16   Faith collaborations in promoting tolerance and social cohesion

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Tolerance and social cohesion have become buzzwords in an era of increased multiculturalism with greater lines of migration, in which discussions about identity and difference often crowd out discourse of integration or assimilation (Brown 2006:2; Chan et al 2006:273). One could argue that, rather than agree on a meaning, it is more productive to see tolerance and social cohesion as discourses or norms of idealised behaviour that guide modes of conduct (Brown 2006:4) at the individual and communal levels, respectively, within the themes of justice, citizenship and community in a reality where diverse groups of people co-exist (Brown 2006:6).

Policy makers have latched on to these discourses, promoting and measuring them in varying ways; similarly, the humanitarian and development communities actively seek ways to promote them in conflict and post-conflict societies where they implement programming. This is seen in the efforts of such global institutions as the U.N. Development Fund (UNDP 2019) and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2019) to proactively measure and report on social cohesion around the world, and the use of 'social cohesion' by large humanitarian organisations such as World Vision (2015), CARE (2014) and Caritas International (2017), as a lens to gauge the needs of post-conflict and conflict-affected communities. In the U.N. 'New Way of Working', the so-called 'triple nexus' between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work has further brought discourses about social cohesion to the forefront of humanitarian thinking (ICVA 2016).

Social cohesion evokes ideas of solidarity, trust, inclusion and integration (Chan et al. 2006:274). The discourse around cohesion often focusses on integration versus exclusion at a systemic level, or societal, level (Chan et al. 2006:275). There has been extensive research on social cohesion, closely linked to the idea of social capital but with an understanding that cohesion requires living with diversity (Chan et al. 2006:275). However, as a discourse, it is difficult to measure because, although it may describe a community as a whole, it nonetheless is shaped by how it is perceived by each member in a group, according to her or his standing, sense of belonging and morale (Chan et al. 2006:276).

Meanwhile, the idea of being tolerant is increasingly spoken of in various fora as an individual virtue which is fundamental to human dignity, and 'intolerance' is an accusation easily thrown across political and social lines. Tolerance is seen as universally good, intolerance as universally bad. However, there is no universal meaning, and different types of difference call for different types of tolerance (Brown 2006:3).

> In philosophy and ethics, tolerance is typically conceived as an individual virtue, issuing from and respecting the value of moral autonomy, and acting as a sharp rein on the impulse to legislate against morally or religiously repugnant beliefs and behaviours.
>
> (Brown 2006:8)

Tolerance is not neutral, and it does not even entail respect or acceptance of that which is being tolerated (Brown 2006:26).

Tolerance is about finding a way to live with difference and disagreement, but without acting against those groups with whom one differs or disagrees. It should be applied to beliefs and practices that may be felt as offensive but do not go against the law; we can tolerate private, personal choices that we disagree with as long as they are not legally deemed to be wrong (Brown 2006:12). Habermas (2004) distinguished between tolerance and an edict to tolerate: governments can legally mandate toleration, but tolerance is an attitude. He argues that there is a limit to our ability to be tolerant of that which we disagree and that tolerance requires accepting a cognitive dissonance between our own values and the values which are held by the party we are tolerating; in other words, tolerance is not necessary if we are indifferent and is nearly impossible otherwise (Habermas 2004:10). On the other hand, tolerance is not always so challenging; although disagreement may feed intolerance if not addressed, interaction with members of different groups can breed tolerance when points of agreement are identified (Djupe and Calfano 2012:770).

This sits in tension with social cohesion, which is likely easier with homogeneity, where there is nothing to tolerate (Chan et al. 2006:292). A number of studies have captured the cost of diversity to society, and various theorists have argued that as diversity increases, social capital decreases. Although small groups may grow tighter and strengthen their ties, thus strengthening their social capital and often their material well-being, without interaction with people of different groups, their capacity for tolerance and peaceful co-existence may decrease (Laurence 2011). This can be dangerous, because, whereas diversity may challenge cohesion, it can also foster tolerance. However, studies of traditional tribal communities have demonstrated that some degree of conflict can also promote social cohesion by challenging and revitalising values and goals, while offering a means of expressing hostile or aggressive sentiments, thus avoiding other types of conflict that are eventually disruptive (Murphy 1957). In contexts of greater, unexpected or highly disruptive civil conflict, however, citizens often choose to protect themselves and avoid making things worse by entrenching in conformity at the cost of promoting civil liberties (Hutchinson 2014:816); in other words, diversity is more difficult to live with when citizens feel their well-being has been harmed.

