



Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development



# Religious communities as partners for development cooperation





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**“A VALUES-BASED DEVELOPMENT POLICY MEANS THAT WE TAKE THE CONTRIBUTION OF RELIGION SERIOUSLY.”**

Dr. Gerd Müller, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development

## WORD AND DEED

### *Religious communities as partners for a values-based development policy*

Helping your neighbor, the people around you, the poor and vulnerable is a strong sign of being committed to compassion. This commitment ties together the world's religions and those who affiliate with a religion – that is, as many as 80 per cent of the global population. The power of religion can bring people together. It can increase each person's awareness of the greater world they live in. This is where justice, peace and the integrity of creation take root in people's lives.

But we also know that a great deal of misery and suffering has been inflicted on people in the name of religion, and this continues to happen. In our present time in particular, radical forces are trying to keep the world from growing closer by committing terrorist attacks and building totalitarian regimes.

Germany's development policy is neutral in terms of religions and beliefs. It is not, however, neutral in terms of values. That is why we want to – and we can – strengthen the potential that religion offers for development. For the benefit of the people, we want to bring together the potential of the world's religions for reconciliation that is evident in so many developing countries throughout the world.

A values-based development policy means that we take the contribution of religion seriously, engage with religious actors and seek to find common answers to hunger, misery and injustice. We are offering to be a partner, and we are partnering with religious actors. Our development policy seeks to strengthen the “peacemakers”, so that our One World can truly become the One World that it is. In this partnership, we seek to foster dialogue, not prejudice. We need more cooperation. We need a dialogue about values and an effort to discern shared values. There is a need for a global partnership with the world's religions. It will not be possible to implement the 2030 Agenda unless the religious communities are active partners in the endeavor. This realization must guide our actions.

That is why we systematically take account of religion and engage with religious communities in our development work. This is the only way in which we can achieve sustainable development and peace for the benefit of the global community of nations. We are doing this because we know that religion is a defining factor for most people's view of the world, their lifestyles and their civic engagement. It continues to have a strong influence on political

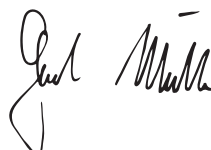
and social life. Thus, it is true that “there can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions,” and “no peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions.”\*

A values-based dialogue with and among the religious communities gives us a chance to achieve a new dimension of development policy for peaceful interaction among the world's people.

Through our partnership with religious communities, we strengthen human rights. We give targeted support to people who are working within their religious communities to foster human rights. The world needs people who show us the way through their strong commitment to reconciliation. Take South Africa, take Togo – often it was reconciliation commissions that helped nations start to deal with the atrocities committed during civil wars. It is not without reason that such commissions have often been chaired by religious leaders.

If we want to foster such dialogue, we need to help foster the right political environment for this in developing countries and emerging economies. That is why, during my visits to partner countries, I do not just have meetings with government officials but I also regularly meet with religious representatives who are socially active. I am thinking of the Sisters from religious orders and the Priests in the Central African Republic who have opened their churches for displaced people, and of the Imams and Bishops who are jointly working for peace and dialogue in Nigeria.

The present strategy describes the way in which we want to realize this structural partnership with religious communities. Our increased emphasis on this aspect has also triggered action at the international level. I consider the following point particularly important: A values-based development policy will not be limited to dialogue. It will always be geared toward the objective of implementing what has been agreed, in line with our values. It is a development policy in word and deed.



Dr. Gerd Müller  
Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation  
and Development

\* Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*





For more information, visit  
[www.bmz.de/religion-en](http://www.bmz.de/religion-en)





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# Summary

More than 80 per cent of all people worldwide affiliate with a religion. Religious communities have always contributed to the provision of services for people – they build hospitals, run schools and provide emergency relief. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, religious communities provide more than 50 per cent of all social services. Many of the world's largest development organizations are motivated by religion.

Religion is an important source of values. It influences people's way of thinking and their actions. Religion has an influence on politics and can act both as a driver of development and an impediment to development.

For too long, the influence of religion on international cooperation has been neglected. A values-based development policy takes the contribution of religion seriously. In future, we will therefore seek to better harness the positive potential of religion for sustainable development and peace. And wherever religion is part of the problem, it must also become part of the solution.







Through the present strategy, we are launching a broad range of actions:

**1. FIND NEW PARTNERS – INCREASE OUR COOPERATION WITH RELIGIOUS ACTORS**

We will increase the number of projects that engage with religious actors. Wherever we can achieve more together, we will reinforce local partnerships in order to improve the acceptance, effectiveness and sustainability of our projects and take advantage of synergies.

**2. EMPOWER “PEACEMAKERS” – FOSTER INTERFAITH DIALOGUE**

In the future, we will take targeted action to foster intrafaith and interfaith dialogue. We will build on the many initiatives that exist in our partner countries (such as interfaith councils).

**3. ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE – INVEST IN EDUCATION**

Sometimes the contents of teaching materials use religious arguments to justify prejudice against minorities. As part of our education programs, we will support reforms of relevant curricula and the development of culture-sensitive and faith-sensitive teaching materials.

**4. REDUCE RELIGIOUS HATRED – SUPPORT A POSITIVE ROLE FOR THE MEDIA**

The media play a key role for the social climate. Through our programs for media development and training for journalists, we also foster the freedom of religion and belief.

**5. STRENGTHEN HUMAN RIGHTS – OPEN UP NEW DIALOGUES**

Sometimes human rights violations are committed in the name of religion. That is precisely why we want to increase our dialogue with religious actors, including those who criticize human rights. We give targeted support to people who are working within their religious communities to foster human rights and are thus particularly suitable to act as facilitators.

