Religion *and*
Gender

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ACTION GUIDE

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Note about gender pronouns: As shown on the title page of this Action Guide, gender pronouns are indicated in parentheses next to a person's name. They express that person's gender identity and how they would like to be referred to by others. This is increasingly practiced in many parts of the world based on the idea that instead of making assumptions, knowing and using people's preferred pronouns honors people and their gender identity. The gender-neutral pronouns, they/them, are used when a person does not identify with the female-male binary and some people are comfortable using multiple pronouns.

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Getting Started

THIS ACTION GUIDE will help faith-based and secular practitioners better understand and address issues at the intersection of religion and gender in conflict and peacebuilding.[1] It provides practical guidance on taking a gender-inclusive approach in the design, implementation, and support of peacebuilding where religious issues or identities are part of the conflict and where religious actors or resources can be part of the solution. This Guide will also interest civil society leaders, local and international nongovernmental organization (NGO) workers, diplomats, funders, and staff of international organizations.

A gender-inclusive approach is multifaceted, seeking to uncover the gender and religious dynamics of conflict and apply this lens to all aspects of peacebuilding. Such an approach involves, among other things, considering the unique experiences and needs of people of different gender identities and ensuring the representation within peacebuilding of those who have been marginalized. It also involves addressing the harmful gender norms and inequitable power dynamics that fuel cycles of conflict.

This Guide does not insist on rigid ideas or expectations of gender roles and norms, but it does hold four assumptions: (1) gender-based oppression remains a universal problem, not one specific to religion or a particular community; (2) across cultures and within all major religious traditions, one can find and draw upon core values of justice, diversity, equity, and respect for the inherent dignity of all people; (3) gender inequities often fuel violent conflict, as growing evidence suggests;[2] and (4) a gender-inclusive approach is an essential component of more responsive, effective, and sustainable peacebuilding interventions in any context.

For many peacebuilders working in religious contexts, a key challenge is how to address gender issues with sensitivity and respect for local beliefs and practices. When gender specialist Sippi Azerbaijani-Moghaddam asked why assistance in Afghanistan was given only to male relatives of a deceased husband, she was told by the implementing partner, "Women are 'too emotional and traumatized to handle the responsibility, and [they cannot] easily travel to distribution sites.'"[3] Other commonly heard excuses and rationales for excluding gender issues include:

- "Gender is too sensitive; if we address it, we risk offending our local partners."

- "Yes, women are important and we want to include them, but we can't find any who are qualified and capable."

- "After we end this foreign occupation, then we can work on gender inclusion."

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1   *Secular* is understood here as not explicitly affiliated with any specific religion but also not hostile to it.

2   Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, *Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20*, 2019, 5, https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf.

3   Philip Smucker, "How the World Failed Afghan Women," Diplomat, November 18, 2021, https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/how-the-world-failed-afghan-women/.

- "Homosexuality is a Western idea forced on our religious and cultural values."

- "That's just how men are. We can't expect them to behave otherwise."

While important scholarship and guidance exist on gender and peacebuilding, as well as on religion and peacebuilding, there are far fewer sources with practical information on how to understand and approach the dynamics of all three. This Guide fills this gap. It is part of a series on religious peacebuilding that includes *Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding: An Analysis Guide* (hereafter referred to simply as the *Analysis Guide*), which was published in 2018; *Religion and Mediation* (the *Mediation Guide*), which appeared in 2021; and *Religion and Reconciliation* (the *Reconciliation Guide)*, which came out, along with this guide, *Religion and Gender* (the *Gender Guide*), in 2023.[4] Each guide draws on examples from a range of regions and religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and interfaith settings. Not all traditions are represented within the page limits of these guides, but we have selected examples that we consider relevant and applicable to other contexts.
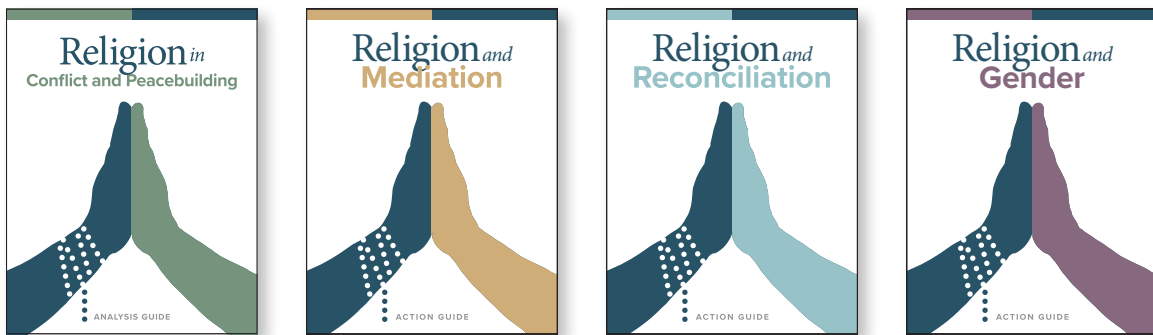
4   Owen Frazer and Mark Owen, *Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding Analysis Guide* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace [USIP] Press, 2018), www.usip.org/sites/default/files/USIP_Religion-in-Conflict-Peacebuilding_Analysis-Guide.pdf; S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana and Tarek Maassarani, *Religion and Mediation Action Guide* (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2021), www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Religion-and -Mediation-Action-Guide.pdf; and David Steele, James Patton, and Tarek Maassarani, *Religion and Reconciliation Action Guide* (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2023).

Understanding Religion

Religious traditions are complex and distinct. They are defined and expressed in different ways by different people from one context to another. This Guide defines religion as "a human response to a perceived nonphysical reality concerning the origin, meaning, and purpose of life."[5] Consider the five interrelated dimensions of religion, as described by Owen Frazer and Mark Owen in the *Analysis Guide* and shown in figure 1. Considerations of religion's role in conflict are often incomplete because they include only one or two of these dimensions.[6]

- **Religion as a set of ideas:** A shared set of teachings, doctrines, norms, values, language, stories, and narratives that provides a framework for understanding and acting in the world

- **Religion as community:** A defined group of followers and believers that provides individuals with a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves

- **Religion as institution:** The formal structures, leaders, and organizations associated with religious communities

- **Religion as symbols and practices:** The many visible manifestations of a religion, from buildings to dress to ceremonies and rituals

- **Religion as spirituality:** A personal experience that provides a sense of purpose and connectedness to something greater than oneself, as well as a powerful source of motivation

FIGURE 1. **Different dimensions of religion relevant to gender-inclusive peacebuilding**

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5 Dan Snodderly, ed., *Peace Terms: Glossary of Terms for Conflict Management and Peacebuilding*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2018), 45.

6 Frazer and Owen, *Analysis Guide*, 8. The idea of dimensions of religion was originally developed by Ninian Smart (see Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, 2nd ed. [New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1976]) and subsequently adapted by others (e.g., Linda Woodhead "Five Concepts of Religion," *International Review of Sociology* 21, no. 1 [2001]: 121–143; and A. Ullmann, "Understanding Religion in Conflict," presentation at Religion and Mediation Course, Schwarzenberg, Switzerland, 2015).

Gender often intersects with the five dimensions: religious *ideas* shape gender norms and practices, which in turn impact who participates in creating or promoting religious ideas; people play different gendered roles in their religious *community*; religious *institutions* (like many other social structures and hierarchies) encourage gender stereotypes and distribute authority, power, and resources along gendered lines; people of different genders maintain different religious *symbols and practices*; and people's experiences of *spirituality* are intertwined with their own unique gendered life experiences.

How do we learn about religion—and who gets to speak for and about it—especially around gender issues? *Reported religion* refers to academic texts and mainstream media coverage that impact people's perception of a religious group. *Represented religion* refers to how religious leaders, dignitaries, and institutions present their beliefs and traditions through publications, sermons, social media, or other public channels. *Living religion* refers to what people say and do in their own lives; it may be different from what is reported or represented.[7]

Forms of reported and represented religion, such as interpretations of doctrine that speak to gender, do not always represent people's day-to-day realities. A gender-inclusive approach calls for close attention to the *lived experiences* of religion: how people experience the different dimensions of religion within their own lives, including within situations of violent conflict. If you are not a member of the religious community yourself, consider where your knowledge of that community's beliefs and experiences comes from. Although a religious leader or institution may present a particular position on a gender issue, do not assume they represent the beliefs and experiences of people of different gender identities within that community.

Understanding Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics, behaviors, and identities of an individual.[8] Gender exists on a spectrum and is often understood in reference to "masculinity" and "femininity". *Gender identity* refers to an individual's internal sense and feelings about where they exist on the gender spectrum. A person's gender identity can be constant or change over time. As such, we can consider both the ways people are socially defined and valued (gender as a social construction) as well as how they internally identify (gender as self-ascribed).

Gender expression refers to how an individual expresses their gender identity, including through behavior, body shape, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and more. It can be understood as a physical manifestation of gender identity and may be understood in the binary of "masculine" and "feminine" or along a spectrum. *Sexual orientation* refers to the gender identities and expressions to which an individual is sexually attracted.[9]

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7   Stephen E. Gregg and Lynn Scholefield, *Engaging with Living Religion: A Guide to Fieldwork in the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2015), 7.

8   The gender-related definitions are drawn from USIP's "Introduction to Gender in Peacebuilding" Global Academy, www.usip.org/academy /catalog/gender-inclusive-peacebuilding.

9   Various forms of attraction exist, including those that are spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and romantic, which may or may not be linked to one's sexual orientation.

Gender and sex are related but are not interchangeable concepts. *Sex* refers to the biological and anatomical sex that is assigned at birth based on the physical sex characteristics both present at birth and developed over time. Sex is captured in the terms "female," "male," and "intersex." An individual's sex at birth or over time may or may not align with their chosen gender identity or gender expression:

- *Cisgender* denotes a person who identifies with the gender corresponding to the sex they were assigned at birth.

- *Intersex* refers to an individual whose biological and anatomical sex does not fall within the binary of "female" and "male." For example, an intersex individual may have the external biological and anatomical features of a "female" while simultaneously having the internal biological and anatomical features of a "male."

- *Transgender* denotes an individual who does not identify with their birth sex and who may change their sex and gender.

- *Nonbinary* denotes a person whose gender identity does not fall within the categories of "masculine" and "feminine" but is a combination of both, an absence of each, or something different.

Gender and Sexual Minorities

The term *gender and sexual minorities (GSM)* refers to individuals whose gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or reproductive development varies from traditional, societal, cultural, or biological standards. Internationally, the terms *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex* and *asexual* (collectively called *LGBTQIA+*) are commonly encountered, but they are not universally accepted. For instance, people who identify as "third gender" in parts of South Asia might be thought of as "nonbinary" in the West. This Guide uses the term GSM to allow for differences across contexts and to recognize that LGBTQIA+ terms are sensitive in some places.

Some religious traditions or communities hold an accepted and even revered role for GSM. The *hijra* community has historic roots in Hindu philosophy and today is officially recognized across the Indian subcontinent. Many *hijras* participate in religious ceremonies and are believed by some to hold sacred powers. In Native Hawaiian Tahitian traditions, *māhū* ("in the middle") hold revered spiritual roles and maintain cultural traditions.

Because their existence challenges social norms, GSM are often subject to exclusion, abuse, and attack. In some contexts, being a member of a gender or sexual minority might be against religious or other laws. A gender-inclusive approach must consider the particular vulnerabilities and risks facing GSM in conflict and the importance of their inclusion in peacebuilding efforts.

The term *gender norms* refers to the social, cultural, political, and religious expectations that society holds for people of a given gender identity. These may include expectations, for example, that women are caretakers of the household. Certain gender norms, such as the expectation that boys and men must fight to protect their families and community, can fuel violent conflict. Gender norms are reflected in *gender stereotypes,* which are generalizations about a person or group based on their gender identities, as well as *implicit biases*, which are quick judgments made without our conscious awareness. We all have implicit bias, even if it runs contrary to our stated values. For instance, someone may value gender equity yet assume that the leader of an organization is a man, or value religious diversity but react with suspicion toward someone of a different religion. Uncovering your own biases is part of the first fundamental consideration of a gender-inclusive approach, discussed in the next section.

The term *gender dynamics* refers to the power dynamics among genders. Gender dynamics are both shaped by and have an impact on political, economic, social, and religious structures and institutions. *Patriarchy*, a social system that upholds the power of cis-men over other genders, is common to most parts of the world. Although many religious institutions promote and justify patriarchal beliefs and practices, religions are not inherently patriarchal. Rather, many religious ideas were influenced by preexisting patriarchal contexts or by contact with patriarchal ideas over time (such as through colonialism), as discussed in the textbox on page 11. Many contemporary theologians and faith-based peacebuilders are demonstrating how gender inclusion and equity are core values of their faith, as discussed later in this Guide.

Our lived experiences are also shaped by other factors and identities than gender, such as race, religion, ethnicity, tribe, class, sexuality, marital status, disability, and age.[10] *Intersectionality* refers to how a combination of identities leads to unique experiences of oppression or privilege. A woman who is a member of a religious minority may be doubly disadvantaged compared with a man who is part of the religious majority. An intersectional approach to peacebuilding recognizes how a person's intersecting identities impact their level of influence and power within their community, as well as how they hold unique perspectives that are important to building a sustainable and inclusive peace.[11]

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10 Although youth are mentioned throughout this Guide, an approach inclusive of youth requires an additional set of considerations. See "Additional Resources on Gender-Inclusive Peacebuilding and Religion" near the end of this Guide.

11 Kathleen Kuehnast and Danielle Robertson, "Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory: A Guide for Turning Theory into Practice," USIP, 2018, 14, https://www.usip.org/programs/gender-inclusive-framework-and-theory-gift.

Is It Religion or Culture?

Religion and the broader culture of a community are often deeply intertwined in ways that make them difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish. When it comes to beliefs about gender, it takes a careful look at the historical context and religion's different dimensions to understand what may have been adopted from broader preexisting cultures versus what is actually found within core religious teachings. Some scholars demonstrate, for instance, that Buddhist arguments for the dominance of men are actually rooted in beliefs and social codes that existed in South Asian and East Asian culture before the advent of Buddhism.[a]

Female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) is still widely practiced in different African communities. Although considered a religious practice by some, it predates Christianity and Islam. Faith-based actors have worked to eradicate the practice where legislation or national policies alone were not enough. In Egypt and Ethiopia, for example, religious leaders and institutions are helping to end the practice through issuing public statements, delivering sermons, and organizing rallies and dialogues.[b]

Religion is often confused with culture when it comes to certain harmful gendered practices, such as FGM/C and child marriage, yet the roots of these practices are not found within religious teachings. This highlights the role religious actors can play in addressing harmful practices done in the name of religion, as well as the importance of improving one's own religious literacy, as discussed in "Strategies for Countering Resistance and Building Partnerships" later in this Guide.

Notes

[a] Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[b] United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Research Centre, "The Dynamics of Social Change: Towards the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Five African Countries," October 2010, 21, www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/fgm_insight_eng.pdf; and Side by Side, "Advocacy Briefing: The Role of Faith Leaders in Achieving Gender Justice," September 2018, 11, https://jliflc.com/resources/side-by-side-advocacy-briefing-the-role-of-faith-leaders-in-achieving-gender-justice/.

