



Capacity for Inter-Religious Community Action (CIRCA) II: End of Project Evaluation



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Capacity for Inter-Religious Community Action (CIRCA) II: End of Project Evaluation¹

The Capacity for Inter-Religious Community Action (CIRCA) II project aimed to contribute to human development and peaceful coexistence among Muslim and Christian communities in Niger and Kenya. The three-year program² was funded by GHR Foundation and led by CRS. Building off CIRCA I,³ an earlier program which focused on capacity strengthening of partner and CRS staff members, CIRCA II focused on sustainability and both partner- and community-level capacity building for facilitating Muslim-Christian cooperation, managing inclusive connector projects, and influencing policy and practice through advocacy. CIRCA II was implemented in collaboration with three partner agencies at four project sites:

- The Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC)—oversaw activities in Matolani, Malindi, Kenya
- The Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya (AOSK)—oversaw activities in Garissa, Kenya
- The Diocese of Maradi / Islamo-Christian Dialogue Commission (ICDC)—oversaw activities in Konni and Agadez, Niger.

The evaluation focused on the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the CIRCA II project by examining to what extent the project met its strategic objective of supporting Muslim and Christian leaders, including youth, to increase collaboration in addressing religiously driven violence and issues of social concern. It was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, when all jurisdictions were under contact restrictions, so a difficult decision was made to evaluate remotely. While the evaluation cannot claim absolutely certainty about its findings due to the limitations of remote methods, the results show the project achieved an unusually high level of effectiveness in improving Muslim-Christian cooperation. The connector projects appear to have brought medium-high effectiveness in the economic empowerment of women through income generation and micro-finance, which also led to some gains in social empowerment. In contrast, the youth connector project groups did not develop as hoped, except in Garissa, where the youth group excelled at income generation and peace advocacy. The frequency of advocacy was medium-high in Kenya and medium-low in Niger, with the latter due in part to staggered starting points and different social-political contexts. Across the project, non-participants were aware of these new developments, and often observed with great interest. While the improvements in Muslim-Christian cooperation got a strong start during CIRCA I, the gains in connector project management capacity, empowerment of women and social justice advocacy are all primarily attributable to CIRCA II.

1 This summary was prepared by CRS, based on an evaluation report by external evaluation consultant, Michelle Garred, PhD, of Ripple—Peace Research & Consulting, LLC. Its structure differs significantly from the evaluation report as it is intended for a general audience.

2 CIRCA II was implemented from June 30, 2017 to September 30, 2020.

3 CIRCA I ran from July 2013—June 2017 and targeted six countries in Africa: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Egypt, Nigeria and Niger. Click [here](#) for an evaluation of this program.

The sustainability of these gains needs the attention of the partner organizations along with CRS support; the apparent lack of a self-reliant ‘transition’ mindset among participants, combined with the disruptions caused by Covid-19, has put the project at risk in terms of maintaining and expanding its connector projects and other cooperative community efforts. Additionally, while an unsuccessful attempt to install a bore hole in Matolani resulted in a nascent county government response, the effect will be very positive if the county government’s water effort succeeds, and potentially damaging as catalyst for inter-group conflict if it does not. As with all the sites, there is rich learning to be explored on connector projects and their relationship to horizontal and vertical social cohesion.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

CIRCA II’s strategic objective was: “Muslims and Christians in targeted communities have increased collaboration in addressing religiously driven violence and issues of social concern.” This was supported by three desired outcomes.

1. Targeted Christian and Muslim male and female community members, including youth, have become active proponents of interreligious understanding and peaceful coexistence.
2. Interreligious committees that include men, women and youth are jointly managing community initiatives as incubators for constructive interreligious engagement on issues of mutual concern.
3. CIRCA partners jointly bring Muslim and Christian community perspectives and faith values to influence policy and practice on issues of social justice and religiously driven violence.

CIRCA II’S OVERARCHING THEORY OF CHANGE

“If Muslims and Christians in target communities witness more people and key people promoting peaceful interreligious coexistence;

and **if** they have access to ongoing opportunities to interact constructively with the religious “other;”

and **if** their priorities, perspectives and concerns related to religiously driven violence and social justice are being heard;

then there will be increased Muslim-Christian collaboration to address those concerns,

because they will have improved their relationships based on shared understanding, values and experiences, and because structural drivers of division between them will have been reduced.”

Key implementation approaches included:

- Organizational capacity-strengthening in areas of conflict analysis, sensitivity, mediation/negotiation, social justice and advocacy, resource mobilization, financial management (for women’s micro-finance groups), and monitoring and evaluation. The GHR-funded Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI) tool was used.

- ‘Connector projects’ to bring people together across religious lines so that they would be able to address shared development concerns. They were guided by community-based project management committees. A majority of participants were women, representing a shift in traditionally male-dominated contexts. Cultural norms required women and youth to work separately at the outset of the project.

THE EVALUATION

This evaluation was carried out in August and September 2020. All evaluation activities were conducted remotely via internet and telephone communications, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. One hundred two interviews were conducted among project participants, staff and stakeholders by a team of six interviewers using five languages (Kiswahili, Giriama and English for Kenya, and Hausa and French for Niger). The interview content emphasized quantitative perception ratings coupled with qualitative explanations of behavior changes observed and other aspects of the interviewee’s experiences. Specifically, participants were given a statement on one project aim and asked to rate their level of agreement on a scale of one to five, with one meaning strong disagreement and five meaning strong agreement. In a follow-up question, participants were asked to explain and expand upon each rating, with the resulting qualitative data being coded to identifying observable behavior changes. While there was no way to validate each individual story of change, counting and comparing the coded categories made it possible to identify meaningful big-picture patterns. The evaluation’s phone-based approach combined with the spread of the interviewing team across six locations posed a number of limitations, including highly constrained communication with project participants and difficulty in accessing external stakeholders, so the evaluation cannot claim absolutely certainty about its findings.

