by religious communities involved in humanitarian efforts, and in their partnerships with child protection actors. Much more work is needed to establish the knowledge base necessary to develop effective partnership strategies. What follows is a brief summary of some of the lessons learned in the course of this review, and enriched by the Consultation of experts.

Strengths and Resources Religious Communities Bring to Child Protection – What they are doing well

- The mandates and belief systems of most religious communities encourages their involvement in helping the more vulnerable members of their communities. The participation of the religious communities often leads to interventions that are more organic and grounded in shared value systems.
- The fundamental values shared by most of the world's religions have informed children's rights. There is more common ground between religious and humanitarian belief systems than is often assumed, and the work of "translating" child rights concepts into the more commonly understood tenets and beliefs of religious communities has shown to have a very positive effect in grassroots child protection advocacy work.
- The processes of reflection and dialogue, which are inherent within much religious practice, provide opportunities for child protection actors to participate in the types of community processes that lead to concrete changes in attitudes and actions. Social science research is establishing evidence that these kinds of processes have greater powers to change social norms deemed harmful to children than advocacy approaches that are more legalistic and punitive in nature.
- Religious communities locate the basic desire to uplift people within an expansive cosmology. Each major religion is influenced by understandings of time and human mortality, as well as a sense of actions and deeds in this life having an impact on one's experience of after-life or eternity. These very deep and long-range philosophical frameworks often shape the call to service into long-term commitments; not necessarily driven by the short-term nature of humanitarian funding and assistance.
- Related to the point above, religious communities tend to see service to vulnerable individuals within larger commitments such as peace, justice and reconciliation. Thus, meeting the immediate needs of conflict-affected individuals is a benchmark, but is not the ultimate end of an assistance. This perspective bridges emergency humanitarian and development goals in coherent and holistic ways. Given the funding, philosophical and organizational limitations of emergency work, religious communities have the potential to provide the continuity and sustainability that have often challenged child protection actors in post-conflict contexts.
- Religious communities tend to have well-established structures of authority in most every environment that a child protection actor might enter. The established trust that a community has in religious leadership would take much longer for outside child protection actors to earn. Particularly in insecure environments, this level of trust provides not only efficiency in programming, but can impart a level of security for child protection actors seen to be working in respectful and collaborative ways with religious authorities. This level of trust can sometimes be multiplied in traditional and other communities where spiritual authority often overlaps with maintaining clan or cultural norms.

- Religious communities, particularly of the larger denominations often have expansive and decentralized networks that they are able to quickly and naturally tap into. This enhances efficiency and sustainability in both advocacy and direct service provision, with an ability to quickly mobilize resources, particularly in remote or insecure environments that child protection actors may not be able to easily or sustainably access.
- Most religious communities are already community-based service providers, providing care and support for vulnerable persons (e.g. foster and other care for children without adequate parental care; emergency support in crises—material, financial, spiritual). They have the mandate and the presence to provide spiritual support and stability in difficult circumstances, therefore meeting important psychosocial needs people have in the face of adversity.
- Because religious actors are able to enter the family sphere in a way most outside actors cannot, they can be a conduit of communication for social change and transformations. In these ways they can also help to close the gap between culture and religion.
- Religious communities are often integral to peace processes, as their moral authority and the trust and impartiality bestowed upon religious/spiritual leaders allows them to play significant roles in mediation and reconciliation.
- Inter-religious cooperation in conflict situations, particularly those in which ethnic and/or religious issues are points of tension, can be a powerful display of the positive and unifying power of religion for communities who have come to view differences as divisive. Further, inter-religious cooperation with secular child protection actors can mediate conflicts arising from suspicions of outside, non-religious organizations and their intentions.

Strengths of Child Protection Actors Working with Religious Communities – What they are doing well

- Child protection actors, such as UNICEF, can provide a bridge between government level policy initiatives and action/programming at the community level. They have been successful at putting child protection issues on national development agendas, mainstreaming of child protection into broader initiatives, have effectively used the child protection framework to prioritize humanitarian assistances.
- Child protection actors and religious leaders have carried out some very effective advocacy on child protection, and child protection actors have helped religious communities build their community-level capacity to promote and respond to child protection issues effectively. There are examples of child protection actors engaging effectively with religious communities and supporting the activation of their structures for psychosocial care and support services.
- In cases where child protection actors have developed strong relationships with religious communities over time, the work at the onset of emergencies is more efficient and effective. Collaboration with religious communities, when viewed as longer-term relationship building, as opposed to *utilization* in emergencies yields very positive results for children, as well as the partners involved.
- In some situations in which conflict is centered on, or around religion, child protection actors can play a positive role in facilitating inter-religious coordination- by acting as a convener around child-centered issues and initiatives.

Challenges

Analysis of some child protection efforts in both conflict- and HIV/AIDS-affected contexts has shown that there are also many challenges faced when religious communities and child protection actors form partnerships. These are as important to understand as the strengths partnerships bring, in order to further enhance collaborative work. A few such issues are noted below:

- Though to a great extent human and children’s rights are fundamentally based on shared values of the world’s religions, there can be tensions between perspectives and approaches (See Annex 3 for a discussion of one example).
- There is often a lack of coordination across faith/religious communities, as well as with outside agencies such as UN, INGO’s, etc. Similarly, there is a lack of documentation and analysis of lessons learned and good practice with regards to issues like child protection, and collaboration with other services provided.
- There is a lack of gender integration, with recognition of women’s capacity, contributions and structures. Their associations and networks are not always linked to formal inter—religious mechanisms, and their models and approaches not documented or visible - yet they have a proven track record of child protection through diverse networks – formal or informal.
- In the experience of the author, even in interviews conducted for this review, child protection actors express a lot of frustration with religious communities around a couple of issues in particular; namely proselytizing and forced conversion (or aid dependent on conversion), and institutionalization of children. Proselytizing can be perceived to be imposing outside ideas, norms and values, and may undermine indigenous systems of care and protection.
 - Though it is impossible to generalize the approaches and values of religious communities, these are issues that can present practical challenges to effective collaboration between some religious communities and child protection actors in many settings.
 - It is very important to note that proselytizing is a deep concern of many religious communities and multi-religious organizations, and this may not be well understood by child protection actors. This common ground offers an important starting point and should be seen as an opportunity for dialogue and cooperation.
- Rigid ideological positions of some religious communities can affect the ability or willingness to deal with new, sensitive, emerging issues affecting children (e.g. drug use, issues of sexuality, new forms of families, etc.)
- There are challenges inherent to inter-religious coordination and establishing inter-religious mechanisms. Some members of religious communities or child protection organizations might consider the integrity of their own philosophies or belief systems challenged or diluted, and may not fully trust the intentions of the other.⁵⁰
 - However, when thoughtfully facilitated, this challenge can create a space for deepening the understanding of shared values without the threat of specific beliefs being undermined, and further to that nurturing the habit of collaboration.
- As discussed in Section 6 above, the very nature of partnership between large child protection organizations such as UNICEF/INGOs and CSOs, including religiously affiliated CSOs is characterized by power imbalances, as well as organizational cultures and approaches at odds with each other. This same dynamic exists between large international faith-based organizations and local religious communities. These cannot necessarily be eliminated, but strategies need to be developed to counter the challenges and obstacles they may pose.
- By nature of their positions, religious leaders and skilled members of the religious communities are often over-extended and taxed by the needs of their adversely affected communities. Outside child protection organizations often place additional demands on these leaders, risking taking them away from the very critical roles that they are expected (and want) to play in their own capacities. Child protection actors may also, even unintentionally, undermine the work of the leaders by making them less, or more powerful through association.

