DCA
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BREAKING THE SILOS -

Key learnings from a DCA Gender, Faith and Human Rights-Based Approach Focused Case Documentation Study

How do we work with the three cross-cutting commitments to a Human Rights-Based Approach, Gender Equality and Religion and Development?
What are key learnings and ways to go forward?

Contents

Cover photo: Kenya / Monica prays at the Church on the streets of Kakuma / Photo: Jakob Dall

Malawi / Construction of a new maternity ward / Photo: Joseph Lyson Scott

1: Introduction

In 2020, DanChurchAid (DCA) conducted a case study to assess the organisation's work with gender equality, religion and development and human rights through collective learning on **what works**, where the **barriers** are, and **where to go from here** with strengthening and combining these global commitments.

The case study has contributed to identifying and documenting how DCA works with these three cross-cutting commitments, and how they contribute to results across the three DCA Global Goals (Save Lives, Build Resilient Communities and Fight Extreme Inequality), across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus and across our programme countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The learning from this study gives important input into strengthening DCA's understanding of how to support sustainable, locally-embedded systemic change processes that promote rights and equality, nurture locally-led peacebuilding and enhance conflict prevention through addressing underlying values, norms and practices and influencing policies, laws and institutional practices. Thus, the study also feeds into DCA's resilience work, localisation agenda and nexus thinking with concrete experiences and lessons learned.

To collect the cases, advisors from headquarters (HQ) had virtual conversations with 12 DCA country offices (CO). The process of the study was designed to stimulate discussion and learning across thematic teams and locations with the aim of capturing cross-learning and avoiding 'silofication' - the risk that gender, human rights, and inclusion of faith actors become isolated efforts rather than exactly what they are supposed to be: cross-cutting and interlinked efforts. This report highlights key learnings and includes a small selection from the case studies that supports the main findings.

Gender Equality:
Gender Equality is a cross-cutting commitment in DCA and is integral to our rights-based commitment and value base. DCA understands gender equality as the equal enjoyment of human rights by all regardless of their gender. Gender equality is about considering the needs and rights of women, men, boys and girls and other gender identities to equally enjoy all human rights. Considering all-pervasive systemic gender discrimination and gender inequality, this can sometimes lead to applying special affirmative actions, which can be implemented through gender mainstreaming or specific targeted gender programming. Any DCA project or programme must promote gender equality and women's empowerment and as a minimum avoid the risk of perpetuating existing gender inequalities, harmful practices, and negative gender stereotypes.

Human Rights-Based Approach:
DCA works to empower the world's poorest and most marginalised in their struggle for a dignified life through HRBA. Our work derives from Christian values, respect for human rights and the equal dignity of all human beings. DCA's commitment to human rights is based on internationally recognised human rights standards. DCA mainstreams the Rights-Based Approach through the PANEL plus gender principles (Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Empowerment and Linking to Human Rights Law and Framework plus Gender Equality) in our partnerships, our development and humanitarian support and within our own organisation.

Religion and Development:
Where DCA works, most people have a religious world view; their faith is important to them and frames how they relate to others. Religion and religious institutions are strong actors for value formation, mobilisation, and behavioural change and thus for positive change and transformation. In reverse, religious actors can also be misused to suppress people and reinforce harmful practices – in which case change is also unlikely without engaging them in pro-change interventions. Sustainable development can only be achieved if changes of legal frameworks, policy and behaviour are rooted in peoples' convictions, beliefs and values. This understanding is reflected in DCA's strategy and Theory of Change: religion and development is a crosscutting commitment in all of DCA's work across all three Global Goals and DCA recognises the responsibility to understand and include LFAs in our interventions.

2: Key Learnings – Promoting Systemic Change

Policies

Practices

Beliefs, values and ideas
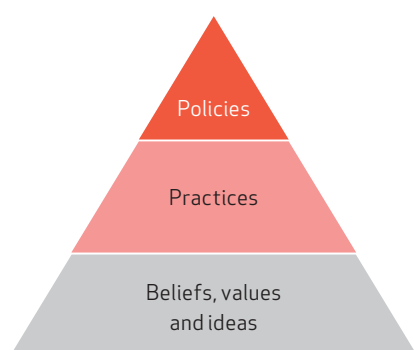
2.1: Interventions at Value, Practice, and Policy Levels Change Perceptions and Lead to Sustainable Transformative Impacts