**6. EXPAND NETWORKS – BUILD THE CAPACITY OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (FBOs)**

Local FBOs often have very good networks and reach people even in places where there are no public institutions. As part of our support for civil society in our partner countries, we will help build the capacity of such organizations.

**7. PROTECT RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY – IMPROVE THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT**

In our negotiations with our partners, we systematically call for the protection of the freedom of religion. We support our partners in reforming their legislation.

**8. INCREASE RELIGIOUS LITERACY – ENHANCE EXPERTISE AND TRAINING PROGRAMS**

In order to take account of religion and engage with religious actors in a professional manner, expertise and sensitivity are needed. We will therefore expand the training programs offered by GIZ’s Academy for International Cooperation, so as to prepare our overseas staff even better.

**9. BROADEN THE ANALYTICAL BASIS – TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE FACTOR OF RELIGION**

We will give greater attention to the role of religion as we draft country and sector strategies. To that end, we will further develop existing analytical tools.

**10. COMBINE OUR EFFORTS – CREATE AN INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

Together with other donors and international organizations (World Bank, UN, etc.), Germany is setting up the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD). This partnership serves the purpose of pooling activities and exchanging experience.



# Religious communities as partners for development cooperation





## CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES

A values-based development policy which takes the individual seriously also needs to take that individual's worldview seriously. Most people's worldview is defined, not exclusively but certainly to a major extent, by their religion. People's faith does not only give them strength for their own lives but also helps them to understand the world, their fellow human beings, and themselves.

Religion has a strong influence on society, and that influence has not been taken sufficiently into consideration in international cooperation so far. And yet it is clear that, in the long term, it will only be possible for people to live together peacefully and achieve sustainable development if there is goodwill-based cooperation between diverse social groups. This includes the world's religions. More than 80 per cent<sup>1</sup> of the global population affiliate with a religion. In many partner countries of the German Development Ministry, that percentage is even higher. Take Nigeria: 97 per cent<sup>2</sup> of all Nigerians say that religion is important to them. 91 per cent have great confidence in religious institutions. Aid agencies enjoy the confidence of 62 per cent, and the national government, only 38 per cent.

A considerable proportion of social services in sub-Saharan Africa is provided by faith-based organizations. In Kenya, that share is about 40 per cent. In Uganda, it is more than 50 per cent<sup>3</sup>. In many countries, health care and education systems would not exist without the contributions from religious communities.

Although we in Europe – where secularization has advanced very far in some places – tend to forget this, we are living in a world that has been shaped by religion. Religion influences the thinking and the actions of most people on our planet. And these figures are not declining. On the contrary: the importance of the world's religions is rising. Forecasts suggest that, by 2020, the share of people who identify with a religion will rise to 90 per cent<sup>4</sup>.

For a number of years now, there has been talk of a renaissance of religion. Ever since the beginning of terrorist attacks that are committed in the name of God, many people have feared a "return" of religion. They fail to realize that in most regions of the world, religion had never disappeared. What has returned is not religion per se but the question about the role of religion within society and in public life. This question has already become a defining item on the agenda of the 21st century – not only



in developing countries. As a result of the migration of people from societies where religion plays a strong role, it will also have an influence on the way we live together in Germany and Europe.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PEACE AND JUSTICE

Cooperation with religious communities offers a lot of potential

- Religion is a key source of values. It provides guidance with regard to ethical and legal norms. Religion is a specific form of human community. Some religions have actually become the source of sets of laws. Religion often has an influence on politics.
- In many developing countries, people have considerably more confidence in religious leaders than in their government. As a result, religious institutions are often the first place people turn to in an emergency.
- Religion can strengthen the resilience of individuals and entire societies because it offers explanations and rituals that help people deal with loss, suffering, failure and disaster.

1 Pew Foundation (2015)

2 World Values Survey 2014

3 UNFPA (2008): Culture Matters. Lessons from a Legacy of Engaging Faith-based Organizations, [http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Culture\\_Matter\\_II.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Culture_Matter_II.pdf).

4 Pew Foundation (2015)



- Religious convictions are a major source of motivation for many people to work for comprehensive, sustainable development. Many faith-based institutions have traditionally contributed to public welfare. In the field of education in particular, religious communities have been playing an important role in operating institutions and programs.
- Religious communities form networks which often reach into the most remote corners of the world. They often reach people even in places where there are no public institutions anymore.
- Ensuring the integrity of creation is a key concern for most religions.
- It is often religious authorities that lend a voice to the poor and vulnerable. They thus play an important role in strengthening civil societies that are often still weak. Moreover, religious places of assembly often provide space for social debate.

It is true that the terrorism of the so-called Islamic State, of Boko Haram and of the Lord's Resistance Army and the religious arguments that are used to justify the oppression of women or of minorities and the systematic violation of their rights do remind us that religion is often misused to legitimize violence or the violation of human rights.

*Religion is ambivalent.*

*It has the potential for both good and bad.*

- Religion can give people a sense of identity and bring people together across borders and continents even if they have different backgrounds. At the same time, religion can be used to exclude people.
- In conflicts, religious authorities can both fan and dampen the flames. Religious communities can be persecuted, or they can be doing the persecuting.
- Religion is sometimes exploited in order to safeguard people's position of power, suppress critical voices and avoid democratic reforms.
- Time and again, people use religious texts and traditions to derive rules for social life that run counter to human rights and justify the discrimination of people.
- Services provided by religious organizations, for instance in the field of education, reach people who have no access to government services, but they may also contribute to radicalization and intolerance.

Religion has always been an integral element of all societies. On the one hand, it is a private matter. On the other hand, it often has a public dimension. Religion is not just something that concerns the individual or people's individual lifestyles. It becomes visible in the public expression of faith, in collective rituals, and in works of art and culture, all the way to architecture and urban planning.