How to Use This Guide

The next section defines a gender-inclusive approach by outlining five fundamental considerations toward more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable peacebuilding within religious contexts and with religious actors. Make sure you start there in order to build a strong foundation for your gender-inclusive approach. The three subsequent sections do not have to be read in consecutive order but address three key questions: how to support and advance the work of those who have been excluded based on gender; how to transform harmful masculinities and confront sexual and gender-based violence; and how to deal with resistance, including through effective strategic partnerships. Recognizing the varied experiences within a given community, this Guide does not provide directions for gender inclusivity in a specific religious context. Rather, you will find guidance and questions to help you move beyond assumptions about people's religious and gendered experiences and toward more responsive and inclusive interventions. You will also find real-world examples to illustrate key ideas and exercises to strengthen your learnings. This Guide is designed to support your individual efforts as well as those of your team. While reading all sections will deepen your understanding of how to take a gender-inclusive approach, you may also find it helpful to refer to specific parts to support the different stages of your work.

Review the companion *Analysis Guide* to better understand the role religion plays in your particular context. Also consult the *Mediation Guide* and the *Reconciliation Guide* to understand how to mediate conflicts where religion is relevant to the community or to reconcile a history of distrust and harm. You may also reference the texts and websites listed under "Additional Resources on Gender-Inclusive Peacebuilding and Religion" (page 63).

Throughout this Guide, the term *actor* is used to identify any person or group involved in the conflict or in some way concerned by it. An actor can be an individual, organization, network, or institution. The term may refer to any person of any gender and any age. *Religious actors* refers both to formally recognized religious leaders and authorities and to actors who are religiously inspired (also referred to as *faith-based*) or recognized for their religious wisdom. *Participants* refers to actors who participate directly in a conflict analysis or peacebuilding process.

Three Guiding Principles

The Action Guides in this series all follow three guiding principles to understanding and working within conflicts with religious dimensions or with religious actors. These principles are reflected in each of the five fundamental considerations of a gender-inclusive approach, as laid out in the next section.

Do No Harm

The most important principle in peacebuilding is to avoid making a situation worse. Peacebuilders are not objective, passive actors. Their presence, who they speak to, the types of questions they ask, the issues they focus on, and the actions they take can all have an impact. Take care to ensure that your presence in no way makes the problems worse or puts others at risk. If you are not from the immediate context, work with local partners or organizations that have deep local knowledge and are aware of the types of issues that might be problematic. If you lack experience in conflict analysis, gender analysis, inclusive peacebuilding, or any aspect of religion that is relevant, seek assistance. Keep in mind that do no harm does not equate to doing nothing and that it is possible to identify gender-inclusive approaches that are sensitive to local contexts. Following the five considerations helps you take a do no harm approach and is important throughout all stages and aspects of peacebuilding.

Be Self-Aware

We all bring our biases to any situation. We may not be able to erase them, but we can be aware of them and how they impact our interactions with others and our understandings of the conflict. Building your self-awareness is a central goal of Consideration 1, discussed on pages 16–17. Refer also to the *Analysis Guide*'s section on self-reflection (pages 21–33).

Embrace Complexity

Conflicts rarely have simple causes or solutions. They are complex, messy, contradictory, and fluid. Applying a religion and gender lens to conflict reveals even more complexity. Do your best by following the five fundamental considerations but note that you cannot control where the process will go. Although you may hope for a particular outcome, remember that social change and transformation take time and that the success of a dynamic process is not always obvious at any one moment.

Defining a Gender-Inclusive Approach to Peacebuilding in Religious Contexts

TODAY'S PEACEBUILDING PRACTITIONERS face complex conflict situations with mixed religious and gender dynamics. Given that almost 85 percent of the world's population is religiously affiliated,[12] most conflicts take place where religion plays a role. Actors use religious ideas and identities to gain power, which deepens religious divides even when political or economic interests are at the root of conflict. Gender also plays a significant role in how conflicts emerge, are experienced, and are resolved. For instance, gender inequities in education and economic opportunities and higher rates of intimate partner violence are "significantly correlated with higher levels of violent conflict."[13]

A gender-inclusive approach not only acknowledges inequities that fuel cycles of conflict but also investigates their sources. It adopts strategies for supporting the participation of marginalized groups in peacebuilding and the meaningful inclusion of their needs and perspectives. It also engages people of all gender identities to transform the harmful norms and dynamics that lead to conflict and exclusion. In the religious peacebuilding context, it engages religious actors and the dimensions of religion to support all these efforts. A gender-inclusive approach can be a lens through which to see and address the intersectional gender and religious dynamics that drive conflict and affect peacebuilding processes.

Gender equity refers to fair treatment and opportunities in light of the diverse needs and experiences of people with different gender identities. Equity is different from equality, which is often taken to mean equal treatment and opportunity. Because of existing power dynamics, equal treatment may not actually lead to equal outcomes. For example, a religious peacebuilding initiative that invites equal numbers of people from different gender identities using the same outreach strategies may get less participation from women, young people, and gender and sexual minorities (GSM). An equitable approach would instead consider providing extra security measures, childcare, and separate prayer spaces to ensure meaningful representation and participation (as discussed further in the next section of this Guide, "Including the Excluded").

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12 "The Global Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, December 18, 2012, www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/.

13 Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. *Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20*, 5.

The following five fundamental considerations will help you adopt a gender-inclusive approach to your conflict analysis, program planning and design, implementation, and evaluation processes:

1. Start and continue with self-reflection
2. Prioritize lived experiences
3. Watch for gender shifts
4. Break through silos
5. Remain responsive and adaptive

These considerations are interrelated, ongoing, rarely linear, and part of a continuous cycle of self-assessment, learning, application, and reassessment and adaption, as shown in figure 2.

FIGURE 2. **Gender-inclusive approach as a continuous cycle**
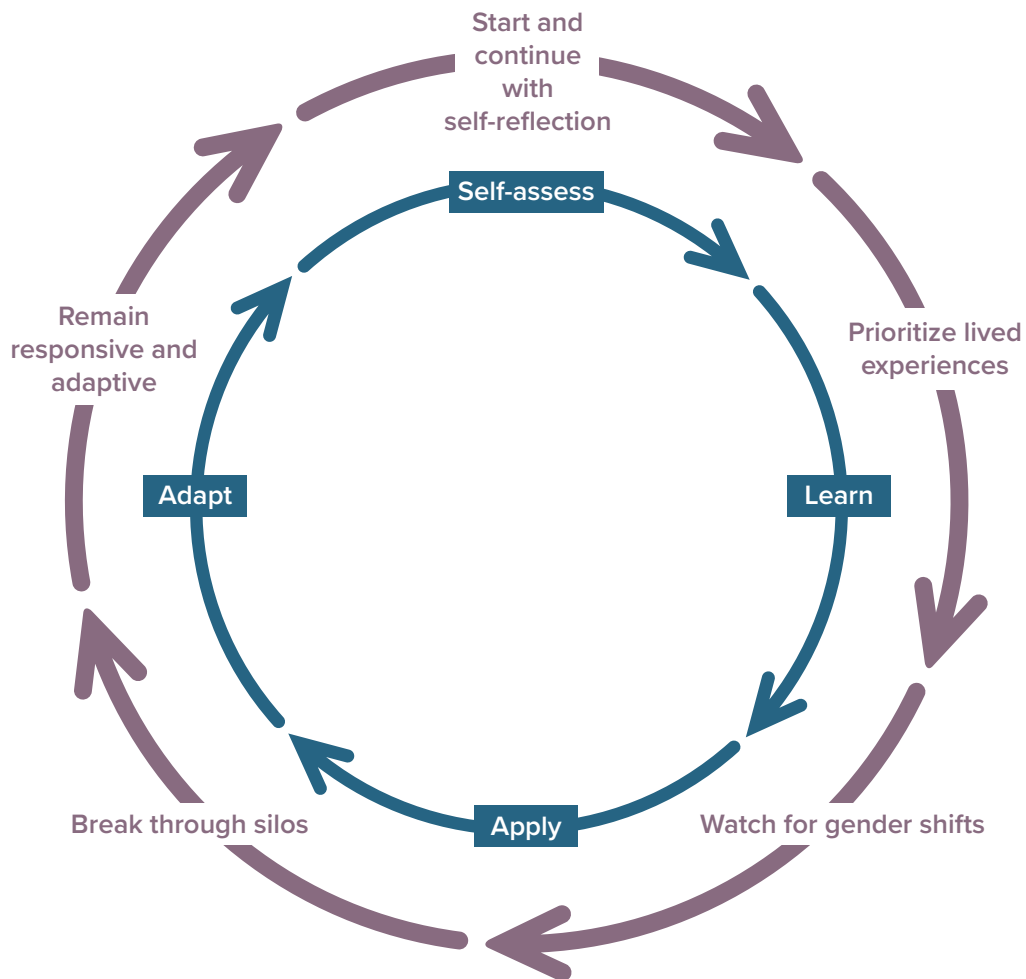
The following parts of this section explain each of the five fundamental considerations. Some include questions for you to consider in order to strengthen your analysis and intervention.

Consideration 1: Start and Continue with Self-Reflection

A first fundamental consideration to a gender-inclusive approach is to become aware of and actively examine the perspectives and biases around religion and gender that we hold based on our upbringing, education, the media, and broader culture. They shape our assumptions, how we view and act in the world, and how we approach a conflict situation and its possible solutions. For instance, a bias against a certain faith may lead us unconsciously to focus on its negative aspects, dismiss evidence of its positive impact, and avoid engaging with it. The goal is not to get rid of our biases; everyone has them. It is to become aware of them, so as not to act on them and to actively fill the gaps in our understanding, particularly through others' lived experiences.[14] Taking time for self-reflection also allows you to learn about your capacities and those of your team, including existing knowledge that is relevant to the context and any important gaps. Prior experience with the local religious community or context can be a major asset, but you may still hold underlying assumptions that need to be checked against other local perspectives (see Consideration 2, "Prioritize Lived Experiences").

Reflect on how you and your team will be perceived by the conflict actors based on their own cultural lenses and biases. Consider how they will, or will not, relate to the perceived religious and gender identities of your team. You cannot control these initial perceptions; however, you can anticipate them and plan for ways to mitigate them.

Self-reflection requires openness, honesty, and humility. This is not about letting go of your own values or ethical principles but about opening up to new insights from multiple perspectives for a more inclusive process. Be prepared to have your assumptions challenged throughout your efforts, recognizing that our own beliefs are constantly evolving. Although it is particularly important to start with self-reflection in the initial stages of your work and analysis, continue to take time for this at all stages as you learn more about a conflict context or community.

Questions to Consider

The following list presents a series of self-reflective questions to ask yourself and your team to understand your perspectives and biases, as well as how you may be perceived by others. See the table toward the end of this Guide (pages 60–61) for additional self-reflection questions, and consult the *Analysis Guide* for ones on religion generally.

- What types of positive and negative messages did you receive from family, friends, religious leaders or institutions, school, and the media about gender and sexuality? (Refer to pages 8–10 for relevant terms.)

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14 To learn more about your own implicit biases, take Project Implicit's association tests on social attitudes, which cover a range of subjects, including gender, race, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion. See https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html.

- Have your views on gender or sexuality changed as you have gained different life experiences?

- How has religion shaped your beliefs about gender or sexuality?

- How have you experienced privilege because of your gender identity or sexual orientation? In what ways have you been marginalized?

- How comfortable are you working with people of a gender identity, sexual orientation, or religious identity different from your own?

- What do you know about the gender and religious dimensions of the conflict? Where did this information come from? What additional knowledge do you need and where (e.g., trainings) can you get it?

- How similar or different are your gender, religious, and other identities to those of the conflict actors? How do they perceive you?

- How might your identities give you access to or close you off from certain spaces? (For instance, a woman will have easier access to women-only spaces.)

- How is your team modeling gender inclusion and equity?

- How do you navigate values and beliefs different from your own?

Consideration 2: Prioritize Lived Experiences

A second fundamental consideration is to prioritize how people actually live out their lives, and the values and perspectives they hold as a result, in your analysis and peacebuilding efforts. Prioritizing lived experiences helps to bring a more nuanced understanding of complex power dynamics and forms of influence that are not immediately obvious, as shown in the textbox below.

| Gusii and Maasai Women in Peacebuilding | In southwestern Kenya, despite being excluded from formal peace processes, Gusii and Maasai women of faith play a central role in supporting healing and reconciliation within both of their communities. Drawing on resources and traditions from locally practiced Christianity and indigenous African religions, they perform mourning and burial rituals, condemn the violence, and comfort survivors. Understanding faith-based women's experiences on their own terms—rather than assuming their passivity and victimhood—uncovers the deep influence many have within their communities, even if they do not hold formal positions of leadership.

 Source: Jacqueline Christine Ogega, "Faith, Gender and Peacebuilding: The Roles of Women of Faith in Peacebuilding in the Conflict between the Gusii and Maasai of South-Western Kenya" (doctoral diss., University of Bradford, October 2014), 162–164. |

Prioritizing lived experiences means looking beyond what is *reported* or *represented* by making observations and asking questions that are attuned to the unique local context. For instance, there is significant variation in how sharia-based laws are interpreted across Muslim countries and within individual Muslim lives. In Malaysia, Muslim family law is even applied differently across state lines. Even an informed understanding of sharia-based laws will say little about Malay Muslim women's lived realities with the laws, such as within polygamous relationships, in seeking custody of their children, or in entering an interreligious marriage (all of which have been sources of conflict within the country).

To prioritize lived experiences, suspend your assumptions as you observe the society and deeply listen to stakeholders with nonjudgmental curiosity to ascertain the unspoken assumptions and rules of a given society. Consider semistructured or open-ended interviewing techniques that enable changes in conversation and themes as dictated by the interviewees. Participatory action research (PAR) can be a particularly powerful approach, one in which research facilitators and subject-participants become co-researchers and co-owners of the entire process of formulating the questions to be asked, data collection, analysis, project design, and implementation.[15]

Remember the principle of do no harm: make sure you are aware of the security risks some people face in talking with you and sharing personal stories. Be careful that the language you deploy is sensitive to these risks. For example, the term *GSM* may be less threatening than *LGBTQIA+* (see the textbox on page 9 for definitions) in some places. If time and resources permit, learning local languages and dialects will help you understand local dynamics. At a minimum, partner with capable local interpreters who are trusted by your interviewees.

Prioritizing lived experiences, especially of those who have been marginalized based on their gender or religious identities, lays a foundation for more responsive and collaborative initiatives. It is important at every stage of your peacebuilding efforts, but especially in your conflict analysis. See the table on page 33 with sample questions to help you prioritize lived experiences in your analysis and turning your analysis into action. The following sections provide additional questions for applying Consideration 2.

Consideration 3: Watch for Gender Shifts

Gender impacts everyone, shaping the challenges and opportunities they face at every stage of life. As such, the third fundamental consideration is to watch for gender shifts. A gender lens is necessary to understanding the often rapidly changing dynamics within all stages of conflict and peacebuilding.

For example, in the early stages of conflict, shifts in gender roles and relations serve as important indicators of unrest. High rates of unemployment among men, the disappearance of women and girls from public spaces, and increased sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV—discussed on page 40) are all early-warning indicators. During conflict, people of different gender identities face different roles and expectations. Men are pressured to take up arms and be willing to die

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15 Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 215.

while women are pressured to support their sons and husbands in the fight. Economic power is often shifted to women as men in the family go off to fight or are killed, and some women become combatants themselves. SGBV is often a deliberate tactic of armed groups, targeting not just women and girls but also boys, men, and GSM, as discussed in the section "Transforming Masculinities."