Several cases demonstrate how the efficient combination of interventions at value, practice, and policy levels can greatly reduce obstacles to the fulfilment of rights. The cases show the value of anchoring change in transforming norms and convictions, in most cases through engaging faith actors, and often by uniting forces with other stakeholders that address gender norms, such as women's rights organisations. Structures and practices of equality and justice – and of inequality and privilege - are always rooted in values, beliefs, and norms. Religion and faith play a central role in informing and shaping these underlying values, norms, and beliefs and therefore must be considered in the fight against extreme inequality. Not least so in the countries of the global south where adherence to religion and faith communities is strong and influences people's worldviews, informs their convictions and attitudes, and ultimately their behaviour. Through combining the cross-cutting commitments in interventions to address inequality, DCA thus engages underlying beliefs, values and norms. There is especially great potential for a combined long-term and sustainable transformational change when projects combine essential work with beliefs and values at community level with working for institutional change at the policy level, addressing legal frameworks at local, national, or international levels, and holding duty bearers accountable to ensure equal opportunities for everyone. Changes of everyday practice have an increased possibility of being successful and long-lasting when they are anchored in and safeguarded by legal and policy frameworks and owned by people through rootedness in beliefs and norms. Unless there is ownership by the citizens and buy-in at institutional levels, even the best of laws and regulations become ineffective; however, the opposite also stands true. If the intervention only works with faith actors and other norm influencers but does not anchor change in legal and policy frameworks, there is a risk of insufficient safeguarding and accountability.

Most countries were able to demonstrate cases of particularly effective interventions where all three commitments were interlinked as described. The examples came from interventions related to all three DCA Global Goals to Save Lives, Build Resilient Communities and Fight Extreme Inequality.

2.2: Addressing Gender Discriminatory Norms and Practices and Challenging Belief Systems

Several DCA actions have addressed gender inequality by challenging and inspiring faith actors to change belief systems and practices which faith leaders and faith communities align to. As an essential element of that, DCA partners facilitated a revisiting of normative faith narratives as it empowered the local faith actors to lead change. As the cases of Myanmar and Uganda show, seeing that holy texts have wider perspectives and may indeed actually underpin gender equality, participation by all and just distribution, brings change.

When interventions also added legal literacy among faith actors, these in turn participated

in shaping policy instruments and sometimes advocated for policy change or implementation of, for instance, gender justice laws. This led to dialogue and debate on gender-based violence (GBV) and contributed to inform faith actors' messaging in community life and sermons with an openness and genuine concern to address gender injustice.

Zimbabwe / Women's empowerment through mobile cash systems
Photo: Christer Lænkholm

2.3: You Can't Eat Rights: Fighting Inequality, Building Resilience and Ensuring Livelihoods

Case studies show that strengthening people's belief in their own rights and empowerment to claim them is completely interlinked with the right to life/food/immediate survival. Empowerment of rights holders to pursue rights realisation and demand accountability from authorities must therefore at the same time address their need for immediate survival as well as protect them from serious threats and risks, including GBV. This also refers to the need to ensure resources for local authorities to respond to citizens' rights claims. Enhanced livelihood also presupposes rights: cash distributed to women in emergency response is diluted from the initial purpose, if not protected by men's recognition and acceptance for women's right to receive and administer the support. Addressing gender norms to ensure that these barriers are addressed is therefore crucial to the success of this type of programme.

Women's economic empowerment is a key strategy to enhance women's social and political participation as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights. This can be through, for example, increased access to income, productive resources like credit, land and training, or access to the labour market and increased employability skills. These increased opportunities and enhanced participation in various public spheres can, over time, greatly impact gender norms and stereotypes, as in the case of Palestine where new education and job opportunities for young women positively affected their self-esteem and ability to engage in society. The

case of Ethiopia further shows the important interrelatedness between women's economic empowerment, social participation, and bodily autonomy.

2.4: Supporting Local Faith Actors and Communities to Prevent Conflict and Build Peace

As a multi-mandated and faith-based organisation, DCA works across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus deploying conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a gender-sensitive manner and in concert with related themes (e.g., climate change, religion and development, human rights-based approach, social inclusion, and fragility). DCA does so with a particular attention to the role of local faith actors (LFAs) in preparing, preserving, and rebuilding peace: LFAs nurture courage, hope and meaning in the communities they are part of - elements needed for a community to pull through times of adversary, and to be 'resilient'. LFAs can also be potential or actual dividers as in the Bangladesh case where the conflict-sensitive approach was self-education of DCA staff on religious sensitivity and seeking dialogue and engagement with the LFAs who gradually turned around from dividers to both facilitators and defenders.