Both the potential for good and the potential for bad show that religion matters. This means that a global transformation toward sustainable development – in other words, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda – will only succeed if we place stronger emphasis on our partnership with the world's religions. Especially in those places where religion is part of the problem, it must also become part of the solution.

In its development policy, Germany wants to systematically take the world's religions into consideration and engage in dialogue with them, in order to jointly tap the positive potential of governmental and religious institutions and of religious worldviews for the benefit of global development.



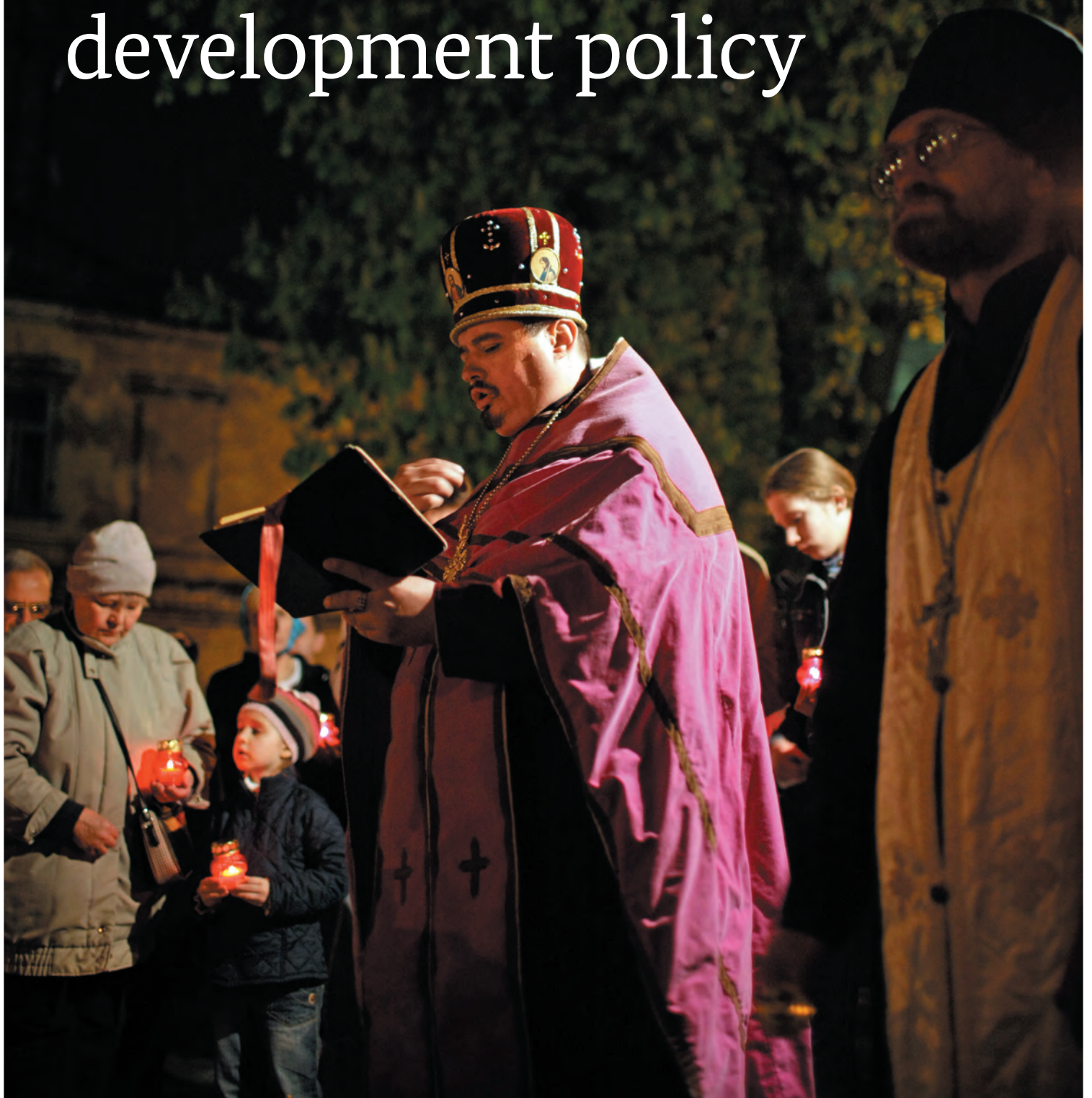


To that end, we need to take a professional approach to religion in our development cooperation. It will not always be helpful or possible to engage closely with religious actors. Sometimes it is more useful to deliberately factor religion out. In other words, we are not planning to make religion a new “cross-cutting issue” or to introduce the mainstreaming of religion. We only want to expand our cooperation with religious actors in those instances where we can achieve more together. We will do this within our bilateral cooperation program, in close consultation with our partner government. However, in order to be able to decide whether or not it makes sense to have cooperation in a given instance, it is absolutely indispensable to give systematic attention to the topic of religion.

The present strategy is intended to provide a framework for that. It builds on the main statements made in the Charter for the Future<sup>5</sup> (Chapter 6). The Charter was drafted in 2014 in a collaborative effort with civil society and on the basis of a broad social dialogue.



# The goals of engagement with religious communities in German development policy





By engaging more closely with religious communities, we want to achieve the following goals:

#### ACHIEVE A TRANSFORMATION TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY AND A LIFE IN DIGNITY FOR ALL

The world is at a crossroads. Unless we manage to achieve a paradigm shift toward sustainable development, we will jeopardize the survival of future generations. Decision-makers in the private sector and in politics need to change their way of thinking. But each and every one of us has to do their part, too.