Within postconflict environments, attempts to "return to normal" often mean reestablishing traditional gender roles that reinforce inequities. A longing for this traditional past may be used to target GSM or render them invisible. Men are expected to take on roles as providers and protectors, but they are likely to face a dearth of economic and political opportunities. Domestic violence may increase as men seek to reassert control. Women, girls, boys, and GSM are particularly vulnerable to SGBV, especially in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees. Yet, with the breakdown of traditional structures, opportunities open for positive social change, which can take the form of passing new laws, building more equitable institutions, and providing civic education that promotes gender equity. Watching for these shifting gender dynamics—by integrating a gender and religious lens strategically and thoroughly from your conflict analysis to project design, consultation with partners, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting—will help you better anticipate, understand, and respond to those dynamics throughout the conflict and postconflict periods.

Questions to Consider

Consider the following sample questions to watch for gender shifts in the conflict context.

- How long has the community been in conflict, and how have gender and religious dynamics shifted from the early stages until now?

- Which previous gender roles have been changed due to the conflict? How are affected persons reacting to this?

- What observable indicators (such as number of women in public spaces or unemployment rates among men) can you think of to help you track gender shifts?

Consideration 4: Break through Silos

A fourth fundamental consideration is to break through traditional silos. A gender-inclusive approach is integral across multiple sectors. Long-term transformation toward sustainable peace and equity requires working across different levels of power and influence, enabling people at all levels to contribute to the formulation of more inclusive and equitable practices, policies, and institutions. Too often, however, peacebuilding interventions treat gender as an "add on": a siloed project conducted separately from other programming, with "gender" often treated as synonymous with "women's issues" rather than as a cross-cutting factor that impacts all people. Such approaches can have superficial results that place the burden of responsibility on women. This is not to say that gender-specific programs are not effective. As discussed in all the following

sections of this Guide, programs that target a gender identity by providing safe space, support, and resources for particularly sensitive issues—such as healing from the trauma of SGBV or dismantling harmful masculinities—are critical.

Incorporating a gender-inclusive approach throughout your work does not mean you can or should overlook questions of budget and time. Consider how your immediate activities can advance longer-term goals of the community, even if those cannot be fully addressed within the scope of your project. Indeed, the *process* of a gender-inclusive approach is as important as the results. Building inclusive and equitable societies is a long-term commitment.

Questions to Consider

Consider the following sample questions to help integrate a gender and religion lens across sectors and spaces.

- How can you work with actors with different forms and levels of power and influence in the community?

- How can you better engage people of all gender identities? If you have a women-centered project, how might you also engage men to encourage their support and understanding? If you are working with GSM, how might you also engage cisgender people to encourage their support and understanding?

- How will your planned activities address the short-term gendered needs of the actors in conflict? How will they contribute to longer-term goals of gender transformation and equitable power relations (even if these cannot be fully realized within your timeframe)?

Consideration 5: Remain Responsive and Adaptive

The fifth fundamental consideration of a gender-inclusive approach to peacebuilding within religious contexts is to remain responsive and adaptive. As your knowledge expands through uncovering your assumptions and learning from the lived experiences of the people most impacted by conflict, and as gender and religious dynamics themselves shift within changing conflict situations, you will have to make changes to your approach. Careful planning is important, of course, but remaining open to change is also necessary. *Deliberative moments* are when you "stop, reflect, reassess, and think anew" in your work.[16] Whether preplanned or in response to unexpected circumstances, these moments are not failures, but opportunities for new learning and innovation, especially when you reflect and reassess with the participants themselves.

A gender-inclusive approach also requires flexibility in the face of resistance. Gender and religious beliefs are often deeply rooted; change is hard in the best of times. Given the sensitivity around gender and religious issues, expect to face some resistance. Depending on how you are perceived, you will face different types of questions and challenges. A faith-based practitioner

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16 See Ackerly and True, *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science*, 44. The authors write of "deliberative moments" within the context of doing research, but they are also applicable to practice.

may face resistance from members of their own community who disagree with or feel threatened by a gender-inclusive approach, while a secular actor may face resistance as an outsider and be perceived as untrustworthy. Be mindful that in some contexts, advocating for gender inclusivity and equity can trigger hostility and play into a particular conception of a Western secular agenda, in response to perceived or real, current or past forms of foreign imposition and cultural imperialism. The section "Strategies for Countering Resistance and Building Partnerships" further discusses the forms of resistance you might face and strategies to overcome them. For now, remember that your willingness to adapt to changing circumstances with an open and humble approach—especially when working in a context different from your own—helps to build necessary trust and better identify possibilities for a peaceful solution. As you learn and adapt, consider how you can measure and document your impact (see the textbox below) both to improve your own efforts and to expand collective understanding about gender-inclusive religious peacebuilding.

Gender-Inclusive Monitoring and Evaluation in Religious Contexts

There is a critical need to document and learn from the impacts of gender-inclusive peacebuilding in religious contexts, yet measuring transformation on gender issues and peacebuilding is often challenging. Changes to gender norms and power relations can take a long time to occur. Nevertheless, gender-inclusive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is possible, and methods that are creative and context specific and that seek to measure smaller changes within broader, longer-term goals are keys to success. For instance, International Alert found that in the case of evaluating a project on gender-equal political participation, it was important to design interview and survey tools that referred subtly to gender dynamics rather than mentioning gender explicitly, given the sensitive nature of the issue. We strongly encourage you to consult one of the many guides on M&E, especially one that engages gender, such as International Alert's "'Measuring Gender' in Peacebuilding."

Source: Henri Myrttinen, Nicola Popovic, and Lana Khattab, "'Measuring Gender' in Peacebuilding: Evaluating Peacebuilding Efforts from a Gender-Relational Perspective," International Alert, April 2016, 15, www.international-alert.org/publications/measuring-gender-in-peacebuilding/.

Including the Excluded

DURING THE SECOND Liberian Civil War, thousands of Muslim and Christian women formed the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, a movement that helped bring an end to the country's bloody fourteen-year conflict. Over the years, they gathered together to pray and mobilize, including in each other's churches and mosques, collectively demanding that women have a voice in the peace process. Excluded from the official peace talks, they staged sit-ins and nonviolent demonstrations, placing continuous pressure on the negotiators. Two weeks after the women threatened to hold the negotiators hostage—interlocking their arms and blocking doors and windows to prevent anyone from leaving until an agreement was reached—the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed on August 18, 2003.

Because of her leadership in the interfaith women's movement, which was recognized as being critical to ending the war, Leymah Gbowee won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, along with first woman president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Tawakkul Karman, a Muslim human rights activist, journalist, and leader in the Yemeni uprisings. Called the "Mother of the Yemeni Revolution," Karman led rallies and joined with women and tribal leaders to stand against unjust government policies and defend freedom of information. These women received significant international recognition, but they are among hundreds of thousands across contexts whose faith similarly inspires and strengthens their peacebuilding and who have been largely overlooked because of their gender identity.

In 2000, the international community passed United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which acknowledges the disproportionate impact of violent conflict on women and girls and the importance of their participation at all levels of decision-making. Since then, the Security Council has passed nine other related resolutions, resulting in a comprehensive Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to which over one hundred countries have agreed through their National Action Plans. Recent years have also seen a growing awareness of the role of religious actors in peacebuilding. After all, religious actors have a long history of leveraging their legitimacy, trust, and moral authority to support communities in conflict and crisis, as well as in struggles against social injustice.

Yet, despite the aspirations of the WPS agenda, too often official peacemaking processes continue to entail small groups of elite men leading behind-closed-door meetings—an approach to peacemaking that empirical analysis demonstrates is more likely than gender-inclusive processes to lead to a relapse of instability and violence.[17] When religious actors are included, often the people invited to the negotiating tables are those in official positions of leadership—most of whom are men. Faith-based women and gender and sexual minorities (GSM) actors are also largely excluded from WPS efforts due to the struggles many secular WPS actors have with religion, viewing it as too sensitive to engage or dismissing it as inherently patriarchal.

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17 Marie O'Reilly, "Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies," Inclusive Security, October 2015, www.inclusivesecurity.org /publication/why-women-inclusive-security-and-peaceful-societies/.

Although faith-based women and GSM do not all experience the same inequities and vulnerabilities, the roots of their marginalization stem from similarly harmful gender norms and patriarchal structures. This section focuses on how they nevertheless bring critical perspectives and play vital peacebuilding roles and on ways you can support their inclusion.

From the Public to Private Spheres: Exercising Different Forms of Power and Influence

Power and influence are not confined to formal leadership in the public sphere, but can be expressed across all sectors and spaces of society. In different traditions, women, and sometimes GSM, serve as nuns, priests, and lay leaders, exercising their leadership through teaching in seminaries and madrassas, preaching, leading religious rituals, serving as spiritual advisors, and running faith-based community organizations. Some GSM also hold historic, sacred roles within their religious traditions. *Two-spirit people* within indigenous communities across North America have been historically understood to be blessed by the Creator to carry both male and female spirits within them. They have served as healers and in other sacred ceremonial roles that have varied widely across tribes.[18] Faith-based women and GSM also work within secular peacebuilding NGOs, development agencies, and government institutions and can bridge efforts across secular-religious and grassroots-policymaking boundaries.

For both faith-based women and GSM, their religious and gender identities afford them a unique understanding of the conflict and the needs and vulnerabilities of the local community. Below are examples of some of the roles they play and issues they prioritize. Their efforts often fall outside of narrowly defined peacemaking—they may not even call themselves "peacebuilders"—yet their work is critical to sustainable peace. Consider their strategies and impact across contexts, despite the lack of resources and the risks that many face. Later in this section, you will have a chance to consider specific ways to support and advance their inclusion.

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18 *Two-spirit people* is a modern term that is used among some North American Indigenous communities and that replaces offensive terms used by non-Native anthropologists and colonizers. While it serves as an umbrella term within some Native American, First Nation, and other Indigenous communities, there is a wide variety of terms, definitions, and traditions involving people who do not identify within the male/female binary within these communities.

Women as Perpetrators of Violent Conflict

As you consider the diverse roles of faith-based women in peacebuilding, be careful you are not falling back on gender stereotypes, such as all women as "natural" nurturers and healers. While these characteristics describe some of their work, they are not innate to only one gender identity, nor do they define the experiences of all women.

Gender stereotypes about women have caused conflict analysts to overlook the role of women as perpetrators of violent conflict, to dangerous effect. Women support violent conflict in a range of indirect and direct ways. Their include encouraging men to engage in violence and educating their children to hate the "other." Women serve as spies, fundraisers, and nurses to the fighters and directly engage in combat themselves. Over the last several decades, women's participation in forms of violent extremism such as suicide attacks has been on the rise. Women's motivations for their participation vary widely, from needing to support their families by any means, to feelings of belonging within a wider movement, to wanting to be liberated from traditional gender norms. Religion can also serve as a strong motivator, including through religious leaders that call on all community members—regardless of gender identity—to support the cause.

Connections across Religious and Other Divides

Among the most powerful roles faith-based actors play as peacebuilders is in working across interreligious divides. Faith-based women are often well-positioned for this work, finding compelling reasons to collaborate across differences. As in the example of the Liberian peace movement, women may find commonality in their similar experiences, such as their shared risks and vulnerabilities, loss of loved ones, similar values rooted in faith, and a common desire to live in safety and peace. Their interfaith initiatives can include opportunities for shared learning and empowerment as well as direct action, as in the example of Sri Lankan peacebuilder Dishani Jayaweera in the textbox on page 25. Because of traditional gender stereotypes, some women also find they are perceived as less threatening and thus more able to work across dividing lines. The women of the Liberian peace movement continuously referred to themselves as the "sisters," "wives," and "mothers" of Liberia, finding this gave them a level of respect and access to both policymakers and combatants that was not afforded to others.[19] Note, however, that women's roles in conflict do not all fall within gender stereotypes; for instance, women can be perpetrators of violence, as discussed in the textbox above.

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19 Jennifer Pedersen, "In the Rain and in the Sun: Women's Peace Activism in Liberia," in *Handbook on Gender and War*, ed. Simona Sharoni et al. (Northampton, England: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), 400–418.

| Dishani Jayaweera, Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, Sri Lanka | Buddhist Sri Lankan peacebuilder and cofounder of the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (CPBR), Dishani Jayaweera, has brought together thousands of Sinhalese Buddhists, Tamil Hindus, Muslims, and Tamil and Sinhalese Christian people of all genders for conflict transformation training, interfaith dialogue, and direct action. CPBR's Female Interfaith Initiative convenes women faith-based leaders, other women community leaders, and women impacted by war from across Sri Lanka for interfaith trainings and dialogue to support their active role in postconflict reconciliation. Within a country in which religious leaders receive a great deal of respect and deference, Jayaweera encourages women to understand their own spiritual roles, traditions, and values as powerful resources for the healing and reconciliation of their communities.

Source: Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, "Dishani Jayaweera, Sri Lanka," accessed September 22, 2022, https://tanenbaum.org/about-us/what-we-do/peacebuilding/meet-the-peacemakers/dishani-jayaweera/. |

Providing Psychosocial and Spiritual Support

People carry extreme stress and trauma during and after conflict, and the impacts are often deeply gendered. Women, men, boys, girls, and GSM each have different vulnerabilities and needs when it comes to such experiences as sexual and gender-based violence, displacement, and reintegration as former combatants, as seen in the example of HIAS's work with GSM in the textbox on page 26. Because of their long-term, on-the-ground presence, as well as the trust and credibility afforded them within their communities, religious actors are often on the front lines of responding to people's needs during and after conflict, providing not just material support but also spiritual and emotional assistance.

Discussing issues of gender, sexual health, and mental health is taboo in many contexts that see these issues as private matters. Survivors of violence may feel more comfortable turning to someone of their same gender for psychosocial and spiritual support, especially in communities with norms of gender segregation. Faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders are particularly well-positioned to provide trauma support to other women and GSM, especially when that support is coupled with physical and mental health services. See the section "Transforming Masculinities and Confronting Sexual and Gender-Based Violence" for more on this topic.

HIAS, Kenya Office	GSM in conflict face particular risks and experiences of trauma that are often overlooked. HIAS, the world's oldest refugee protection agency, was founded by the Jewish community and today supports all refugees of all backgrounds, embracing the Jewish value of "welcoming the stranger." One of its current areas of focus is supporting GSM refugees and asylum seekers who, without recognized status, face heightened risks of SGBV, exploitation, and trafficking. HIAS's office in Kenya began to see huge numbers of GSM refugees from across East Africa after Uganda passed its anti-homosexuality bill. Evalyne Adhiambo Onyango, a social worker with HIAS Kenya, describes how refugees "come with stories of persecution that they have faced. They have been sexually abused. They are imprisoned. They have been beaten. They have been stoned. To help them start afresh, rebuild, and embrace the future with all that it holds, that is all that matters." HIAS country offices provide comprehensive legal aid, mental health and SGBV prevention and support, housing, and economic inclusion services. *Sources:* HIAS, "I Never Thought It Will Happen to Me," www.hias.org/blog/watch-i-never -thought-it-will-happen-me; and HIAS. "LGBTQ Refugees," www.hias.org/what/LGBTQ.

Serving as Insider-Multipartial Mediators and Negotiators

Across diverse religious contexts, faith-based actors have long played roles as mediators and negotiators, whether formally or informally. They serve as particularly effective *insider-multipartial* mediators, which the *Mediation Guide* (pages 17–18) defines as having social ties within the community and thus being more likely to be accepted where conflict is a community concern. Faith-based women and GSM have been sorely underrepresented in mediation, yet their unique vantage points are crucial assets, as seen in the example of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone in the textbox below. See the *Mediation Guide* (page 32) for more on the importance of including religious actors of different genders in the mediation process.

Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone	During their country's civil war, an interfaith group of fifteen women from the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone began engaging with members of the Revolutionary United Front to seek the release of child soldiers. Drawing on their religious and gender identities, they framed their negotiation with prayer and emphasized mercy and hope, as well as the inalienable rights of children from the women's different religious perspectives. Their approach seemed to have an impact on the rebels, and they successfully negotiated the release of fifty children. One Muslim woman negotiator recalls what one rebel leader said to her: "You look like my mother. I have not seen my mother for a long time. You also remind me of the way we prayed together. Shall we pray?" *Source:* Jacqueline Ogega and Katherine Marshall, "Strengthening Religious Women's Work for Peace," in *Women, Religion, and Peacebuilding: Illuminating the Unseen*, ed. Susan Hayward and Katherine Marshall (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2015), 288.

Identifying Early Warning Signs and Conflict Prevention

Faith-based women and GSM often have firsthand experience with the signs of growing conflict. Especially when religion is a factor, they are among the first targets, their rights increasingly restricted in the name of religion and community protection. In such roles as community leaders, educators, and service providers, they can be particularly effective in conflict prevention and identifying early signs of conflict. Many can also respond more rapidly than other groups because of their on-the-ground presence and being less constricted by bureaucracies, as seen in the example from Nigeria in the textbox below.

Federation of Muslim Women's Associations, Nigeria	Faith-based women's groups have been at the center of preventive action within Nigeria and are well-placed for rapid response and network building. Bilkusu Yusuf, founder of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations (FOWMAN) in Nigeria, says: "For a long time, the women of FOWMAN have spoken on behalf of Muslims where there was some issue the government wanted to address, because it was easier to work with us than with the men's organizations; there is so much bureaucracy they can't respond promptly. The men do not have a rapid response like we have, so the government have turned to us to speak for Muslims." *Source*: Chris Shannahan and Laura Payne, "Faith-Based Interventions in Peace, Conflict and Violence: A Scoping Study," Coventry University, Centre for Trust, Peace & Social Relations, and Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities, May 2016, 22.

Working toward Reconciliation

Although often excluded from formal peace processes, faith-based women often play a central role in the longer-term process of community healing and reconciliation that is required for a sustainable peace. They draw on their own social and community identities and experiences, as well as spiritual resources for rebuilding trust and forgiveness, as seen in the work of GemPaz in the textbox at the top of page 28. See the *Reconciliation Guide* for more on the role of religious actors in supporting community healing and reconciliation.

GemPaz, Colombia

After decades of war within their country, the three hundred members of GemPaz (the Ecumenical Group of Women Peacebuilders) came together across class, political, and geographic lines with a shared spiritual commitment to begin the hard work of "person-to-person" social reconstruction. "Women of faith have a special place in cementing the peace," says Mónica Velásquez, a GemPaz member. "Women have dreams and goals they want to realize and even have hope of a country at peace." With links to various local networks and women's groups, GemPaz's work includes using church spaces to create a safe environment for healing and restorative justice processes. The group's members bring together both victims and perpetrators for psychosocial healing, creating a system for rehabilitating offenders rather than criminalizing them in the postconflict environment.

Source: Fred Strasser, "Colombia: Religious Women Prepare for Reconciliation after War," USIP, July 30, 2015, www.usip.org/publications/2015/07/colombia-religious-women-prepare -reconciliation-after-war.

Bridging between Local and Governmental and between Informal and Formal Peacebuilding

Many faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders connect their on-the-ground efforts to other tracks of the peacebuilding process. This happens through many creative and strategic means, including through staging mass protests and demonstrations that demand the attention of the government, convening forums that bring community-driven recommendations to decision-makers, and drawing on the peacebuilders' networks to build relationships across sectors of society. As seen in the textbox below, some initiatives also benefit from trainings on effective advocacy and political participation.

Forum for Dignity Initiatives, Pakistan

Forum for Dignity Initiatives (FDI) is a research and advocacy nonprofit organization working for the rights of GSM, girls, and women in Pakistan. Although not an explicitly faith-based organization, FDI brings together people from Pakistan's many ethnicities, religions, and other social groups. In 2018, FDI held a series of consultations with political leaders and leaders of the transgender community on trans-inclusive elections. Their consultations produced a charter of demands that was presented to political party members, the media, and activists and is now available in Urdu and English to reach the broader public. In the summer of 2021, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) partnered with FDI to conduct a five-day residential training program on meaningful participation of cis and transgender women. FDI's efforts serve as an important example of how groups who have been marginalized because of their gender identity—such as cis and transgender women of different backgrounds—find common ground for mutual support and mobilization within divided societies.

Sources: Forum for Dignity Initiatives, "Consultation on Transgender Political Participation-Post Nominations Situation, 11 June 2018," www.fdipakistan.org/single-post/consultation-on -transgender-political-participation-post-nominations-situation-11-june-2018; and Julia Schiwal and Kathleen Kuehnast, "Why Gender and Sexual Minority Inclusion in Peacebuilding Matters," USIP, June 2021, www.usip.org/publications/2021/06/why-gender-and-sexual -minority-inclusion-peacebuilding-matters.

Engaging Alternative Religious Interpretations and Faith-Based Advocacy

Social and political shifts during and after conflict can break open spaces for new religious inquiry and leadership. In response to the rise of violent ideologies in recent years, many religious actors have been motivated to better understand their own religious texts and histories to provide a strong counternarrative to the extremists' narratives. Yet this work is not new. It builds on a long history of faith-based individuals engaging their religious teachings as they seek guidance for current realities.

Today, a growing number of faith-based women and GSM theologians, religious leaders, and activists are engaging in a new hermeneutics, or interpretation, of their religion with a gender lens and rooted in their lived experiences. Although their work is typically not defined as peacebuilding, they can serve as powerful partners and resources for gender-inclusive peacebuilding efforts within religious contexts. Their methods point out that, historically, it was men who had the authority or opportunity to interpret religious texts and resources. The gender norms and dynamics of a time and place largely influenced how religion was understood and what was prioritized.

By revisiting religious sources with a sensitivity to gender, they are uncovering the ways in which their religion carries compelling guidance for gender inclusion and equity, as seen in the textboxes below and on page 30. To be sure, by challenging traditional patriarchal interpretations, they often face strong resistance from conservative sectors. Yet their work also serves as powerful evidence that gender inclusion and equity are not foreign, secular concepts but can be found within core principles and values of their faith tradition. See "Strategies for Countering Resistance and Building Partnerships" for more on dealing with resistance by improving your religious literacy.

Muslims for Progressive Values, United States	For several years, Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) has partnered with Islamic scholars to provide theological, historical, and spiritually based knowledge for supporting gender and sexual diversity and for dismantling religious justifications for homophobia. Their efforts include workshops and an accessible question-and-answer section that provides clear explanations of how the Quran celebrates human diversity and does not judge or condemn same-gender sexual relationships, and of how the Prophet Muhammad knew and respected people who did not fit within strict heterosexual women and men categories.
	Source: Muslims for Progressive Values, "LGBTQI Resources," www.mpvusa.org/lgbtqi-resources.

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, Thailand

Women are barred from becoming Buddhist monks in Thailand, yet a growing number of bhikshunis, or female monastics, are emerging as a powerful force calling for reform. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, known as the Venerable Dhammananda and the first bhikshuni in Thailand from the Theravada branch of Buddhism, justifies women's religious leadership by reference to the teachings of the Buddha. She teaches that the Buddha supported the ordination of women monks and defined religion as a four-legged stool of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen, yet "we are now sitting on just three legs." Despite a conservative backlash, bhikshunis in Thailand today are leading an increasing number of women and men in religious teachings and practices, as well as aiding the poor and other vulnerable populations.

Source: Denis D. Gray, "'Rebel' Female Buddhist Monks Challenge Thailand Status Quo," AP News, September 12, 2015, https://apnews.com/article/deb48628f2a748ab8fad3604cf8c179b.

How to Support the Inclusion and Work of Faith-Based Women and GSM Peacebuilders

Despite the challenges and risks they face, faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders and the initiatives they lead continue to play critical peacebuilding roles. Below are practical ways to support and advance their work and inclusion within the broader peace and security sector. Make sure you apply the five fundamental considerations of a gender-inclusive approach, as discussed in table 1 on page 31, to ensure your efforts are truly responsive to their needs and context.

Honor Choices in Respecting and Defying Traditional Gender Roles

Throughout the above examples, some faith-based actors seek to challenge and take apart traditional patriarchal structures (such as by engaging alternative religious interpretations), while others work strategically within them—and they find that both paths can be successful. By working within traditional structures, some take advantage of gender norms (such as women drawing on their roles as mothers) and their relative invisibility within formal structures of power (such as bypassing dividing lines to make connections or serving as unofficial negotiators). This "strategic invisibility" brings both opportunities and challenges, however.[20] On the one hand, some find that working outside formal structures affords them more flexibility and ability to mobilize. They find they are more trusted by their community than the men who hold more visible positions. They can access spaces that official leaders cannot, especially within communities that have a culture of gender segregation. Some also prefer less formal or public roles because they take pride in maintaining traditional norms and values. On the other hand, strategic invisibility can backfire, as working within traditional gender roles and inequitable structures may reinforce them.

As you seek to support or partner with faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders, pay attention to how *they* want to be supported. Be mindful that many are making strategic as well as moral

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20 The term *strategic invisibility*, in reference to faith-based women, was coined by Susan Hayward and Katherine Marshall; see their edited volume, *Women, Religion, and Peacebuilding*, 16.

or spiritual choices on whether to work within traditional roles and structures or to defy them. Consider how they may strategically take advantage of their "invisibility," but also when and where they seek visibility and access. Respect how they are positioning themselves and where they want to be in both formal and informal spaces and peace processes.

TABLE 1. **Applying a gender-inclusive approach to including the excluded**

FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS	QUESTIONS TO ASK AND ISSUES TO CONSIDER
Start and continue with self-reflection	Return to the questions in Consideration, 1 such as: • What preexisting assumptions do you hold about faith-based women and GSM in this community? • What knowledge or experience do you have that may be relevant, and where are the gaps in your knowledge and experience? • How do you think you will be perceived?
Prioritize lived experiences	Prioritize the lived experiences of faith-based women and GSM to better understand how to support their efforts, including by considering: • What types of decision-making roles and access to resources do faith-based women and GSM have within the community? • What types of issues do they focus on? How do they talk about their work—including their priorities, needs, and challenges? • Who has representation within different spaces, and whose voices are missing? (Consider, for instance, large NGOs led by elite, urban women compared with local indigenous groups, or women's organizations that leave out transgender women.) Remember that different people face different risks in sharing their story, especially within conflict and if they are already targeted for their gender identity or sexuality. Always prioritize their safety and security—and your own—when collecting information. Take time to understand the context and build trust. Partner with local actors to better understand how to address particularly sensitive issues. When asking questions related to gender, do your best to ensure that the people with whom you are talking understand the terminology you are using (refer to the gender definitions in "Getting Started").
Watch for gender shifts	In addition to observing the broader gender shifts within the conflict context, consider how faith-based women and GSM actors have shifted their efforts to work around or address challenges.
Break through silos	• How are faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders seeking to work across different sectors and spaces, including any choices regarding "strategic invisibility"? • With whom are they partnering? What broader networks are they tapped into, if any?
Remain responsive and adaptive	• How have your previous assumptions changed as you learn more about the lived realities of faith-based women and GSM? • What types of resistance are you facing and from whom? What are ways to further build trust and connection? • What aspects of your plan need to be adapted or changed based on new knowledge, feedback from the community, or shifting conflict dynamics? • How are you measuring success in your programming? Are there opportunities to share your outcomes to further our collective understanding of the impacts of gender-inclusive peacebuilding within religious contexts?

Ensure Equitable Financial and Other Resources

A lack of financial and other resources is a constant challenge for women and GSM peacebuilders, and those who are faith-based are no exception. Often working informally and "invisibly," they may not know funders and funders may not know them.

- If you are in a position to provide funding, be mindful that sources of Western funding are viewed with suspicion in some non-Western contexts, especially when earmarked for gender issues. Be sure to follow the desires of the local actors on how they want to receive funds to reduce risks. In addition to traditional grants, consider the promising use of women's scholarships and microloans in terms of multiplier effects and return on investment.

- Many faith-based women and GSM have a long history of conducting peacebuilding work as volunteers with few resources. Operating without dedicated bank accounts, accounting capacity, and financial controls, they are overlooked when financial support is available. Consider providing financial training, providing funding for an accountant, or finding a trusted fiscal agent who holds gender issues as part of their mission and is sensitive to the local context.

- Identify with them what nonfinancial resources may also be helpful, such as childcare, phones, other equipment, and transportation. In-kind support may be more difficult for male leaders and spouses to attempt to control or take away.

- Whether you are serving as a funder, intermediary, or partner, consider how to develop budgets cooperatively to ensure funding meets real needs and the capacities to account for them.

Support Education and Training Opportunities

Faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders have highly relevant and locally honed skills, religious knowledge, and keen insight into the gender issues within their communities. Yet many do not see their work as peacebuilding and have not had the opportunity to receive formal training. Although training is not always necessary for a peacebuilder to be effective, some faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders have a strong interest in strengthening their work or candidacy for leadership and decision-making positions or engaging within formal spaces as "professional" mediators or negotiators. To support their capacity building efforts:

- Consider their specific needs and interests before making assumptions about the type of training that would be helpful. Trainings in project management, accounting, grant writing, communications, and social media can serve to strengthen their organizational efforts, while trainings on mediation, negotiation, and strategic nonviolent action can strengthen and expand their peacebuilding roles. Mental health training can be critical for faith-based actors working closely with people who carry trauma.

- Provide opportunities for them to practice and strengthen their interviewing and negotiation skills, as well as to develop their resumes.

- To reach faith-based women and GSM, particularly with other intersecting nondominant identities (e.g., ethnic minorities), consider conducting outreach with trusted locals at social gathering points (e.g., markets, boreholes, schools, the women's sections of houses of worship), verbal applications, and radio broadcasts. (Typical outreach for trainings through institutions, internet, existing local partners, and written applications tend to attract the same participants.)

- Work in close partnership with local actors to make sure the training content is contextualized. Consult participants and adapt the curriculum with each round of training to improve the accessibility and relevance of materials to all genders.

- Recruit trainers and facilitators who reflect the gender identities of the participants and, if possible, their religious and community backgrounds.

- Anticipate gender roles and norms that make it difficult for GSM and women to participate (discussed further below).

Ensure Accessible Entry Points and Meaningful Participation

Faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders often face significant barriers to participating in decision-making. These obstacles can be structural, such as rules that allow only people in official leadership positions to be invited, or rooted in gender norms, such as those limiting women's behaviors in meetings. To help women and GSM peacebuilders overcome these barriers:

- Identify entry points by magnifying and leveraging a country's formal commitments to gender inclusion made in international conventions and national legislation, holding government officials and partner institutions accountable.

- Develop parallel bodies for faith-based women or GSM that serve similar functions as those dominated by men or that serve as advisory bodies to the male-dominated ones.