LFAs are often able to act as non-partisan connectors and cultivate diversity and inclusivity so no one in the community is left behind, marginalised, or stigmatised, as in the case of Zimbabwe. The common thread to all of DCA's conflict prevention and peacebuilding work is to promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies. DCA places added emphasis on people as central drivers of change and on LFAs as strategic partners. In this way, violence is addressed through initiatives that strengthen active participation, cultivate accountability, encourage non-discrimination (actively encompassing age, gender, & diversity inclusion), support community empowerment, and advocate rule of law, such as in the Churches Convergence on Peace Project in Zimbabwe. This project secures grass-roots voices to participate in local and national structures and peace strategies of the National Peace and Reconciliation Committee (NPRC), to secure rule of law and, to address root causes of conflict, including ethnic and gender inequalities, police bias and restoration after past atrocities.

2.5: Localised and Sensitive Approaches to Transforming Inequality and Injustice across the Triple Nexus

Through the cross-cutting transformative approach, DCA addresses issues of inequality and injustice across the humanitarian, development, and peace building nexus. The structures of inequality and injustice that are embedded in the context before, under and after conflict and humanitarian crisis, are often perpetuated when crisis hits. Therefore, DCA interventions engage with fundamental norms, values and unequal practices and structures in a context-sensitive, people-centred, do-no-harm approach that contributes to sustainable change, empowerment, and local capacity across the triple nexus. This is illustrated by how DCA has changed the strategic approach in relation to combatting GBV in Bangladesh, which now includes faith leaders in the intervention after advice from the local community. Another example is the way women-led organisations and faith actors are cooperating to promote a stronger legal status for women in Uganda after DCA has supported a trust building process.

The cases also highlight the transformative potential and value of meaningful substantial

participation and localisation. In the Palestine case of community-led intervention, the project plan is deliberately open-ended in the beginning: to take localisation as seriously as possible and let it be up to the local community to define the project approach based on its needs. In this way, inclusive and accountable mechanisms, agency, and ownership are mobilised from within communities. The objective has been to ensure that red-tape and procedures are adapted to community needs rather than adapting community needs to those of donors or other external stakeholders. It is anchored in the human rights-based approach (HRBA) principles that affected communities are in the best position to understand their problems and thus design appropriate strategies to address them. This approach also refers to the "survivor and community-led crisis response" (sclr) methodology that is practised by DCA and its partners in various crisis-affected contexts. A cross-country learning study on sclr good practices in relation to the COVID-19 response from December 2020 evidenced that change agents like LFAs and community-based organisations were present at short notice and often the only responders to address conflict and humanitarian needs and respond to harmful effects emerging from lockdown measures (for instance GBV, income and food shortages, shrinking civic space). A repeated learning from COVID-19 responses is the strength of building on and adding features to existing engagement with local actors. Faith actors have also been central in addressing gender inequality and other human rights concerns across the triple nexus, particularly in COVID-19 responses. The readiness and commitment of engaging with LFAs and their quick development of new approaches has been a key driver in several cases. It needs to be further investigated how these initiatives also bring – or can aim to bring - change at law and policy levels, as has been the case in Uganda.

2.6: Bridgebuilding and Dialogue Enhance the Impact of Projects

Promoting cooperation, dialogue and reflection between women's rights organisations and faith-based organisations has been a successful strategy in some cases leading to legal and policy changes in protection of human rights, including in the case of Uganda. Furthermore, strengthening dialogue and action between local organisations, faith actors and government at local or national level led to positive change in other cases. Importantly, the learning goes both ways, as in the case of Bangladesh, where DCA staff developed their own religious literacy in their dialogue with imams and collected Quran references for informed conversation, which led to enhanced mutual trust and buy-in for the work of DCA.

The cases also highlight the transformative effect of exposure to the experiences of the affected. When sceptics are given the opportunity to generalise, they can easily maintain stereotypes. When exposed to a specific experience, they tend to open up; for example, male IT business leaders in Palestine initially rejected young women's entry into the male dominated IT business but changed their minds when they met the young women. It was also the case of bishops who were sceptic towards the marriage and divorce law reform in Uganda until sitting down with women's rights organisations, as well as in the case of the perpetrators in the peace work in Zimbabwe who changed when confronted with lived experiences of victims. It may be easy to enemise an entire group of people, but when a programme intervention systematically facilitates personal encounters and story-sharing between perpetrators or discriminators on one side and victims or affected on the other side, then the experience shows that it often mobilises empathy, identification and understanding.

