



## GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGING FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS (FBOs) AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

These Guidelines provide a critical framework for engagement with faith-based organisations (FBOs). They are not a blue-print. Like all similar guidelines, these are provided with the pragmatism that each UNFPA Country and Regional Office will consider them in light of the specific political, social, cultural and economic circumstances.

The Guidelines are designed to provide a rationale for the engagement of and with, faith-based organisations, the principles structuring such engagements, and the strategy for partnership. The elements of these guidelines are derived from UNFPA’s terms of partnership with other constituencies (i.e. parliamentarians and youth). In addition, the guidelines are built on the lessons learned from prior Country Office engagement, gleaned from the mapping exercise undertaken from 2006-2008; best practices from case studies compiled from 2002-2008; as well as the recommendations and discussions carried out with FBOs themselves over the course of 2007-2008.

### RATIONALE

*“At a time where basic needs are becoming increasingly harder to provide for more than half of the world’s population, we can no longer avoid acknowledging the parallel faith-based development universe which reaches so many and provides so much.”*

The case for working with faith-based organizations , as one community among many critical agents of change, is no longer a matter of discussion, but rather, one of considered, systematic and deliberate engagement of the like-minded partners among them. For many years, international development has been a field dominated by largely ‘secular’ agents of development, with a preference for keeping faith and faith-related matters strictly in the so-called ‘private’ domains. At the same time, many scholars, human rights activists, and indeed, development actors, have argued persuasively that the dividing line between ‘public’ and ‘private’ is increasingly blurred. This is increasingly the case in a globalised world where information technology enables rapid and pervasive information flows.

Moreover, there is clearly an important parrallel faith-based universe of development, one which provides anywhere between 30-60% of health care and educational services in many developing countries. At a time when basic needs are becoming increasingly harder to provide for more than half of the world’s population, we can no longer avoid acknowledging these parallel faith-based development interventions which reach so many and provide so much. Many are critical venues for outreach, resources, and service delivery.

The world of faith-based development organizations is filled with a diversity of mandates, missions, expertise, services, modality of work, among other things. Religions themselves are a vast and complex tapestry, and this is reflected in the plurality of faith-based organisations. Amongst this world are friends of the MDGs and the ICPD. And it is to these friends – with a legacy of engagement and service provision – that the international development world turns, as was the case over a quarter of a century ago, with other civil society organizations.

An important realisation from the mapping of FBO engagement undertaken by UNFPA from 2006-2008, is that even where headquarters of United Nations and development agencies were themselves too hesitant to engage with the faith-based sectors, some of the country or field-based offices did anyway. This was a natural evolution not necessarily always mandated by policy, but in most instances, because the realities on the ground required it, and it was strategic to realise their objectives.

## PRINCIPLES

UNFPA believes that partnership with faith-based organisations is vital for the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo, 1994), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, New York, 2000) and the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit (New York, 2005).

The legacy of engaging FBOs as cultural agents, complemented with recent initiatives, provides important opportunities to reflect on and formulate UNFPA's lessons learned and respective policy considerations around engaging FBOs, as part of its overall strategy to create conducive socio-cultural environments, and consolidate partnerships for population and development. While continuing in-depth consultations and partnership outreach (within UNFPA, at the UN interagency level, and beyond), UNFPA is guided by the following 5 policy considerations:

### PRINCIPLES:

1. *Strategic, issue-based alliances*
2. *A level playing field*
3. *Diversity of outreach*
4. *Clarity, accountability and consistency*
5. *South-South engagement and global continuity*

- 1. Strategic issue-based alliances:** focusing on the common ground (instead of divisive aspects) allows consideration of joint efforts to achieve the ultimate objectives captured in UNFPA's mission statement. This is realistic when focusing on specific issues. The common ground is a critical building block of these partnerships. UNFPA has found that leaders of faith - and interfaith - based organizations are open to discussing reproductive health, if issues are addressed with care and sensitivity. It is clear that women's equal rights, and reproductive rights in particular, are not usually

the issues which generate consensus in the faith-based world – and especially not publicly. Nevertheless, UNFPA recognises the importance of rallying those within the faith-based communities who are already supportive of the common goals and targets embodied in the ICPD PoA, are reflected in and reindorsed by the MDGs, and have ongoing programmes to that effect. One effective approach has been to use scientific evidence, on issues such as infant and maternal mortality, violence against women, and HIV and AIDS prevalence rates for instance, to tap into ethical positions.

