



TONY BLAIR
INSTITUTE
FOR GLOBAL
CHANGE



Alliance for
Peacebuilding

Harnessing collective action for peace

Insights Forum

Working with Religious Actors to Build
Peaceful and Stable Societies

20-21 November 2019
Nairobi, Kenya

Purpose

In November 2019, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (the Institute) will convene an Insights Forum for organisations working with religious actors in the preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and peacebuilding sectors across the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. Our aim is to meet challenges with practical solutions in order to *better evidence the impact of working with religious actors to build peaceful and stable societies to practitioners and policymakers*. The Institute is partnering with the Alliance for Peacebuilding, building on the success of the Peacebuilding M&E Solutions Forum held in Washington, DC in October 2018 to ensure a strong focus on developing sector capacity for measuring programme impact and leveraging evidence for policy influence.

This concept note sets out the background to the Insights Forum and gives an overview of the content, with a view to encouraging proposal submissions from individuals and/or organisations interested in attending.

Rationale

Violent extremism is a threat to communities globally. As evidenced in the Institute's [Global Extremism Monitor](#), at least 121 violent Islamist groups were active across the world in 2017. Of these, 92 perpetrated violence in at least one country. Our programmatic work, which is kindly funded by GHR, has focussed on sub-Saharan Africa where violent extremism by organisations such as Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and the Lord's Resistance Army has led to millions of refugees and many thousands of deaths. In particular, Nigeria's Boko Haram demonstrates the fluidity of violence across the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, having instigated attacks in four countries in 2017. This places a premium on identifying and disseminating transferrable lessons throughout the region and beyond.

While the causes of conflict are many and varied, they are all linked to an expression of identity, including religious identity. Violent extremist groups in Africa define themselves primarily in religious terms, based on a distorted understanding of their religion. The overarching extremist narrative feeds on local grievances, real and imagined, by manipulating religious identity to divide

communities and recruit fighters based on an ideological and exclusivist worldview that defines 'the other' as 'the enemy'.

Engaging with religious actors is therefore of vital importance to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) and identity-based conflict, and contribute to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, inclusive human rights and freedom of religious belief, and social cohesion in affected communities. The political and operational space around P/CVE programming contributes to the perception that it is a distinct and novel field, yet peacebuilding and P/CVE increasingly intersect; a peacebuilding approach to P/CVE has the potential to leverage existing positive dynamics in conflict contexts, grounded in local knowledge, and should not be dismissed from the conversation.

The 2015 UN Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism recognises the role of faith and community leaders as "critical in mentoring vulnerable followers so as to enable them to reject violent ideologies" and calls for greater cross-sector collaboration between governments and civil-society organisations on extremism. Yet the international community lacks a comprehensive understanding of *how* to effectively engage religious actors and enhance their capacity as influencers to counter the ideological basis of extremist narratives. Building this capacity is critical to strengthening the social cohesion necessary for individuals and groups to be resilient to the push and pull factors that drive extremism.

Practitioners in the P/CVE and peacebuilding fields struggle to generate robust evidence of how interventions have led to positive outcomes, including increased cooperation and social cohesion that is attributable to reduced levels of violence. Weak M&E practices have led to a lack of solid methodological examples, tested approaches and proof of concepts for programming aimed to contribute to change processes in complex environments. This lack of evidence prohibits our ability to demonstrate to partners, donors and policymakers the importance of investing in work with religious actors to prevent violent extremism and conflict.

To continue addressing this gap by helping practitioners and policymakers identify and respond to the challenges of working with religious actors, the Institute and the Alliance for Peacebuilding will convene a stakeholder Insights Forum in Nairobi, Kenya from 20-21 November 2019 to promote knowledge sharing, action learning and policy dialogue.

Objectives

The objectives for the event are:

- 1) To explore shared challenges and recommendations for effective working with religious actors and groups across the P/CVE, peacebuilding and conflict resolution sectors.
- 2) To share best practices, lessons learned, results, and evidence of impact across the broad spectrum of M&E activities.
- 3) To gather evidence to inform advocacy, policy and practice across the P/CVE, Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) and peacebuilding communities.

Target Audience

We aim to bring together religious leaders, national and international civil-society actors, representatives of UN organisations and regional bodies, diplomatic and donor communities, government representatives, and academics. We are keen to focus on individuals and organisations from the global South with knowledge of relevant policy issues and country-level experience, to ensure the discussion maintains a bottom-up focus and the emphasis remains on the voices of local actors.

Forum Design

The two-day Forum will include an opening keynote address, thematic panel discussions and M&E presentations or demonstrations, and a closing dialogue on programmatic and policy recommendations.