Research suggests that social cohesion and the promotion of tolerance in society are intrinsically linked to economic performance and the existence of strong institutions to manage and reinforce these norms (Chan et al. 2006:278). In fact, "it is not diversity per se but uneven diversity which makes a difference" (Portes and Vickstrom 2011:472). Disadvantage may be the factor that is most linked to a decrease in willingness to interact with neighbours, to an increased sense of powerlessness and mistrust, and to increased interracial competition for scarce resources (Laurence 2011:73). The effect of intolerance is worsened by weak institutional protections in a context of social fracture (Hutchinson 2014:797); this is counterbalanced by strong institutions that can enforce a shared set of norms, a set of rules embodied in a diversity of roles in which each member of society can see where she or he belongs (Portes and Vicstrom 2011:473).

Research also supports the idea that diversity undermines cohesiveness when one group feels threatened by another, usually a dominant group feels that certain resources that belong to them are being threatened by a minority group (Djupe and Calfano 2012:770; Laurence 2011:73). Similarly, civil conflict has been found to dampen the public's willingness to extend basic civil liberties to non-conformist groups; in other words, instability hurts political tolerance, which, in turn, can lead to long-standing societal problems and a slowed process of reconciliation and peace (Hutchinson 2014). The

highest level of intolerance, in fact, may be of groups that are perceived as presenting not a personal threat, but rather a danger to the state and society (Hutchinson 2014:802).

Another concept which helps capture the ideal of society that policy makers and humanitarians are seeking to promote could be solidarity. This term has received much less attention in public discourse than the terms discussed thus far, but theorists have posited that where there is solidarity, there is space for cohesion and tolerance. Solidarity may be characterised by a high level of social capital, demographic stability, both economic and social inclusion, and quality of life at both the individual and the community levels (Chan et al. 2006:284). Classic sociologist Emile Durkheim suggested a distinction between "mechanical solidarity", in which solidarity is based on homogeneity and mutual acquaintance, and "organic solidarity", which is characterised by heterogeneity, role differentiation and a complex division of labour (Portes and Vickstrom 2011:472). It is this organic solidarity that characterises most modern societies and which in fact has potential to be stronger and more robust under certain conditions. Therefore, Portes and Vickstrom (2011:472) suggest that it is in fact a bit simplistic and idealistic to see homogeneity as important for the sake of social cohesion. Organic solidarity requires diversity, a complex division of labour and strong coordinating institutions (Portes and Vickstrom 2011:473).

In the model of organic solidarity, sometimes, the existence of strong community organisations may help solidify solidarity, but other times they can create obstacles by promoting the interests of a small group over society as a whole (Portes and Vickstrom 2011:473). On the other hand, as argued above, strong institutions can help enforce the shared norms – such as values of tolerance and cohesion – that can help promote a cohesive society. This is often found in strong state institutions, but can also be found in strong private coordinating institutions. Therefore, we begin to see that religious institutions in conflict and post-conflict societies, especially where the government has limited legitimacy, can be essential for either promoting or harming cohesion through the ways in which they foster and encourage tolerance and well-being.

Religion has long been implicated as a cause of, or contributor to, conflict and violence, as well as harmful practices such as persecution of minorities and legitimisation of discrimination (Shannahan and Payne 2016). Further, there has been a fair bit of evidence collected and published over the years that pro-violent discourse on the part of religious leaders can contribute to the escalation of religious conflict (Basedau and Koos 2015:760). Religious teachings, or the influence of religious leaders, can shape power relations and underpin narratives that legitimise and motivate physical violence in communities that may be susceptible to conflict. Specifically, religious leaders may be motivated by competition for influence to incite conflict amongst their congregants (Basedau and Koos 2015:762).

Religious narratives can also dehumanise members of different groups, which can legitimise both action, such as atrocities against entire communities, and inaction, on the part of faith communities when witnessing violence (Shannahan and Payne 2016:11). Evidence also suggests that religious attitudes, more than individual or personal demographic factors, are likely to motivate support for faith-based violence (Basedau and Koos 2015:761). Research with religious leaders in South Sudan found that if religious leaders have expressed intolerant or hostile views about other faiths, they may also be more prone to support violence (Basedau and Koos 2015:767). Further, religious leaders have influence on the views of their followers, although the nature of this influence and the process of faith community

mobilisation are complex (Basedau and Koos 2015:769), many of the nuances of which are captured in other chapters of this volume.

