



DIALOGUE 4SDGs

Four areas where interreligious dialogue is supporting
the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), Schottenring 21, A1010-Vienna, Austria
www.kaiciid.org

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)
Edited by Colette Holden, Mike Waltner, Kyfork Aghobjian, Virginia Ottolina
Design: Carlos Gaido
Text © KAICIID. All rights reserved.
Photographs by Katherina Schiffli, © KAICIID

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in this publication are those of the participants and do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of KAICIID. Although the authors and KAICIID have made every effort to ensure that the information in this report was correct at the time of going to press, KAICIID do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or any other cause.



CONTENTS

Conference Overview	4
Key Discussion Points	8
General Recommendations from the Opening Plenary	11
Conference Recommendations	12
SDG 4: Quality Education	13
Target	
Recommendations	
SDG 5: Gender Equality	14
Targets	
Recommendations	
SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	15
Targets	
Recommendations	
SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals	16
Targets	
Recommendations	
Conference Day 1	17
Opening Address	18
Keynote Speech	19
Panel: Dialogue and the SDGs - Inclusion, Citizenship and Social Cohesion in an Age of Transition	20
Conference Day 2	23
Keynote Speech	23
Breakout Session: SDG 4	24
Breakout Session: SDG 5	26
Breakout Session: SDG 16	30
Breakout Session: SDG 17	32
Conclusion	35
Actions	38

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW





THE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE CENTRE (KAICIID) FELLOWS ALUMNI NETWORK ASPIRES TO BE AN INCLUSIVE NETWORK OF LEADERS AND EDUCATORS. ITS MAIN AIM IS TO MAP AND DEVELOP SYNERGIES AMONG INDIVIDUALS TO FOSTER COLLABORATION AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND GLOBAL LEVELS.

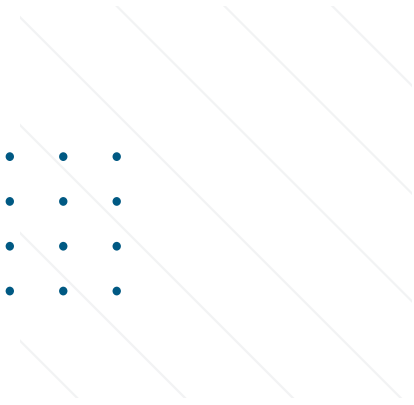
The majority of Fellows are educators embedded in devotional education institutions. Today there is an increasing focus on the unique roles that these kinds of religious actors and dialogue practitioners play in supporting women's involvement in dialogue; in supporting and developing new interreligious dialogue initiatives contributing to peace; in increasing respect for pluralism in education; and in forming partnerships to build on all of the above to improve social cohesion and build a sense of responsible common citizenship in societies throughout the world.

At KAICIID we realize this must go further, which is why we are working to develop and coordinate connections beyond individual Fellows to their affiliate institutions. Fellows are working to bring changes to their organizations and societies, and it is clear we need these institutions to bring change to the world.

The world has changed dramatically since the Dialogue4SDGs Conference in December 2019. No one could have imagined how rapidly the "age of transition" that keynote speaker Kirsten Evans spoke of would accelerate into a time of disorientation: just weeks after the meeting, the coronavirus pandemic stopped the global economy in its tracks.

The pandemic and its far-reaching impacts have not diminished the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Rather, they have served to focus all of us on the reality that we are a global community - that the challenges faced by humanity and the environment are a concern for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, culture or beliefs.

We have seen that governments and societies can take dramatic action when called upon. We are learning very quickly that the SDGs are not only aspirational: they are essential to the survival of humanity and the future of our planet.



Young people throughout the world are being asked to suspend their lives and isolate themselves for the sake of older and more vulnerable people. Meanwhile, older generations, including leaders from the great religious traditions, are considering the sacrifices and changes that must be made to secure peaceful, fair, inclusive societies for younger generations, including those young people who will mature in the post-COVID-19 world.

The Dialogue4SDGs Conference, held at the Hotel Fleming Neubaugürtel in Vienna on 11-12 December 2019, was the first international meeting of the KAICIID Fellows Alumni Network. It took place just before the graduation of the four 2019 Fellows cohorts, and over 150 participants were involved. The conference highlighted the important role interreligious dialogue can play in supporting the 2030 development agenda with regard to four specific SDGs:

- **SDG4:** ensure inclusive, equitable, good-quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- **SDG5:** achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- **SDG16:** promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; provide access to justice for all; and build effective, accountable, inclusive institutions at all levels.

- **SDG17:** strengthen means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

The conference explored the four goals through the lens of interreligious dialogue. During the discussions, several important topics relating to the SDGs emerged, such as migration and displacement, hate speech, attacks on places of worship, and the rise of extremist discourse.

The conference had the following aims:

- To empower and connect Fellows from the 2015-2018 cohorts with 2019 Fellows.
- To identify ways in which dialogue can advance the SDGs.
- To strengthen personal and institutional relationships through the adoption of local and regional strategic action plans to promote dialogue interventions supporting four key SDGs.
- To examine ways in which women are impacting the field of interreligious dialogue, and to explore ways to include more women in dialogue processes.
- To examine how dialogue skills and competencies can support the aims of global citizenship education.



KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

It was generally agreed by participants that religious leaders, actors and institutions are crucial stakeholders. In fragile contexts, such as the Central African Republic, Congo, South Sudan and Syria, they may be the most trusted leaders in society – in some cases they are the only leaders holding the trust of the public. Therefore, leaders from the religious sphere must be involved early in discussions on any **comprehensive strategy to achieve the SDGs**. At the same time, religious leaders and scholars must view the development agenda not as an imposition but as a set of shared goals of common interest, crucial to the flourishing of the whole of humanity and our planet.

Processes of engagement should be reciprocal. **Religious leaders** and actors should be open to engaging with and learning about important public issues, and **policymakers and decision-makers** must be sensitized to the concerns and perspectives of religious citizens.

Most participants felt the focus of engagement should remain on **practical coordination** around shared concerns. Religions have teachings, stories and traditions that speak to people's deepest-held views. Religions inform opinions and actions in societies. These are powerful motivations that need to be considered when solving common challenges and building a better world.

Mutual accountability for all stakeholders is necessary. Stakeholders need to be responsible for their actions; rhetoric is not enough. Speeches and appearances, although valuable, must be backed up by **concrete commitments and actions** by faith-based organizations, religious actors and political leaders. Religious infrastructure, such as educational and faith-based aid organizations, chaplaincy organizations, and others that specialize in spiritual care, should be mobilized in coordinated ways to move these issues forward effectively.