2.7: Flexibility, Patience, and Innovation are Necessary for
Systemic Change and Social Transformation

DCA addresses the cross-cutting commitments in multiple and often innovative and complex ways. For example, several cases have gone beyond simple gender mainstreaming and contributed to change of attitudes towards gender equality. However, this is not necessarily captured in MEAL frameworks, learning and project management tools. Social transformation and systemic change, for example in terms of changed behaviour of duty bearers, altered gender norms and sustainable empowerment and agency of marginalised groups, demand long-term and flexible planning as well as the willingness to take on a challenge that will not necessarily be fully solved within the lifetime of a particular project. This includes the necessary engagement with faith actors to root new norms of equality and the right of all to participate in beliefs, values, and convictions. Social transformation is difficult to foresee, it may happen over a very long time, and specific tipping points for change may occur in an unforeseen way as they are affected by many different factors. As the example of Bangladesh shows, it was particularly when the project was strongly challenged under COVID-19 that the transformed gender norms of imams became evident. This calls for an openness to apply innovative and flexible approaches, constantly assessing changes in the context and monitoring and evaluating changes qualitatively. Furthermore, it is crucial to invest the time and necessary resources to work strategically with multiple stakeholders at various levels if sustainable change of norms and harmful practices is to be obtained.

Ethiopia / Imam promoting
COVID-19 measures

Kenya / Revisiting Narratives
in Holy Scriptures
Photo: Jakob Dall

3: Where to go from here?

Bring to scale: The strategic synergy between gender, faith and rights described in 2.1. above is indeed a novelty in a development discourse that has often seen the three as in opposition to each other. But even if it is novel, this approach makes very good sense when working with a rights-based and localised approach and is a low hanging fruit to implement for much greater impact in most places and across most themes (climate change, triple nexus, localisation etc.)

Be intentional: Whilst staff do identify a need for knowledge and capacity (see below), their basic realisation is that this synergy is pursued and realised when development actors are intentional about it and think it strategically into project and programme planning and implementation processes. Therefore, consider it in context analysis, include it in theories of change and start implementing into MEAL.

Strengthen MEAL attention: The cases illustrate that a lot of transformational gender and rights activities with the active involvement of faith actors are happening in DCA programmes, beyond what is reported on in annual reporting. Find out why it is under-reported and measure it to see it. Include systems change perspectives in both results frameworks and MEAL approaches, for example using outcome harvesting.

Increase knowledge: The relationship between gender, faith and rights is unfortunately often seen and approached primarily as oppositional and tense. Of course, it can be. However, it can also be turned around to be mutually supportive, as cases illustrate. That

takes a change of mindset and perspective. Sometimes also some skills development, but there are many new and easy-to-access e-learning courses and much instructive and hands-on literature available already. It is more a question of using what exists (Learning site: Religion & Development (fabo.org[1]), Learning site: Faith-Sensitive Humanitarian Response (FSHR) (fabo.org[2]), Learning site: Introduction to Human Rights Based Approach (fabo.org[3]), Learning site: ACT for Gender Justice (fabo.org[4]), and Gender and GBV in Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) (fabo.org[5])) than of producing new material.

Overcome reservations and bias: In some cases, synergy is blocked by more than lack of attention, as there can be serious reservations and barriers to addressing norms and practices. In these cases, there is a need to work more intensively with the resistance to rights, gender equality and the role of religion both with staff, partners, and rights holders and to address this at organisational level both in faith institutions and secular institutions. This includes overcoming a possible secularist bias of international humanitarian and development actors and workers who fail to acknowledge, respect, and engage with the role of religion in the lives of the affected local communities and individuals.

Stronger multi-level advocacy: We have addressed the need to know, to pay attention to, to be strategic and intentional, to measure and to address bias. However, there is also a need to document and advocate the potential of synergy between gender, faith, and rights, as in a report like this. Such documentation should also be brought to the attention of international networks and institutional processes like for instance the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development – PaRD (PaRD Homepage[6]), the UN Human Rights Council – HRC (OHCHR | HRC Home[7]) and the Women, Peace and Security agenda (UN Resolution 1325[8]) and the Call to Action on Protection from Gender Based Violence in Emergencies (calltoactiongbv.com[9])

And finally, an additional comment on each of the three commitments:

Gender: increase involvement of men and boys; for improved and sustainable gender justice, make better use of methodologies like, for instance, Engaging Men Through Accountable Practice (EMAP).

Faith actors: overcome the danger of identifying LFAs with ordained male leaders. LFAs are a much broader category: youth groups, choirs, women's guilds, women leaders (nuns & non-ordained) etc.

Rights: improve impacts on laws and policies as well as utilising the human rights system on national, regional, and international level through strategic selection of competent partners, coordination of advocacy efforts with partners and international networks.