However, there is a growing consensus that the influence of religion, and of religious leaders in particular, to foster conflict, can also be seen in their capacity to mitigate conflict, promote a narrative of tolerance and support cohesion. Religious communities may be able to help address challenges to cohesion such as inequality, disadvantage and weak institutional support systems (c.f. Ostby 2008; Stewart 2009). They may also promote an open dialogue about practices that could be harmful or contributing to conflict.

Religious leaders, or clerics, have a role to play in promoting tolerance through their sermons and other teaching (Djuupe and Calfano 2012; Kalin and Siddiqi 2014) and have been found to be important partners in international peacekeeping interventions (Moore 2013:10). There are many possible reasons for this, but of particular note is, as one study of religiously motivated peacebuilders found, that "much of their effectiveness lay in the fact that these religious leaders were perceived by the people as a committed neighbour, intimately acquainted with their suffering" (Moore 2013:80). There is evidence supporting religiosity both as a motivator of intolerance and as a means of promoting tolerance. High church attendance, when it becomes a means by which individuals join tight homogenous groups and are not interacting with the healthy tension of diversity outlined above, can foster intolerance; although a high level of religiosity, especially when one's leaders are promoting inclusive values, can foster greater tolerance (Djupe and Calfano 2012).

There is a growing consensus amongst humanitarian actors that multi-faith and interfaith initiatives which involve religious actors reflecting the diversity of the communities in which conflict takes place are particularly noteworthy (c.f. Abu-Nimer and Smith 2016; Bolton 2017; Uysal 2016), although there is very limited evidence available about how interfaith work functions and what it can contribute to peace or social cohesion work (Lyk-Owen and Owen 2019:23). This chapter begins to explore the role of faith actors, and in particular collaborative networks of faith groups, in promoting social cohesion through a narrative of tolerance, by exploring three case studies of World Vision's interfaith programming in different contexts. The focus is on understanding the role of these faith groups in promoting narratives of tolerance and social cohesion within religiously diverse contexts which have experienced recent civil conflict or threats to cohesion.

Research context

World Vision, an international Christian charity founded in 1950, is now active in nearly 100 countries. The bedrock of its programming is community-based child sponsorship, which supports the establishment of locally focussed development programmes ranging from 10 to 25 years in duration. During these programmes, World Vision builds partnerships with local community organisations, including government entities, other development actors and traditional leaders. As a faith-based organisation, often World Vision's strongest ties in the communities where it works are forged with religious congregations, and faith leaders become key points of contact for World Vision staff.

Even though World Vision is a Christian organisation, and usually its first point of contact is likely to be with fellow Christian faith leaders, the organisation has expressed commitment to acknowledging the

key social role played by all religions (World Vision 2019) and often proactively engages with all religious groups represented in the communities where it works. This over time in many contexts has led to the development of broad networks of faith leaders of different traditions within the communities where World Vision works and, in some cases, to intentional engagement in interfaith work in the form of activities, such as material support to interfaith networks or offering group training to religious leaders of different traditions. This approach has enabled World Vision to support interfaith engagement in communities where there is a risk and/or history of conflict.

In 2017–2018, as a new member of World Vision International staff, I had the privilege of visiting three countries in three different regions of the world in order to explore how each had engaged in interfaith work and the impact that this had on both development programming and promoting social cohesion. In all three countries, there is a recent history of conflict and World Vision programming has invested heavily in faith partnerships, including a strong interfaith element. In each country, over the course of a week-long visit hosted by local staff who have themselves worked with faith partners, I met with various World Vision staff, religious leaders of different traditions, representatives of partner organisations and members of the communities where programming took place. Most meetings took the form of semi-structured interviews with myself and a member of local staff present.

In Central African Republic (CAR), World Vision began operations after conflict broke out in 2013 and did not implement long-term development programmes, rather maintained a country-wide multi-year humanitarian response. Along with other humanitarian actors, World Vision's programming included support for a national-level interreligious platform and the establishment of mirror platforms at the local level in conflict-affected communities across the country.

In the Philippines, World Vision has supported interfaith work on the island of Mindanao for several decades. The city of Zamboanga was the site of a long-term development programme, during which World Vision helped to establish Amores Interfaith Forum, a network of faith leaders from Muslim, Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. Although World Vision's development programme in Zamboanga ended in 2012, Amores continued as a charity offering interfaith dialogue and peace education. When conflict broke out in Zamboanga a year later, the members of Amores both supported their own congregations and facilitated World Vision's humanitarian response.