Achieving the SDGs will require inclusive processes, and the **dialogue process** itself must become even **more inclusive**. Women must be





able to represent their own issues to share their perspectives. Religious and ethnic minorities, including often ignored indigenous traditions, must have a place at the dialogue table. Throughout the conference, the issue of citizenship was discussed, including the fact that many people live in countries where they are not afforded rights or voices as citizens. Dialogue, if facilitated properly, can provide ways to engage with these difficult issues and to share perspectives, including issues that some governments and religious institutions may normally avoid. The age of transition in which we live requires leaders with the courage to face these issues and to hear the perspectives of groups who have been ignored.

Emphasis was placed on the **importance of dialogue in education**. Whether non-devotional or religious, education should provide opportunities for learning and encountering people who hold other beliefs and worldviews. Curricula that include interreligious dialogue skills and competencies should be incorporated into formal and informal education at all levels. Such education should seek to recognize the whole person, including their spirituality, beliefs and worldview.

Sustainability and communications were major topics of the conference. Coordination will not happen by accident. Dialogue is an intentional process, and one-off events are not sufficient to provide a space for learning and fostering a shared

commitment to cooperation and change. Ongoing **communication and lasting commitment** in terms of funding and stakeholder participation are required. Many participants recommended **regional approaches** to ensure the agendas developed are appropriate and relevant. Connections between policymakers and leaders, along with improvements in communication, social media and processes, will raise awareness of important issues and effectively overcome challenges.

Sustainability requires top leaders to be connected to the grassroots community level to ensure comprehensive engagement. In the words of KAICIID Senior Advisor Mohammed Abu-Nimer:

“IT IS NOT ‘EITHER OR OR’: ALL LEVELS NEED TO BE ENGAGED EFFECTIVELY AND WORK IN A COORDINATED MANNER IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS.”

Participants spoke of an urgent need to address other SDGs, with environmental issues and climate action being of vital concern. The importance of partnerships cut across each goal, using approaches such as collective impact, that seek to align and coordinate the actions of institutions at all levels. Such approaches must respect the individual mandates and values of participating organizations, while at the same time expecting high levels of involvement, cooperation, commitment and accountability from partners.



GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

FROM THE OPENING PLENARY

- Recognize **religious leaders**, particularly those involved in interreligious dialogue, as **crucial stakeholders in the SDGs**: invite them to the dialogue table so they feel ownership of the decisions and can become involved; hold them accountable to their role in fulfilling the goals; and advocate so that governments support their initiatives.
- Increase **education in dialogue for religious leaders** and other actors working on the SDGs, including those who have not had relevant training or who lack adequate skills and competencies.
- Make **dialogue** around issues tied to the SDGs **more inclusive of women** and representatives from minority and traditional religions, which are often conspicuously absent from discussions that affect them the most.
- Build **awareness of climate issues** and related actions among religious institutions: give religious leaders specific guidelines on issues such as helping people to apply for citizenship and protecting the environment.
- **Emphasize practical concerns** rather than theological issues.



CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

In preparation for the conference, specific targets were selected according to each SDG where dialogue interventions could be most impactful. Although other targets may be relevant, those identified below are most relevant to the approaches and mandate of KAICIID and the International Fellows Programme. In addition to the four selected SDGs, conference participants thought that interreligious dialogue partnerships should focus on SDG 13 (Climate Action) because of the urgency for climate action across sectors.

SDG 13

Climate Action

Global warming is causing long-lasting changes to our climate system, which threatens irreversible consequences if we do not act. These actions must also go hand in hand with efforts to integrate disaster risk measures, sustainable natural resource management, and human security into national development strategies.



SDG 4

QUALITY EDUCATION

TARGET

By 2030 ensure all learners **acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development**, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- KAICIID Fellows and their affiliated institutions should play an active role in the **adoption of** global citizenship education, peace education, and interreligious and intercultural dialogue at the level of **national state policies**.
- Religious leaders should vigorously **promote** education and **knowledge-seeking** in the light of the teachings and tenets of each faith or tradition.
- KAICIID Fellows, religious leaders and teachers should use scriptural stories and examples to demonstrate the importance of lifelong learning and skills.
- Promote **education that addresses the myth of "separation"**, which so often exacerbates narratives that drive violence and conflicts around the world.
- Plan a vigorous **review of existing curricula** and teachers' capacity for promoting respect for differences, **enhancing pluralism** and fostering social harmony. Interreligious dialogue should be introduced as part of the curricula of learning institutions.
- Create a working mechanism for sharing responsibility among educational institutions, religious teachers and governments.
- Ensure national councils' dialogue activities trickle down to the grassroots level to bring about actual change.
- Improve use of **social media as** a powerful **education tool**.
- Introduce into schools at all levels a system that highlights our similarities; identifies children as global citizens; nurtures courage, connection and creativity; and delves into the elements that make us human - that is, education to "make us more human".
- Ensure religious leaders are trained in peacebuilding education.

SDG 5

GENDER EQUALITY

TARGETS

Ensure **women's full and effective participation** and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make every effort to **ensure women's voices are included** at the dialogue table. Encourage men to refuse to participate in panels, workshops and discussions comprising only men.
- Approach **SDGs 4 and 5 in coordination**: women's education is a must, not an option.
- From each religion, bring out the aspects that are empowering, and talk about them with religious leaders and communities.
- Encourage **women and men to network** and focus on issues such as human trafficking, regardless of religion or gender.
- Suggest initiatives to empower women.
- Build **solidarity** and partnerships among **religious and secular women**.
- Focus on gender justice issues.



SDG 16



PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

TARGETS

Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere.

Ensure responsive, **inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making** at all levels.

Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and to combat terrorism and crime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Religious leaders and their communities should develop special learning kits of **peaceful communication integrating spiritual practices**.
- Religious leaders should work to develop special programmes to educate youth in digital communication.
- Religious leaders need to **work in cooperation with secular and state authorities** and develop a common sense of the importance of the SDGs.
- Theologians and academics must work together to develop programmes that **tie** the scriptural interpretation of **holy texts** to these pressing **world issues**.
- Capacity-building programmes for religious leaders on how to **effectively and appropriately intervene on important social issues** related to social cohesion are important.



SDG 17

PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

TARGETS

Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the SDGs, including through north-south, south-south and triangular cooperation.

Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries, in particular developing countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage and enable **cooperation** between, and engage with, **governmental, nongovernmental, faith-based** and multifaith organizations.
- Provide platforms to share and exchange expertise and practices.
- Develop and **use technology and virtual platforms** such as the KAICIID Dialogue Knowledge Hub.
- Provide information in a way that is understandable to laypeople.
- Form a **collective agenda**.
- Engage young people, who are strong influencers, through social media and technology.
- Increase interreligious dialogue-related activities at grassroots levels and mutually reinforce activities.
- Popularize the roles of faith-based organizations and religious leaders and bring them together with policymakers and nonstate actors.
- Embed work at regional levels.
- Coordinate and organize partnerships between faith actors, policymakers and civil society around specific and measurable outputs and outcomes. This is best done at the local or regional level in order to measure each organization's outputs towards the SDGs.
- Address environmental issues through interreligious and interfaith dialogue and programmes.



CONFERENCE DAY 1

Contrary to expectations of many experts and observers, religion is returning as a subject of public interest around the world. In a 2010 global survey by the Pew Research Center, 84% of the global population identified with a religious group or organization.¹ Although much has changed since 2010, and **religious devotion is on the decline in many countries of the global north, numbers of religious adherents have continued to increase in the global south.**²

For this reason, interreligious and intercultural dialogue projects and initiatives have also been growing, and dialogue has moved from the margins to the mainstream as a global, national and

local phenomenon. More international organizations, including intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, recognize the need to engage with the religious dimension of the societies where they are active.

Additionally, research and scholarship in these areas has increased dramatically over the past 20 years. Combined with this, increasing urbanization and paradigmatic economic, technological and social changes are now connecting more diverse people than ever before. In many cases, these encounters of diversity are enriching – but challenges and tensions do occur.

¹ The global religious landscape. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center; 2012 (<https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>).

² The changing global religious landscape. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center; 2017 (<https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>).



Sustainable development, and implementation of the SDGs, must take into account these changes and the challenges faced by millions of people's traditional customs, beliefs and practices throughout the world.

The conference opening panel focused on locating the place of interreligious dialogue in the sustainable development agenda, and how dialogue can contribute towards achieving the SDGs. Special attention was directed to how the KAICIID Fellows Network can serve as a resource to align dialogue with, and place dialogue higher up, the global development agenda.

OPENING ADDRESS



Faisal bin Muaammar
KAICIID Secretary General

KAICIID Secretary General, Faisal bin Muaammar, emphasized the importance of engaging the religious sphere, including religious leaders, actors and institutions represented in societies throughout the world in their many expressions to support sustainable development.

HE SAID: "WE ARE AN INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION THAT BELIEVES THE GLOBAL QUEST FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, AS EXPRESSED PARTICULARLY IN SDGS 4, 5, 16 AND 17, CANNOT BE FULLY UNDERSTOOD OR IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE STRUGGLES, HOPES AND EXPERIENCES OF THE 'COMMUNITY OF THE FAITHFUL', WHICH MAKES UP 80% OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION."

He closed by emphasizing the important role played by KAICIID Fellows in promoting and advancing dialogue in their institutions and societies.



KEYNOTE SPEECH



Kirsten Evans

Director of the Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives and Senior Advisor to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Kirsten Evans, Director of the Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives and Senior Advisor to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), spoke of the current “age of transition” presenting many challenges around the globe, such as lack of access to education for millions of children affected by conflict, and the large proportion of girls forced into child marriage or who do not experience education. She emphasized the need for rule of law, and the importance of leaders to speak out and defend human rights and freedom of religion and belief.

She stressed the important role the religious sphere can play in advancing the development agenda:

“LOOKING AT THE CRISES AFFECTING HUMANITY LEADS US TO THE CONCLUSION THAT WE NEED TO WORK HARD IN ALL RELIGIOUS GROUPS. THEIR DEEP COMMITMENT TO THEIR COMMUNITIES, VOLUNTEERISM, RESOURCE MOBILIZATION, SERVICE AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE PROVIDE A BASIS FOR THE SOCIAL COHESION NECESSARY FOR LASTING DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACT.”

She underscored the importance of interreligious dialogue in the work of USAID, citing examples such as youth-focused programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina that use religious visits and camps and work with religious educators to combat intolerance. She also highlighted interreligious dialogue work with women in Nigeria and broad grassroots conflict-resolution projects in Sri Lanka. Programmes such as these provide new opportunities for collaboration to address common issues in inclusive and effective ways.



PANEL



Mohammed Abu-Nimer
KAICIID Senior Advisor

DIALOGUE AND THE SDGS - INCLUSION, CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL COHESION IN AN AGE OF TRANSITION

KAICIID Senior Advisor Mohammed Abu-Nimer facilitated the first panel of the conference. The panel discussed the role of interreligious dialogue and its place in the broader conversation regarding sustainable development. Professor Abu-Nimer described the session as a “reflective approach” to how dialogue can address the SDGs. He highlighted the relevance and timeliness of the conference and the crucial role played by respectful, inclusive dialogue in fostering human rights. He encouraged participants to think of themselves as one unified group that can work collectively to address the issues raised.



Khin Sandar Tun
Myanmar

Khin Sandar Tun presented her experiences in Myanmar. She spoke of the important issue of citizenship in the country and the need for common citizenship to make a minority group feel a part of society: “We have the third-highest community of stateless people worldwide.”³ She talked about the need for laws to provide clear pathways to attaining citizenship for religious and cultural minorities.

She addressed the importance of religion in Myanmar society, especially Buddhist monks, who have significant influence. She emphasized that recognition of religious leaders as significant stakeholders is crucial. She stressed the importance of encouraging them to become involved, bringing them to the dialogue table so they feel included as part of the decisions made and do not oppose initiatives aimed at progress.



Mugu Zakka Bako
Nigeria

Mugu Zakka Bako talked about the importance of religious leaders in Nigeria. Nigeria has a population of 200 million people, and religion informs most aspects of their lives and views. He said the role of religion and faith-based organizations is crucial and has a role in “shaping the character of every Nigerian”. He highlighted that religious leaders are respected and therefore influential.

³ Statelessness in numbers: 2019. Eindhoven: Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion; 2019 (https://files.institutesi.org/ISI_statistics_analysis_2019.pdf).



Amanah Nurish
Indonesia

With reference to SDGs 4 and 5, he emphasized the need for furthering high-quality education and training in dialogue, as many people involved in dialogue have no formal training. He spoke of the need to include more religious leaders and women. He also spoke of the need to address the trauma of survivors of religious or ethnically motivated bias or violence.

Amanah Nurish spoke about the situation in Ambon, Indonesia, where conflict between faiths is “related to the politics of natural resources” - specifically deforestation, which is rapidly challenging indigenous communities’ values and ways of life. She emphasized the importance of interfaith institutions engaging with environmental issues and suggested that religion can be called upon to ameliorate or exacerbate issues.