Panel discussions will include 3-4 speaker presentations followed by an audience Q&A or breakout sessions. One presentation on each panel will focus on improving evidence-based M&E practice including innovative methodological approaches. Shorter M&E presentations and demonstrations will include 1-2 organisations or individuals sharing creative, flexible, and successful strategies to pressing M&E problems in the P/CVE and peacebuilding fields.

The Institute and the Alliance for Peacebuilding are confident this design will allow the Insights Forum to be an opportunity for practitioners to come together, network and connect with people working in this space, and collectively share best practices, lessons learned, results, and evidence from across the broad spectrum of P/CVE and peacebuilding programming.

A Forum Report will be made available after the event to support wider advocacy for programmatic and policy change.

Call for Proposals

The Insights Forum's guiding question is "How can we better evidence the impact of working with religious actors to build peaceful and stable societies to practitioners and policymakers?" The Forum will include a series of panel sessions and M&E presentations and demonstrations addressing key challenges and lessons learned to improve the practice, delivery, quality and impact of programming, and inform policy development.

Who is eligible to submit a proposal: We would like to invite submissions from diverse organisations and speakers to participate on a panel or deliver an M&E presentation or demonstration. Organisations who implement direct P/CVE or peacebuilding programming are encouraged to submit a proposal. Programmes that are implemented in fragile and conflict-affected countries that address grievances, violence reduction, and prevention but are not conflict prevention or peacebuilding programmes specifically will also be accepted on a case-by-case basis. Submissions should be based on relevant research or programmes and provide an opportunity for practitioners to learn from and engage with the challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations from practical experience.

General Area: Sessions should have a primary focus within one of the following thematic areas:

1. **Working at the Interface of Religion/Ideology, Identity and Grievance** – What are our insights in respect of the relationship between religion and other drivers of ideological extremism?
2. **The Effectiveness of Intra-Religious and Inter-Religious Action in Countering Extremist Narratives** – How and in what contexts does intra- and inter-religious action help build stable, prosperous and peaceful societies?
3. **Approaches to Changing Gender Norms in P/CVE:** Understanding pervasive norms feeding extremist narratives and obstructing prevention efforts – What does effective gender inclusion look like?
4. **Empowering ('Privileging') Local Voices and Community-Led Approaches** – How do we ensure that community-led projects are 1) sustainable and 2) informing wider policy?
5. **Engaging Youth** – What approaches and models are effective for youth inclusion in peacebuilding and P/CVE programming?

To help inform these discussions the Institute will circulate a Lessons Learned Paper in advance of the Forum that will examine the P/CVE field in greater detail and present a series of provisional programmatic and policy recommendations.

Session Type: Proposals should appeal to participants with varying levels of P/CVE, peacebuilding and M&E experience. We will accept proposals for Panel Speakers, Evidence Presentations, and Methodological Demonstrations.

- **Panel Speakers:** 90-minute panels on the 5 thematic areas above will present and discuss key issues related to the guiding question. Each panel will be composed of 3-4 speakers and a moderator. Panel speakers are encouraged to use their programmatic experiences to address the question and discuss evidence-based challenges, lessons learned and recommendations. Priority consideration will be given to panel speakers who integrate M&E into their presentation.
- **M&E Evidence Presentation:** Evidence presentations are 20-minute presentations that present monitoring and/or evaluation results and data. This includes formal and informal, and internal and external M&E results. In addition, the presentation must include a discussion on the approach/methodology employed, programmatic context, how the data was verified, replicability of the methodology, and lessons learned.
- **M&E Methodological Demonstrations:** Methodological demonstrations are 20-minute presentations that show how to use or apply an M&E concept, methodology, or tool. This includes data collection methodologies, sampling processes/beneficiary selection, monitoring methodologies, M&E tools, data quality processes, data visualization, and dissemination and sharing procedures. The presentation must include lessons learned from application of the concept or tool being presented.

Proposals must be submitted through an online form by **5 August 2019** here:

<https://forms.gle/AoyYyEUzACv1Vu6Y8>

5 August 2019 - Submission Deadline

22 August 2019 - Notification of Acceptance

31 October 2019 - Presentation Outline and Speaker Biography

4-8 November 2019 - Calls with the Institute and Session Panellists

20-21 November 2019 - Insights Forum

The Insights Forum is **free to attend**. The Institute and the Alliance for Peacebuilding are unfortunately unable to cover travel and accommodation expenses for attendees, but funding may be available for 1-2 exceptional proposals. We invite organisations willing and able to sponsor local participants to attend the Forum to contact the Institute for more information.

We are most grateful to GHR for their generous funding for the Insights Forum.

Contact

If you would like more information or are interested in becoming involved in this event, please contact Anum Farhan, a.farhan@institute.global.