Moreover, none of these alliances have to be life-long partnerships. Each engagement is predicated upon certain circumstances and needs, and may well be, as per the discretion

and consideration of the UNFPA Office, time-bound. This is a valid and necessary aspect of a strategic alliance, which also requires anticipating an exit strategy.

**2. A level playing field:** While UNFPA recognizes the differences between its mandate and approach and those of FBOs, it nevertheless seeks to cooperate as equal partners, depending on each other's comparative advantage and respective strengths. Partnering as equals also entails that neither side is utilized or perceived as a means, but both are relevant agents of action based on their different, and in many instances, complementary strengths. While the partnerships sought within the FBO community are expected to share the objectives of the ICPD-linked MDGs, UNFPA respects that they would reach these objectives differently – using their own language, networks and *modus operandi*. And in the meantime, UNFPA acknowledges that the diverse languages and methods require mutual understanding and sensitivity, at all times.

**3. Diversity of outreach:** UNFPA ensures that its outreach is multi-faith and balanced according to the religious diversity within communities, nations and globally. This is often made explicit in the terms of reference of the programmes. One of the lessons learned is that this multi-faith outreach approach cannot be implicit. UNFPA also recognizes that in order to identify like-minded partners and continuously enhance the modality and programme delivery, engaging with already established multi-faith organizations and communities which already work on an inter- and intra-faith basis is critical.

**4. Clarity, accountability and consistency:** As with any other partnership, UNFPA sets out clearly (in Memoranda of Understanding, joint proposals, or other project documents) the concrete outcomes expected of the joint endeavours. How the partnership falls within the parameters of the Strategic Plan (and its Global and Regional programmes), defines joint mechanisms of accountability, monitoring and evaluation, which are then discussed and on which agreement is reached. Moreover, the engagement with FBOs needs to be consistent, not a one-off, event-oriented alliance which creates false expectations. An engagement that is designed with a collective sense of ownership and responsibility for specific outcomes in mind, is also one that is sustainable. Together, clarity, accountability and consistency are essential for building the trust necessary to establish a legacy of realistic partnerships.

5. Throughout these partnerships, UNFPA maintains two important dimensions *and* targets of its commitment which significantly enrich the experience and inform the policy considerations:

- ✓ **South-South engagement:** Within each region, and amongst its five regions (e.g. Africa, Arab States, Asia and Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean), there is much scope for knowledge sharing, creation of knowledge networks, and the strengthening of alliances. Indeed, several UNFPA Country Offices expressed an interest in learning from other experiences of engaging FBOs and indeed, in strengthening their own networks of faith-based partners.

- ✓ ***Global perspectives, comparisons and continuity:*** There is much to be said for a continuous feedback loop where the national, regional and the global/international enrich one another. There are several cases where national and regional efforts at engagement have been informed by organizations which, at the global level, advocate against some aspects of the ICPD Programme of Action. Yet, there are other instances where some FBOs are actually finding very creative means to provide ICPD relevant services at the field levels, mandated by circumstances and needs. Such knowledge and comparison of engagements at the national, regional and international levels, i.e. feedback loops, enable better appreciation of FBO interventions, as well as grounding and sustainability of the partnerships formed.

## STRATEGY

### UNFPA's working definition of FBOs

Faith-based organisations are religious, faith-based groups, and/or faith-inspired groups which operate as registered or unregistered non-profit institutions. UNFPA partners with human rights-oriented FBOs which are service deliverers and/or advocates (existing and potential) of the ICPD PoA areas.

The main goals of UNFPA in working with faith-based organizations therefore, are to:

1. Create a conducive socio-cultural environment (impacting on behaviour, attitudes and practices) to ultimately promote and mobilize key communities towards achieving the goals of the ICPD PoA and the MDGs; and
2. Strengthen the range of pro-ICPD agents and friends, through integrating various partnerships formed at the national, regional and global levels, formed to impact on socio-cultural dynamics, policies and programmes which would further implement the ICPD PoA and the MDGs.