She emphasized that dialogue should be focused on common issues and concerns rather than on theological issues. She also stressed the importance of dialogue becoming more inclusive and accepting leaders from minorities and indigenous people. She spoke about how deforestation and climate change are impacting the people who populate hundreds of islands, leading to a decline in their beliefs and practices.



Rabbi Jeff Berger
United Kingdom

Rabbi Jeff Berger presented two British projects he is involved with. Mitzvah Day is a Jewish faith-led day of social action introducing people to their neighbours and to local, national and international charities, setting up projects which address real needs. Mitzvah Day brings together people of all faiths and backgrounds, to volunteer side by side, building longstanding, genuine relationships.

The second project, Camp Unity, is an interfaith camping programme that takes place in Boreham Wood, a small town near London, where 3-4% of children are living in poverty. The programme strives to improve economic, social and environmental conditions in the town. Links have been developed between five different religious communities to overcome years of self-segregation and create equal opportunities for children.

Rabbi Berger said he believed the projects contributed to SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by creating a sense of community and moving people away from self-segregation and insularity. Camp Unity provides opportunities for economically disadvantaged young people to fully participate in and benefit from the experience. He stated: "The project was supported enthusiastically by some religious leaders and political councils; our success was the cumulation of interfaith engagement through our faith forum."

SDG 1

No Poverty

Eradicating poverty in all its forms remains one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. The first Sustainable Development Goal is to end poverty in all forms and dimensions by 2030. This involves targeting the most vulnerable, increasing basic resources and services, and supporting communities affected by conflict and climate-related disasters.

SDG 10

Reduced Inequalities

Income inequality has increased in nearly everywhere in recent decades, but at different speeds. It is lowest in Europe and highest in the Middle East. These widening disparities require sound policies to empower lower-income earners and to promote economic inclusion of all, regardless of sex, race or ethnicity.

Professor Abu-Nimer stressed the importance of engagement across lines of division, whatever they are:

"YOU DON'T NEED TO LIVE IN A WAR-TORN COUNTRY TO HAVE SEGREGATION IN SOCIETY. VERY OFTEN IT IS SELF-IMPOSED. WITH A FEW RESOURCES, IT IS POSSIBLE TO DESIGN PROJECTS THAT BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER ACROSS LINES OF RELIGIOUS AND CLASS DIFFERENCES THAT TOO OFTEN DIVIDE."





CONFERENCE DAY 2

KEYNOTE SPEECH



Maya Assaf-Horstmeier
Director of Conflict
Sensitivity and Peacebuilding
at World Vision

Maya Assaf-Horstmeier, Director of Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding at World Vision, addressed a major challenge affecting civil society in advancing the SDGs - state fragility - which is both a threat to global security and an obstacle to achieving the SDGs. The number of people living in fragile states will increase to 2.3 billion by 2030, and 80% of these people will be living in extreme poverty at that time. In many fragile contexts, social contracts have been broken between people and their governments due to an inability to provide basic services.

She spoke about the role of religious actors and faith-based organizations in addressing such issues. The role of faith actors, although influential for a long time, has often not been acknowledged by secular partners in the way it is now. For example, in the Central African Republic, religious leaders are working together to provide safe access for children to go to school.



She emphasized the work of World Vision as it seeks to engage the grassroots level in multi-faith contexts and the necessity of engaging in dialogue to deal with matters openly and reach communities. World Vision has given religious leaders a forum to discuss development issues and how to deal with them in their communities. She spoke about how a number of organizations, including KAICIID, have invested time, money and effort to foster peaceful societies through inclusive and sustainable dialogue platforms between and among adherents of different faith traditions.

BREAKOUT SESSION: **SDG 4**

CHAired by
**Sadhvi Bhagawati
Saraswati**
Secretary-General of
the Global Interfaith
WASH Alliance

FACILITATED by
Anas Alabbadi
Chief of KAICIID Global
Practices Hub



Approaches such as global citizenship education, peace education, and intercultural and interreligious engagement programmes are on the rise to allow more people to navigate the different perspectives and ways of life they increasingly encounter in their societies, including their neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces.

The panel focused on the importance of equipping young people with competencies and skills to engage the diversity of worldviews and perspectives. The panel discussed how interreligious dialogue principles, skills and techniques are being incorporated into education mechanisms in ways that promote lifelong learning programmes that advance respect for difference, acceptance of pluralism and social harmony.





**Sadhvi Bhagawati
Saraswati**

India

Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati opened the session by recalling Nelson Mandela: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” She spoke of the importance of education moving beyond maths and science and addressing spirituality and religion to “keep us grounded”. She presented her understanding of religion as a way of cooperatively creating a new world in which we want to live.



Ashin Vicittasara

Myanmar

Ashin Vicittasara, a Buddhist monk and teacher, spoke about his life history. He was born in a small village in Myanmar where Muslims and Buddhists lived peacefully. He stated: “I love difference, I love pluralism, I love social cohesion.” His early life experiences influenced him. He became a teacher and invited people from different religions to attend his classes. He established the Pali College in Yangon, where he introduced peace education. He is currently developing an education centre. He said: “Through inclusive curricula, dialogue-based teaching and learning interactions, and creative and reflective teacher trainings, we will be able to promote equality, equity and peace, which need to be recognized by government and reinforced in policies.”



Elyse Brazel

Canada

Elyse Brazel is engaged daily in pluralism through her work in the Faith and Spirituality Centre, University of Calgary, Canada. She pointed out that Canada is a secular society, where many people do not trust religious institutions and view religion as the main reason behind conflicts. The Centre has 19 chapels from different religious communities aimed at encouraging students to engage in inter-religious dialogue. In the interreligious education programme, which aims to break down stereotypes and misconceptions, 15–20 students from different religious and cultural backgrounds live together for a week, eat at restaurants from different traditions and visit sacred sites.



Sr Rose Kyaligonza

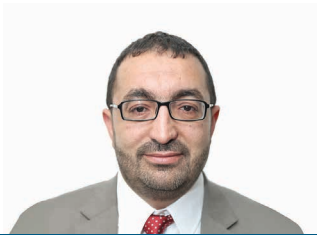
Tanzania

Sr Rose Kyaligonza spoke about her experiences as a Catholic sister working on interreligious dialogue in the United Republic of Tanzania, where Christianity and Islam are the major religions. The country has inadequate access to education, and schools provide no opportunities for facilitated interreligious encounters or dialogue. There are private confessional schools, but they focus on one religion. Her recommendations were to integrate interreligious engagement and dialogue into existing curricula, to institute district councils for teaching interreligious dialogue, and to make sure a diverse mix of children from different religions are included in seminars.