The 2030 Agenda has paved the way for this. However, the goals laid down in the Agenda need to be filled with a new spirit, a new ethos of responsibility. This requires proponents of values who are able to influence people's way of thinking and their actions. The outstanding role that religious leaders can play in this regard is evident, for example, from the work of Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama but also many local leaders.

If we want a global partnership and equitable development of the kind described in the 2030 Agenda, we need all players on board. The BMZ is working to fill this new global partnership with life and, as part of this, to include religious actors in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The representatives of religions are part of society. In that capacity, they are to be given a greater say in other international processes as well, with a view to building our common future.

#### STRENGTHEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND ADDRESS EXTREMISM

Sometimes, discrimination and other human rights violations are committed in the name of religion. That is precisely why we want to increase our dialogue with religious actors, including those who criticize human rights, and to find suitable players to work with in our programs. We want to help reduce the many misunderstandings about human rights by facilitating dialogue between religious representatives who take a critical view and human rights defenders. The purpose of such a dialogue about values is to strengthen human rights and to reduce discrimination. We are particularly advocating for the right to freedom of religion<sup>6</sup>, which guarantees respect and diversity. We will support those who are working within their religious communities to foster human rights and peaceful inter-faith relations and who are thus particularly suitable to act as facilitators.

Religious representatives are key players for fostering not only the freedom of religion and belief but also other civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights for all people. They can launch sensitization and dialogue processes among their members and act as role models for an unbiased exchange with representatives of other faiths and worldviews.

By working more closely with religious representatives, we want to encourage them to assume responsibility for addressing intolerance and extremism within their own group. This also includes critical debate within faith communities about issues that have a human rights dimension, such as the rights of (religious) minorities, LGBTI people<sup>7</sup>, the empowerment of women, sexual and reproductive rights, and the fight against gender-based violence.

In the long run, religious extremism can only be overcome by the religious communities themselves. But this requires an enabling political environment. Our goal is to empower those who are working against extremism.

<sup>6</sup> The right to freedom of religion and belief was laid down as early as in 1948 across religions and cultures in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Later it was made international law through Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It says that everyone shall have the freedom to have, not have or adopt a religion or belief and the freedom, either individually or in community with others, to manifest that religion or belief. This also includes protection of a person who converts to another religion or turns away from a religion, that is, also atheists and agnostics.

<sup>7</sup> LGBTI = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex



## WHAT IS RELIGION?

*For the purposes of this strategy, it is crucial to realize that religion is a complex system that is primarily characterized by questions about the meaning of life, the desire to deal with contingency, spirituality, and transcendence. By referring to transcendence, religion tries to explain the world and give meaning to it. If we view religion exclusively from a functional point of view, we will fail to recognize this complexity. Religion consists of diverse traditions, experiences, practices, tenets of faith, institutions and actors. The boundary between religion and culture is fluid. Every culture has been shaped by religion. And the ways in which religion is expressed have, in their turn, been shaped by culture. This mutual influence is sometimes so strong that it*

*is difficult to separate the two. In Africa in particular, this system often also includes belief in spirits and witches and veneration of the ancestors (animism). It is important to note that religion is not a homogeneous, monolithic, static entity. Each religion has its own history that has influenced its attitude on violence and peace, on justice and poverty, and on the balance between unity and diversity. Each religion has a variety of theologies, practices, forms of organization and diversity management models. Each religion is subject to change that is influenced by internal debate and by the social environment.*

## FIND NEW PARTNERS AND BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE

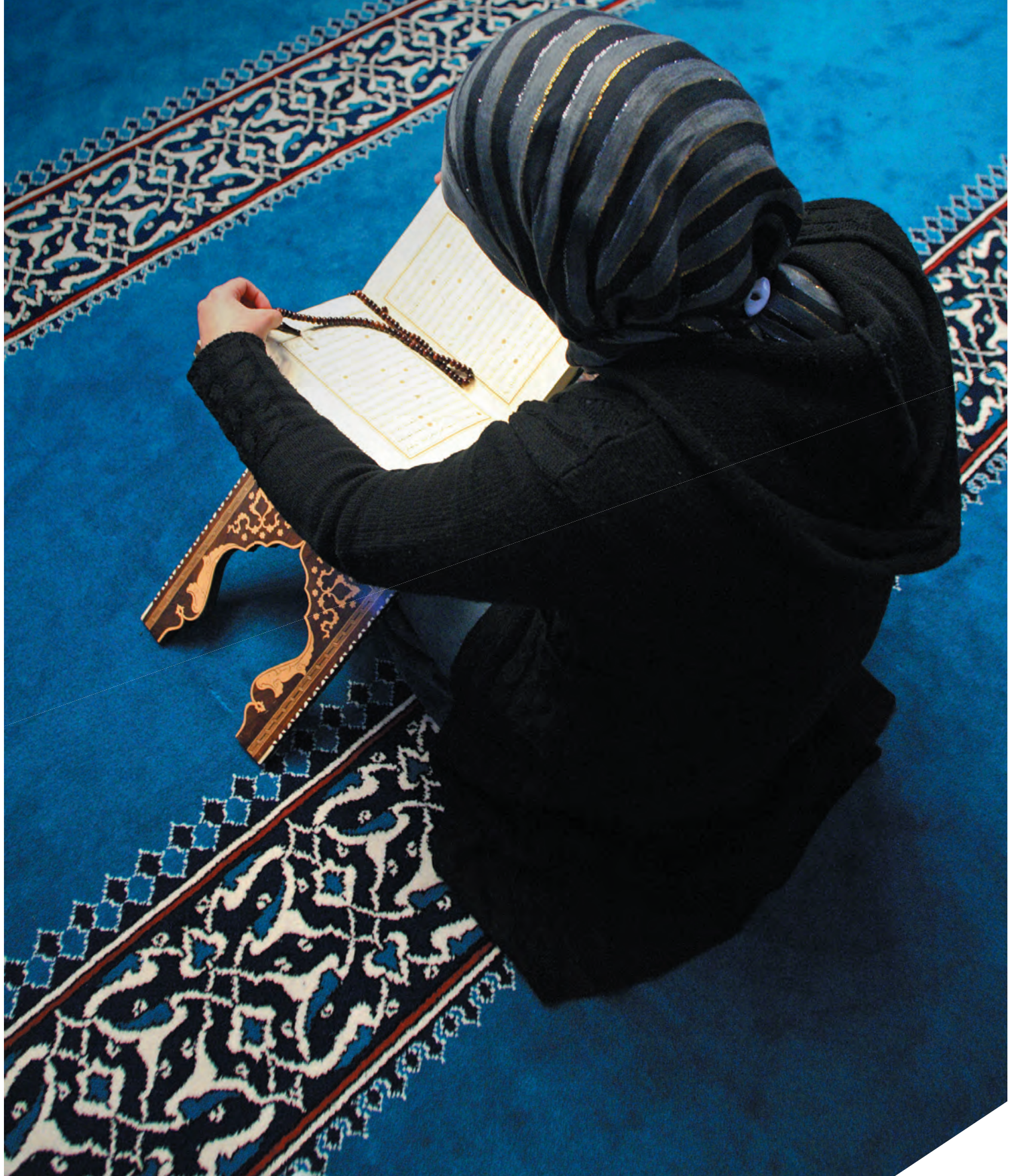
If we want to meet the global challenges we are facing, we need to bring social groups and resources together to greater effect. Religious communities have key resources at their disposal (networks, confidence, financial resources, etc.). Our goal is to create new partnerships, thus taking advantage of synergies that had been neglected. The key aspect of such a partnership is mutual learning.