⁵⁰ See Hovey and Saleem (2008)

- There is great diversity amongst religious coordinating bodies in terms of size, structures, and operational and technical capacities. This presents some challenges for UNICEF and other child protection organizations that may approach these bodies in a uniform fashion. Likewise, religious bodies sometimes sense that child protection organizations do not understand their distinctive organizational cultures and structures.⁵¹
 - Child protection actors lack religious literacy and sensitivity, that is, they often do not speak the language of religious communities, inter-faith mechanisms and/or faith-based organizations. Additionally, they do not always understand the differences regarding religion and culture.
 - Child protection actors do not often understand appropriate entry points for engaging with religious communities because of this lack of understanding about their structures, hierarchies and inter-linkages with other organizations.
 - In emergency contexts, child protection actors often have a lack of knowledge of the prevailing religions/spiritual traditions of the contexts. They also tend to neglect the religious/spiritual dimensions of communities in rapid assessments and stakeholder analyses.
 - The author has noted in key informant interviews conducted for this review the standard understanding of “religious communities” in emergency situations to be faith-based NGOs. Though few respondents discussed community-based structures of organized religious institutions (such as mosques or parishes), most all considered NGOs to be the face of religious communities in conflict and other emergencies, suggesting that many possibilities for grassroots work may be overlooked.
- Some child protection actors express ambivalence about engaging with religious communities or organizations due to their own perceptions and beliefs about these communities, or sometimes, due to negative previous experiences. They also appear not to be interested in, or perhaps comfortable with, the spiritual dimensions of religious communities, or even children.
 - It is notable that even within the framework of this project, there is a persisting dichotomy between *religious communities* and *child protection actors*, inferring that persons engaged in child protection are not, themselves, members of religious communities or possessing religious or spiritual beliefs. This compartmentalization of value/belief systems between the personal and professional domains is probably externally encouraged, if not explicitly, and worthy of further reflection.
- There have also been observed gaps in communication and knowledge between the higher levels of religious coordinating bodies and the practical activities being taken at the community level. Child protection actors may not be dealing with these different levels, thus facing challenges in communication, capacities and commitments. Of course, these gaps can also be present within large child protection organizations.
 - Related to this, sometimes there is not adequate and equitable gender, age, and other types of representation; therefore the leadership is often predominantly male, so when collaboration is only with the leadership it lacks the participation of important community religious networks, such as women and youth.
- Funding is an ongoing challenge for most religious communities. On the one hand, most of these communities are in need of funding support for any scaling up of activities in larger emergencies. However, many community-based religious institutions may lack the organizational capacities to handle the influx of large amounts of money. Also, management and reporting requirements of UN agencies and INGOs can stretch the capacities of smaller religious organizations with limited staff numbers and formal training.

⁵¹ *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF, *Study of the Response by Faith-Based Organizations to Orphans and Vulnerable Children*, report compiled by Dr. Geoff Foster, January 2004, p. 16.

- In some cases, there is a lack of systematic code of good practice and appropriate/ethical conduct regarding children and child protection, particularly pertaining to emergency situations such as conflict. For example, reliance on institutionalization of children without adequate parental care rather than alternative family based systems within communities has been documented.
 - Also there sometimes can be priority placed on staffing programs with people who are respected in the religious community but may lack the technical expertise required for appropriate care and protection of vulnerable children.⁵²
- Religion itself can become highly politicized, and be manipulated to meet the political or ideological needs of some, but not representing the larger consensus of believers. In this way, it can create or exacerbate conflict. Additionally, religious belief systems can be misrepresented or misused in ways that actually harm children, rather than protect them (e.g. maltreatment of orphans, child labor, sexual and other abuse, etc.). On many of the most controversial child protection issues (e.g. gender-based violence, child abuse) there is often a lack of ownership or response at the highest levels (especially if religious leaders are the perpetrators).
- There is little substantial documentation readily available that assesses, evaluates and analyzes the issues under investigation in this review.

As a more general issue that stands out in this literature review is the rather glaring absence of any substantive inclusion of gender analysis and child participation.

Recommendations

The *Literature and Desk Review* proposed some preliminary recommendations, which were further enhanced by the Consultation in New York. The following summarizes the priority recommendations that were outlined.

1. Multi-religious approaches to partnership with religious communities should be explored, as they have been shown to be effective in broadening the base of shared values upon which work is based. Such partnerships also model cooperative attitudes and behaviors that can impact and potentially improve community perceptions of religious and child protection actors.
2. More opportunities for dialogue between child protection actors and religious communities operating in conflict affected areas should be created in order to make explicit the common ground (i.e shared values, skills, experiences, competencies) and challenges they share in potential collaboration. These should happen at all levels.
3. Efforts must be made to raise the visibility of women of faith by developing opportunities and mechanisms for them to fulfill the important roles they play as child protection actors.
4. It is essential for children's rights organizations and religious communities to have the adequate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively engage with each other in constructive ways - for example to understand each other's roles, working methods, and structures to help identify effective entry points for co-operation. To address this, the following specific actions are recommended:
5. The development of a substantial body of policy and good practice guidance material, specifically:
 - Rearticulating standards and policies on child protection that reflect the beliefs, values and identity of religious communities while being in accordance with agreed upon good practice principles of child protection. Both child protection actors and religious experts can provide support in this process.
 - Emergency assessment materials used by child protection actors to include key aspects related to religious communities and their resources.

⁵² Ibid, p. 17.