- Consider active recruitment of faith-based women and GSM for internships and permanent positions within peacebuilding organizations. Ensure or at least encourage these organizations to adopt gender-inclusive and equitable policies such as maternity leave, family benefits, remote work, and flexible scheduling.

When planning gatherings, meetings, workshops, or trainings:

- Introduce at the start group norms or guidelines that explicitly mention and address gender inclusion.

- Bring in educational components on gender equity, even if it is not the main focus. Include agenda items and promote discussion around topics on which faith-based GSM and women have expertise.

- Work directly with men participants on gender awareness at the outset of a project and ahead of planned activities so they are prepared and more supportive of gender-inclusive processes (see the discussion on pages 48–49 on faith-based men as allies).

- Work directly with women and GSM participants before meetings, dialogues, and other activities to ascertain what would support their participation and help them feel comfortable.

- Be aware of religious and cultural norms of participation based on gender, such as how some women are socialized to not interrupt or assert their positions during a conversation or meeting, especially within mixed-gender spaces. Hold gender-specific breakout groups to ensure that all perspectives are expressed, and have a notetaker bring insights back to the whole group. Ensure, where possible, that there are at least some assertive or high-profile women or GSM participants, which may help others feel comfortable speaking.

- Use facilitation techniques that manage who speaks when and for how long, such as the use of talking pieces (with instruction that only the person holding the piece is invited to speak) and rotating facilitator or moderator roles within meetings. See the textbox below for an example of how to include participants despite gender norms that tend to silence their voices.

Inclusive Facilitation Techniques in Kenya	During facilitated dialogues among the Turkana and Pokot communities in Kenya, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and Reformed Church of East Africa used the "soft shoe shuffle," in which participants physically moved closer to those voices with whom they agreed and farther away from those with whom they disagreed. This allowed participants to express their views even when they felt uncomfortable speaking. For some women, this was the first time they shared their views in such a public space. *Source*: ACT Alliance, "Clapping with Both Hands," 2012, 37–38, http://reliefweb.int/sites /reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_3610.pdf.

- Be aware of how certain religious or cultural rituals and uses of space favor men, such as men customarily leading opening prayer, sitting in the center or front of the room, and wearing formal clothing that is associated with authority. Consider possible responses to this, such as starting with traditional arrangements but relaxing them over time as trust builds among the participants and gender awareness is raised, holding activities in nonreligious spaces, and mixing traditional and gender-inclusive rituals and practices.

- Consider the underlying stress and trauma experienced by participants, which may be an obstacle to meaningful participation. Gender norms that suppress crying by men or shouting by women can inhibit the discharge of stress and trauma. An understanding of this neurobiology can help in talking about and changing these gender norms. Consider how to mitigate stress and trauma responses, such as by holding meetings away from the area of active or historic violence.

- More techniques for balancing power and participation can be found in the *Mediation Guide* (pages 39–40).

Address Safety and Logistics

A significant barrier to inclusion can be logistics, which is seldom as simple as it seems. What might appear to be straightforward, such as deciding the time and place of gatherings, becomes highly sensitive during conflict and has important gendered implications. Creating inclusive spaces means being most mindful about the accommodation of those who have been the most excluded.

- In addition to considering which meeting location is viewed as neutral and acceptable to all participants, consider what would make it safe and accessible for faith-based women and GSM in particular. Consult with them in advance about what safety and security would look and feel like for them—they are best positioned to identify what they need.

- Schedule meetings when women and GSM can easily attend and consider providing support to participants who are caretakers (such as childcare or eldercare providers). Consider the distance they must travel (and their safety along the way) and forms of transportation available, providing travel funds when possible.

- Be mindful about any norms of gender segregation, such as the need for separate meeting or prayer spaces for people of different gender identities.

- Take time to define what is gender harassment and ensure all organizers understand the mechanisms to address it. Consider offering a special section or training to clarify what constitutes harassment, including making sure organizers and facilitators are aware of how their positional power can make any kind of romantic or sexual involvement with participants coercive.

Support Opportunities for Partnership and Networks

Many faith-based actors who work on gender issues express feelings of isolation within the broader WPS sector or within the international women's or GSM rights settings. To help connect isolated actors with one another and with broader movements:

- Design activities whose primary focus is to bring together faith-based women and/or GSM who usually work in isolation. Consider planning some of these activities to be less formal and more social in order to allow participants to form deeper connections.

- If you work within secular peacebuilding spaces, invite faith-based GSM and women peacebuilders to every relevant meeting, media engagement, and conference. Consider how to connect them with your own networks.

- Create spaces at WPS or secular women's rights and GSM rights meetings and conferences that highlight faith-based voices, including as keynote speakers.

- See "Strategies for Countering Resistance and Building Partnerships" for further discussion on building strategic partnerships.

EXERCISE

Including the Excluded in WPS

Women's groups continue to mobilize to hold government and international actors accountable to the WPS agenda. Yet faith-based actors are noticeably absent from these efforts, particularly in the compilation of National Action Plans that aim to put UNSCR 1325 into action at the local level.

Consider the four pillars of 1325 shown in the table below. Alongside each, list how the efforts of faith-based actors are relevant and how their engagement will help to realize these goals. Consider how the WPS agenda can be supplemented with other goals and resources to ensure that its aims extend beyond the confines of the agenda to include the needs of GSM.

PILLARS OF UNSC 1325	RELEVANCE OF FAITH-BASED ACTORS	HOW TO ENGAGE FAITH-BASED ACTORS TO REALIZE GOALS	OTHER GOALS AND RESOURCES TO ENSURE THE INCLUSION OF GSM
Increased *participation* of women at all levels of decision-making, including in national, regional, and international institutions			
Protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, including in emergency and humanitarian situations			
Improving intervention strategies in the *prevention* of violence against women			
Advancement of *relief and recovery measures* to address international crises through a gendered lens			

Transforming Masculinities and Confronting Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

GENDER NORMS IMPACT the life experiences and potential of people. A common assumption is that if women are hurt by patriarchy, then all men must benefit from it. Yet beliefs and practices that limit boys and men to strictly defined roles or promote them as violent aggressors are also harmful to the boys and men themselves. Within conflict, men and boys have a range of experiences as not just combatants but also victims and witnesses. They must be thoughtfully engaged along with women and gender and sexual minorities (GSM) within gender-inclusive peacebuilding and treated as individuals with their own unique needs and vulnerabilities. They can also be allies in promoting equity and peace. Religious actors—including faith-based men—are uniquely positioned to engage their communities in transforming the harmful expectations of men and boys that can fuel cycles of violence, especially where religion is used to justify and enforce these norms.

This section discusses harmful masculinities and their intersections with religion, including in fueling sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and the particular roles religious actors can play to support positive masculinities and break cycles of violence within their communities.

Understanding Masculinities

Masculinities are the qualities, behaviors, and attitudes that societies expect of men and boys. They are also a form of gender expression. Masculinities and femininities are formed in relation to one another and can be deeply rooted in religious and cultural beliefs. Different contexts define different masculinities and expressions of manhood (and femininities and expressions of womanhood), yet the associated gender stereotypes and expectations of behavior often fall along such binaries as aggressive-passive, strong-weak, protector-follower, or perpetrator-victim.

Hegemonic masculinities are norms of what is an "ideal" man in a given society, which legitimize some men to maintain dominant roles over women as well as over other men. Hegemonic masculinities often privilege elite, cisgender, heterosexual, physically strong, and able-bodied men of the dominant race, religion, or tribe. These norms are an "ideal" that few men embody in reality and are thus not only a threat to women and GSM but also deeply damaging for many men. For instance, men who show vulnerability or are the victims of violence, especially SGBV, risk being seen as weak or not "real men." Masculinities are not a given, but are socially constructed and thus changeable, influenced by a range of social and political issues in a particular context. Although men commit significantly more acts of direct violence than women,[21] violent acts are most often behaviors learned through modeling or peer pressure and reinforced through social structures that promote and reward such behavior. Harmful masculinities fuel violent conflict and conflict itself further fuels harmful gender impacts, yet conflict also offers an opportunity to question and redefine opportunities for all genders.

The following exercise can help you examine the origins and impacts of masculinities, including their intersections with religion, within the context in which you are working.

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21 Paul Fleming et al, "Men's Violence against Women and Men Are Inter-related: Recommendations for Simultaneous Intervention," *Social Science Medicine* 146 (December 2015): 249–256.

EXERCISE

Redefining the Man Box

MAN BOX

Physically strong
Head of household
Successful
Leader
Competitive
Aggressive
Sexually attracted to women
Exerts power over women
Unemotional
Not feminine
Fearless

One way to understand the socialization of masculinities is through the notion of the "man box," a narrowly constructed definition of what it means to be a man as illustrated in the example to the left. When boys and men step out of the box, meaning they do not meet the characteristics within it, they can face ridicule, shaming, and even violence—often by other boys and men, but also by women.

Working with your team or with community members, create your own man box by drawing a square and within it listing all the responses to the question, "How is a socially accepted or 'real man' expected to behave within the community?" You can do this with a group of men or, if you have a mixed-gender group, consider separating the mixed group by gender, being mindful of people who do not identify themselves within the gender binary of man or woman, and then come together as a mixed group to reflect on any differences.

Once you have constructed your man box, consider these questions:

- In what ways have religious beliefs or practices been used to define and strengthen the box? In other words, how does religion influence what are considered to be men's "ideal" characteristics and behaviors?

- How has conflict changed the man box over time?

- How do boys learn about what is in the man box?

- Are there different man boxes for men of different ages (or other aspects of identity) within this religious community?

- What happens to people who do not fit within the man box or step outside of it? How are they treated by other men? How are they treated by women?

- What are some religious teachings or traditions that provide an alternative to the man box? How can religious resources be used to redefine the qualities of manhood, such as by supporting men and boys to process their emotions in healthy ways and without hurting others?

If you are working with just men, add the following questions. If you are working with people of other gender identities, consider adapting these questions to encourage exploration of their own personal experiences:

- How did you first learn about what is in the man box and the repercussions for stepping out of the box? What roles did your father, uncle, brother, religious leader, or other important men in your life play in shaping your understanding of manhood?

- How have you been harmed or disadvantaged by following what is in the man box?

- What has happened when you stepped out of the box?

- How do you and the men in your life express platonic love and affection to each other?

- How do the men around you talk about sexuality and sexual orientation, including homosexuality?

- If applicable, how has your faith influenced your experience inside or outside the box?

- What role do you currently play for the boys in your life? What role do you want to play—what kind of role model do you want to be?

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

SGBV is any act of violence that is sexual or directed at a person's gender identity and expression. SGBV includes rape and all forms of sexual assault, sexual harassment and abuse, and intimate-partner violence. It also includes nonphysical violence, including threats of violence, street harassment such as unwanted comments and gestures within public spaces, and other forms of psychological and cultural violence, as well as socioeconomic violence, such as restricting or denying access to resources.

Although this discussion falls within the section on masculinities, SGBV is perpetrated by people of all genders, and men and boys can also be victims. It is often exacerbated within conflict settings and can be used as a systematic tactic of war. The motivations behind it are varied across contexts. It can be used as a recruitment mechanism, as a tool of ethnic cleansing and genocide, as a means of promoting instability and displacement, and for opportunistic reasons linked to the breakdown of law and order. Religious extremist ideologies can be used to justify and fuel SGBV as a tool for genocide and forced religious conversion, as in the case of the use of SGBV by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or Daesh, against Yazidi women (see the textbox on page 46). SGBV often increases within postconflict contexts, serving as a tactic to reinforce order and reassert power amidst continued social and economic instability.

It is critical to acknowledge the historic, widespread occurrence of SGBV within many religious institutions. A report by the French Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church estimated that 330,000 children—80 percent of whom were boys—were sexually abused over a span of seventy years by Catholic priests, deacons, monks, nuns, and other church workers. An unknown number of people also systematically hid the abuse over the years. The commission urged the French Catholic Church to denounce its faults and take strong action in supporting victims.[22]

While women and girls are disproportionately impacted by SGBV generally, there is growing awareness of the ways that men and boys are violated, including through rape, other forms of degrading treatment, and being forced to witness the sexual violation of family members. More recently, there is acknowledgment of the roles of women as perpetrators—such as the sexual abuse and torture by US women military members of Muslim men detainees held at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, in which religious norms were intentionally violated as a tactic of their abuse. Despite its pervasiveness, however, there is a lack of adequate services for SGBV survivors, especially psychosocial support. People of all gender identities often face stigma, rejection, isolation, or further abuse by community or family members, and they carry trauma from their experiences that obstructs their ability to build healthy relationships and participate in the rebuilding of their communities.

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22 French Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (CIASE), "Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church: France 1950–2020," October 2021, https://www.ciase.fr/rapport-final/.

How Religious Actors Can Support Positive Masculinities

Religious actors hold enormous potential to help end SGBV—both as a tactic of war and as a manifestation of inequitable gender relations outside of active conflict—and to transform harmful masculinities broadly. Religious arguments are often used to justify male dominance over women and other harmful gender norms, yet religions also hold resources that promote positive notions of what it means to be a man. Religious actors can be particularly influential in promoting a *peaceful masculinities approach*, which seeks to disassociate violence from understandings of manhood and support men in being champions of gender equity for the benefit of all people.[23] The following subsections highlight several roles they can play.

If you are a faith-based practitioner, consider how you can draw on the below examples to expand your role in promoting positive masculinities. If you are a secular practitioner, consider how you can serve as an ally or partner to religious actors, and see the textbox on page 48 for more ideas, as well as the next section of the Guide for more on building religious-secular partnerships. Keep in mind that this work can instigate a backlash among some men who fear a loss of power. Some women and GSM advocates also fear that a focus on men will overshadow the specific needs and experiences of women and GSM. Table 2 outlines how you can apply the five fundamental considerations of a gender-inclusive approach to all stages of your work to ensure your efforts are responsive yet reflect the do no harm principle.

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23 Kuehnast and Robertson, *Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory*, 12.

TABLE 2. **Applying a gender-inclusive approach to transforming harmful masculinities and confronting SGBV**

FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS	QUESTIONS TO ASK AND ISSUES TO CONSIDER
Start and continue with self-reflection	Return to the questions in Consideration 1 on what has shaped your own perspectives and experiences, particularly on manhood and masculinities. Consider your assumptions about these topics within the local religious context and be mindful of your gaps in knowledge. How do you think you will be perceived by local men or other community members as you engage in efforts to transform harmful masculinities? Use the above exercise on redefining the man box to further reflect on your assumptions and experiences.
Prioritize lived experiences	Remember that some people will react with sensitivity or defensiveness toward efforts that appear to question local gender norms, especially around men's roles. Take time to build trust as you seek to learn about their own lived experiences. Consider: • How do boys learn about manhood and masculinities within the religious community? (Use the above exercise on the man box as a helpful tool.) • How do people explain inequitable gender relations? To what extent is religion referenced to justify these dynamics? • How is SGBV discussed within the public sphere and among different actors? • Which local actors are already working on transforming masculinities and/or addressing SGBV? How are religious actors in particular engaging these issues?
Watch for gender shifts	• How have norms of masculinity changed during and after the conflict? How has this impacted the lives of different men? • What specific challenges are faith-based actors facing in addressing harmful masculinities or SGBV? How are they responding?
Break through silos	• Where are opportunities to forge linkages across diverse actors and sectors of society to more holistically promote positive masculinities?
Remain responsive and adaptive	• How are your previous assumptions changing as you learn more about local beliefs and experiences regarding harmful masculinities and about possibilities for promoting positive masculinities? • What types of resistance are you facing and from whom? What are ways to enhance trust and deepen connection? • What aspects of your plan need to be adapted or changed in light of new knowledge from the community or shifting conflict dynamics? • How are you measuring success in your programming? Are there opportunities to share your outcomes to further our collective understanding of faith-based approaches to promoting positive masculinities?