We want to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of our development cooperation by giving more attention to the religious and cultural context and engaging with religious actors early on. To that end, we will enter into a dialogue on the impacts of our programs. Where necessary, we will further evolve our understanding of development.





# How do we get there? Partners and players







The 2030 Agenda forms the framework for our international cooperation. It also guides our cooperation with religious actors. Thus, such cooperation is not an end in itself but is intended to achieve common goals. This has consequences for the selection of partners and the principles that guide the cooperation.

We want to work together with change agents – with actors who can foster change on the ground toward sustainable development. This means not only those who have good access to the international donor community because they are well-organized and speak the language of the development community. It also includes those who criticize “Western values.” It is not dialogue that poses risks, it is the refusal to engage in dialogue. We can strengthen a common basis of values if we address the aspects that matter to most people and unite all religions through the Golden Rule: human dignity, empathy, tolerance, equality, and the freedom to lead one’s own life.

So it is vital to strike a balance between using clear criteria for the selection of partners and reaching out to players whose worldviews and value systems differ from ours.

## SELECTION CRITERIA

The selection of religious actors as partners in German development cooperation projects will be based on the following criteria:

- a. Respect for human rights standards and principles, that is, a clear commitment to the universality, inalienability and indivisibility of human rights, including the principles of non-discrimination, equality of opportunity and participation
- b. Focus on development, that is, an interest in improving the living conditions of all people while taking account of the limits of our planet – in other words, implementing the Sustainable Development Goals
- c. Competency and capacity, that is, the (technical and organizational) ability to implement agreed measures in the field of cooperation in question
- d. Network and reach, that is, the number of people, segments of society or regions (for instance in fragile states) that can actually be reached by the actor

- e. Moral authority and confidence, that is, the actor’s real influence on the way local people think and act

These criteria guide us as we look for new partners. They must be assessed and applied in light of the local context.

## PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATION

We regard our partners as peers. Our cooperation is to be guided by the following principles. Both sides must by all means avoid using the other side for their ends.

### Respect and openness

- We expressly recognize the important contribution which religions make to sustainable development and peace. This includes the realization that the activities of religious communities usually began a long time before official development cooperation and will continue for a long time after local projects have ended.
- We respect our partners’ spirituality and accept that they cannot just check their spirituality in at the cloakroom before the beginning of talks about cooperation. At the same time, we draw attention to the fact that the BMZ and its implementing organizations are governmental and, thus, secular institutions.
- Freedom of religion also includes the right not to affiliate with any religion and not to practice any faith. So we owe respect to both religious and non-religious people.
- We regard our dialogue with religious actors as a chance to critically review our own understanding of development and our own ways of thinking. We expect the same kind of openness from religious representatives.

- For us, the government's monopoly on force is just as much a basis for a culture of dialogue as the recognition of the independence of religious ideas and systems.

#### No discrimination, no proselytizing

- Germany's development policy is neutral in terms of religions and beliefs. It is not, however, neutral in terms of values. That is why, in our work with religious actors, we do not accept any form of discrimination against other religious actors or secular organizations.
- In our development work, we do not give preferential treatment to any religious community.
- Within the scope of our cooperation, no activities are allowed that serve to spread or preach a religion.

#### Transparency, accountability and focus on results

- International transparency and accountability standards also apply to our cooperation with religious actors. However, the limited capacity of smaller religious communities in particular must be taken into account, in the same way that this is taken into account in our cooperation with civil society organizations in general.
- The focus of our cooperation is on the results of our joint projects. As indicators are formulated, care is being taken to ensure that the specific contribution of religious actors will be reflected (for example, their contribution to changing people's attitudes or behavior or to building social capital).
- The cooperation is based on the holistic approach of the 2030 Agenda, that is, all dimensions of sustainable development have to be taken into account.

