JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE *on*
FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Policy Brief 2:
The Unique Contributions of Faith Communities to Community Resilience

The value of partnering with faith communities is getting unprecedented attention globally, including from the United Nations, World Bank, and major government development agencies. In our view, this is a welcome change that is just in the formative stages, with many questions and preferred practices still to be addressed. Current efforts are looking at approaches to partnership and preferred roles for faith communities. In this brief, we consider an essential question for effective work with local faith communities: What are the unique contributions of faith communities to humanitarian and community development that are distinct from international, secular, and other non-faith development actors. We describe several unique roles and contributions from local faith communities. Our aims are to support faith communities in asserting their unique contributions, to clarify the value of these contributions as shown by case examples, and expand the scope of the conversation about the role of local faith communities.

Relevance to Sustainable Development Goals. The World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 included discussions of the role of the faith community in achieving the SDGs. Much work is needed to clarify the role of LFCs. In an interview at the Summit, Lt. Col. Dr. Dean Pallant, director of the International Social Justice Commission at The Salvation Army, discussed how faith-based organizations need to identify their purpose … "if we are going to negotiate this space, we need to be clear on who we are. Does our identity make a difference in the world?"[1] This policy brief identifies a set of contributions to community and development where evidence suggests local faith communities are either functioning in a unique way or have a unique contribution to a community dynamic. This is important for several reasons. If, as Pallant says, LFCs need to claim a unique contribution then they must first define what unique actions lead to those contributions. Further, we suggest that these contributions are not only unique, but unduplicated and essential to community life. Thus, development that fails to accommodate these contributions will be limited in its impact.

Faith communities are not homogenous entities. We do not suggest that the contributions we describe are true of all faith communities, nor true all the time. These are actions we have observed that are true of at least some faith communities. Further, we are not making any evaluation about any faith group, or comparing faith groups. Our effort is to describe contributions that apply across faith communities. We are describing actions that may be unique to faith communities, or a commonly used activity where there is a unique approach or outcome when a faith community engages in the activity.

1. **Development of Social Capital.** LFCs engage people in developing structures and relationships that lead to greater social capital within the faith community, often eventually spreading to the larger local community.

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[1] http://www.waccglobal.org/articles/faith-groups-essential-to-achieving-development-goals

Social capital refers to the social relationships and infrastructure that facilitate individual or community action. Churches create social capital by bringing together people who share a common faith and values and building relationships among them. In the process, the people are informed about the content of their faith identity and how that identity relates to the larger world.[2]

Brown states "it is largely those churches that espouse a civic culture, where members are exposed to [social and] political discussions and are encouraged to be activists that lead to … civic engagement."[3] Brown relates this process to development. Studying the faith communities of people involved in social action, he finds that their faith groups expose members to social and political discussions, and encourage them to become active in their communities. Barrett[4] describes how religious affiliation helps people to access social capital and resources. Wilkinson et al[5] report how religious involvement fosters the adjustment of refugee children by fostering prosocial behavior.

Overall, these and other studies support the positive contribute of faith communities and institutions to the social capital of the community by promoting social consciousness, valuing of all people, and addressing inequality and injustice.

2. **Healing Moral and Spiritual Injury.** A growing body of research is distinguishing moral and spiritual injury as a distinct form of trauma. Caregivers from LFCs are in a unique position to help people suffering spiritual injury.

Doehring[6] states that resilience when exposed to trauma is neither static nor a personal trait but the product of a relational and dynamic process. Moral conflict produces distress that reduces resilience by, for example, undermining recovery from potentially traumatic events. Compassionate spiritual care helps people recover from moral conflict. When compassionate care is provided by people of a shared faith and connected to a supporting faith community then it can be an effective approach to healing moral and spiritual injury. Others forms of attention to the spiritual dimension are developing and showing the effectiveness of attention to the spiritual dimension when caring for traumatized individuals.[7], [8]

3. **Bridging between local communities and international agents (Trusted agency).** LFC leaders can act as agents for the LFC and foster trusting and cooperative relationships with external humanitarian agents.

In a case study on a refugee faith network[9] within a refugee camp, a network of refugee houses of worship confronted violence between faith groups. They did this by establishing a trusted network to transparently

[2] Newton, Kenneth. 1997. "Social Capital and Democracy." *American Behavioral Scientist* 40: 575–86

[3] Brown, R.K. and Brown, R.E., 2003. Faith and Works: Church-Based Social Capital Resources and African American Political Activism. *Social Forces,* [e-journal] 82(2), Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3598204?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

[4] Barrett, B. D. (2010). Faith in the inner city: The urban Black church and students' educational outcomes. Journal Of Negro Education, 79(3), 249-262

[5] Wilkinson, J., Santoro, N., & Major, J. (2017). Sudanese refugee youth and educational success: The role of church and youth group in supporting cultural and academic adjustment and schooling achievement. International Journal Of Intercultural Relations, doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.04.003

[6] Doehring, C. (2015). "Resilience as the Relational Ability to Spiritually Integrate Moral Stress." Pastoral Psychol Pastoral Psychology 64(5): 635-649.

[7] Harris, J. I., Erbes, C. R., Engdahl, B. E., Thuras, P., Murray-Swank, N., Grace, D., & Le, T. (2011). The effectiveness of a trauma-focused spiritually integrated intervention for veterans exposed to trauma. Journal Of Clinical Psychology, 67(4), 425-438.