Drawing on Religious Resources to Counter Harmful Gender Norms

Religious and cultural beliefs strongly influence norms of manhood and masculinities, which can be magnified in conflict and increase violent behavior—including in the name of protecting religion. Religious actors are in a prime position to counter harmful religious influence and ideas by promoting religious teachings of positive masculinities, as also seen in "Engaging Alternative Religious Interpretations and Faith-Based Advocacy" in the previous section (page 29). The National Inter-Religious Network (NIRN)—Nepal, for instance, provides faith-based trainings and resources from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Baha'i, Sikh, Kirant, and Jain perspectives that focus on how gender equity can be found within each of the religions.[24] See the textbox below for more on the important leadership role religious actors can play in countering harmful masculinities and supporting SGBV survivors.

| Learning from Tearfund's "Silent No More" Report | "Silent No More," a 2011 report by the Christian charity Tearfund, documents how churches have been fearful to address SGBV and do not know how to respond effectively, yet survivors still look to the church as a safe place for care and comfort. As one Rwandan community leader told Tearfund: "The church is the only reliable social network within poor countries. . . . The church is all they have. Also, many people no longer have family left. The church becomes their only source of 'family.'" The report calls on churches to show leadership in challenging SGBV by equipping themselves to be a space for compassion and care, including through the training of clergy and by drawing on Bible studies and sermons that challenge harmful masculinities. Tearfund emphasizes that churches cannot do this work alone. They need the support of service providers, governments, and donors.

Source: Tearfund, "Silent No More: The Untapped Potential of the Church in Addressing Sexual Violence," 2011, https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/research-report/silent-no-more. The community leader is quoted on page 10 of the report. |

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24 See the website of the National Inter-Religious Network (NIRN)—Nepal, https://nirn.org.np/.

Redefining Manhood through Positive Religious Examples

Prophets and other revered religious leaders, both past and present, are among the most influential figures for many religious followers. Their examples—through stories of the ways they lived their lives and led their communities—are powerful resources for reflection and inspiration. Religious actors can encourage their communities, such as through the below exercise, to consider how respected male figures modeled positive masculinities, healthy gender relationships, and gender inclusion and equity.

EXERCISE

Religious Role Models of Positive Masculinities

In a small group with members of your religious community, choose a male religious figure of high importance, such as Jesus in Christianity, Mohammed in Islam, and Guatama Buddha in Buddhism. What model of manhood do they exemplify? How do they defy hegemonic masculinities and serve as an example of positive masculinities?

Discuss the below questions together as a group. If you are with a large group of community members, consider dividing up into smaller groups for this exercise and then coming together as a large group to compare answers and share insights.

- How did they treat the women in their lives?

- What did they teach, through action or words, about violence against women?

- How did they treat men who were different from them or had less social power in the community? How did they treat other marginalized communities?

- How did they treat children?

- When they were angry or upset, how did they process their emotions?

- In what other ways did they exemplify a model of manhood that defies harmful notions of masculinity? Consider, for instance, they ways in which they showed humility, respect, mercy, and compassion for others.

Now consider how their example applies to today's realities:

- How are their characteristics reflected in men leaders you see today (whether in your religious institutions or the broader community)?

- What would have to change within your religious institution or community to reflect the values and principles they exemplified?

- What would you have to do differently in your own life to live more like them? What would you lose if you did, and what would you gain?

Addressing the Trauma and Stigmatization of SGBV

Faith-based actors can play a particularly meaningful role in addressing the trauma and stigmatization SGBV survivors experience. Research shows that many trauma survivors rely on prayer and other traditional or spiritual healing practices to support themselves.[25] Survivors often turn to trusted religious actors for support, even when religious institutions do not know how to adequately address their needs.

In "Restoring Dignity: A Toolkit for Religious Communities to End Violence against Women," Religions for Peace, a global interfaith organization, outlines several ways faith-based actors can offer support and care to survivors, including by providing safe and confidential spaces for survivors to talk freely about their emotions and experiences, facilitating group reflections so survivors feel less isolated and powerless, linking survivors to health care providers, and providing counseling to partners and guidance on healthy intimate partnerships. They stress that nonjudgmental listening is essential, discouraging faith-based actors from telling survivors what to do, blaming them, or encouraging them to forgive the perpetrator.[26]

Given the social stigma, shame, and silence around SGBV, keep in mind that survivors often feel more comfortable confiding in someone of the same gender identity. Faith-based men leaders and peacebuilders who are willing to talk openly about SGBV from a faith perspective signal to men survivors that it is not weak to seek help. Faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders are similarly well placed to respond to the needs and vulnerabilities of women and GSM survivors, as noted in "Providing Psychosocial and Spiritual Support" (on page 25). Collaboration between religious actors and service providers is essential to providing the holistic care survivors need. The United States Institute of Peace has initiated pilot programs in Latin America to identify how to best facilitate collaboration among religious actors, mental health professionals, NGOs, and public officials to support trauma-affected persons. Such collaboration can take the form of establishing virtual online learning and exchange platforms as well as strategically disseminating research and resources to inform policy and practice.[27]

Furthermore, one of the biggest challenges to addressing SGBV is the stigmatization and isolation many survivors face, including through rejection and abandonment by their families and communities. Traditional beliefs can encourage the blaming of victims and justify their being pushed out of the community. Religious leaders can be a powerful, authoritative source of support for the healthy reintegration of people impacted by SGBV, as seen in the textbox on page 46, including through taking a public stance in support of survivors.

25 Negar Ashtari Abay, Andrés Martínez, and Carolina Buendia Sarmiento, "Peaceful Masculinities: Religion and Psychological Support amid Forced Displacement," USIP, March 2, 2022, www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/peaceful-masculinities-religion-and-psychosocial-support-amid-forced.

26 Religions for Peace, "Restoring Dignity: A Toolkit for Religious Communities to End Violence against Women," 2013, 24–25, www.rfp.org/resources/restoring-dignity-toolkit-for-religious-communities-to-end-violence-against-women-2/.

27 "Religious and Psychosocial Support for Displaced Trauma Survivors," USIP, n.d., www.usip.org/programs/religious-and-psychosocial-support-displaced-trauma-survivors.

Countering Stigmatization in the Yazidi Community

The Yazidi community of Iraq and Syria has been the target of a range of war crimes, including what the United Nations has called "genocide" at the hands of Islamic State. Thousands of Yazidis have been tortured and brutally killed for refusing to convert to Islamic State's version of Islam, and thousands of women and girls have been captured and sold into sexual slavery. The women and girls who have escaped face the risk of being rejected by their families and community for being raped by a non-Yazidi and for their forced conversion to Islam.

Khurto Hajji Ismail, known as Baba Sheikh, was the spiritual leader of the Yazidi religious community. Along with a council of religious advisors, he issued an official declaration in September 2014 that the returning women are still Yazidi, having not lost their honor, and should be fully reintegrated into the community. This was a drastic change from historical Yazidi belief and practice, in which a woman who has had sex with a non-Yazidi was pushed out of the community. Having the opportunity to be reintegrated back into the faith and receive the blessing and support of their spiritual leaders and community greatly supported the women's sense of self-worth and identity.

Source: Emma Graham-Harrison, "'I Was Sold Seven Times': The Yazidi Women Welcomed Back into the Faith," *Guardian*, July 2017, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jul/01/i-was-sold-seven-times-yazidi-women-welcomed-back-into-the-faith.

Creating Safe Spaces in which to Confront Hegemonic Masculinities

Across contexts, hegemonic masculinities encourage men to maintain a "tough" exterior and hold their emotions inside, regardless of their experiences of loss or trauma. Demonstrating vulnerability can come with feelings of shame or fear of public ridicule. Religious actors can create safe, confidential spaces for men to discuss trauma, ask questions without fear of being judged, and receive compassionate spiritual support and care. They can encourage reflection on their experiences as men, including the privileges, power dynamics, and the limitations and harms of hegemonic masculinities. It is especially important that these spaces consider the diversity of experiences among men, such as through conversations about diverse gender identities and the dangerous limitations of a binary interpretation of gender. The textbox on the next page provides one example of the creation of a safe and supportive religious space for people of all genders. *Created in God's Image: A Gender Transformation Toolkit for Women and Men in Churches* is a publication of Norwegian Church Aid, a humanitarian Christian organization, in consultation with gender activists in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, South Africa, and Malawi.[28] The toolkit includes a plethora of faith-based stories, prompts, activities, and facilitator guidelines to foster conversation within faith communities to understand gender and transform harmful gender norms toward positive masculinities. Although the toolkit was written for church communities, the activities it presents may provide inspiration and be adapted for other religious communities.

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28 Norwegian Church Aid, *Created in God's Image: A Gender Transformation Toolkit for Women and Men in Churches*, 2015, www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/arkiv/gender-based-violence-and-reproductive-health/gender-transformation-toolkit/.

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Unity Mosque and the el-Tawhid Juma Circle, Canada

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The el-Tawhid Juma Circle (ETJC) seeks to provide gender-equal, affirming mosque spaces for people of all genders and sexualities. ETJC's Unity Mosque in Toronto provides a safe, spiritual space where diversity and inclusivity are celebrated and where the inherent dignity of all people regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or any other aspect of their identity is recognized as Allah-given. ETJC sees this as underscored in "the Qur'anic declaration that Allah is closer to each one of us than our own jugular vein, without distinction." Imam El-Farouk Khaki's weekly services are a "safe haven" for the many GSM Muslim attendees who have been pushed away by their families or communities, including GSM refugees. Imam Khaki often focuses on the importance of self-care and physical, spiritual, and emotional healing for those who feel guilty about their sexuality, and he provides encouragement for each congregant to form their own spiritual path and connection to God.

Sources: El-Tawhid Juma Circle website, accessed September 22, 2022, www.jumacircle.com/#who-we-are-section; and Davide Mastracci, "Unity Mosque Provides a Space for Observant Muslims Who Openly Live in LGBTQ Relationships," Broadview, September 6, 2016, https://broadview.org/unity-mosque-provides-a-space-for-observant-muslims-who-openly-live-in-lgbtq-relationships/.

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Using the Power of the Pulpit

As figures with strong moral authority and important ties to different sectors of society, religious leaders can play a particularly powerful role in facilitating a public discussion of the effects of harmful masculinities. They can draw on religious sermons and services that, for example, foster inclusivity and acceptance of people who have been most marginalized by harmful masculinities. A study by the Political Settlements Research Programme, an international research consortium led by the University of Edinburgh Law School, found that sexual and gendered inequities, harmful norms of masculinized behavior, and high levels of insecurity among GSM persisted during and after the Northern Ireland conflict—with churches among the sources of prejudice and fear. Many GSM hid their identities and experienced extreme levels of anxiety, including fear of losing custody of their children and suffering harassment and physical attack. The report called for institutional and policing reforms, but also found that the church's services for and public inclusion of GSM proved to be particularly important for promoting inclusivity within postconflict civil society.[29]

Religious actors can also form interreligious partnerships to amplify and strengthen their message. Within religious contexts, they can lend significant influence to advocacy campaigns addressing SGBV, as seen in the textbox on page 48. Religions for Peace's "Restoring Dignity" toolkit includes an adaptable statement for religious leaders that can be read at services and interreligious events, alongside references to their own prayers, scriptures, and faith traditions. It also includes guidance on how to promote policies and other actions among government and other community leaders.[30] Of course, it is imperative that the efforts of religious actors do not stop at public statements and are coupled with meaningful action of the kind described throughout this section.

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29 Fidelma Ashe, "Reimaging Inclusive Security in Peace Processes: LGB&T Perspectives," Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh, 2018, 7–8, 12, https://peacerep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018_PSRP_Gender-Report.pdf.

30 Religions for Peace, "Restoring Dignity."

ABAAD
Resource
Center for
Gender Equality,
Lebanon

The ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality in Lebanon works with men and boys to end violence against women, creating resources as well as safe and confidential support groups for boys and men to better understand and challenge harmful masculinities. In 2015, ABAAD brought together religious leaders from the four main sects within Lebanon who together released a statement condemning violence against women as a sin. While these diverse and highly influential religious leaders may not agree on everything regarding gender, this large-scale public initiative sent a powerful message that SGBV goes against the core teachings of their religions. Notably, the campaign does not focus on accusing men as perpetrators, but encourages men to join the fight against domestic violence.

Source: Mike Walter, "Anthony Keedi: A Man's World," CGTN America, April 2015, www.cctv-america.com/2015/04/18/anthony-keedi-a-mans-world.

Secular and Donor Partnerships with Religious Actors

Secular peacebuilding agencies and donors can play a critical role as partners and supporters of religious actors who are addressing SGBV and promoting positive masculinities. Consider the following methods:

- Provide professional training and educational resources to religious leaders of all genders on the roots of SGBV and how to provide psychosocial support to survivors of violence. Remember that many trauma survivors turn to trusted religious actors for support and care, but religious actors often do not know how to effectively respond.

- Link religious actors with services and facilities that provide medical and emotional support to trauma survivors, acknowledging that survivors need holistic care that includes both physical and emotional as well as spiritual and community support.

- Through funding and partnership, support the production of faith-based trainings and resources on positive masculinities.

- Actively seek religious actors as partners in advocating for policies to confront SGBV, recognizing their key insights and unique access and influence within their communities.

How to Serve as an Ally as a Faith-Based Man

Faith-based men who hold positions of privilege and power within their communities can serve as important allies in gender-inclusive peacebuilding. If you identify as a faith-based man, consider the following ways you can serve as an ally to women, girls, GSM, and other marginalized communities. If you do not identify as such, consider how you can serve as a source of encouragement and support to faith-based men in the following areas. In either case, be careful that your efforts are not reinforcing norms where men are seen as natural saviors or protectors.

- Lead by example. How do you serve as a healthy model of masculinity in your roles as a father, husband, brother, uncle, or community member? Continue to do your own

self-inquiry work on your beliefs and assumptions about gender and how you have been impacted by hegemonic masculinities.

- Pursue education and training to further your understanding on gender, sexualities, masculinities, and SGBV. Consider how you can promote learning opportunities for other men and boys you know.

- Work directly with men in your religious community, providing a safe and confidential space for them to share their emotions and questions as you share your own.

- Ask questions about the distribution of resources among departments or programs within your religious institutions. Use your voice to promote an equitable distribution of dedicated resources toward gender inclusion.

- Work alongside GSM and women and publicly support their leadership by giving the platform to them whenever possible to speak on their priorities. Promote shared decision-making opportunities and equitable power structures. Make sure you are not speaking for them—except in the instances when their priorities would not otherwise be heard (such as when genders are segregated and only men are in the room).

- Engage in critical conversation about your religious community's treatment of GSM issues, drawing on faith-based resources that support the full acceptance and inclusion of GSM people. Consider the impact of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's speech in Cape Town in 2013, during which he said, "I would not worship a God who is homophobic and that is how deeply I feel about this." [31]

- Hold your peers accountable for their misuse of religious teachings to justify harmful gender norms and inequities. At the same time, continue to engage in dialogue with those who hold different religious ideas on gender or sexuality. Be open to listening and learning together. See the next section of this Guide for more discussion of dialogue.