THE KIND OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS WE WORK WITH AND THEIR FORM OF ORGANIZATION VARIES DEPENDING ON THE GOAL AND FIELD OF ACTION THAT WE PURSUE.

*Such players may include*

- religious leaders/authorities,
- traditional leaders,
- religious communities and their umbrella organizations,
- faith-based organizations (FBOs),
- interfaith networks and councils, and
- active members of congregations/communities at the local level.





How do we get there?  
Areas of action







IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS MENTIONED ABOVE, WE WILL TAKE MORE SYSTEMATIC ACCOUNT OF THE FACTOR OF RELIGION IN OUR BILATERAL COOPERATION. THIS GOES BOTH FOR DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING OUR PROJECTS AND FOR THE TRAINING WE PROVIDE TO OUR OVERSEAS STAFF.

#### TAKING ACCOUNT OF RELIGION IN BILATERAL COOPERATION PROGRAMS

- a. We will increase the number of projects that engage with religious actors. We will not focus on isolated projects. Rather, we will pursue an integrated approach. In other words, religious actors will be included – wherever that is possible and makes sense – in existing projects on education, health, water, etc.
- b. We will give greater attention to the role of religion as we draft country and sector strategies. Strategies should explicitly address this factor if religious actors have a particularly influential role in the partner country in question.
- c. As a basis, we will further develop analytical tools such as our “brief political-economic analysis” and “brief socioeconomic analysis,” and we will further evolve our set of criteria. These tools are to provide sound information on religion and on the ways in which the freedom of religion and belief will be guaranteed in each social and political context, and the tools should help us make recommendations for action.
- d. In the medium and long term, we will also increase the relevant expert knowledge available at our governmental implementing organizations. This is the only way in which we can take account of religion and engage with religious actors in a professional manner. At Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), we already made a start by setting up the sector project on religion and development.
- e. Expert knowledge includes knowledge about effectiveness and results. We will therefore evaluate our cooperation with religious actors on a regular basis in order to find out more about the influence that religion has on sustainable development, and in order to build a bigger evidence base.
- f. Generally, we will increase the religious literacy of German development staff, that is, we will increase their context-specific knowledge on how to deal with religious dynamics in a professional manner and sensitize them to religious issues. We will increase the number of relevant training programs offered by GIZ’s Academy for International Cooperation, so as to prepare our overseas staff even better. And we will give a set of best practice examples to our economic cooperation officers at German embassies in order to support them in working with religious actors.
- g. In order to be able to identify players on the ground with whom cooperation would be useful, we will map the landscape of religious actors in our partner countries. We will work with our partner countries and other donors as we develop and conduct such mappings.
- h. In partner countries where religion is a particularly sensitive issue, we will carry out portfolio analyses as needed in order to ensure that our portfolio takes account of religion. Our methodology will follow existing procedures, such as conflict-sensitive context analysis.



## FOSTERING INTERFAITH AND INTRAFaITH DIALOGUE

Many of our partner countries have traditionally been characterized by religious diversity. Over the centuries, many different forms of interfaith dialogue have emerged. In many countries, there are interfaith councils or other forms of formalized exchange. They help make societies more resilient, address political deficits, provide platforms for interfaith communication and are a forum for resolving conflict peacefully.

- a. We want to build on that. In future, we will make a point of improving the environment for interfaith dialogue and supporting relevant bodies (networks, councils, umbrella organizations, etc.). We will increase our engagement with them under our bilateral programs.
- b. And we want to build their capacity to such an extent that they can be long-term partners for sustainable development and peace.
- c. In countries that have no such fora, we will provide space for dialogue – through our field structure or through dialogue meetings in Germany. While official development cooperation can help to improve the general environment, it is still up to the religious communities, and to them only, to discuss issues of substance and theology.

## IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND TOLERANCE; PROTECTING FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

A pluralistic society with peaceful relations between different religions is only possible if the right political and legal environment is in place.

- a. We will therefore give greater attention to the role of religion when we hold government negotiations with our partners. By ratifying international agreements, Germany's partner countries have committed themselves under international law to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights enshrined in these agreements. Wherever members of religious communities suffer oppression, we call for compliance with the right to freedom of religion. Wherever religious extremism is growing or is even being encouraged by government institutions or financed from abroad, we raise these issues in our political dialogue with our partners.<sup>8</sup>
- b. In many cases, the discrimination of religious minorities (and, thus, social conflict) is rooted in a country's legislation or administrative practice. As part of our support for the development of the rule of law, we encourage our partners to change discriminatory legislation. Such legislation includes regulations that disadvantage women or minorities on religious grounds or restrict their access to specific resources, but also blasphemy laws that limit the freedom of speech.
- c. When we provide advice to a partner on constitution-drafting, we will do more in future to share information about the good experience with church-state cooperation in Germany.
- d. Religious education is a key issue. It is not uncommon for the contents of government teaching materials to increase prejudice rather than reduce it. In our education programs, we will support reforms of relevant curricula and the development of new culture-sensitive and faith-sensitive teaching materials.<sup>9</sup> Whenever Germany supports its partner countries through development programs for teacher training, we will work for religious tolerance and diversity.

<sup>8</sup> The 2013 EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief provide useful guidance for our political dialogue.

<sup>9</sup> Guidance can be found in the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (OSCE/ODIHR 2007).

- e. The media play a key role for the social climate. Through our programs for media development and training for journalists, we also foster the freedom of religion and belief.
- f. We also assist organizations and human rights defenders working on the freedom of religion and belief.

### BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) differ widely in terms of their capacity. There are highly professional organizations with worldwide operations, and there are many smaller regional FBOs whose institutional capacity is rather weak. But such smaller players tend to have better networks on the ground, often enjoy the confidence of local people and are able to reach particularly marginalized groups.