Links for learning sites and websites

1. https://fabo.org/enrol/?id=531

2. https://fabo.org/enrol/?id=708

3. https://fabo.org/enrol/?id=485

4. https://fabo.org/enrol/?id=640

5. https://fabo.org/enrol/?id=550

6. https://www.part-ner-religion-develop-ment.org/

7. https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/pages/home.aspx

8. S/RES/1325(2000) - E - S/RES/1325(2000) -Desktop (undocs.org)

9. https://www.callto-actiongbv.com/

4: Selected Case Studies

Palestine / Members of a
community protection group
Photo: Nils Carstensen

4.1: Palestine: Community-led Interventions in the West Bank and Gaza

DCA's Global Goals: Save Lives, with strong links to Build Resilient Communities
and Fight Extreme Inequality
Cross-cutting commitments: Gender, Religion and Development, HRBA

DCA supports community-led interventions in the West Bank and Gaza as a key approach in humanitarian response. The main concept of this approach is to empower local communities to take action and influence changes. The interventions focus on strengthening local community committees, where youth, women, the elderly and religious actors are represented and lead needs identification, planning processes and the implementation of humanitarian and development responses in the communities.

This approach applies all three cross-cutting commitments: Gender equality because DCA and partners ensure active and meaningful representation of women in local committees; HRBA because communities are empowered to hold authorities accountable and respond to their needs; and inclusion of religious actors in community committees in recognition of their effect on people's awareness, behaviour, and mobilisation. Involving local faith leaders has added value to the interventions and the project has simultaneously strengthened the religious leaders' capacities to promote changes within the communities and to undergird and protect the norms and behaviour changes achieved, for instance around gender equality.

The principal success has been strengthened ownership of the local community in humanitarian response. Importantly, DCA Palestine and its local partners have had a facilitating rather than intervention role. The project has enabled communities to approach and cooperate with duty bearers like municipalities and community councils to highlight

their priorities and push for putting their needs and rights on the authorities' agenda. This bottom-up approach unfolds in a context with many different international and national interventions where the local population does not necessarily feel a sense of ownership or representation of their needs. Local needs identification comes with a sense of restoring people's dignity and confidence.

The broad diversity within the community groups and committees, in terms of age, gender, religious affiliation etc. overall improved the performance and the outcomes in the communities and ensured that diverse needs were heard, while empowering the more marginalised groups and individuals to become proactive and address their specific issues.

DCA Palestine's local partners are close to and trusted by the communities; in the West Bank it is the YMCA, and in Gaza the Ma'an Development Center. Both partners have welcomed the new approach and adapted to it, and local communities have developed and used innovative methods to implement the project, for example conducting financial accountability through mobile phones and Facebook. Flexibility has therefore been key as well as a willingness to give power to the local communities. In the beginning of the intervention, DCA does not know what the community will suggest, and this challenges the old ways of working and ensuring accountability.

There were, however, also barriers to gender equality in the project; traditional cultural norms in the communities dictated that women should not have roles in addressing social issues within the community. Initially the women's presence was therefore not encouraged, and men's issues were prioritised. Therefore, different community groups were created in the beginning, one for men and one for women, to enhance the agency of women. Over time, the gender separated committees were merged and both men and women could voice their opinions and needs.

Another key challenge was the limitation of resources for local duty bearers, which hampered cooperation. It was a key learning from the project that even if local duty bearers wish to meet rights holders' needs, they may be unable to do so due to lack of financial resources.

The project illustrates the potential of substantial localisation, but also the flexibility needed. Key lessons learned include the necessity of awaiting maturity of committees to yield gender-inclusive processes; the potential of involving religious leaders who may be sceptical at first, but eventually safeguard changes in norms and behaviours; and the need to intentionally build on communities' own interaction with duty bearers to enhance their opportunities for addressing needs and rights. The project has demonstrated great potential for methodological learning and adaptability, as well as scalability as it builds on supporting self-mobilisation and requires very little initial input.

In a separate project, the Palestine programme works with economic empowerment and labour market participation for young women.

An 83% unemployment rate and lack of access to work presents a serious challenge and stress

factor for young women in Gaza. The project therefore aimed at improving skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities for young women, particularly in the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) sector. This sector is characterised by fast development and growth but is heavily male dominated, as strong gender stereotypes indicate that this is not an appropriate field for women.

The ICT project for young women broke down barriers by involving a variety of stakeholders, including private sector companies from the beginning of the project. Male ICT employers sat down and talked with the young women, which made them realise their competency - and this helped to promote a shift in the mindset of the employers to reduce gender discrimination within the sector, create safe work environments for women and change their perception of young women's potential role in the sector. The income of the targeted group of 120 young women improved, several long-term contracts were established with international companies, and some of the young female graduates obtained freelance employment contracts with universities to teach ICT subjects. Many of the involved young women stated that participating in the project led to great improvements in their self-esteem and overall feeling of being active in society.