Swati Chakraborty
India

Swati Chakraborty discussed her work as a human rights expert dealing with education in India. She indicated that dialogue can be a powerful tool towards achieving human rights education. She said: "The school curriculum should work towards the holistic development of the individual." She emphasized that education policy must account for interreligious and intercultural engagements that uphold the dignity and integrity of these aspects of life, which are often not viewed as tangible aspects of educational processes.



Yousef Belmahdi
Morocco

Yousef Belmahdi spoke about a growing "culture of closed-mindedness [that] is faster than us". He believes that respect for pluralism is crucial to education, and that proper citizenship cannot happen without some aspect of interreligious education: "For where there is no education for pluralism, there is closure, and there are seeds of extremism." He spoke of the importance of including high-quality interreligious dialogue in school curricula to counter religious and cultural close-minded attitudes and cited examples from Morocco.

BREAKOUT SESSION: SDG 5

CHAired by
Rabbi David Rosen
KAICIID Board Member

FACILITATED by
Renata Nelson
KAICIID

Rabbi Rosen talked about the ways in which we fail to support full human dignity when we ignore, misuse or in any way marginalize the story of women. He emphasized that religious narratives have often been distorted or abused, citing the example of women being derived from men:

"IN THE HEBREW BIBLE NARRATIVE, CHAPTER 5 SAYS 'MALE AND FEMALE, HE CREATED THEM'. IT IS CLEAR THERE IS ONE ENTITY CREATED AT THE BEGINNING ... THE ORIGINAL ONE WAS BOTH MALE AND FEMALE. HUMANITY IS NOT COMPLETE IF THE MALE AND FEMALE COMPONENTS ARE NOT REPRESENTED."

He shared his hope that the session would offer helpful ways to grow and improve.



Victoria Pelaez

Guatemala

Victoria Pelaez, who works in Guatemala on interreligious dialogue for development, described what women's empowerment means. She presented gender relations as a manifestation of power relations that attempt to define how women are represented in important social issues, politics, and all other aspects of their lives. She mentioned the exclusion of women in the political, economic and cultural dimensions of life as a key challenge in all aspects of societies. She discussed how women, and women's issues, are defined in matters of religion and faith. She highlighted that because women are seldom the official representatives of religious communities, there is a need to find ways to include women within and outside faith communities so they can represent themselves, voice their own opinions and represent their issues.



Basmah Ahmed Jastaniah

Saudi Arabia

Basmah Ahmed Jastaniah, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, spoke about the impact of interreligious dialogue on women's empowerment. Since her involvement as a KAICIID Fellow, she has monitored the progress women are making during the programme and as alumni. She highlighted the need for continued capacity-building, providing online resources and apps to connect and amplify women's voices, and to empower women to contribute to solving problems and intervening in conflict situations.



Haya Alhargen

Saudi Arabia

Haya Alhargen, focusing on the Arab region, stated: "Equality between men and women is the basic principle of Islam." There are customs and "some extreme judicial interpretations" that give women less status. She mentioned patriarchal family traditions that have reduced the level of female education across the world. She cited the importance of the SDGs and their comprehensiveness in empowering women and creating balance in societies at many levels. The SDGs aim to provide equal opportunities for women at all levels in decision-making in all areas of political, economic and public life. She stressed the importance of empowering women to become involved in dialogue to promote inclusion and peace within societies. She also emphasized the importance of partnerships, referencing SDG 17: many organizations must collaborate in support of participatory standards and to engage diverse stakeholders to advance the goals.

She spoke about how the Arab world has witnessed significant measurable improvements in reducing the gender gap during the past five years, including in women's political empowerment. But

- she also emphasized that it is important not to be content with these
- changes, to continue to demand equality and a better life for all.
- She highlighted the recent opportunities she has had that would
- have been impossible based on the cultural beliefs of people. Conducting her project as a KAICIID Fellow required interviewing several prominent officials, which required her to travel between cities within Saudi Arabia. Among these projects are video interviews with a number of officials in high positions of institutions concerned with dialogue and peace.



Jessica Sitek
United States

Saudi Arabian society began to act on gender inequality about 15 years ago. Youth cadres have been created in the field of dialogue and all its branches, with equal proportions of females and males as ambassadors of peace and fellows of local and international dialogue to open platforms that allow discussions for peace and overcoming stereotypes. A new generation of women is challenging barriers by creativity and determination and by taking advantage of opportunities and support from local and international religious actors.

Jessica Sitek spoke about the role of intergenerational dialogue in women's empowerment, offering perspectives that are often not included. Intergenerational dialogue allows mutual exchanges that engage and challenge existing power structures. She mentioned the importance of seeing the SDGs holistically within a broader global framework. She highlighted the important relationship between the empowerment of women and religion. Religion has a central role in achieving SDG 5, although it is not explicitly stated in the goals. She said: "Women ought to use the tools and resources of their religions to effect change."



Heba Salah
Egypt

During the question and answer session, Heba Salah suggested that in the Arab region, "women in different countries do great work, but we lack connection; we need to connect and know each other to reap the fruit of our efforts. I like the idea to follow up and to monitor achievements of the year". Basmah Ahmed Jastaniah responded that in her experience, women in the Arab region are increasingly being taken seriously and playing a greater role in dialogue.

Following a discussion on the misinterpretation and instrumentalization of religious texts and teaching to denigrate the role of wom-



Rabbi David Rosen
KAICIID Board Member

en, Rabbi Rosen responded that the issue does not only apply to the status and role of women, but also relates to the problem of violence in the name of religion. Some people use religious texts to justify violence. In his view, the problem is not the texts themselves but their interpretation and exploitation to the advantage of one party, group or gender:

“RELIGION IS ABUSED BY POWER, WHICH WILL EXPLOIT HOLY TEXTS TO PROMOTE ITS PARTISAN INTERESTS.”

Rabbi Rosen discussed the relationship between religion and secularism:

“SECULARISM HAS BROUGHT CHALLENGES BUT ALSO BLESSINGS; THEREFORE, WE NEED A HEALTHY DYNAMIC BETWEEN RELIGIOUSNESS AND SECULARISM; RELIGION NEEDS TO BALANCE THE EGOCENTRISM OF SECULARISM. REGARDING WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT, WE NEED TO EMPLOY SECULAR INSIGHTS TO CHALLENGE RELIGION TO POSITIVELY REINTERPRET ITSELF ACCORDINGLY.”