However, for an organization to be given a stronger part in an official development cooperation program, it must have a certain level of capacity (for example with regard to accountability, financial management, etc.).

- a. In order to find new partners and not limit our cooperation to large, well-organized agencies, we will take targeted action to help build the capacity of FBOs. This includes human rights sensitization, including with regard to gender equality.

### EXPANDING INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

If we want to achieve a global paradigm shift toward sustainable development, we need to partner with religious communities at the international level, too. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will facilitate this, as the Agenda is explicitly based on a multi-stakeholder approach. We need a formalized exchange between donor nations, international organizations and religious actors in order to develop new forms of cooperation.

- a. We will improve the links between existing experience and initiatives and implement joint activities. To that end, the BMZ will become a founding member of the new International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).

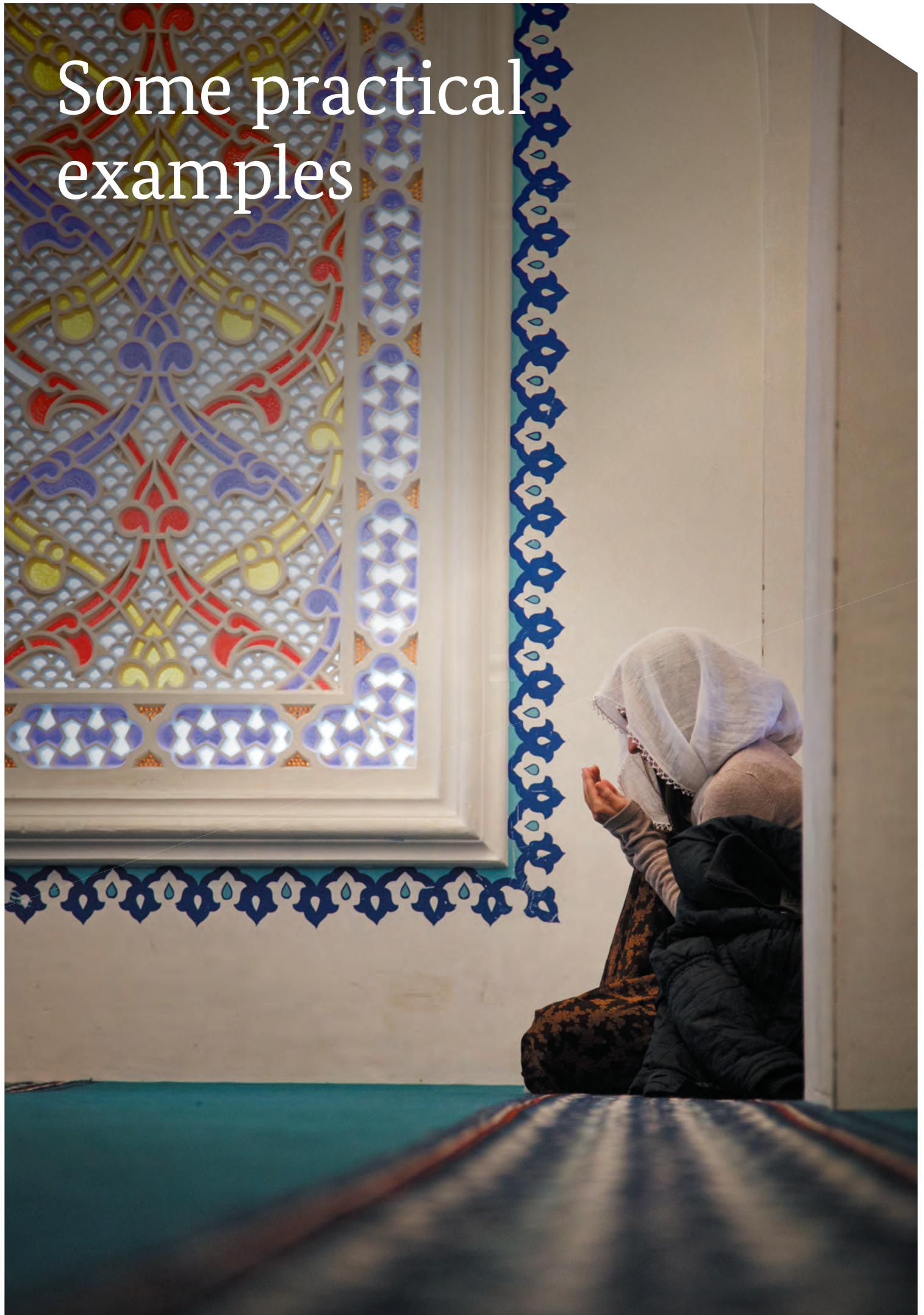
When we implement activities in the five areas of action outlined above, we want to draw on the expertise and experience of our partners from civil society and academia. In particular, it will be necessary and useful to have an exchange with religious communities in Germany, which are often in close touch with fellow believers in developing countries. The present strategy, too, has been drafted in consultation with representatives from various religions and from civil society. Our national thematic team on religion and development<sup>10</sup> will continue to be a critical observer and partner for us as we implement our strategy.



<sup>10</sup> That team was established in December 2014 in order to provide critical feedback in the debate on religion and development. It comprises representatives of religious organizations, secular NGOs, political foundations and academia. It meets about three times a year at the BMZ.