Uganda /
Christian Priest
Photo: Heine Pedersen

4.2: Uganda: Changing Discriminatory Laws to Obtain Gender Equality
DCA's Global Goals: Fight Extreme Inequality
Cross-cutting commitments: Gender, Religion and Development, HRBA

The project engages faith actors who are involved with the Uganda ACT Alliance Forum to unfold their potential for support of gender justice. The project facilitates faith leaders in revisiting the normative narratives in holy scriptures of the faith communities (Bible, Quran) with gender-sensitive lenses to rediscover the liberating discourse of all people being created equal in the image of God and what it means for power relationships and accountability. With

this deeper understanding, the already influential faith leaders can contribute significantly to shaping and changing gender norms and practices of the communities over time.

In parallel, faith leaders are empowered with legal knowledge: in recognition of their leadership role in communities and in society, the project aims to build their understanding of policies, institutions, and the legal framework to enable them to better discern and address acts and practices of GBV and help build a culture of Gender Justice. In turn, this means that faith leaders deliver better in the communities by referring cases of GBV to medical care and juridical arbitration in addition to what they already do in their counselling. They thereby secure that processes of reconciliation do not substitute justice and restitution: "Reconciliation is not everything, sometimes you need to step out and demand for accountability, especially if a crime is being committed" (DCA Country Office staff).

This foundational work goes hand in hand with efforts to bring together faith actors and national women's organisations with a strong rights-based approach to support them in cooperating on improving laws. Since the religious actors' new interest in the legal framework of gender justice, the parliament has started to give religious leaders space to input into other legislations as well, such as the sexual defence bill, succession bill and other legal areas where ACT Alliance Uganda Forum is being called by the parliament to give thoughts on the legislation. The project brings this access and influence together with the insights and interests of the women's organisations to build a stronger, more qualified legal consultation process that also reflects new norms, beliefs, and convictions of the community.

One successful example of this work was the cooperation between faith leaders and the women's organisation UWONET to break the stalemate of an important piece of legislation which was stranded in parliament. This law, aiming at strengthening the rights of women in family disputes, divorce procedures and inheritance issues, was first named 'the Marriage and Divorce Bill' and was blocked for years not least by faith leaders who saw it as a driver for broken relationships. As a result of the project's dialogue between faith leaders and women's organisations, the law was given the new name, "The Family Law", and redrafted while maintaining the rights improvements for women in the first draft of the law and could thus jointly be recommended by faith leaders and women's organisations and tabled for processing by parliament. This bridge-building was in many ways the 'magic ingredient' of the project. What started as a more one-sided attempt by UWONET to 'build capacity' of the faith leaders ended in a 'capacity exchange' for better mutual insight in each other's concerns and stronger cooperation.

The case illustrates the synergy achieved by working with all three cross-cutting commitments at the same time. Gender justice needs a good legal framework that is rooted in people's convictions and beliefs, and this experience has shown that it is necessary to be intentional about engaging with faith actors. The potential of this combined approach seems immense.

Bangladesh / Rohingya
women at the Cox's Bazar
refugee camp
Photo: Shreya Singh

4.3: Bangladesh: Awareness Raising and Prevention of GBV in Cox's Bazar
DCA's Global Goals: Save Lives and Fight Extreme Inequality
Cross-cutting commitments: Gender, HRBA, Religion and Development

In Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee camp, DCA is a leading actor when it comes to combatting GBV by transforming gender norms in cooperation with religious leaders through a nexus approach. Women and men from host communities are included as agents of change and for strengthening contact between host communities and refugees. The project is a targeted gender action fighting gender discrimination and providing critical services to women and girls in a refugee situation.

The intervention takes place in a complex setting where terror groups try to convince local cultural and religious leaders not to cooperate with DCA, and there is generally a negative attitude towards International NGOs. Furthermore, the Rohingya refugee community is relatively conservative and GBV is a taboo in the camps. However, through a continuous striving to understand the community and address social norms, DCA has turned humanitarian support into a transformative intervention that challenges discriminatory gender norms. Before, religious leaders and men were advising women not to go to the crisis centres, but after DCA engaged the imams, they are now encouraging women to seek service provisions and are supporting follow up on GBV cases. Men and adolescent boys are changing attitudes and starting to share responsibilities of household chores after being involved in dialogue and training with DCA through an Engaging Men as Accountable Partners (EMAP) approach.