In Lebanon, a country which boasts 17 different officially recognised religious groups, since beginning operations in the 1980s, World Vision has by necessity invested in interfaith relations in order to facilitate development work in mixed-religious communities. With the tensions accompanying the influx of Syrian refugees in the 2010s, World Vision in Lebanon has worked hard to maintain its reputation as a credible Christian humanitarian actor while proactively working alongside Muslim groups and in Muslim-majority communities. In this context, World Vision has engaged directly with religious actors of different backgrounds as well as supporting interfaith activities to address complex social problems.

In this chapter, I explore how, in these three countries, religious leaders played an important role as partners in humanitarian work, which positioned them to promote narratives of social cohesion and tolerance in various ways. When supported with technical expertise and sufficiently resourced, they were able to innovatively address complex social issues, which may contribute to conflict. Furthermore, they sought to model tolerance and help community members to accept people of different groups. They also helped humanitarian actors better understand and respond to the urgent material needs of conflict-affected communities and saw this as an important prerequisite toward building social

cohesion. In this way, they could help bridge communication between different groups of people. These collaborations were by no means simple and were limited in their capacity to reach as many people as they wanted with as much support as was needed. The rest of this chapter draws some insights regarding these dynamics of World Vision's faith partners' position within their communities.

Proximity to conflict

Religious communities are often in the epicentre of conflict and, as has been proposed above, within their position can play various roles which may allow them to promote either violence or tolerance. There are various ways in which religion may be found in conflict, such as the proximity of religious communities to conflict. Rather than being part of the conflict, they are often bystanders sometimes used as scapegoats.

In Lebanon, members of many churches were affected by the rapid influx of refugees, and their church leaders felt the need to address the ensuing concerns that they expressed. As many of the refugees were Muslim, the difference in religion between themselves and the new arrivals was highlighted by parishioners and other community members who found it easier to place blame on Muslim cultural practices rather than reflect on the existence and complexities of conflict in neighbouring Syria.

In CAR, there were numerous reports of militias using religious identity as a recruitment tactic (Poblicks 2019). For example, while competing for control of the nation's mines, a militia may have recruited fighters or garnered community support in Christian-majority areas by pointing out that the mines were controlled by Muslims or vice-versa. Youth were particularly susceptible to such use of identity politics. I was also told stories about how militias from Muslim-majority regions in bordering countries entered a community and began to fight, then recruited local Muslims to join the militias on the argument that they shared a religion. Christian militias did the same thing, thus entrenching a religious division in communities which were previously proud of their peaceful co-existence.

The shock of the 2013 siege in Zamboanga, Philippines, affected most members of Amores Interfaith Forum in a highly personal way. The church of one of its members was destroyed in the 2013 violence, while the chairman was isolated in his house, unable to leave, without communications, and hosting dozens of displaced neighbours; he fled to safety after more than a week. Other Amores members were either personally affected, or else had congregants or close family members who were affected. As soon as they could come together to discuss what was happening, the members of Amores agreed that they had a role to play in sharing messages of spirituality and acceptance with their congregations. Those who suffered loss spoke also looked for opportunities to speak of forgiveness. In CAR, many religious leaders who were directly affected by the conflict, such as the members of the Interreligious Platform themselves, have similarly used their experiences to make their message of peace sound credible.

Furthermore, in CAR, religious leaders played a role in mediation, directly negotiating with militias to bring a cease to fighting in their areas or to allow safe passage for displaced families. They often worked in partnership with armed international peace forces operating in their communities. The efforts of some religious groups in CAR were somewhat hindered, however, by the fact that not all religious communities used their proximity to conflict to speak out for peace; some religious leaders were indeed amongst the most vocal proponents of continued violence and, in particular, retribution, usually

because they suffered loss in the conflict. Such relatively isolated instances of religious leaders calling for retribution did undermine the influence of others calling for peace.

Meeting felt needs of congregations

In the three contexts where this study took place, conflict had led to widespread displacement and an increase in poverty levels; and in all three countries, religious communities were at the forefront of the effort to meet the urgent material needs not only of their congregation members but also of other residents of their communities. This was seen as a demonstration of their faith-motivated compassion, as well as a step towards building credibility for addressing more complex social issues later on.