- Guidance materials and tools for child protection actors on how to engage with religious actors, including:
 - Basic information on religious communities and structures, with recognition of women’s and youth networks and other organic structures within religious communities that are particularly well-equipped to promote child protection in conflict
 - Key questions to guide engagement with religious actors, including basic *do’s* and *don’ts*
 - Ways to “simplify” and “lighten” demands they place on religious communities, particularly leaders, in partnerships (general partnership principles, broader partnership issues)
 - How to articulate child protection concepts and principles in ways that are relevant to religious communities
 - Integrating religious understandings of child protection in key policy guidance initiatives
 - Guidance materials and tools for religious communities on how to engage with child protection actors, including:
 - Basic concepts and principles of child protection (international law, major principles and guidance documents, etc) and how they are relevant to religious communities and their belief systems
 - The range of roles different child protection actors play
 - How child protection actors have been engaging with religious structures and communities effectively
 - How religious actors can play roles in child protection in conflict
 - Common partnership arrangements utilized by child protection organizations (e.g., contractual, non-contractual)
 - These materials need to be developed through representative consultative processes at global and/or regional levels to determine how to meaningfully interpret child protection standards into religious frameworks, policies and structures. Also, these guidance tools will need to have well-planned strategies for roll-out and dissemination in approaches that both raise awareness, as well as seek feedback and further explore the primary issues relating to partnership between religious communities and child protection actors. These should be planned at national, regional and global levels.
6. Strategically link and engage with inter-agency networks and initiatives of both religious communities, inter-religious mechanisms and child protection actors, to promote this work, document and disseminate lessons learned about good and promising practices, support capacity-building efforts and develop joint advocacy initiatives. Some of the key child protection networks would be the Child Protection Working Group at the global level and the Cluster working groups at the national and (sometimes) sub-national level, which bring together multiple child protection actors for coordination, development of policy and guidance and joint programming. Inter-religious mechanisms, such as *Religions for Peace*, mobilize representatives of many religious communities on national, regional and global levels and can facilitate coordination with child protection actors.
 7. Further work should be done on understanding deliberative processes that change attitudes and behaviors, such has been so successful in abandonment of FGM/C. Recognizing the important role of religious leaders in facilitating these processes, as well as in developing religious statements and edicts is a key to more effectively changing a range of attitudes and behaviors that underlie violations of children’s rights. These processes can then strategically link with legislative work at national and international levels.
 8. Keep *child protection* as the central focus of partnership programming. Partner assessment and selection should prioritize contributions that partners can make to enhance child protection, and more broadly the realizations of children’s right. This does not imply negating potential partners

without specific experience or skills, but building in to the analysis identification of what benefits such partners bring, the potential they have for enhancing their own capacities, and specifically what capacity-building efforts are required (by all partners) for effective work, and then ensuring resources for such capacity-building.

9. The tensions inherent in partnership between child protection actors and religious communities (as well as all CSO partners), such as the differentials in power, resources, status and influence, need to be explored in a forthright and explicit manner. Concrete strategies to mediate the potentially negative impacts of these differences need to be delineated and implemented with strong oversight and self-critique.⁵³
 - a. This applies as well within the broad spectrum of religious communities necessitating concerted and systemic mobilization of religious communities from senior religious leadership to local community/congregation levels.
10. Purposeful efforts need to be made to systematically document the strategies and programmatic outcomes of partnerships between religious communities and child protection actors working in partnership in situations of conflict. Further, networks for disseminating, analyzing and building new methodologies from this learning need to be identified, or created where they do not exist.
11. Honest discussion is needed about the challenges of mainstreaming gender analysis and sensitive approaches, as well as child participation in work with religious/multi-religious communities and child protection actors (in conflict, as well as non-conflict settings). Clearly defined strategies must be explored, articulated and tested in order to effectively realize child protection.

⁵³ This is part of a larger set of recommendations for UNICEF and its partnerships with CSO, outlined in the evaluation of CSO partnerships, UNICEF (2007), pp. 57 – 62.

7. Conclusion

In no way is this current document exhaustive in its exploration and analysis of potentials, challenges and opportunities of partnerships between religious communities, inter-religious mechanisms and child protection actors. Clearly, these partnerships are underway in many settings, with many attributes, and undertaking a wide variety of assistances. Further exploration of some of the practical, as well as philosophical underpinnings of these efforts affords an opportunity to enrich the potential benefits for children that will arise from these collaborations.

Annex 1: Background to *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF Joint Program

Religions for Peace is the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition that works to advance peace, and UNICEF is the United Nations agency mandated to promote and protect children's rights. The two organizations have worked together since 1990 to strengthen the efforts of religious communities to fulfill the rights of children with advocacy initiatives. The current program undertaken by UNICEF and *Religions for Peace* aims to strengthen the engagement of religious communities and child protection actors to work in partnership to enhance protection for children affected by conflict. Though such partnerships between child protection actors and religious communities have been ongoing for a long time, there has been insufficient documentation of lessons learned about how they can be strengthened to maximize their potential for child protection.

Goals, Objectives and Key Elements of the Program

Goal: Children affected by conflict receive appropriate protection through strengthened partnership between religious communities and child protection actors.

Objective 1: *Strengthened capacity (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) of religious communities, particularly inter-religious mechanisms, to protect children affected by conflict.*

Result Areas:

1. Increased knowledge about principles and practice of child protection in conflict situations.
2. Demonstration of good practice principles in direct service provision and advocacy campaigns

Major Activities:

- Training and other capacity-building activities grounded in the identification of, and building on the shared human rights values within the diversity of religious traditions
- Service delivery of child protection and psychosocial support
- Development and implementation of advocacy campaigns

Objective 2: *Strengthened capacity (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) of child protection actors and religious communities, particularly inter-religious mechanisms, to partner in protecting children affected by conflict.*

Result Areas:

1. Increased knowledge of effective partnership in providing child protection in conflict situations.
2. Effective strategies for engaging with religious communities are reflected in key child protection policy guidance.

Major Activities:

- Training and other capacity-building activities
- Documentation and dissemination of lessons learned with major policy forums

Key Project Elements:

- Documenting Experience, Lessons Learnt and Knowledge Gaps
 - Though much work in such partnerships is underway there has been little systematic documentation and analysis of how to maximize the potentialities of collaboration.
- Applied Learning
 - Participatory Action Methodology in country-based field projects
 - Emphasis on Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DME) mechanisms within the whole project with feedback mechanisms to help refine approaches/strategies
 - Mainstreaming of guidance into key inter-agency initiatives
 - Developing of training packages and learning tools for religious communities and child protection actors
- Mainstreaming program work within existing inter-religious and child protection networks at national, regional and global level (E.g. African Council of Religious Leaders-*Religions for Peace* and regional child protection networks)

Annex 2: Commitment of the World's Religions to Children: A Multi-Religious Declaration

Conscious of the plight of vast numbers of children throughout the world and compelled by our religious and moral traditions, as representatives from the world's religions we speak with a common voice. We commend the United Nations on the occasion of the Special Session on Children, 8-10 May 2002, and urge the delegates there assembled to seize this historic moment to continue building a world truly fit for children.

In many ways, the world in which we live is not fit for millions of children. Obscene living conditions – impure drinking water, lack of sufficient food, inadequate health care – result in more than 10 million child deaths every year, most of which are preventable. Conditions of abject poverty result in wasted bodies and stunted development. The promise of universal primary education has not been met: 129 million children ages 6 to 11 are unschooled, and the goal of equal access for tens of millions of girls is unrealized. Children continue to suffer other gross injustices such as sexual abuse, labor exploitation, and homelessness.

Countless numbers of children are victims of war and conflict and suffer both physical and psychological trauma. Millions of children have been orphaned or otherwise affected by the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Too many children are deprived of the right to grow up in a secure, loving, and caring family.