Renata Nelson
KAICIID

Renata Nelson posed the question: “How do we integrate women into interreligious dialogue processes? How do we convince men of the importance of women’s empowerment?” Jessica Sitek responded that different cross-cutting levels of dialogue, including theological, between women are needed to change the mindsets of generations. Haya Alhargen emphasized the importance of mutual respect in addressing the issue. She reiterated that Islam does not prevent women from becoming leaders; the problem is with the traditions and customs. To resolve this issue, she proposed educating communities and societies to respect other views: “I came to represent not only Saudi Arabia but also what we learned from KAICIID – to respect our own people, even if they do not belong to our religion and culture.”

Victoria Pelaez suggested that education is the answer. She highlighted the importance of men becoming involved in this commitment, such as having men support campaigns to counter violence against women: “We need to educate ourselves before we educate our society; we need to change our conviction, our belief of the role of women.”

The role of religion in the exclusion of women was raised. Basmah Ahmed Jastaniah said: "I don't think we have a problem with our religions - most of the problems are caused by lack of knowledge and information. We need to change mindsets and wrong behaviour." She emphasized the important of education and dialogue.

Rabbi Rosen responded:

"I AM NOT SURE WE CAN LET RELIGIONS OFF THE HOOK - RELIGION CANNOT BE DETANGLED FROM CULTURE, AND CANNOT BE DISREGARDED IN RELATION TO INEQUALITIES TOGETHER WITH WIDER CULTURAL AND SOCIETAL FACTORS."

He emphasized the diversity and complexity of religions and their structures, which make it difficult to apply universal or generalizing statements. He expressed that learning is much more important than the literature one produces, because those who attain expertise achieve status due to their religious knowledge. He closed by stating there have been massive improvements in Islam and Judaism in providing space for and supporting women scholars.

BREAKOUT SESSION: SDG 16

CHAired by
**His Eminence
Metropolitan
Emmanuel**
KAICIID Board Member

FACILITATED by
**Abderrahman
El Yessa**
KAICIID





**His Eminence
Metropolitan Emmanuel**
KAICIID Board Member



His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel emphasized that peace is inherent in religious traditions and that dialogue is a tool to promote peace and build sustainable peace:

“THROUGH DIALOGUE, WE DISCOVER THE OTHER, CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE IN A MEANINGFUL WAY, TRYING TO FIND SOLUTIONS TOGETHER TO PRESSING ISSUES IN OUR COMMUNITIES.”



**María del Milagro
Dallacaminá**
KAICIID

María del Milagro Dallacaminá talked about a multisector, multidisciplinary system that addresses issues such as social justice, human development, and proper stewardship of the environment. Religions have values that are fundamental for human development and flourishing, and have a significant role to play in advancing these goals because they speak to the personal values of people in ways that resonate and help form their views and individual actions.



Isheanesu Sextus Gusha
Zimbabwe

Reverend Isheanesu Sextus Gusha spoke about the suspicions of governments in working with religious leaders, and how this is slowly changing. He presented the example of the Interreligious Dialogue Council in Zimbabwe that provides an inclusive platform for all religions to express their voices on common issues and concerns. The platform has helped to reduce tensions within and between religious groups; it provides a space to introduce and educate young people to other worldviews and helps promote peaceful cooperation on social justice issues.



Zainab Al-Amin Elian
KAICIID Fellow

Zainab Al-Amin Elian reiterated a common sentiment of the panel that dialogue and peace are two fundamental pillars of humanity and human development. In her opinion, “Peace is God’s will and there are so many Quranic passages about peace that describe the just and correct relationship between people.”

BREAKOUT SESSION: SDG 17

CHAired by
Mohammad Sammak
KAICIID Board Member

FACILITATED by
Patrice Brodeur
KAICIID Senior Adviser



Mohammad Sammak
KAICIID Board Member

Mohammad Sammak opened by highlighting the unique role of KAICIID in bringing together religious leaders and actors to foster peace and harmony among diverse people. He said:

“THE WORLD IS CHANGING. THE NEW GENERATION THAT THE FELLOWS REPRESENT HAS TO FACE THOSE CHALLENGES.”

He discussed the rapidly changing demographics of religious people around the world and how “fanaticism, phobias and isms” have led to deep ideological entrenchment and division in societies. He emphasized the importance of education and dialogue to address these issues.



Stephen Shashoua
Netherlands

Stephen Shashoua spoke of the collective impact model to leverage partnerships to achieve social change. This approach was first initiated in Ohio in 2008 following the economic crises that emerged from the crash of the stock market, which exacerbated the already lacking public funds for the education system. A group of core leaders chose a new collective approach to coordinate efforts and improve areas of education. These leaders were drawn from local civil society and nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, and corporate and government officials. The initiative's success led to it being implemented in other sectors. He spoke about the need to address problems of social cohesion, referring to the rise of antisemitism, violent extremism and xenophobia. He said: "It is dark and it is getting darker. Only if we are concerted in our efforts and bring our lights together can we win over darkness."



Mercy Wambui Muigai
Kenya

Mercy Wambui Muigai spoke about strategic planning, referencing her involvement as a young member of the Steering Committee of the African Union Interfaith Dialogue Forum. She highlighted the importance of regional approaches in Africa and the need to develop a strategic plan developed from diverse actors, drawing on experiences and examples of good practices to strengthen social cohesion. There are a number of challenges that need to be addressed to improve partnerships in region: she cited a lack of outreach to policymakers, lack of clear leadership structures creating difficulties with communication and coordination among stakeholders, and invisibility of faith-based organizations and religious leaders. She recommended establishing a good practice platform comprising actors from across the region; continuing to work towards strengthening social cohesion in African communities at the grassroots level; and finding ways to popularize roles of faith-based organizations and religious leaders, bringing them together with nonstate actors.



Mussolini Sinsuat Lidasan
Philippines

Mussolini Sinsuat Lidasan spoke about the Al Qalam Institute based at Ateneo de Davao University. This is an Islamic institution based in a Jesuit university. Al Qalam Institute is dedicated to the understanding of Islam among Muslims and the people of Mindanao who are culturally linked to other Southeast Asian communities, aiming to foster a sense of spirituality based upon Islam that increases belongingness to a larger humanity. This partnership approach is a



**Rabbi Naomi
Rachel Kalish**
United States

holistic way to address conflict, ensuring continuous dialogue with people on the ground. The engagement is interreligious in nature and reflects the demographics and issues of the surrounding society, allowing for the development of relevant alternative narratives on identity and belonging to create a vibrant post-conflict community across religious lines.