This so-called EMAP approach brings women's thoughts and voices into the men's dialogue sessions by addressing the challenges women face in the communities; this helps to engage men as agents of change. Through this approach, women are engaged first, and then men and adolescent boys. Using this methodology in the community was made possible through systematic dialogue with religious leaders, supported by DCA staff who developed own

religious literacy and collected Quran references for informed conversation. This led to mutual trust building and eventually support by the religious leaders for the work of DCA. DCA also sensitises other influential actors, such as camp coordinators who are crucial partners to help reduce GBV in the camp. During the COVID-19 pandemic, religious leaders and EMAP members have strongly supported a continuous GBV effort in the communities, when DCA staff could not enter due to restrictions on movement.

The DCA approach is well recognised by donors. UN agencies and other organisations are referring cases to DCA, because DCA is influential in case management in Cox's Bazar in both Rohingya camps and host communities.

Myanmar / Students Being Trained with Easily Accessible Materials
Photo: Bax Lindhardt

4.4: Myanmar: Changing the Culture of Silence and Neglect Around GBV

DCA's global goals: Fight Extreme Inequality
Cross-cutting commitments: Gender, Religion and Development, HRBA

The high prevalence of GBV in Myanmar is an effect of extreme gender inequality as well as strong gender stereotypes and norms. In Myanmar, the joint programme of DCA and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) seeks to reduce instances of GBV and improve the quality of services to GBV survivors through changing fundamental norms and perceptions, empowering women and adolescent girls to build self-esteem, assume leadership and realise their rights as well as advocating for gender justice and supporting women's economic empowerment. DCA and NCA aim at achieving this by supporting organisations that address violence and harmful practices, promoting peaceful interfaith co-existence, and supporting survivors and advocating for good legal practice. The programme targets both faith-based and secular institutions, duty bearers and rights holders to change the culture of silence that surrounds GBV and safe access to GBV services.

DCA and NCA work with the partner organisations Legal Clinic Myanmar (LCM), Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEG) and the Baptist Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) in this intervention. One of the 'magic ingredients' is the focus on the young generation of faith actors and faith leaders through partners YMCA and MIT. They ensure that students get access to study gender issues and in turn also advocate for inclusion of gender aspects in the curriculum of other Myanmar Theological schools and they train the educators of these schools. They also produce easily accessible materials for academic use (including on positive masculinity) as well as for Sunday schools, for example 'This Body is Mine' materials. With MIT students, the partners also address female ordination as well as LGBT+ respect and inclusion. This has, among many other effects, led to faith leaders advocating against GBV on social media during COVID-19 as well as to interreligious countering of hate speech on social media. Some minority faith traditions got blamed for allowing COVID-19 to spread, and the faith leaders responded to this by speaking to the importance of both interreligious and intra-community tolerance. This material had over 600 000 views on Facebook. The MIT theological education has a strong sustainable impact, as new faith leaders are trained and prepared in a gender rights discourse. These are acknowledged to have a strong influence on norms, convictions, and practice. MIT even expands its influence beyond the master's programme for its own constituency and includes the gender rights discourse in its MIT Youth's Liberal Arts Programme which includes Buddhists, Muslims, and Atheists.

The intervention has thus led to awareness-raising in a much wider community than directly targeted; this has been achieved through interfaith youth involvement, training of positive masculinity both in the institution and in communities, and through comprehensive campaigns for gender justice like '16 Days of Activism' and 'Thursdays in Black'. The impact on women leadership in the Myanmar Baptist Convention (4 million Baptists in Myanmar) has also been considerable, for instance with impact on gatherings, counselling, capacity building etc. This has, for example, led to research on female-ordained ministry and to the interfaith women leadership promoting The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security.

The simultaneous inclusion of all three cross-cutting commitments has created a strong synergy. The complimentary choice of project partners ensures an intervention against extreme gender inequality that is both rooted in values and convictions and at the same time addresses change at policy and legal frameworks level.

4.5: Zimbabwe: Local Peace Committees Enhancing Peace, Non-discrimination and Community Ownership

DCA's Global Goals: Fight Extreme Inequality, Build Resilient Communities
Cross-cutting commitments: Religion and Development, Gender and HRBA

Elections have a tendency to become violent in Zimbabwe, challenging both human security and the economy. Therefore, to prevent violence in the 2018 presidential election, DCA and partners launched the Churches Convergence on Peace Project (CCPP), supporting the formation of local peace committees. The committees were established by the local

communities themselves and the composition of the committees differed from place to place, depending on the local peace plan for each area. Members of the committees included faith actors, traditional leaders, district leaders, members of local community-based organisations, youth, women, representatives from the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission. In some areas, they also included persons from the police force and government representatives. The objective of the committees was to have a dialogue across societal divides and prevent politically-motivated conflict.