This situation is intolerable. Today, the world possesses an ever-greater collective capacity to support the survival, protection, and the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental development of our children. This capacity represents a moral imperative for action. Because we can act, we must. Therefore, our common voice resounds despite differences in our traditions, our practices and our beliefs: We must act together to build a world fit for our children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets forth important legal rights of children, including the realization of the special protection owed to a child before as well as after birth. Our religious traditions, however, summon us to regard the child as even more than a legal entity. As religious men and women, we dare to assert that the state of childhood, with its attendant vulnerability, dependence, and potential requires special care, based upon recognition of the child's inherent human dignity and founded on a moral principle that the human community must give children's basic needs a priority over competing claims – a first call upon the human and material resources of our society. This principle needs to be accepted as a guide for relevant action in every society and community.

We acknowledge the key roles of our religious communities as frontline actors for children. We embrace the responsibility to translate the challenges to be addressed in the Special Session into action. Our capacities for action are substantial: almost 5 billion people belong to our religious communities. From the smallest village to the largest city, through districts and provinces, to national and transnational levels, religious communities offer the largest social infrastructure for human care. In hospitals and clinics, schools and academies, orphanages and social service centers, our communities continue long-standing missions to heal the afflicted, educate the unlearned, and provide refuge to the vulnerable. Our religious communities are, thus, uniquely qualified to undertake efforts in each of the four priority areas for children set forth in the Special Session Outcome Document:

- Promoting healthy lives
- Providing quality education
- Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence
- Combating HIV/AIDS

Through advocacy and concrete action, we recommit ourselves to enhancing the well being of children, starting with practices within our own communities, especially in those areas where we have fallen short. We pledge to act in partnership with other religious communities, non-governmental organizations, governments, and the United Nations and other international agencies to support and enhance the Global Movement for Children.

We respectfully call on the Heads of State and Government and other leaders of the world assembled in New York to manifest the political will necessary to create a social and international climate in which the survival, protection, and the full development of children will be ensured. We challenge these world leaders to boldly translate the spirit of the

Convention on the Rights of the Child into concrete realities. We urge them to implement the principle of putting the needs of children first, making it central to national policy and allocating resources accordingly.

Meeting our inescapable moral duty to children is essential to human fulfillment. In continuing to build a world fit for children, we will liberate them to achieve their fullest potential and thereby realize the promise of tomorrow present in every child.

Plan of Action

As senior representatives from the world's religions, we pledge to work through our respective religious communities to carry out the following action steps to ensure a world fit for children.

We commit ourselves to:

- Strengthen multi-religious collaboration in the pursuit of peace to improve the environment in which all children live;
- Endorse the broad priorities and goals established during the UN Special Session for Children (UNSSC) and disseminate them widely through our religious communities worldwide. In particular, we appreciate the recognition of religious organizations as important partners and will work actively to fulfill our responsibilities in this regard;
- Advocate at all levels on behalf of children both in terms of policies and greater resource mobilization and allocation;
- Support greater partnerships with governments, UN agencies, and other sectors to fulfill the goals of the UNSSC, in particular the full ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols on involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
- Review existing teachings, programs and policies within our own religious communities that address children to ensure that their best interests are being promoted and to overcome past actions that might have fostered discrimination against children;
- Work tirelessly to reduce the discrimination and stigma faced by children whether caused by disease, disability, gender, or minority status;
- Call on WCRP/International, through its Standing Commission on the Child and Family and its network of national chapters and affiliates;
 - To facilitate the ongoing engagement of religious leaders and communities in support of the rights of children and their survival, protection, and development;
 - To serve as the liaison with UNICEF and other international agencies in promoting stronger partnerships between them and religious organizations;
 - To compile and share information on programs from among the world's religious communities that are particularly effective in addressing the needs of children;
 - To monitor the fulfillment of the commitments made in this declaration and plan of action;
- Utilize the existing infrastructure and communications networks within our religious communities to disseminate information on the situation of the world's children and efforts to improve their welfare;
- Encourage our religious communities at all levels to work for the goals of the Global Movement for Children and to seek partnerships with other stakeholders to achieve their realization.

Adopted by consensus 7 May 2002
New York, NY USA

Annex 3: Advocacy: Tension Between Rights-based and Religious Perspectives?

Generally, partnerships between child rights organizations and religious communities and inter-religious mechanisms undertaking advocacy on children's rights and protection is effective because of the strength of their shared values and mutual commitments. In some cases, however, there may be a divergence between religious belief systems and that of the legal rights-based framework, which presents an interesting challenge for child protection work.

A case in point is that of the International Criminal Court (ICC) decision to issue a warrant for Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has been brutalizing the population of Northern Uganda for over 20 years (and more recently those of neighboring countries). Religious leaders from the Acholi region of Northern Uganda—traditional, Christian and Islamic—had been at the forefront of social protection and peace negotiations throughout the history of the conflict and have been highly respected as the moral authority of the population. As discussed earlier in this paper, an inter-religious body, ARLPI, has been instrumental in working with the Government of Uganda on demobilization and reintegration of former LRA combatants (children, as well as adults), including the issuance of an amnesty for all those surrendering. ARLPI has argued for the need for a peaceful and indigenous solution to the conflict, with an emphasis on Acholi traditional justice mechanisms, which are based on forgiveness and compensation rituals, alike in many regards to the fundamental tenets of forgiveness and acceptance of (in particular) Christian religious traditions.

Human rights organizations, including the large child rights/protection organizations, which have worked closely with the religious leaders in Northern Uganda, had been strongly supporting the establishment of the ICC in order to enforce the criminalization of recruitment of children in armed conflict. The dilemma in Northern Uganda was the potential of a violent backlash in response to the ICC warrant, issued while peace talk between the LRA and the Government of Uganda (GoU) were underway, leading to more child recruitment, brutalization of the population and ultimately, the expansion of the conflict.

Interviews with residents of Northern Uganda tended to show very strong support for the efforts towards peace and justice initiated by the religious leaders. However, as time went on and the violence continued, perhaps not as intensively (at least in the Acholi region, as it had gone across borders) there were also people who felt strongly that the international community needed to step in. Fundamental to the whole issue was the concept of justice, and the competing understandings of that concept on the local and international levels.

This example presents a compelling argument for dialogue around the concepts underlying rights-based programming in conflict. There was and remains enormous agreement between the child protection actors'

and religious leaders' perspectives on the fundamental rights of the population affected by conflict in Northern Uganda. As rights become increasingly embedded in universal systems of justice that may seem abstract in localized areas of conflict, religious communities whose value systems emphasize broader goals of peace and justice can help to negotiate shared meanings.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For an in-depth analysis of this issue see Mawson, Andrew, "Children, Impunity and Justice: Some Dilemmas from Northern Uganda," in Boyden, Jo and Joanna de Berry (Eds), *Children and Youth on the Front Line: Ethnography, Armed Conflict and Displacement*, Studies in Forced Migration, Volume 14, Berghahn Books, New York, 2004, pp. 130-144.

Annex 4: “Religion as Resource and Risk”⁵⁵ for Children Affected by Conflict

Children’s well-being and their hope for the future is bound up with their understanding of themselves, their purpose and their relationship to others and with that which is variously referred to as God, the Creator, the Divine, or the transcendent.