[8] O'Donnell, K. (2015). Help for heroes: PTSD, warrior recovery, and the liturgy. Journal Of Religion And Health, 54(6), 2389-2397. doi:10.1007/s10943-015-0034-5

[9] Boan, D., Drake, K., Andrews, B., Martinson, D., Lower, E. & Aten, J. (In Review) A qualitative study of a grass-roots peace and reconciliation program in Kakuma Kenya *Missiology*

represent all groups and manage donated resources provided to refugees. Conflict between groups reduced and use of resources improved.

Other studies have examined how the infrastructure of the local church provides a basis for engaging community members in health and social service programs sponsored by outside agencies. Church ties to the community, and the trust they have within the community, allow pastors to serve as gatekeepers to the community and facilitate adoption of health services.[10] The more developed the faith community infrastructure, and the greater the presence of the faith community in the larger community, and the greater the ability to engage community members in health programming. [11]

> **Case Study**: A campaign to end early marriage. After attending a workshop on child protection, the Bishop of Cameroon launched a campaign to confront sexual assault in all forms, including early marriage. Noting that the government had child protection laws, but that these were not being effective, churches were engaged to teach child protection as a mission of the church and not the government's role alone. A church based campaign was implemented on several levels, starting with training Sunday School teachers and developing materials on child protection. This was followed by camps for children where they were taught to respect themselves, culminated in a March to respect childhood. The related issues of family planning, pregnancy care, and support for education are incorporated as the program grew over time. Project leaders

4. **Providing a voice to the vulnerable (Advocacy).** LFCs are in a unique position to recognize the vulnerable and advocate for them.

Offutt and colleagues[12] describe local faith communities as living out their relationship with the community. Their proximity creates a base for advocacy that makes impact and transformation possible in ways that external agents cannot achieve. The local faith community is the community, already responding to poverty and injustice, in relationship with those in need.

Faith community advocacy and outreach services have been shown to have a positive impact on quality of community life.[13] Recently Johnson[14] reports how black faith communities addressed prior racial injustice in healthcare and advocated for a more just and equitable care.

5. **Peace and Reconciliation.** LFCs have several special roles they can play in peace and reconciliation. They can speak with authority upward to leaders and agencies about peace and reconciliation, and simultaneously, to the grass roots. They can provide a "sacred space" where differing parties can meet in security and face one another[15]

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[10] Kim, E. (2016). Social service outreach programs using elderly Korean immigrants' church ties. Journal Of Social Service Research, 42(1), 130-142. doi:10.1080/01488376.2015.1087448

[11] Brand, D. J. (2012). The healing station: The role of the African American church as a change agent for health. Dissertation Abstracts International, 73, 261

[12] Offutt, S. (2016). *Advocating for justice : An evangelical vision for transforming systems and structures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

[13] Watson, J., & Stepteau-Watson, D. (2015). Troubled waters: The Black church in Mississippi, a single subject case study. Social Work & Christianity, 42(3), 369-384.

[14] Johnson, K. A. (2017). A Black theological response to race-based medicine: Reconciliation in minority communities. Journal Of Religion And Health, 56(3), 1096-1110. doi:10.1007/s10943-017-0373-5

[15] Brewer, J. Higgins, G. & Teeney, F. (2014) *Religion, Civil Society & Peace in Northern Ireland* Oxford University Press

Persistent violence and the failure to reconcile is often due to perceptions of the other as corrupt and evil. These perceptions can have political and cultural support, making them resistant to change. LFCs have an ability to confront this intransigence. They can translate between groups and perceptions while speaking with moral authority. This requires that LFCs not be compromised politically, that they recognize whether they are contributing to the resistance to change.

Other studies[16] have shown how engaging in a faith community can lead to a reducing in harmful practices. When faith leaders become politicized they risk losing their moral authority. In a study in Kenya, when faith leaders publicly turned from politics and returned to the faith identity they restored their ability to play an active role in peace building and reconciliation, and played a part in reducing violence.[17]

Case Study: Distributive justice is an important theme in international development, overlapping with concepts of peace, equity, compassion, and more. The United Refugee and Host Churches (URHC) is a network of churches in Kakuma Refugee Camp (Kenya) and the surrounding Turkana community founded in 1996 by refugees and people from the local Turkana community. The URHC addressed ongoing conflict and distrust in the camp by establishing procedural and distributive justice. A qualitative study in 2015 described the methods used by the URHC to restore justice and reduce conflict in the camp. The study identified eight themes describing URHC strategies, including advancing women's rights, transparent leadership, education for community and faith leaders, and support for the most vulnerable.

Summary. The five unique contributions by LFCs to community resilience and development reflect the close connection between faith, community life, culture, and the community dynamics of trust, justice, and peace. This brief is offered to generate dialog leading to more successful partnerships between LFCs and development agents. To that end, we offer suggestions for policy makers and LFC leaders:

1. The positive contributions of LFCs should be acknowledged and supported. To that end, both LFCs and humanitarian agents would benefit from educational programming on the role LFC play in advancing community health, peace and resilience.

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[16] Keefe, R. H., Brownstein-Evans, C., & Polmanteer, R. R. (2016). 'I find peace there': How faith, church, and spirituality help mothers of colour cope with postpartum depression. Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 19(7), 722-733. doi:10.1080/13674676.2016.1244663

[17] Gathogo, N. (2011). Ethnicity, peace, and violence: The voices of Kenyan church leaders. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A, 72, 3905

2. Documentation on community programs should include the role and impact of LFC participants. This may include the impact of these contributions, particularly on the question of whether unique contributions yield unique impacts.

3. Guidance on the development of successful collaborations is needed for all parties. This should include recommended practices and case studies on successful collaborations.

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