In Zamboanga, during its early years, Amores Interfaith Forum launched a spin-off charity called Jabu Jabu, which had as its mandate to increase levels of birth registration in order to help address widespread social exclusion of Muslim children. Many Muslim families did not think registering their children's birth was important and so did not bother. However, legal identity is sanctioned as a universal right of children and birth documentation is needed for registration in school, employment eligibility and even for World Vision sponsorship. World Vision approached Amores members to ask their assistance, and the resulting initiative was successful. It grew such that it became its own legal entity, registered separately from Amores but with overlapping leadership. As such, it became a platform for Amores members, raising their profile and visibility, which, in turn, allowed them to engage both government officials and residents of Zamboanga City in discussions about social issues with greater ease.

In Lebanon, World Vision supported several churches providing assistance to vulnerable families, most of whom are Syrian refugees, through a small grants programme designed to simultaneously support the churches' humanitarian work and strengthen their capacity to manage future aid projects. The pastor of one of the churches implementing a food and education project through this scheme said that his congregation's ability to continually provide such aid has helped position them as an important community centre within the neighbourhood, providing an opportunity for church members and refugees, most of whom are Muslim, to meet and build friendships with one another.

The support of religious actors also helps international aid organisations gain acceptance from beneficiary communities. In times of crisis, affected groups often refuse aid from international humanitarians, suspecting them of having a political or proselytising agenda, but a trusted local leader can help mitigate such fears. World Vision's faith partnerships repeatedly helped facilitate delivery of urgently needed services to affected populations. For example, in a rural village in Lebanon, many of the Sunni Muslim residents were at first suspicious of World Vision's offer of basic educational services, even more so because education can often be used as a tool for shaping impressionable young minds and World Vision is a Christian non-governmental organisation (NGO). However, drawing upon a strong partnership with an Islamic charity and a deepening relationship with a sheikh who works at the charity, World Vision was able to demonstrate its commitment to humanitarian education for all children in need, regardless of faith background.

In Zamboanga, members of Amores swung into action for aid delivery in the early days of the 2013 siege, at first to help members of their own congregations who were affected. Then, at the peak of the

humanitarian response, many Muslim leaders spoke out on behalf of Christian and secular NGOs, assuring displaced families that they could and should accept assistance offered. Amores members were present at all World Vision distributions, usually both a Muslim and a Christian faith leader, to bless the event and encourage the recipients to trust World Vision's humanitarian intentions.

In CAR, many people whom I interviewed drew a link between aid provision and social cohesion, especially when partnering with faith leaders for beneficiary selection and messaging. With limited rations, community members in many locations throughout the country had grown restive and even violent when they did not receive the food they had hoped for. World Vision mobilised faith leaders to help facilitate communication with beneficiaries, explain selection criteria and generally alleviate tension at distributions. However, there were also a number of stories told of faith leaders who redirected aid to their family members or congregants, abusing their influence because they felt the same desperation that others in the community felt.

In keeping with the idea that financial need, disadvantage and inequality can all contribute to a breakdown in social cohesion, faith communities' role in facilitating aid provision was seen as an important contributor, not just to meeting urgent material needs but also to rebuilding communities in which cohesion was possible and discussions about values such as tolerance could take place.

Modelling collaboration and tolerance

Faith leaders expressed a desire to help mitigate communal tension in the three countries through their own visibility. In Bangui, CAR, I saw posters of three religious leaders: the Catholic Cardinal based in the city, a senior Muslim cleric and the head of a Protestant church network. Each was wearing an outfit that clearly identified his religious affiliation, and they were shaking hands. This image was splashed on billboards and across the media as a symbol of collaboration and a message that people of different religious traditions can in fact co-exist (WEA 2014).

When I travelled to the small town of Zamboanga on the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippines, and told the co-leaders of Amores Interfaith Forum about this, they got excited and decided they wanted to take a photo of themselves in their clerical clothing and plaster copies around town: 'The Pastor and the Imam', they would caption it. After all, they told me, emulating interfaith collaboration is part of their organisation's core purpose.

At the highest political levels, religious leaders can serve as community representatives, harnessing their extensive constituencies or congregations, along with a status that often comes with visible symbols in both their clothing and their places of worship. The national-level interreligious platform in CAR was offered a seat at most peace negotiation meetings and invited to consult with donors planning humanitarian aid to their country. As a visible group representing three religious denominations, they claimed a degree of credibility few other stakeholders in the conflict can claim.