Children are born into the world as a trust of the whole and require nurturing, love, education and training, and meaningful opportunities to be of service for their intellectual, emotional, spiritual and moral development.

Children who are aware of their latent spiritual capacities and who have developed moral capability have more resilience in the face of hardship and greater ability to act in partnership with others to remedy problems and to achieve social justice.⁵⁶

A discussion of the role of religious communities in providing protection for children in conflict situations cannot exclude some commentary on the role of religion and spirituality on children. That discussion could be rich and lengthy, examining understandings of children, childhood and the spiritual and social experiences every religion imparts on children.⁵⁷ This is not the purpose of this paper, which will only lightly touch upon a few relevant themes.

Resilience

As difficult as it is to find a common understanding of the terms *child* or *childhood* across the world’s diverse cultures, it is impossible to generalize how the world’s different religions understand children’s relationship to faith and spirituality, when and how these emerge in the life cycle of children, and how they are mediated by social forces. There is a shared belief, however, that at some point in their lives, every child has an understanding of spirituality that leads them to connect with and derive meaning from the world around them, including the natural environment. This understanding also creates an intuitive sense of what is just and

⁵⁵ Acknowledging the title of an article by Mike Wessells and Alison Strang, “Religion as Resource and Risk,” in Boothby et al (Ed), *A World Turned Upside Down: Social Ecological Approaches to Children in War Zones*, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, CT, 2006. This Annex is largely based on a chapter from Religions for Peace and UNICEF, *From Commitment to Action: What Religious Communities Can do to Eliminate Violence Against Children* (in publication), pp. 21 – 22.

⁵⁶ From the *Preamble of National Plan of Action for a World Fit for Children*, Bahá’í Community of Canada, 2 April 2003, www.ca.bahai.org/pdf/planofaction.pdf

⁵⁷ For an in-depth discussion on conceptions of children and childhood in the world’s major religions see Browning, Don S. and Marcia J. Bunge (Eds), *Children and childhood in world religions: primary sources and texts*, Piscataway, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2009.

unjust, and as children develop, these sensibilities begin to be shaped more formally, primarily by the family – itself shaped by faith and religious belief.

Early in life many families give or expose children to religious instruction intended to impart the values, spiritual enlightenment, and perceived source of salvation that the family has enjoyed over generations. For children, being a member of a particular family means acquiring its values, beliefs, and traditions, which occurs in no small part through exposure to religion.⁵⁸

As children grow and their relationships with their broader communities develop, religion further influences them through the social and cultural institutions in which they participate.

The mosque, church or temple often provides children's first point of contact with the community beyond their immediate neighbours and with wider social institutions. There, children learn not only religion but also important lessons about morals, social behaviour and their own value as human beings. They also learn subtle messages about whether the world is a safe place, how to be a good person, and what their responsibilities are as members of a religious group. Their developing religious identity becomes part of the wider, collective identity that binds children and adults together into a people having a sense of collective meaning and place in the world.⁵⁹

Given the profound influence that spirituality and religion have on children's development and socialization, there is the potential to provide strong protective influences and promote resilience. The beliefs, practices, social networks and resources of religion can strengthen children by instilling hope, by giving meaning to difficult experiences, and by providing emotional, physical and spiritual support. While much of the academic research is still limited to the major religions of Western countries, studies show that “children, in order to attain psychological and physical well-being, need not only strong attachments to parents and families but also ‘deep connection to moral and spiritual meaning of the kind generally provided by religious traditions.’”⁶⁰ Takriti has suggested that research into children's understanding of religion has demonstrated that “religiosity in children has a positive relationship with self-esteem.”⁶¹

There is a growing body of documentation, such as program evaluations and some research from conflict

⁵⁸ Wessells, Michael and Alison Strang, “Religion as Resource and Risk: The double-edged sword for children in situations of armed conflict,” From Neil Boothby et al (Eds.), *A World Turned Upside Down: Social Ecological Approaches to Children in War Zones*, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, CT, 2006, p. 205.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 205.

⁶⁰ Browing and Bunge, p. 4.

⁶¹ Takriti, Rachel A. et al, “Children's understanding of religion: Interviews with Arab-Muslim, Asian-Muslim, Christian and Hindu children aged 5 – 11 years,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, March 2006; 9(1): 29–42, p. 30.

situations, that supports the very positive roles that religion and spirituality play in promoting children's resilience to adverse situations. In a summary of research on children's mental health in conflict situations, Betancourt and Khan cite "connection to spirituality" and religion (include ritual practices) as key factors promoting resilience in children affected by conflict in Colombia and Sri Lanka.⁶² A study of the reintegration of children formerly abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in the Teso region of Uganda highlighted that many social challenges they faced and that "the most common way for ex-abductees to cope was to seek strength and comfort in religion. Praying, reading and going to church were among the most frequent coping strategies cited by the children."⁶³

It has been well-established in the research literature that family can be one of the strongest protective factors for children in adverse circumstances. Beyond the direct benefit spirituality and religion can have to children's own sense of well-being and resilience to adversity, there is emerging thought about elements that promote "family resilience." Tol discusses this in his dissertation exploring psychosocial healing and mental health in situations of political violence, where he conducted research with children in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Sulawesi, Indonesia. He briefly describes three key processes in building family resilience, one of which is "Belief Systems, consisting of the possibility to make meaning of adversity, retaining a positive outlook, and the dimension of spirituality."⁶⁴ These processes have a reinforcing effect for both parents and children.

Spirituality in many non-Western cultures is not viewed as a discreet or compartmentalized aspect of self-identity. It is inherently bound with the physical, social, mental and other conceptualized aspects of self in an interdependent fashion. As such, spirituality is an integral part of well-being. In research carried out by de Berry in Afghanistan this was made very explicit. Community members identified attributes of children's well-being:

These attributes were not only important alongside emotional well-being but more than this, were actually inter-dependant with emotional well being. So, for example, having good morality based in

⁶² Betancourt, Theresa Stichick & Kashif Tanveer Khan, "The mental health of children affected by armed conflict: Protective processes and pathways to resilience," *International Review of Psychiatry*, June 2008; 20(3): 317–328, p. 320.

⁶³ Chobrok, Vera and Andrew S. Akutu, *Returning Home: Children's perspectives on reintegration (A case study of children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Teso, eastern Uganda*, February 2008, London, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Tol, Wietse A. "Healing in the Aftermath of War: Conceptualization and Evaluation of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Populations Exposed to Political Violence in Low-Income Settings." Unpublished dissertation, 2009, p. 146.

religious knowledge and instruction was said to be vitally important to mental health. A child with good morality would be able to withstand traumatic events. For children with good morality can separate off the impact of conflict on themselves by having a clear dividing line between right and wrong, good and evil.⁶⁵

For example parents said that if their child was afflicted with grief and all the physical pain that goes with it, they would take them to a mullah in the mosque. The religious leader could give specially blessed amulets and extracts from the Koran to aid the child's recovery. The leader could also instruct the child in morality and belief, in being able to discern right from wrong and therefore build in the child the moral resources to understand and withstand risks and emerge with their emotional health intact.⁶⁶

Risk

Unfortunately, the same elements of religious experience can also promote or condone violence, including violence against, or involving, children; thus increasing the vulnerability of children faced with adversity. Violence can lead to a loss of connectedness to one another, our environment, and the sense of a higher purpose. Ultimately, violence against children not only violates a child's physical and emotional integrity, it violates a child's spiritual integrity too – especially when violence is perpetrated in the name of religion or tradition. Experiencing violence fractures children's sense of trust in others and wonder for creation and the world around them.