Generally, UNFPA will build on and expand its work with various national, regional and global interfaith Networks by participating in their meetings and providing funding, technical, logistical and other support for their activities. UNFPA will strengthen its partnership with faith-based organizations around three key areas: capacity building, knowledge sharing and advocacy, as follows:



### Capacity Building

- Strengthening national, regional and the global FBO/Interfaith networks to bring them together with broader stakeholder coalitions which can support and endorse each other as well as UNFPA's mandate areas.
- Providing and facilitating trainings, workshops, and safe spaces around human-rights and rights-based approaches to programming.
- Securing the necessary resources through endorsing their integration in national development plans and development assistance programmes for population and development programmes, particularly for SRH and family planning (FP).

### Knowledge Sharing

- Sharing and facilitating access to latest evidence-based knowledge and information amongst Interfaith Networks around sexual and reproductive health (SRH), gender equality (GE) and population and development (PD) issues.
- Documenting and updating information on partnerships between FBOs and UNFPA around SRH, GE and PD to ensure collation and analysis of lessons learned for enhanced respective outreach and advocacy.

### Advocacy

- Integrating the Interfaith Network (at national, regional and international levels) in advocacy efforts for ICPD+15 together with other networks.
- Protecting and promoting the ICPD agenda and the work of UNFPA and its partners through countering misinformation campaigns and building social support within the governments for the ICPD.

More specifically, in programme countries, UNFPA's **Country Offices** will facilitate the creation of national Interfaith Networks on population and development in countries where they do not exist. The Country Offices will therefore continue to work closely with the national FBOs working on ICPD related issues and integrate them within other civil society outreach to create and nurture a favourable social environment for RH issues. This will be particularly strategic since most FBOs tend to be male-dominated (at the leadership levels) and therefore such Interfaith Networks also serve as an important means of engaging men in gender-equality related initiatives. UNFPA Country Offices will also advocate for efforts by rights-oriented national FBOs to be involved in national development planning around population and development programmes.

In **donor countries**, UNFPA Headquarters and the Liaison Offices will strengthen their work with the global interfaith network to garner support for the further implementation of the ICPD PoA and the MDGs. They will also support efforts by members of the interfaith networks to promote awareness of population issues and build supportive coalitions. In addition, the UNFPA Headquarters and Liaison Offices will continue to provide interfaith network members with factual information on the ICPD agenda and the work of UNFPA and its partners to counter any misinformation.



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At the **regional level**, UNFPA Headquarters, in collaboration with the Regional Offices (ROs), will promote dialogue and cooperation among FBOs by supporting sub-regional, regional and inter-regional consultations and capacity-building. It will continue to assist the regional FBO networks on population and development in enhancing RH-related service provision modalities and/or referral services, where necessary; and assisting with the development of models of best practices which could be adapted in different countries.

Finally, at the **global level**, UNFPA Headquarters will seek to coordinate and monitor FBO/Interfaith initiatives conducted at the national and regional levels in order to bring coherence to, maximize the impact of, and safeguard, the work of UNFPA and its partners with this critical constituency. It will continue to liaise at the interagency level, specifically around policies and strategies as regards FBO engagement. It will also develop mechanisms, such as a socio-cultural observatory, socio-cultural programme indicators, to monitor the impact of FBO engagement on creating an enabling environment and mobilizing resources for population and development. As the permanent secretariat for this Interfaith Network, UNFPA Headquarters will continue to keep FBOs informed, through the database and LISTSERV, of opportunities and progress being made on population funding, directions, policies and programmes.

### **The Istanbul Consensus**

#### **Principles of a Global Interfaith Network**

#### **for Population and Development [October 2008]**

The gathered representatives of UNFPA and FBOs from around the world commit to:

- The principle that faiths share the same aims to safeguard the dignity and human rights of all people, women and men, young and old;
- Work together to advance human well-being and realize the rights of all individuals with attention to women and young people;
- Identify regional and national UNFPA-FBO focal points;
- Exchange experiences and learn from each other through the Interfaith Network;
- Ensure that FBO partners own the principles of the Network and maintain linkages with each other, with the support of UNFPA;
- Continue to maintain strong regional and national networks supported by UNFPA Country Offices, feeding into a Global Network facilitated by Headquarters, as a working modality to realize the ICPD mandate.