- Publicly denounce SGBV. Refuse to be silent, but remember that real transformation toward healthy, peaceful, and equitable gender relationships requires more than just a public statement.

- Collaborate with other religious leaders, supporting interfaith efforts that demonstrate a strong public stance against SGBV from multiple religious perspectives and that can reach broad, diverse audiences.

- Use your position of authority and leadership to draw attention to gender issues among government and other high-level actors, ensuring that women and GSM are present at every stage of peace and reconciliation processes.

31 "Archbishop Tutu 'Would Not Worship a Homophobic God,'" BBC News, July 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23464694.

Strategies for Countering Resistance and Building Partnerships

A S DISCUSSED THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE, harmful gender norms can fuel violent conflict, and conflict has gendered impacts, yet addressing gender issues can also create conflict *within the peacebuilding process*. Understanding how to engage a gender-inclusive approach in religious contexts is perhaps half the challenge. The frequently encountered resistance to this type of work—as faced by both secular and faith-based actors—is the other half. Addressing gender issues can start a "conflict within a conflict" as communities struggle with differing beliefs and values. When one group perceives that an alternative belief system is being forced upon them by another, this threat can feel existential and can even lead to actors adopting more extreme positions, such as the Taliban's attitude to girls' education in the face of support for such education from local Afghan movements and the international community.

As a practitioner engaging a gender-inclusive approach, you can expect to face resistance. It may come from those within the community who are wary of changes to traditional gender roles and relations, which can be perceived as directly challenging their religion itself. Resistance may also come from actors within the largely secular Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) sector, who may fear that this work is a losing battle because religious actors will never fully accept gender inclusion and equity. Your identity will also largely impact your experiences with resistance. Women, girls, gender and sexual minorities (GSM), and allied faith-based men may face a strong backlash and even threats to their safety from their own community for challenging local traditions. Outsiders to the community may be strongly rejected as being foreign to and disrespectful of local customs. Yet these dynamics are complex. Outsiders often encounter different gender expectations than do the local population. For example, foreign women may be held to different standards compared with local women, able to escape criticism for behaviors that defy local gender norms. At the same time, a local actor has legitimacy, trust, and intimate knowledge of their community from which to contextualize messaging strategies—knowledge that an outsider would take years to build (and that might still be incomplete).

Applying a gender-inclusive approach at all stages of your work will help you anticipate the resistance you might face and how you might effectively respond, as discussed in table 3. The following subsections identify strategies for navigating and working through resistance.

TABLE 3. **Applying a gender-inclusive approach to countering resistance**

FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS	QUESTIONS TO ASK AND ISSUES TO CONSIDER
Start and continue with self-reflection	Remember that a community's perceptions of you—whether as a community insider, a fellow religious adherent, an outsider, an ally, or an enemy—may have little to do with how you see yourself. Consider how these perceptions might result in different forms of resistance toward you or your team. Consider also how you will navigate beliefs different from your own. Take care to uncover your own assumptions about conservative or progressive religious actors. Recognize the plurality of beliefs on gender within religions and among people of all genders (and the possibilities for partnership among people with different beliefs).
Prioritize lived experiences	Active listening is critical to learning about people's lived experiences and for better understanding different beliefs, including areas of disagreement and possibilities for dialogue and mutual understanding. Paying close attention to the lived experiences of different community members can help you to understand the roots of resistance you are facing, as well as to identify possible areas of common ground. Consider the local power dynamics and who might be at risk of encountering resistance or backlash for engaging in gender initiatives. Be attentive to what are trigger words on gender issues within the local context and how to contextualize messaging by working with local partners who understand local cultural and religious sensitivities. Challenge your assumptions by being open to different partners and potential allies, such as a religious actor who espouses religious teachings of peace, justice, and equity, even if they do not use terms such as "women's rights" or "gender equity."
Watch for gender shifts	How do changing gender norms and dynamics impact resistance to or possibilities for new partnerships in gender-inclusive peacebuilding?
Break through silos	Consider the relationships among different partners and sectors, and look for opportunities to make linkages among them by finding common ground, despite disagreements on some issues. Weigh the opportunities and challenges of having a separate women's or gender program versus integrating a gender lens throughout your efforts by considering the possible resistance each approach may receive. For example, in some contexts, launching a separate women's program may attract more attention and backlash than integrating a gender-sensitive approach throughout all areas of your work; however, in other contexts, a separate program may create a safer space to focus on sensitive and vulnerable issues.
Remain responsive and adaptive	A willingness to adapt and change as you learn more about both the successes of your programming and the challenges it is facing is essential to navigating the resistance and backlash you may meet. Openness and humility toward different actors can open the door to potential allies, who may at first appear to think differently than you but who may have shared underlying values that can be a basis on which to build a collaborative relationship. Remember that gender transformation is a long-term process, and it is important to measure and celebrate each incremental step you take and goal you accomplish even as you work toward your long-term vision of a more gender-inclusive and equitable community or world. Monitoring, evaluation, and documentation are critical to demonstrating the effectiveness and importance of a gender-inclusive approach.

Seek Common Ground

Transformation of harmful gender norms and inequities that fuel conflict is a long-term process that requires the engagement of multiple actors across society, some of whom have suspicions about each other or disagree on issues or strategies. When facing resistance from actors with whom partnership or collaboration is helpful or necessary, such as a senior religious leader with authority and influence or a conservative youth organization with ties to the community's young people, see where you can find common ground on which to start building trust. Finding areas of agreement or shared values is an important step toward establishing trust and mutual respect, as well as recognizing each other's strengths and finding creative or practical ways to work together. Participating in joint prayer and sharing meals are ways to build meaningful social interactions. Note also that in some places, there is a culture of courtesy visits to certain officials and authorities whenever arriving or starting a program. Such visits can be the first step in building a relationship.

Members of MenEngage Alliance, a network of six hundred organizations working with men and boys in over thirty countries, found that "although a resistance to discussing issues of substantive equity or sexuality was common at the start of programs, faith communities and leaders generally opened up during the later phases and were keen to talk about such issues, as they had not usually had previous opportunities to discuss or learn about them."[32] A common strategy among members was to start with "less contested entry points such as violence against women, HIV/AIDS, or girls' access to education" and then to introduce other issues once a relationship of trust was established. Remember to be careful of the terms and language you use to talk about gender issues, as loaded terminology may immediately turn away some actors who may otherwise hold common values (such as a belief in the inherent dignity of all people) and common interests (such as stopping intimate partner violence or helping young men find alternatives to violent behavior). Partnership does not mean that you see eye to eye on all points or adopt each other's worldviews, yet it does require trust, respect, honesty, and a willingness to learn about each other even as you agree to disagree on some issues.

Engaging in dialogue can be especially helpful for building trust and creating space to better understand the roots of different beliefs, as noted in the textbox on page 53. Dialogue is not a debate nor just a discussion, but a structured process with a facilitator and participants who jointly own the learning process.[33] Keep in mind that many religious communities have a tradition of leaders delivering lectures and sermons while adherents primarily listen. Therefore, consider carefully how to create an environment that allows for questions and critical thinking among both leaders and religious followers and that feels safe and inclusive for women, youth, GSM, and religious minorities. See "Fostering Intrareligious and Interreligious Dialogue" (pages 54–55) for prompts that can be used in dialogue among different actors to help build trust and foster mutual understanding.

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32 MenEngage Alliance, "Faith-Based Approaches to Transforming Masculinities for Gender Justice and Equality: A Two-Day Consultation," 2016, 9, https://menengage.org/resources/faith-based-approaches-to-transforming-masculinities-for-gender-justice-equality-a-two-day-consultation/.

33 Consult resources on how to design dialogue processes, such as USIP's training on designing community-based dialogue, www.usip.org/academy/catalog/designing-community-based-dialogue.

Make sure your efforts to find common ground are not compromising your goals or putting anyone at risk. Be particularly mindful of marginalized communities with whom you already work when seeking new connections with actors who hold conservative or even dangerous views toward these communities. Be sure to maintain the confidence of vulnerable people unless they give informed consent to having their identity shared. Although some resistance to your work is inevitable, make sure you are not sacrificing your own values to spread your messages to difficult audiences.

Fulata Moyo, Circle of Concerned African Theologians	Dr. Fulata Mayo identifies herself as a faith feminist scholar-activist and is a member of the Circle of Concerned African Theologians, a pan-African ecumenical organization supporting African women theologians. When asked in an interview how progressive faith-based organizations can work toward the inclusion of GSM issues, she highlighted the importance of sustained dialogue: "We know that some of the resistance is based purely on lack of knowledge and understanding; it would be important to have a space where knowledge is shared in a less threatening way that allows people to go through their own process of questioning, accepting, understanding, and conversation." Creating a space for conversation among progressives and conservatives allows for "the human face to the issue" to be identified, rather than just statistics. *Source:* Maria Melinda Ando, "Interrogating Religion in Search of Gender Justice: In Conversation with Fulata Mayo." *Arrow* 23, no. 1 (2017): 26.

Improve Your Religious Literacy

When working with religious actors and within religious contexts, it is particularly helpful to educate yourself on the scriptures and interpretations that are core to community members' beliefs and practices. Remember not to rely on reported or represented religions alone, but rather pay close attention to lived religions.[34] Especially when it comes to gender issues, it is important to familiarize yourself not only with mainstream ideas but also with those put forward by gender-inclusive theologians, as discussed above in the section "Including the Excluded." Increasing your religious literacy helps you to engage in the same "language" of the community and not to rely solely on secular language defined through the international WPS sector or the international human rights framework (see "Identifying Opportunities for Religious-Secular Partnerships" below for a discussion of how to identify opportunities for understanding secular-religious areas of complementarity). Locally and religiously grounded arguments for gender inclusivity and equity can serve as a powerful response to attempts to discredit gender initiatives. See the table on page 54 for an example of increased religious literacy among both religious and secular practitioners.

Secular practitioners and others not from the religious community, however, should be careful to not instrumentalize religion. Instead, seek to increase your religious literacy for the sake of better understanding the values and motivations of the community and your partners. Gender-inclusive

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34 For further discussion of different types of religious literacy and why they matter, see the USIP project page on religious literacy, www.usip .org/programs/religious-literacy-and-peacebuilding.

theologians and faith-based activists can be key partners for navigating how to engage religious resources in ways that are respectful.

Sisters in Islam, Malaysia	Sisters in Islam was founded in 1987 when a group of Malaysian Muslim women lawyers, journalists, academics, and activists questioned their country's Islamic family laws, asking, "If God is just—if Islam is just—why do laws and policies made in the name of Islam create injustice?" Working with women theologians, they turned to the Quran with particular interest in the verses that have been used to justify gender discrimination. They discovered an Islam that espouses gender equity and created a theologically based foundation for their activism on women's rights within the Malaysian context. Other Malaysian women's groups that are secular or of different faiths have been similarly concerned with the rise of conservative politicized Islam. In addition to working closely with Sisters in Islam, many of these groups have taken steps to learn more about Islam for their own advocacy work. As one activist noted: "I think no one is under the illusion that you're able to do any protection of rights without engaging with the religion here. It's the most critical thing that we need to do, to loosen up all this monopoly . . . [on] religion." *Sources:* Sisters in Islam, "Empowering Voices for Change: Annual Review," 2006, 2, https://sistersinislam.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Annual-Review-2006.pdf; and Sheherazade Jafari, "Deconstructing Religious-Secular Divides: Women's Rights Advocacy in Muslim-Majority Societies" (doctoral diss., American University, 2015), 184.

Seek Partnership Opportunities

Religious actors who are directly confronting harmful traditional practices within their own community can feel especially challenged. One study of women's rights activists and peacebuilders in Muslim contexts, for example, found that many felt particularly isolated from other gender-inclusive faith-based actors as well as from secular actors.[35] Making partnerships helps to build broad-based support and demonstrate that gender inclusivity and equity are important across contexts and belief systems. As partners you also benefit from each other's skills and expertise. Be sure to pay attention to power dynamics, such as between a better-resourced international network (whether secular or religious) and a community-based group. Take special care to build and maintain local ownership of programs.

Fostering Intrareligious and Interreligious Dialogue

Whether coming together with actors from their own or from other religious communities, faith-based actors' collective efforts strengthen their legitimacy and messaging to a wider audience, creating a bigger platform to pursue change. Dialogue is an especially important practice for better understanding each other's beliefs and as an opportunity to identify new or shared religious resources and opportunities for collective action.

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35 Sheherazade Jafari, "Deconstructing Religious-Secular Divides: Women's Rights Advocacy in Muslim-Majority Societies" (doctoral diss., American University, 2015), 308.

In dialogue with members of your own religious community or with actors from other religious communities, consider the following tips and reflect on the questions below.

Tips

- Carefully choose your facilitator based on the type of dialogue you are having. If it is an intrareligious dialogue, choose a facilitator from the same religious community who is respected and knowledgeable about common religious language, symbolism, and practices. If it is an interreligious dialogue, consider choosing cofacilitators, one representing each religious community, to model interreligious cooperation. You may also choose a facilitator who does not identify with either religious identity yet is recognized as a trusted and credible figure by the dialogue participants. Also consider the facilitators' gender identity.

- Consider sharing and affirming intentions through prayer, and assess how you can incorporate religious symbols or practices to infuse the dialogue with deeper meaning. As noted in the section "Including the Excluded," when possible, alternate between traditional practices and gender-inclusive ones.

Questions

- What stories and teachings from your religion support gender inclusivity and equity? How did you learn them? Do you think they are commonly known, and why or why not is that the case? What elements from these stories are contextual, and what are universally applicable?

- What religious verses or practices do you think are controversial or problematic? How do you understand them within the context in which they were written or formed?

- On what issues do you see common ground among conservative and progressive actors within your religious community?

- On what issues do you see common ground among different religious communities?

Identifying Opportunities for Religious-Secular Partnerships

There is continued widespread belief that religious frameworks of gender and secular frameworks of gender are incompatible. Secular actors are often wary of faith-based approaches, while faith-based actors may feel that secular actors are imposing their own agenda, or they may fear that associating with secular actors will invite suspicion from within their own communities. As a result, the voices of many gender-inclusive faith-based actors remain absent from national, regional, and global policy spaces, while secular actors continue to face mistrust and rejection by local religious communities.

Yet actors are also finding critical linkages and compatibilities between religious principles and those of secular human rights approaches, pointing to a strategic entry point for religious-secular efforts on gender issues. Many faith-based actors already draw on international laws and other

nonreligious tools to strengthen their work, demonstrating their practical compatibilities. Even if their methods are not exactly the same, gender-inclusive religious and secular actors often have similar goals, as seen in the textbox below. As one woman who identified as nonreligious said during a workshop organized by the Mujeres Ecumenicas Constructoras de Paz, a network of Protestant and Catholic women peacebuilders in Colombia:

> We [religious and secular women] will not agree on everything. . . . But we can come together on many things. We both want women to be more engaged in the peace processes in Colombia. We both want to reduce violence against women. We both want women's voices and priorities to be taken seriously. Let us come together on these things, and work together, and perhaps come to appreciate the perspectives and experiences and spiritual beliefs of the other.[36]

For religious actors, strategic partnership with secular actors can expand their tools and abilities to engage with the broader WPS sector. Secular actors can greatly benefit from the knowledge of and deep connections among religious actors, including with their communities, and from learning about the religious sources of people's beliefs and identities. Religious-secular partnerships can broaden peacebuilders' reach and effectiveness across both community and policy spaces. The exercise on the next page can help in identifying commonalities among religious and secular values and goals from which to build a foundation for partnership.