In situations of extreme adversity, such as poverty, political violence and armed conflict, the main drivers of children's vulnerability may appear to be related to economic and/or political disenfranchisement. However, socio-cultural factors can reinforce structural inequalities and traditional and/or religious attitudes and practices can further exacerbate inherent vulnerabilities based on gender, class, ethnicity, etc. In this way religion may no longer be a protective factor for children and their families, but may even be perceived as a cause of their suffering. Thus, protection activities are far more likely to be effective when they involve religious leaders in their design and implementation.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ De Berry, Jo, "Community Psychosocial Support in Afghanistan," *Intervention* 2004, Volume 2, Number 2, p.146.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 147

⁶⁷ Overseas Development Institute and UNICEF, *Promoting Synergies Between Child Protection and Social Protection: West and Central Africa*, Regional Thematic Report 5 Study, UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa, February 2009, pp. 45 – 46.

In summary, while acknowledging the potential for harm religious attitudes and practice can bring to children, it is evident that nurturing a child's spirituality, and promoting the protective aspects of religious belief, practice and community provide valuable resources for children whose lives have been blighted by violence. These factors can also strengthen resilience in the face of potential violence, thereby mitigating its impact. Every member of a religious community, including children themselves, can play a role in encouraging and enriching the spiritual and religious life of each child.

Selected References and Resources

Introduction

This overview of selected literature and web-based resources highlights some of the key reference materials related to the *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF partnership program focused on enhancing collaboration with religious communities, particularly inter-religious mechanisms, in promoting child protection in conflict situations. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

Advocacy

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“Statement by The Children of the ‘Fisher Program’ to the Regional Consultative Seminar on ‘The Spiritual and Ethical Values as Basic Principles of Child Education and Development,’” Amman, Jordan, 1 – 2 April 2003.

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Web Resources

A World Fit for Children

<http://www.ca.bahai.org/npa>

National Plan of Action for a World Fit for Children, by the Babá’í Community of Canada.

Decade to Overcome Violence

<http://overcomingviolence.org>

Home page of the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010), Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace.

International Action Network on Small Arms

<http://www.iansa.org>

The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) is the global movement against gun violence - a network of 800 civil society organizations working in 120 countries to stop the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons.

Mobilizing religious leaders in Afghanistan

http://www.unicef.org/media/media_13249.html

In Afghanistan, Islamic leaders have been developing positive partnerships with UNICEF in recent months to promote core services and programmes for women and children.

UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace

<http://faithdecadeforpeace.net/mission/>

The vision of the initiative for a UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace is for a genuine and lasting peace based on more equitable, fraternal and harmonious societies.

Child Rights

Documents

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Wall, John, “Human Rights in Light of Childhood,” *International Journal of Children’s Rights*, 16, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Leiden, 2008, pp. 523 – 543.

Web Resources

Action for the Rights of Children

<http://www.savethechildren.net/arc/>

The ARC is a capacity building tool for child protection in, and after, emergencies. The resource pack is an interagency collaboration.

Arigatou International, <http://www.arigatou.ch/en/arigatougeneva/aboutus.html>

A non-governmental organization committed to work for the empowerment of children and youth and the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Better Care Network, <http://www.crin.org/bcn/>

The Better Care Network facilitates active information exchange and collaboration on the issues of child abandonment, alternatives to and standards for institutional care, and family unification, and advocates for technically sound policy and programmatic action on global, regional, and national levels.

Child Rights Information Network (CRIN), <http://www.crin.org/>

CRIN is a global network coordinating information and promoting action on child rights.

International Bureau for Children's Rights (ICBR)

<http://www.ibcr.org/eng/home.html>

The IBCR is an international non-governmental organization (INGO) based in Montréal, Canada. Created in 1994 by Judge Andrée Ruffo (Canada) and Doctor Bernard Kouchner (France), the IBCR's mission is to contribute to the promotion and respect of the international legal instrument adopted by the UN in 1989 and now ratified by 192 countries.

NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child,

<http://www.crin.org/NGOGroupforCRC/index.asp>

A coalition of over 50 international non-governmental organisations that work together to facilitate the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Includes many religiously-affiliated groups.

UNICEF, <http://www.unicef.org/>

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, safe water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS

Women's Refugee Commission

<http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/>

The Women's Refugee Commission advocates for laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and young people, including those seeking asylum—bringing about lasting, measurable change.

Conflict

Documents

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Web Resources

Accompanying churches in situations of conflict

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/interreligiousdialogue/churches-in-situations-of-conflict.html>

This project accompanies churches faced with religious intolerance, discrimination and conflict, and advocates for inter-religious cooperation, human dignity, sustainable values and just relationships. It emphasizes those aspects in all religions that promote harmony among communities that help people to live their individual faith with integrity while living together in mutual respect and mutual acceptance of each other's faiths.

Children and Conflict in a Changing World

<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/machel10.html>

To mark the 10th anniversary of the landmark United Nations report by Graça Machel, Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF co-convoked a strategic review of the current situation faced by children in conflict situations.

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

<http://www.child-soldiers.org/home>

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers works to prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, to secure their demobilisation and to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/index.html>

Since the World Summit for Children, in 1990, the United Nations has increasingly sought to draw international attention to the horrendous plight of children affected by armed conflict. In 1996, the United Nations General Assembly established the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Mission Statement of the Office of the Special Representative is: To promote and protect the rights of all children affected by armed conflict.

The Humanitarian Crisis and the Role of Religious Leaders

http://www.peace-srilanka.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=180:the-humanitarian-crisis-and-the-role-of-religious-leaders&catid=47:peaceact

In 2008 PAFERAL and NPC succeeded in bringing the World Conference of Religions for Peace together with the National Chapter the National Conference of Religions for Peace, to adopt a multi religious approach to the ethnic conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka.

HIV/AIDS Contexts

Documents

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UNAIDS, “UNAIDS Partnership with Faith-based Organizations - UNAIDS Strategic Framework,”
UNAIDS, Geneva, 2010.

UNICEF, *What Religious Leaders Can Do About HIV/AIDS: Action for Children and Youth People*, a workbook developed by UNICEF, Religions for Peace and UNAIDS, published by UNICEF, New York, 2003.
http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_19024.html

Web Resources

Faith to Action Initiative

<http://www.faithbasedcarefororphans.org>

Faith to Action Initiative brings together Christian faith-based organizations, churches, and individuals seeking to respond to the needs of orphans and other vulnerable children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Humanitarian Responses

Alert Net

<http://www.alertnet.org/>

Reuters AlertNet is a humanitarian news network based around a popular website. It aims to keep relief professionals and the wider public up-to-date on humanitarian crises around the globe.