Rabbi Naomi Rachel Kalish spoke from her experience as a hospital chaplain. She views chaplaincy as a model for developing sustainable partnerships, integrating the fields of healthcare chaplaincy and interreligious dialogue. She described how chaplaincy takes place in different settings, and how chaplains reach people away from their homes or in situations where they need spiritual care. Chaplaincy education empowers chaplains with skills and capacities such as listening, compassion and resiliency during times of crisis. She recommends developing partnerships with governmental and non-governmental chaplaincy organizations so the existing infrastructure of chaplaincy can be harnessed and coordinated in support of the SDGs. Dialogue could be used to bring these institutions together to promote the common good throughout the world.

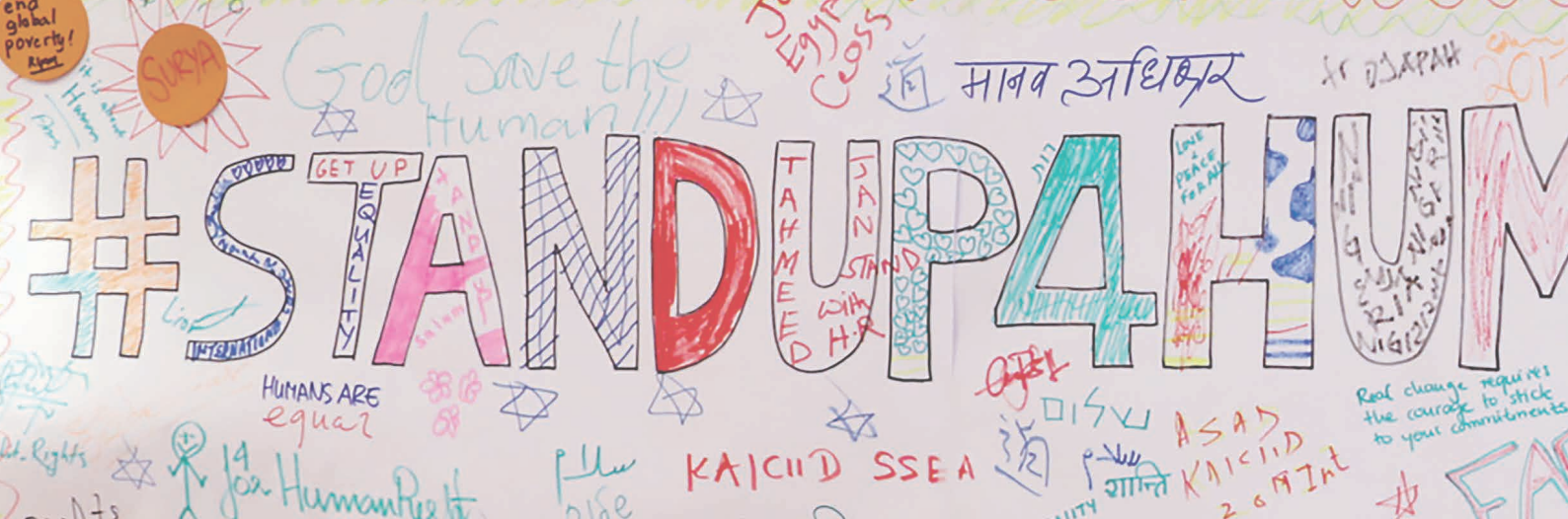


**Auwal Farouk
Abdussalam**
Nigeria

Auwal Farouk Abdussalam spoke about the importance of partnerships for SDG 13 on climate action in the context of Nigeria. He focused on the need to engage grassroots actors in addressing environmental issues. He stressed the importance of mid-level religious leaders involving communities and for all KAICIID-related activities and people working on interreligious dialogue and peace issues to include local communities. Touching on the topic of social cohesion, he explained that conflicts often develop in places where poor people live, and therefore focus should be on areas where community-based projects and engagement can best address related issues. He highlighted that issues related to environmental and climate change provide an excellent opportunity to strengthen partnerships and that KAICIID should expand to local areas to include SDG 13. He explained that addressing environmental issues is a win-win situation for programmes to eradicate scepticism regarding effectiveness and importance of interreligious and interfaith dialogue.

CONCLUSION





The exchanges and debates during the Dialogue4SDGs Conference showed **dialogue is a foundational practice** to sustainably advance the global development agenda and to support human rights, and that this practice can and must be inclusive. The religious sphere of societies, including religious actors and institutions and men and women of all ages, must be included when considering collective and cooperative process of working towards a better world.

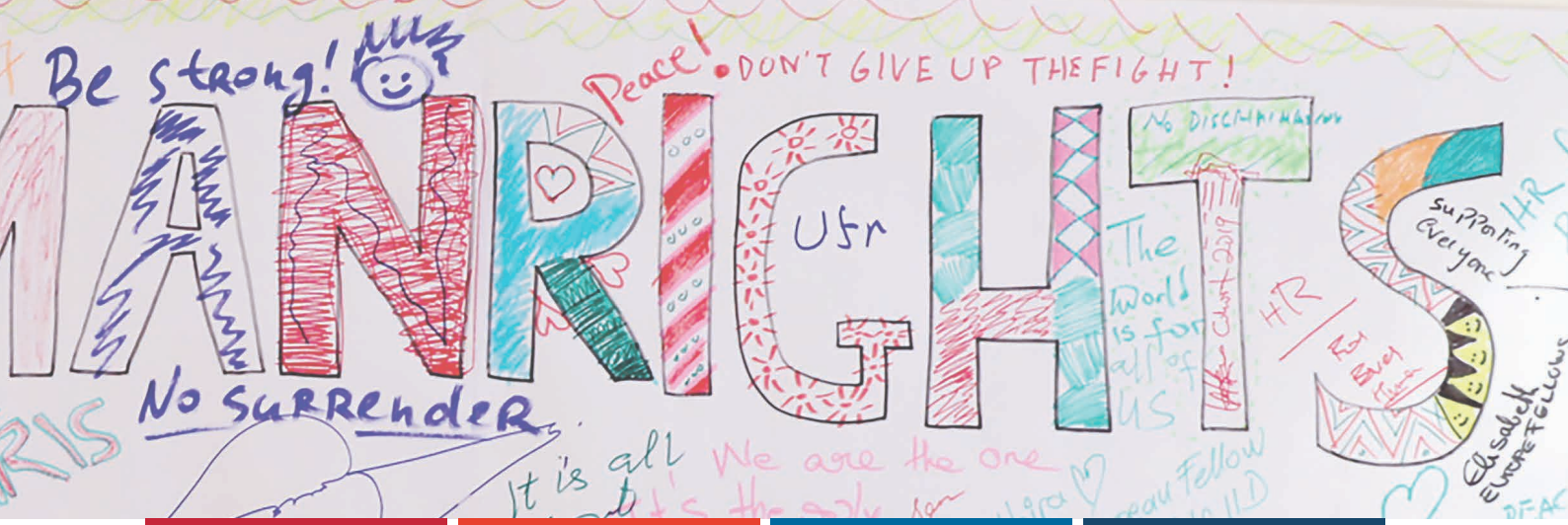
Interreligious dialogue is a tool to help build a better world by developing processes for communication and cooperation among governmental, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations. No matter how innovative or effective disparate interventions from individuals and organizations are, **advancing the SDGs requires larger coordinated collaboration** and reciprocal commitment, from the grassroots community level to international institutions and decision-making bodies, if results are to be achieved.