Many stories were shared in the media, by humanitarian organisations and through word-of-mouth in the CAR that demonstrated tolerance and shared humanity through demonstrations of practical mercy. An Imam gave food to the displaced families who took refuge on the mosque grounds, regardless of their religious background. The Cardinal representing Catholics in the interreligious platform housed and protected his Muslim counterpart, the Imam in the platform, and his family for the better part of a year.

Local families allowed displaced people to squat on their land or, in some cases, even in their homes. These stories have inspired others to think of peace and tolerance.

In Zamboanga, some of the members of Amores Interfaith Forum took a more targeted grassroots approach to modelling tolerance. They wanted to challenge employment discrimination, in which businesses usually only hire staff of their own religious tradition. Their plan was to establish a business with mixed-religious management and staff, so as to demonstrate that Muslims and Christians can in fact work together effectively. They also felt it was important to use this initiative to illustrate that, in working side-by-side, they were not trying to convert one other. Their stated purpose in interacting with one another was collaboration and dialogue rather than persuasion.

Religious leaders do not have to operate as interfaith networks in order to model tolerance, though. In Lebanon, a Muslim leader (sheikh) shared a story of two young women from a Christian town who went to a conservative Muslim area to do some research. Their visit was to include time spent at an Islamic charity and with a sheikh. They were scared to go to a Sunni Muslim region which had a reputation as a possible base of ISIS and their parents went so far as to ask them to cancel their trip. When the students decided to go anyway, their parents stayed home praying. The visit went well and the two girls were well-received, to the great surprise of their families. The students were pleased to return home and speak well of their Muslim hosts, and the Muslim community was proud of having received them well.

Such examples of tolerance were arguably more powerful because of the story they told, the stories told about them and the sharing of those stories to others within the community or even the wider society, than for the improved relations which emerged from such encounters themselves.

Opportunity to discuss social protection and tolerance with congregants

When they maintain the respect of their congregations, in part by ensuring material needs are met and modelling honourable values, religious leaders then have a platform for creating space within their congregations, and with each other, to discuss complex social issues. Religious leaders are often better positioned than other humanitarian actors to engage with sensitive social issues, building upon their existing relationships and reputations in their communities. Furthermore, collaboration and partnership on material aid provision can open up new spaces for dialogue. Alternately, World Vision, as an international humanitarian actor, could bring religious leaders of different traditions together to discuss social issues that were of common concern to all communities. This is a space where an external broker, an international organisation or non-religious partner, can help facilitate dialogue and engagement of sensitive issues.

When Amores Interfaith Forum was first established in Zamboanga, World Vision staff dedicated significant effort to training and sensitising its earliest members about the importance of respecting other religions and how religious leaders of different traditions could work together on values formation. Gradually, key World Vision staff and active Amores members came to understand and promote a vision of an interfaith forum that could come together out of a shared desire to instil strong values in children rather than to promote any religion.

Then, as Amores grew in number and diversity, it became a space for challenging stereotypes and promoting dialogue. The name 'Amores' comes from the word for 'love' in Zamboanga's local language

Chavacano, and this message of love became the unifying theme of Amores Interfaith Forum. Many members of Amores shared that, before joining, they had had no contact with people of a different faith.

In Lebanon, the partnership between World Vision and an Islamic charity began to serve as a space for dialogue, with Muslim refugees and people affiliated with the Islamic charity seeing the values with which a Christian NGO operates. With a deepening relationship, World Vision staff were then able to introduce the sheikh working at the Islamic charity to other faith leaders in Lebanon of different traditions, who shared a vision for child well-being.

One such unique experience of this was when World Vision and Islamic Relief co-hosted a workshop for faith leaders to discuss child protection issues; the participants were all leaders with whom they had a pre-existing relationship. Even so, at the beginning of the event, the invited faith leaders were not even all willing to ride the same transport to the venue with leaders of different religions, and on the first day of the training, there was little interaction between different groups. This improved over the course of the workshop, though, and by the final day, priests, sheikhs, pastors and imams were eating together and discussing sensitive issues, including values regarding child safeguarding, with one another during break times.

In CAR, one of the themes that humanitarian agencies emphasised when talking about and working on social cohesion was the importance of recognising each other's humanity. Faith-based organisations such as World Vision were particularly influential in communicating this message because, throughout their programming activities, they regularly talked about the concept of a God-given dignity that all people share and make sure it is embodied in their staff and their approaches. Religious leaders then reinforced this through scripture and their teaching.