Forced Migration Online

<http://www.forcedmigration.org/>

A comprehensive web site that provides access to a diverse range of relevant information resources on forced migration. It is a technically and intellectually administered resource, combining specialist subject knowledge with high standards of information management.

Humanitarian Practice Network

<http://www.odihpn.org/>

HPN is an independent forum for humanitarians to share and disseminate information, analysis and experience. It publishes specialist resources for practitioners and policy makers alike and facilitates debate through regular events and the Online Exchangediscussion forum.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

<http://www.icrc.org/eng>

The ICRC is an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of war and other situations of violence. It has a permanent mandate under international law to take impartial action for prisoners, the wounded and sick, and civilians affected by conflict.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

www.ifrc.org

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian organization, with 186 member National Societies. Its work is guided by seven fundamental principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

International NGO Training and Research Center (INTRAC)

<http://www.intrac.org/>

Provides specially designed [training](#), [consultancy](#) and [research](#) services to organisations involved in international development and relief. We aim to improve civil society performance by strengthening management and organisational effectiveness, and by exploring policy issues.

IRIN

<http://www.irinnews.org/>

The humanitarian news and analysis service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Relief Web

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

ReliefWeb is an on-line gateway to information (documents and maps) on humanitarian emergencies and disasters. It was launched in October 1996 and is administered by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The Humanitarian Forum

<http://www.humanitarianforum.org/>

The Humanitarian Forum is a network of key humanitarian and development organisations from Muslim donor and recipient countries, the West, and multilateral networks.

Miscellaneous

Documents

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www.svenskakyrkan.se/psychosocialservices or www.act-intl.org

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Inter-agency Standing Committee Child Protection Working Group, “Interagency First Phase Child Protection Assessment Resource Kit,” January 2009.
<http://www.savethechildren.net/arc/modules/foundation/programmedesign/pdfs/ARC-ModF3-3-H8-2009.pdf>.

Overseas Development Institute and UNICEF, *Promoting Synergies Between Child Protection and Social Protection: West and Central Africa*, Regional Thematic Report 5 Study, UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa, February 2009.

Religions for Peace, *A Guide for Building Women of Faith Networks*, Religions for Peace, New York, 2009.

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<http://www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org/Display.asp?Page=biblio>.

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UNICEF Sudan, “Technical Briefing Paper 1: Alternative Family Care,” UNICEF, Khartoum, August 2007.

Web Resources

Education about Religions and Beliefs, <http://aocerb.org/>

A web-based clearinghouse featuring approaches, consensus guidelines, intellectual and instructional resources, links to associations/organizations and institutions working in the field of ERB, an ERB journal, an online forum for users to discuss issues and pose questions, and events of interest to researchers, policy-makers and educators working in this area.

Ethics Education for Children, <http://www.arigatou.ch/en/>

Ethics Education for Children is an initiative of The Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children to promote value based and quality education for children and young people within the framework of the child's right to education as stated in the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Multi-Religious Cooperation

Action by Churches Together- International

<http://www.act-intl.org/>

Action by Churches Together (ACT) International is a global alliance of Protestant churches and related agencies working to save lives and support communities in emergencies worldwide.

ACT Alliance

www.actalliance.org

On January 1, 2010, ACT International and ACT Development united to create the new ACT Alliance, one of the largest global humanitarian networks in the world.

African Council of Religious Leaders, <http://www.acrl-rfp.org/index.htm>

The mission of the ACRL is to advance African multi-religious cooperation in support of peace and sustainable development. The ACRL also works to highlight, support and connect the work of the African national inter-religious councils affiliated with Religions for Peace.

European Council of Religious Leaders, <http://www.rfp-europe.eu/>

A coalition of Senior religious leaders of Europe's historic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam with Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians in Europe who have committed themselves to cooperating on conflict prevention and transformation, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation and encouraging members of their respective communities to do the same. It is one of four regional inter-religious councils of Religions for Peace.

Religions for Peace, <http://wcrp.org/>

The largest global coalition of representatives of the world's great religions, dedicated to stopping war, ending poverty and protecting the earth.

United Religions Initiative, <http://www.uri.org/>

A global community committed to promoting enduring, daily interfaith cooperation and to ending religiously motivated violence. The site has links to websites for Youth and for Children.

The World Council of Churches

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/home.html>

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches, now 348 in more than 120 countries in all continents from virtually all Christian traditions.

Partnership

Documents

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Volkman, Dr. Christian Salazar, “Why and how UNICEF cooperates with religious leaders in Iran,” UNICEF, Tehran, February 2008.

Web Resources

Sharing common goals: UNICEF, faith-based organizations and children
http://www.unicef.org/media/media_4537.html

UNICEF works very closely with religions whose tenets of religion include an interest in the health and wellbeing of people, and particularly of children.

Muslim Aid and UMCOR Form Partnership

<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umcor/work/fieldoffices/partners/muslim-aid>

and

<http://www.muslimaid.org/index.php/media-centre/press-releases/7-press-releases/71-muslim-aid-and-umcor-form-landmark-partnership>

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and UK-based Muslim Aid inter-religious partnership will mean maximum response to global disasters, enhanced economic and social development, and, UMCOR hopes, a new peace building model based on cross cultural understanding.

Women, Faith, and Development Alliance (WFDA)

<http://www.wfd-alliance.org/AUresource>

Women's organizations, faith communities and the international development community have come together to tackle the issue of women in poverty.

Peace building and Conflict Resolution Processes

Documents

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Religions for Peace, *Workbook – ‘Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security,’* a collection of background papers for the *Religions for Peace 8th World Assembly* in Kyoto, Japan, 2006.

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United Nations General Assembly, Sixty-fourth session, “Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace: Report of the Secretary General,” A/64/325, 24 August 2009.

Web Resources

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative

<http://www.arlpi.org/>

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) is an interfaith peace building and conflict transformation organization formed as a proactive response to the decades long conflict in northern Uganda.

Catholic Peacebuilding Network

http://cpn.nd.edu/about_us.htm

The Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN) is a voluntary network of practitioners, academics, clergy, and laity from around the world that seeks to enhance the study and practice of Catholic peacebuilding, especially at the local level. The CPN aims to deepen bonds of solidarity among Catholic peacebuilders, share and analyze "best practices," expand the peacebuilding capacity of the Church in areas of conflict, and encourage the further development of a theology of a just peace.

Psychosocial Care and Support

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Network, <http://psychosocialnetwork.net/>

The MHPSS Network aspires to improve mental health and psychosocial well being in emergencies and situations of adversity by enabling dialogue and collaboration amongst people and diverse communities of practice; sharing state of the art practice and resources; and facilitating peer support.

Psychosocial Care for Children in Conflict, <http://www.psychosocialcarechildren.org/>

A web-based resource package that attempts to provide a care delivery framework to set up and provide community-based psychosocial care in situations of conflict and political violence. Funded by Plan Netherlands and implemented by Healthnet TPO.