Grassroots organizations must understand the importance of the SDGs and not view them as an imposition on their communities or as issues outside their scope of responsibility. Simultaneously, international organizations must commit to engaging communities and investing in mechanisms for dialogue and knowledge-sharing regarding which approaches are being used effectively at the local level and then replicating, scaling and supporting these approaches.

Throughout the conference, participants emphasized the **need for knowledge-sharing and connecting** as well as empowering large numbers of people in accessible language. Participants spoke of a sense of urgency to find effective ways to engage grassroots. The Fellows' role in this process is to build bridges **connecting high-level institutions to the community level** in their countries. Fellows can also address misunderstandings in societies that increasingly are sources of distrust, antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia and violent extremism. It is important that Fellows serve as multipliers equipping other religious leaders, faith actors and interreligious dialogue practitioners to be leaders in these fields, especially where there is an absence of clear leadership.

The closing panel encouraged cooperation among governmental, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations, including knowledge-sharing, expressed as the most important part of SDG 17. Shared knowledge must be conveyed in a way that laypeople can understand, enabling action at the grassroots level.

Fellowship Alumni have established seven national alumni chapters in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka. It will be necessary to **explore how regional and international collaboration can be fostered** by drawing from these chapters and other Fellows in Africa, the Arab region, Europe, South Asia and



Southeast Asia. KAICIID will continue to support the establishment of national chapters as the network grows and to seek partnerships to work with Fellows in developing connections with important policymakers and decision-makers in their regions, such as with the African Union, where KAICIID Fellows serve on the steering committee.

The Centre is exploring ways to better partner with and develop relationships among Fellows' institutions. A needs assessment has been completed, aiming to create a network of educational, religious and interreligious dialogue institutions committed to advancing interreligious dialogue. The SDGs will remain a major focus in developing this network.

Because the majority of Fellows' institutions are educational organizations with a faith-based mandate, KAICIID will seek ways to build interreligious cooperation among the institutions and to **support establishment of high-quality interreligious dialogue curricula** and engagement opportunities in existing programmes that train religious leaders, youth and women in countries that need it most. It will be necessary to work in cooperation with these institutions to respect the unique beliefs, values and identity of each organization.

The inclusion of women in the Fellows programme has been a priority since its establishment, but more needs to be done to support women, focusing on initiatives and special projects that

coordinate activity among women peacebuilders throughout the world. The Fellowship Programme will continue to **promote the inclusion of ethnic and religious groups** that are currently underrepresented in the Fellows network and will seek out and recruit Fellows who are members of minority groups within their respective societies.

Partnerships are a key issue to be addressed in the longer term with Fellows, their institutions and other networks. KAICIID will continue to seek ways to coordinate with partners such as the African Union, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

The infographic on the next page shows the actions that are currently being taken, or could be taken in the future, to enhance the contribution of the Fellows programme to the SDGs.



ACTIONS

To enhance the contribution of the Fellows programme to the SDGs

Expand Micro-Grants

To strengthen interreligious dialogue activities in all areas

**SDG 4
EDUCATION**



Education and empowerment
Ensure women have access to education and the tools they need to be effective champions of interreligious dialogue

**SDG 5
WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT**



Resources
Continue to develop learning resources for Fellows and interreligious dialogue



Capacity-building
Train more regional experts and consider a scholarship programme to strengthen interreligious dialogue expertise



Multiply
Develop an expert mobility programme comprised of KAICIID and other regional experts



Connect
Develop more regional workshops and alumni exchange programmes



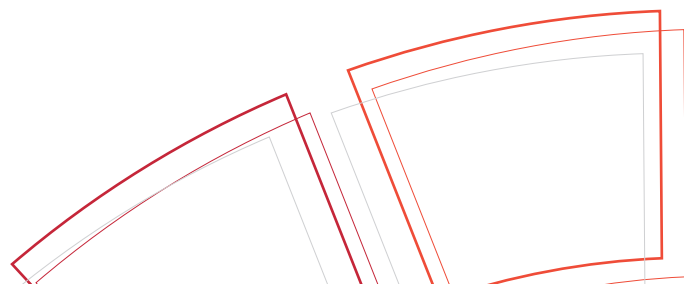
Empowerment
More support for women-centred and women-focused initiatives



Support
Encourage men to support women's inclusion and involvement



Recognize
Critical role women play in being champions and ambassadors of dialogue and peace throughout world



DIALOGUE 4SDGs

SDG 17 PARTNERSHIPS




Inclusion

Women, minority groups and indigenous groups represent themselves on issues important to them

SDG 16 PEACEFUL SOCIETIES




Scope

Consider expanding scope of engagement to other SDGs



Engagement

Improve interreligious dialogue engagement with policymakers and government through meetings, workshops and training



Commitment

Advocate for interreligious dialogue funding for more sustainable interreligious dialogue projects and programmes



Collaboration

Develop joint regional and global interreligious dialogue partnerships; encourage regional interreligious dialogue collaboration between national and international partners



Regional events and reunions

Increase number of regional interreligious dialogue events and institute alumni reunions



Reciprocity

Shape processes so learning and accountability are mutual



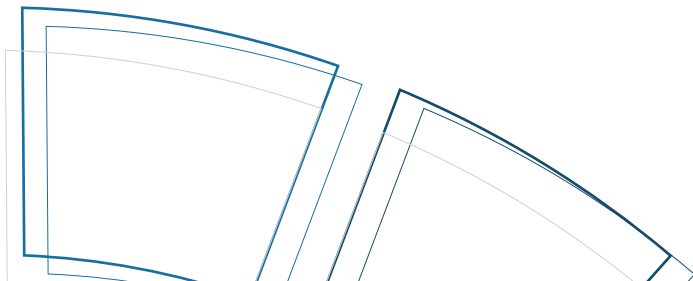
Institutions

Strengthen relationships with Fellows' institutions



Regional and subregional networks

Establish subregional networks for Fellows





4SDGs



The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)

Schottenring 21, A1010-Vienna, Austria

www.kaiciid.org