Limited influence/reach

Religious leaders seeking to promote narratives of tolerance and social cohesion are interesting to observe and effective in a number of ways, but the breadth and even depth of their influence may be limited. They are rarely able to reach beyond their local communities or congregations. Even in countries where most citizens would describe themselves as religious and religious institutions play an active political role, not all members of the population recognise religious leadership to the same extent or in the same ways. Furthermore, one of the strengths of religious leaders is their personal approach, which by necessity limits the number of people that they influence. Therefore, cross-faith collaborations can be strong models of tolerance and co-existence, but may not be recognised or appreciated by a large number of people, or able to achieve the depth of influence that they may like.

Because of the localised nature of religious collaborations, and because often religious partners conducted humanitarian or social protection activities, some beneficiaries and community members in Lebanon did not realise that World Vision had any collaboration with religious leaders at all. Rather, they assumed that World Vision and its partners were humanitarian only and not religious. In fact, even though religious leaders were acknowledged as key community influencers, few people were looking for links between a charitable entity implementing quality programming and religious communities.

In Zamboanga, Amores members felt limited in their reach. They were a grassroots network, and each member of Amores had his own congregation to minister to in addition to engaging in interfaith work, so they felt that they were only making a small difference in the city of Zamboanga. Meanwhile, a World Vision staff member suggested that, even with these limitations, interfaith work thrived more in Zamboanga than elsewhere on Mindanao because the city has a Christian majority in a region that is mostly Muslim and tribal. She argued that this created a space for dialogue that did not exist elsewhere in Mindanao because Christianity is also the majority religion of the nation as a whole, meaning that the majority faith of the town may have felt less threatened.

Amores also established a youth arm, but it too was limited in its interfaith influence. Amores Youth members attended interfaith activities only when invited by their pastor or priest, which was rare. One Christian youth explained that nothing had happened in several years and that while he saw the value of interfaith work it was not priority to him. He would go to things if invited, but he was not taking any initiative. He had a few Muslim friends, defined as acquaintances with whom he was on good terms, and that felt like enough to him. Another explained that he may like to do more, but life was busy and he did not have time.

Faith leaders may also feel like they are only able to speak to certain issues, leaving some of the most deep-seated mindsets in their congregations unchallenged. Some leaders in the CAR recognised that genuine social cohesion remained elusive. When people said that they had social cohesion, they were saying that there was an ability to tolerate the presence of people of different religious, ethnic or political affiliations in their midst, and this was mainly because of the tangible benefits it gave around freedom of movement with active engagement in economic and social activity. But they did not claim to be supporting returns, reconciliation, forgiveness or a return to peaceful co-existence as they remembered life to have been pre-2013. The Central African citizens' willingness to tolerate others ended at an expectation that they would welcome perpetrators of war crimes, people who killed their own flesh and blood, back into their midst.

In all three countries, therefore, each in its own way, I found the scope of what World Vision with its faith actors could do for promoting a cohesive society was significant yet still quite limited. They did support narratives of tolerance and social cohesion but were not recreating entire social structures as would be needed to transform conflict-affected societies.

Conclusion

Religious congregations are integral members of many communities where civil conflict or social fracture has affected social cohesion or the ability of their members to express tolerance towards one another. Sometimes they actively contribute to conflict, other times they are merely present, and yet other times they can take proactive steps to promoting renewal of discourses about tolerance and social cohesion.

In partnership with an international humanitarian actor such as World Vision, religious communities, which were addressing issues of inequality and disadvantage, were able to promote social cohesion by helping to mitigate the social fall-out of financial and material loss. They did this through aid provision as well as through facilitating dialogue about social protection issues, often about sensitive issues such as

child protection, which they could do due to their credibility as community establishments along with their partnerships with international humanitarians.

Their engagement in these spaces also opened up new opportunities for talking about values of tolerance and ideas of cohesive communities. Many religious leaders, in turn, further built on their position in their communities to model tolerance amongst themselves, often across religious fractures in interfaith networks. When such examples of religious leaders demonstrating tolerance were told and shared by word-of-mouth, their actions themselves helped to promote these narratives. Nonetheless, the experience of World Vision and its religious partners in CAR, Lebanon and the Philippines also serve as a reminder that faith partnerships can help promote cohesion and tolerance but are not in and of themselves a solution to broken communal relations.

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