[Psychological Support Policy Paper](#), International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent

<http://psp.drk.dk/sw38267.asp>

The International Federation [Psychological Support Policy Paper](#), adopted May 2003, established the basis of Red Cross and Red Crescent intervention both in emergency response operations and in the implementation of long-term development programmes. The Policy exists in the four official languages.

Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent

<http://psp.drk.dk/sw2955.asp>

The Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support (PS Centre) is a delegated function of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Its primary function is to develop strategically important knowledge and best practice which will inform future operations of the Federation and National Societies.

Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI)

<http://www.repssi.net>

<http://www.children-psychosocial-wellbeing.org>

REPSSI is a non-profit organization working to mitigate the psychosocial impact of HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict among children and youth in 13 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Religion, Religious Communities and Children

Documents

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Web Resources

Arab Resource Collective

www.mawared.org

ARC’s goal is to develop resources, build on the capacities and experience of each individual, and enhance primary care and positive development of children, adolescents and youth within their environment and community, enacting their right to knowledge, participation, non-discrimination, protection, health and education, through a holistic, inclusive and integrative approach to sustainable development in Arab countries.

Bharat Sevashram Sangha

<http://www.bharatsevashramsangha.net/>

Bharat Sevashram Sangha, is a registered charity and a non-profit organization working in areas hit by the 2004 Tsunami, tribal welfare, education programs, healthcare facilities.

Global Network of Religions for Children, <http://www.gnrc.net/en/>

A worldwide interfaith network exclusively devoted to working for child rights and other children's issues.

Interlude: an internet retreat

<http://www.interluderetreat.com/prayers.htm>

An inter-faith collection of prayers for inspiration

United Sikhs

<http://unitedsikhs.org/index.php>

UNITED SIKHS is a UN-affiliated, international non-profit, non-governmental, humanitarian relief, human development and advocacy organization, aimed at empowering those in need, especially disadvantaged and minority communities across the world.

World Prayers

<http://www.worldprayers.org/index.html>

Gathering the great prayers from all spiritual traditions around the world into a unified prayer archive for the purpose of inspiration, study and cross cultural appreciation. This is a growing collection of historically important prayers.

Research

Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Center

<http://www.cpclearningnetwork.org/>

The Agency Learning Network on the Care and Protection of Children in Crisis-Affected Countries (the CPC Learning Network) grew out of the CPC Research Initiative. The goal of the CPC Learning Network is to further strengthen and to systematize child care and protection through the collaborative action of humanitarian organizations, local institutions, and academic partners.

Center for Children and Childhood Studies

<http://children.camden.rutgers.edu>

The Center for Children and Childhood Studies promotes understanding, enrichment and the recognition of the significance of the experiences of childhood.

Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence

<http://www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org>

A global initiative to advance the research and practice of spiritual development in children and adolescents.

Centre for Child-focused Anthropological Research

<http://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/acad/sss/research/centres/cfar.bsp>

The aim of C-FAR is to consolidate and build a comparative international approach to child-focused anthropological research.

Children in Armed Conflict

<http://www.childreninarmedconflict.org/home.html>

The website was developed in connection with research carried out by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre on the European Network for the Research Agenda on Children in Armed Conflict during the programme cycle 2003-2005.

Innocenti Research Centre

<http://www.unicef-irc.org>

The Innocenti Research Centre works as the organization's dedicated research centre, maintaining academic freedom and contributing to UNICEF's strategic agenda. The Centre's activities promote knowledge generation and brokering to fill research gaps and address emerging and sensitive issues in the areas of social and economic policies and the implementation of international standards for children in all countries.

Intervention

<http://www.interventionjournal.com/>

A multi-disciplinary journal intending to make existing knowledge of mental health, psychosocial work and counselling in areas of armed conflict explicit and accessible to all interested parties. A printed journal with summaries of current issues, as well as archived issues available online.

Journal of Refugee Study

<http://jrs.oxfordjournals.org/>

Journal of Refugee Studies is a multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal, and is published in association with the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. It provides a forum for exploration of the complex problems of forced migration and national, regional and international responses. The Journal covers all categories of forcibly displaced people.

Life & Peace Institute

<http://www.life-peace.org/default2.asp?xid=297>

The Life & Peace Institute (LPI) is an international and ecumenical centre of research on and action for peace and justice.

The Center for the Study of Law and Religion, "The Child in Law, Religion and Society", Website, Emory University, <http://cslr.law.emory.edu/research/the-child-in-law-religion-and-society/>.

An interdisciplinary exploration of children, with focus on birth, naming, and growth; children's rights and rites; education and formation; child abuse, poverty, and homelessness; juvenile delinquency, violence, public policy responses, and reforms.

UNICEF Childinfo Data

<http://www.childinfo.org/>

This website contains UNICEF's statistical information, including data used in UNICEF's flagship publications, [The State of the World's Children](#) and [Progress for Children](#). It also has technical resources for conducting UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), which are a major source of global development data.

Social Norm Change Processes

Documents

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Concept Note, "Expert Meeting on Human Rights and the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in countries of prevalence and among immigrant communities," organized by the Swiss National Committee for UNICEF and UNICEF NYHQ, 2-3 July, 2009, Geneva, Switzerland.

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Violence Against Children

Documents

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Save The Children, United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children, “Safe You and Safe Me – Violence is NOT ok”, Save the Children Sweden, Stockholm, 2006,
<http://www.violencestudy.org/r247>

Save the Children Sweden, *Towards the universal prohibition of all violent punishment of children,* a report authored by Gopika Kapoor and Sharon Owen for Save the Children Sweden, Stockholm, 2008.

United Nations General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, “Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on violence against Children,” A/61/299, 29 August 2006.

The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, “Child Protection in Faith-Based Environments: A Guideline Report,” London, March 2006.

UNICEF, *Disciplining with Kindness: A Shiite Shari'a Perspective*, Georigina M. Nitzche and Sarah Mchugh (Eds), translated by Siamak Delara, UNICEF Iran Office, Tehran, 2007.

Web Resources

Churches Network for Nonviolence www.churchesfornon-violence.org.

Up to date publications and resources to download including resources for eliminating corporal punishment. Link to multi-religious organizations at <http://www.churchesfornon-violence.org/links.html>.

End All Corporal Punishment of Children, <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/>

Website of the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment. Includes links to research, legal reform, and other resources.

International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (IPSCAN), <http://www.ispcan.org/>

The only multidisciplinary international organization that brings together a worldwide cross-section of committed professionals to work towards the prevention and treatment of child abuse, neglect and exploitation globally by increasing public awareness of all forms of violence against children, developing activities to prevent such violence, and promoting the rights of children in all regions of the world.

The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children,

<http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>.

Website for the Study on Violence, containing background documents, the official report presented to the General Assembly, a book containing additional details and recommendations from the Study, and related materials.

VDAY

<http://www.vday.org/home>

A global movement to end violence against women and girls.