TPO Foundation, Sarajevo

Following the passage of gender equality legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003, many women continued to feel a tension between their civic identities and rights and their religious identities, which were tied to their families and ethnic communities. In response, TPO Foundation, an NGO dedicated to democratic civil society and gender equality, worked in cooperation with the University of Sarajevo and graduates from both the religious and the gender studies programs to write a book and training manual in local languages (Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian) on the compatibility of religious traditions with women's human rights. The publications translated legal and academic texts into language that could be easily understood by the general public and opened space for communication and collaboration between religious and secular women, as well as among Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Muslim women.

Source: Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, "Women Citizens and Believers as Agents of Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina," in *Women, Religion, and Peacebuilding: Illuminating the Unseen*, ed. Susan Hayward and Kathleen Marshall (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2015), 239–242.

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36 Hayward and Marshall, eds., *Women, Religion, and Peacebuilding*, 304.

EXERCISE

Finding Compatibility between Religious and Secular Principles

In a mixed group of religious and secular actors, first identify the underlying principles of the WPS framework or consider the below seven principles that underlie many international human rights instruments. Define what each principle means from the perspective of international or secular frameworks. Next, create a list of religious scriptures, stories, and practices that reflect each principle.[37] Finally, reflect together on the process of doing the activity and the new perspectives it opens. Was it easier or harder than you expected? How might these shared principles serve as common ground for collaboration?

PRINCIPLE	RELEVANT RELIGIOUS SCRIPTURES, STORIES, AND PRACTICES
Dignity	
Inclusion	
Equity	
Nondiscrimination	
Justice	
Opportunity	
Autonomy	

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37 This activity is adapted from Norwegian Church Aid, "Created in God's Image," 77–78.

Prepare for the Long Term

The transformation of deeply held gender beliefs and practices takes time. It can also be difficult and frustrating work. Those who do this work are likely to face many obstacles and can encounter considerable backlash from people who do not want to see a change to the status quo and who view your efforts as directly challenging their beliefs and way of life. Recognize that you may not live to see all of the social changes you are working to create, but you can nonetheless take steps forward. Honor your feelings when they rise, such as anger, frustration, or hopelessness, and take the time to talk with and get support from people in your circle, whether spiritual leaders or trusted colleagues or friends. Also take time to celebrate small and large victories with your team and partners. Identify and work toward practical, short-term goals and priorities, taking one step at a time, but do not lose sight of your long-term vision for gender justice and equity to guide and motivate you. The below exercise offers an opportunity to see and outline your vision and steps to get there.

EXERCISE

What Is Your Vision for the Future?

Individually or with your team, reflect on what a gender-inclusive, peaceful community (or world) looks like. Consider, for instance:

- How do people of different gender identities, faiths, and other identities relate to each other?

- How are decisions made?

- How do people deal with stress, anger, and other difficult emotions?

- What values are prevalent, and how do they manifest in everyday life?

Get creative. Start by writing down your reflections on the above questions, and then get blank sheets of paper, markers, magazines, and other useful materials to capture images and colors that reflect your vision for the future. If you are doing this activity with a team, come together to discuss everyone's visions and reflect on the process of allowing each person to envision the community or world they are working to build. Discuss how your current initiatives and goals are taking a step toward that vision, acknowledging that transformation is a long-term process and even a small step is meaningful.

Final Remarks

THERE IS A SAYING that a fish does not know it is in water. In a similar way, gender and religious dynamics are all around us and we may be so immersed in them as to not realize they are there. We hope this Guide raises your awareness of these dynamics and how they impact your own intersecting identities as well as of those around you.

Acting on this awareness and doing gender-inclusive peacebuilding in religious contexts is challenging, yet it is essential for building equitable and sustainably peaceful societies. The good news is that there are many examples of effective, responsive, and transformative efforts from which to draw inspiration and ideas—efforts that have been led by faith-based women, gender and sexual minorities, and allied men from diverse religious backgrounds and contexts. And there are many practical ways to support, amplify, expand, and integrate their work within the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and the broader peace and security sector.

Transforming harmful gender norms and dynamics that fuel cycles of conflict takes time and will happen only if many of us strive for change at individual and institutional levels. We hope this Guide has provided you with practical guidance and inspiration for your own gender-inclusive peacebuilding work and has made clear that religious actors and resources can be a vital part of those efforts.
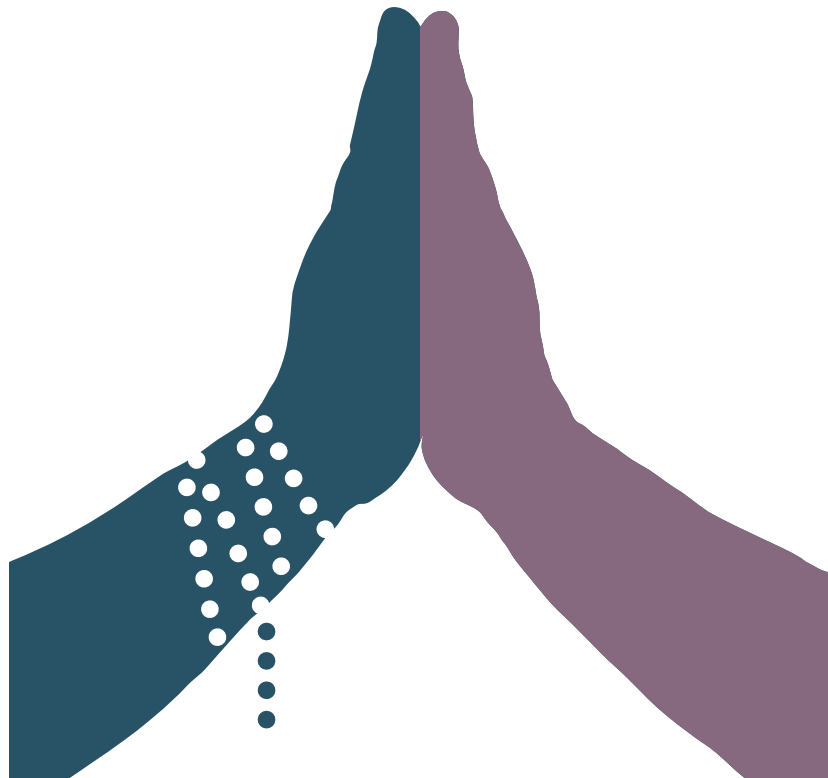
A Gender-Inclusive Approach to Conflict Analysis in Religious Contexts

The following table is adapted from a series of tables in the *Analysis Guide* and distills some of the questions that you should ask yourself at each step of the process of conflict analysis when planning a gender-inclusive intervention in a conflict involving religious issues and actors.

TABLE A. **Questions to consider when conducting a gender-inclusive approach to conflict analysis in religious contexts**

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	STEP 1 Self-Reflect	STEP 2 Understand the Context	STEP 3 Analyze the Conflict	STEP 4 Map Peacebuilding	STEP 5 Turn Analysis into Action
WHERE? Geographic and social location	Where does your knowledge of gender and religion come from?	To what extent are diverse gender identities, expressions, and sexualities accepted?	How are people of different gender identities and religions being impacted by the conflict?	Where are faith-based peacebuilders of different gender identities focusing their efforts? Where are they excluded or have unique access?	Where will you focus your efforts in engaging a gender-inclusive approach? What religious identity groups will you work with?
WHAT? Factors and issues that contribute to conflict and peacebuilding	What are your assumptions about the gender and religious dynamics within the conflict?	What are prevailing gender norms and power dynamics, and how are they shaped by religion?	How do harmful gender norms impact the conflict? To what extent is religion influencing these norms?	What issues are faith-based women and GSM peacebuilders focusing on?	What gender issues will you address, and how will you engage religion?
WHO? Actors, their characteristics, and their attributes	What are your self-defined gender and religious identities? How do you think they will be perceived?	What formal and informal religious leadership roles do people of different gender identities play?	How do people of different gender identities engage in the conflict, and how does religion shape their roles?	Which actors are religious peacebuilding initiatives engaging and how? Who is missing?	Which religious and gender identity groups will you focus on in your peacebuilding activities?
WHY? Motivations: why actors behave the way they do	What are your motivations in taking a gender-inclusive approach?	To what extent does religion serve as a source of influence in the lives of people of different gender identities?	Why are actors of different gender identities motivated to engage in violent conflict, and are their motivations shaped by religion?	Why are actors of different gender identities motivated to engage in peacebuilding, and are their motivations shaped by religion?	Why will people of different gender and religious identities be willing to engage in your peacebuilding efforts?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	STEP 1 Self-Reflect	STEP 2 Understand the Context	STEP 3 Analyze the Conflict	STEP 4 Map Peacebuilding	STEP 5 Turn Analysis into Action
WHEN? The conflict over time	What time and resources do you (and your team) have available for implementing a gender-inclusive approach?	How have gender norms and structures (such as laws and institutions), including those shaped by religion, changed over time?	How have gender and religious roles shifted through the conflict?	When has a gender-inclusive approach been used in previous peacebuilding efforts, including in religious peacebuilding?	When and where is it logistically possible for people of different gender identities to engage with you and in your peacebuilding project?
HOW? The use of power and resources to achieve goals	How can you contribute your expertise and insights? What additional training or resources do you need to understand and address local dynamics?	How are religious leaders talking about and otherwise engaging gender issues?	How do gendered social structures impact which voices get heard?	How are faith-based peacebuilders of different gender identities using their power and influence, including in "hidden" or overlooked ways?	How will you know you have met your objectives in implementing a gender-inclusive approach?

Organizations Working on Gender-Inclusive Peacebuilding and Religion

The following is a nonexhaustive list of international and local organizations and programs working at the intersection of religion and gender-inclusive peacebuilding. The list does not capture all the relevant organizations or countless actors throughout the world. Additional listings are available at www.usip.org/programs/religious-peacebuilding-action-guides.

ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality
www.abaadmena.org

Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University
http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu

Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation
https://cpbr.lk/

Equimundo
www.equimundo.org

GemPaz (Ecumenical Group of Women Peacebuilders)
www.gempaz.org/

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
https://giwps.georgetown.edu

Global Interfaith Network
https://gin-ssogie.org

International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD)
http://icrd.org

MenEngage Alliance
https://menengage.org

Musawah
www.musawah.org

National Inter-Religious Network (NIRN)—Nepal
https://nirn.org.np/

Network of Religion and Traditional Peacemakers
www.peacemakersnetwork.org

NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security
www.womenpeacesecurity.org

Pew Research Center, Religion
www.pewresearch.org/topic/religion/

Religions for Peace
www.religionsforpeace.org

TPO Foundation
www.tpo.ba/b/OnamaEN.html

United States Institute of Peace, Gender Policy and Strategy program
www.usip.org/issue-areas/gender

United States Institute of Peace, Religion and Inclusive Societies program
www.usip.org/issue-areas/religion

Additional Resources on Gender-Inclusive Peacebuilding and Religion

The following is a list of some of the resources on gender and/or religion that can support you in applying a gender-inclusive approach to peacebuilding within religious contexts or with religious actors. Additional listings are available at www.usip.org/programs/religious-peacebuilding-action-guides.

Created in God's Image: A Gender Transformation Toolkit for Women and Men in Churches, by Norwegian Church Aid
www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/arkiv/gender-based-violence-and-reproductive-health/gender-transformation
-toolkit/

"Faith-based Approaches to Transforming Masculinities for Gender Justice & Equality," by MenEngage Alliance
https://menengage.org/resources/faith-based-approaches-to-transforming-masculinities-for-gender-justice
-equality-a-two-day-consultation/

"Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory: A Guide for Turning Theory into Practice," by the United States Institute of Peace
www.usip.org/programs/gender-inclusive-framework-and-theory-gift

"A Guide for Building Women of Faith Networks," by Religions for Peace
www.rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RfP-A-Guide-for-Building-Women-of-Faith-Networks.pdf

"A Mapping of Faith-based Responses to Violence against Women and Girls in the Asia-Pacific Region," by the United Nations Population Fund
www.unfpa.org/resources/mapping-faith-based-responses-violence-against-women-and-girls-asia-pacific
-region

"'Measuring Gender' in Peacebuilding: Evaluating Peacebuilding Efforts from a Gender-Relational Perspective," by International Alert
www.international-alert.org/publications/measuring-gender-in-peacebuilding/

Partnering with Religious Communities for Children, by UNICEF
www.rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/RfP_Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children
_UNICEF.pdf

"Reimaging Inclusive Security in Peace Processes: LGB&T Perspectives," by Fidelma Ashe, Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh
https://peacerep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018_PSRP_Gender-Report.pdf

"Restoring Dignity: A Toolkit for Religious Communities to End Violence against Women," by Religions for Peace
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Acknowledgments

About the Action Guides

Why were the Religious Peacebuilding Action Guides written? Although it is difficult to deny that religion plays a role in many conflicts across the world, only relatively recently has there been an increased interest in what this means for peacebuilding. Religious peacebuilding has developed as a recognized field in its own right since the turn of the century. However, religion continues to be relatively neglected in the wider field of peacebuilding both because of a secular bias that tends to downplay the importance or relevance of religion and because of a shortage of practical tools to help peacebuilders navigate the complexities of the religious dimensions of conflict.

The Action Guides aim to address this shortage of practical tools and, in the process, to challenge the persisting secular bias in peacebuilding. We hope they will bridge the divide between secular and religious peacebuilding by ensuring that peacebuilding actors are capable of understanding and acting within the religious landscape of conflict environments.

These four Action Guides are the product of a collaborative process involving seven authors coordinated by three editors with support from the religion and peacebuilding team at the United States Institute of Peace. Two consultations, one in New York and one in Thailand, with stakeholders from the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia; a global survey of some eighty respondents; and two symposia of religious and thematic specialists fed into the process. Editors were then responsible for reviewing and finalizing the publications, ensuring consistency across all four Guides.

About the Author and Series Editor

Sheherazade Jafari, PhD (she, her) is a trainer, facilitator, and researcher on inclusive conflict resolution. She brings an equity lens to her work supporting organizations and communities in transforming conflict, addressing implicit biases, and building inclusive cultures. Her background within academic, NGO, and community development spaces includes issues in gender transformation and justice, human rights, culturally rooted and faith-based peacebuilding, and fostering more inclusive and equitable conflict resolution practice and pedagogy. She teaches university courses on related topics and has worked in the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

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About the Supporting Organizations

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers builds bridges between grassroots peacemakers and global players in order to strengthen the work done for sustainable peace. The Network strengthens peacemaking through collaboratively supporting the positive role of religious and traditional actors in peace and peacebuilding processes.

See www.peacemakersnetwork.org/about-us for more information.

The Salam Institute for Peace and Justice is a US-based nonprofit organization for research, education, and practice on issues related to conflict resolution, nonviolence, human rights, and development, with a focus on bridging differences between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The Salam Institute has extensive experience directing projects focused on peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue and exchange in Muslim countries.

See http://salaminstitute.org for more information.

The United States Institute of Peace is a national, nonpartisan, independent institute, founded by Congress and dedicated to the proposition that a world without violent conflict is possible, practical, and essential for US and global security. In conflict zones abroad, the Institute works with local partners to prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict. To reduce future crises and the need for costly interventions, USIP works with governments and civil societies to build local capacities to manage conflict peacefully. The Institute pursues its mission by linking research, policy, training, analysis, and direct action to support those who are working to build a more peaceful, inclusive world.

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