The project succeeded in building cohesion in local communities, promoting participation and empowering local community representatives to take ownership of promoting peace in their societies as well as hold duty bearers accountable by inviting government representatives and perpetrators of violence into the discussions when relevant. Hitherto antagonistic parties (i.e., traditional leaders and the opposition members in the community) were brought together through the facilitation of mutually-trusted faith actors. With the increased interaction, community members were able to discuss their differences and become more tolerant of diverse opinions and beliefs, reducing polarisation born out of mistrust and suspicion. Through the project, local peace infrastructures emerged stronger, well organised, and mobilised; indigenous knowledge systems were activated and strengthened. When the NPRC formed its provincial peace structures, some of the members of the local peace committees were included in these. Thereby, the grassroot-level structures were linked to the national level and because of that connection, the project is now working towards influencing strategic decisions of the NPRC. Some of the members from the local peace committees, including DCA and partner staff, now also sit in the different thematic committees of the NPRC, having created a space to influence peace at the national level.

The establishing of the committees and the implementation of the peace plan was done by the communities themselves, forcing them to collaborate, thereby building social cohesion among them. This sense of ownership allowed the project to be sustainable. After the funding stopped in September 2019, the committees continued functioning and some of the action points in the peace plans that did not need financial support were continued. What makes this project particularly strong is the combination of community ownership and working closely with faith-based actors who have a high level of trust and influence in the local communities in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the invitation to duty bearers to engage in dialogue with the peace committees on certain issues is a strong way to address accountability.

4.6: Ethiopia: Unleashing the Potential of Women and Youth through Empowerment and Tackling Socioeconomic Problems

DCA's Global Goals: Fight Extreme Inequality, Build Resilient Communities and Save Lives
Cross-cutting commitments: Gender, Religion and Development, and HRBA

This project promotes the increased knowledge of rights and improved attitudes and practices to fight unsafe migration, gender inequality and Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs). This is done through increasing the income and livelihoods of women and youth through diversified economic opportunities, addressing gender norms and stereotypes in communities as well

Ethiopia / Agricultural program

Photo: Peter Høvring

as promoting increased accountability, transparency, and gender responsiveness of local government actors through social accountably and improved governance.

The project has mobilised religious leaders through capacity-strengthening of the inter-religious council (IRC). The religious leaders have been engaged at district and grassroot levels in awareness raising and norms-change actions. Economic empowerment strategies of the project include saving groups and credit projects, as well as income generating activities such as gardening and poultry rearing.

Furthermore, a district anti-HTP and illegal migration taskforce composed of police officers, legal personnel, gender experts, and others, has been created and trained on issues such as illegal migration, peaceful coexistence, combatting GBV, and HTP protection and response. The project has also implemented community- based awareness raising interventions using TV and radio campaigns as well as family dialogues, community-based psychosocial counselling and radio listener groups. In the radio listeners groups, women have had a safe space to discuss messages received via radio. Community-based psychosocial counselling has also been carried out, as well as house visits by spiritual leaders. Around 500 000 people have been reached with messaging on unsafe migration, HTPs and gender inequality through local radio and TV. Messages have been delivered on duty-bearers' roles and needed changes in perceptions and practices. After COVID-19 hit, this also included messaging to communities on pandemic prevention and response. The project is implemented by two partners, one faith-based organisation and one women's rights organisation, with the aim of them complementing each other as they can reach both same and different beneficiary groups with different key messages.

Strengthening of the already-existing IRC consisting of members from the Orthodox, Muslim and Protestant churches has been a key driver of success, as faith leaders have promoted positive change to challenge harmful practices in their engagement with communities. Engaging the religious leaders in the project from the beginning has helped reach the grassroots level in every step of the project.

There have been significant improvements in harmful practices against women, in which faith leaders were instrumental; for example, early marriage was common before and has now been greatly reduced.

Self-help groups, home visits and psychosocial counselling have served to foster dialogue between men and women and have been key tools to empower women to enter into dialogue and reflect on their needs and rights, including on issues such as control and use of resources and prevention of inter-household conflict. The project has created good results in women's social empowerment, improved livelihoods, and financial income. The district anti-HTPs and illegal migration taskforce has monitored unsafe migration, which has opened a possibility to include a peace building component in the project.

The project has successfully included faith actors as primary agents of change regarding gender norms, women's economic empowerment and women's rights in a development and peace nexus context.

The involvement of two very different partners, a faith-based actor and a women's rights organisation, who both have a strong representation, but work based on different foundations, has been a strength for the project. However, it has also been a challenge to ensure that the two partners who come from two different backgrounds would work well together, as they are in competition at times. One key reflection from this experience is that faith has turned out to be common ground for the work of both organisations and a means to connect their visions.

Ethiopia /
COVID-19 hygiene
measures

5: Acknowledgements

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