# Some practical examples





WE HAVE ALREADY GAINED GOOD EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH RELIGIOUS ACTORS. FOR MORE THAN 50 YEARS, WE HAVE WORKED WITH THE “CENTRAL AGENCIES” OF GERMANY’S TWO MAJOR CHURCHES (PROTESTANT AND ROMAN CATHOLIC). THESE AGENCIES ARE IN CHARGE OF GOVERNMENT-FUNDED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS THAT ARE RUN BY THE CHURCHES’ DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS. FURTHERMORE, THE BMZ IS ABLE TO FINANCE PROJECTS RUN BY FAITH-BASED NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS. THERE ARE ALSO EXAMPLES OF THE SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS IN OUR BILATERAL OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION.<sup>11</sup>

### EXAMPLES FROM BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

In Indonesia, it only became possible to set up a civil registry in Aceh following the 2004 tsunami when the council of Islamic scholars published a statement in which it said that official registration of vital statistics was a contribution to the public good. Previously, large sections of the population had been opposing registration on the grounds that it was a “Christian” concept.

In Algeria, support was provided to Imams who were working with government representatives to draft positions on environmental protection. This resulted in a handbook for the training of Imams on the role of mosques for environmental education. The handbook is now being used to teach the new subject of “Biodiversity” that was introduced at Koran schools. It will also be made available for use in Pakistan under a South-South cooperation project.

In Burundi, Germany’s Civil Peace Service is working with local churches to revive dialogue between groups that are deeply divided after years of civil war.

In Mauritania and other African countries, it has been possible to get Muslim scholars to support the fight against female genital mutilation. With a view to protecting women and girls, it is important that religious authorities condemn the practice.

Muslims for Human Rights (Muhuri) is a human rights organization based in Mombasa, Kenya. It works for the implementation of land reform and for strengthening human rights throughout the country’s coastal region. The

BMZ has sent a Civil Peace Service expert to support the conflict-sensitive implementation of land reform in the coastal region and the integration of nonviolent conflict management methods in local human rights work.

### EXAMPLES FROM THE BMZ’S COOPERATION WITH THE GERMAN CHURCHES

Together with their partners, the German churches have been involved in development cooperation for more than 50 years. Their work is characterized by being particularly close to the poorest of the poor. Often, church aid agencies are still able to act in settings where official development agencies cannot, or may not, become involved – especially if the political environment is unfavorable. The BMZ supports the work of the churches with more than 200 million euros a year through the Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development and the Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid. This support is helping the churches to implement important projects.

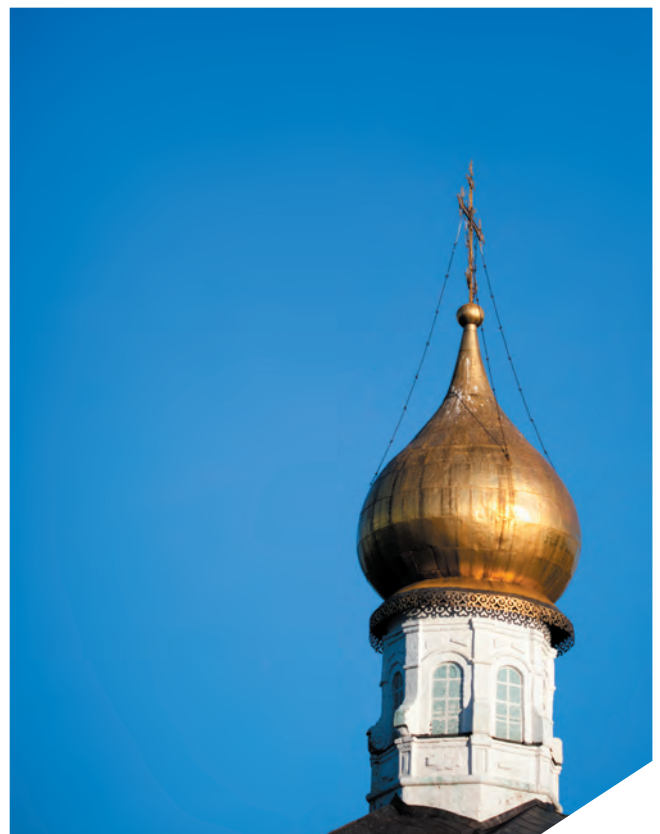
The Cuban Council of Churches (CIC) is working with the German Protestant agency Bread for the World to enable people with disabilities to live independent lives. The project covers twelve communities in the five eastern provinces of Cuba, which are particularly affected by poverty. Many volunteers from local communities are involved in the effort. Their work is based on the Christian vision of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The project reaches even people in remote areas because church institutions have existed there for a long time and thus have a more close-knit and comprehensive network than secular civil society organizations.

<sup>11</sup> See the brochure More than anything. The contribution of religious communities to sustainable development, [https://www.giz.de/expertise/downloads/giz-2015\\_SP\\_Values\\_Religion\\_Mappe\\_EN.pdf](https://www.giz.de/expertise/downloads/giz-2015_SP_Values_Religion_Mappe_EN.pdf)





In northern Burkina Faso, Misereor (the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation) is working with the interfaith Union Fraternelle des Croyants de Dori (Fraternal Association of Believers in Dori). The organization has been working for many years to give local people in this drought-affected region, the majority of whom are Muslim, access to safe drinking water. Thanks to its interfaith composition, the organization enjoys particularly great confidence among the people.



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#### **AS AT**

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#### **ADDRESSES OF THE BMZ OFFICES**

→ BMZ Bonn

Dahlmannstraße 4

53113 Bonn

Germany

Tel. +49 (0) 228 99 535 - 0

Fax +49 (0) 228 99 535 - 3500

→ BMZ Berlin im Europahaus

Stresemannstraße 94

10963 Berlin

Germany

Tel. +49 (0) 30 18 535 - 0

Fax +49 (0) 30 18 535 - 2501

#### **CONTACT**

poststelle@bmz.bund.de

www.bmz.de/en