Figure 1: Data Collection 102 mixed-method interviews by six interviewers using KoBo Toolbox

KEY CHARACTERISTIC	PROPORTIONS (ROUNDED)
Location	Agadez 19%; Konni 34%; Garissa 20%; Matolani 18%; Niger (both) 3%; Other 7%
Religion	Christian 57%; Muslim 42%; Other (Kaya) 2%
Sex	Women 60%; Men 40%
Youth Status	55% self-identify as youth
Role	Connector project participant 39% Connector project management committee member 31% Staff of implementing organization 11% External local stakeholder 1% Other 10%
Interview Type⁴	Local (participants) 81%; Midlevel (staff, stakeholders) 19%

⁴ ‘Local perspective’ interviews were conducted with direct participants, while ‘midlevel perspective’ interviews were conducted with staff of both CRS and implementing partners, including clergy, plus external stakeholders.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section summarizes findings—clustered in three categories—against all ten questions.

CATEGORY 1: PROGRESS TOWARD OBJECTIVES⁵

Participants found the overall effectiveness of CIRCA II in improving Muslim-Christian relations to be quite high⁶, on the basis of perception ratings. These ratings reflect not only the quality of the project, but also the natural human desire to present progress in the best possible light. To mitigate this positive bias, the perception ratings should not be interpreted as absolute scores but only as relative comparisons of success across the different project objectives and components, and should always be triangulated against the observable changes in behavior. Figure 2, on the following page, presents the perception ratings in a project-wide format in order to show the variation in interviewee responses. Figure 3, on the following page, presents the same perception ratings disaggregated and averaged by project site.

PERCEPTION-RATED STATEMENTS

- The Connector Project has been successful in increasing cooperation between Christians and Muslims. (M-C Cooperation).
- I have experienced positive changes in the way that I relate to people of other religious backgrounds. (Individual M-C Changes).
- The Connector Project has been successful in improving the economic wellbeing of the participants. (Econ Wellbeing.)
- The Connector Project has been successful in empowering women. (Empower Women).
- The Connector Project has been successful in empowering youth. (Empower Youth).
- Ten years from now, this project's effects will still be felt in the community. (Ten Years Future).
- The local community and government leaders are committed to this Connector Project. (Local/Gov Leader Comm).

QUESTION 1: To what extent is there behavior shift among the participants across religious groups, including actions in which faith actors were involved/engaged in both within and out of CIRCA project?

CIRCA II achieved an unusually high level of effectiveness in improving Muslim-Christian cooperation, including newly integrated civil society formations that were ground-breaking in the contexts of Konni and Agadez. The improved relations included both individual changes and broader cooperation within the project and at all four sites, and this was confirmed by behavioral change data. Figure 4 below presents the proportion of interviewees in each project site who mentioned a particular type of behavior change. (For the detailed definition of each coded behavior change category, see Annex B.)

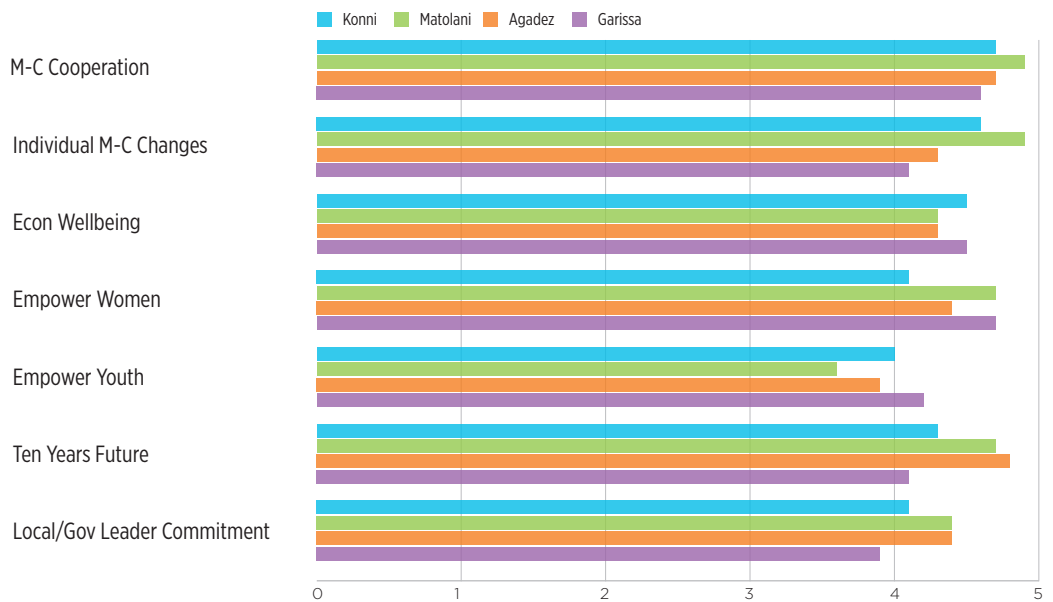
⁵ For a summary of Insights by Project Site, see Annex A.

⁶ Less than 10 interviewees gave a negative perception rating (1 or 2) in response to any question. This occurred primarily on questions relating to economic empowerment and sustainability. Interestingly, it did not occur at all in Konni. However, across all locations, interviewees sometimes used 'don't know' or 'no response' as a subtle alternative way of expressing negative views.

Figure 2: Perception Ratings Project-Wide—by number of participants

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
M-C Cooperation	70	28	1			1
Individual M-C Changes	48	28		3	1	1
Econ Wellbeing	48	42	2	2		4
Empower Women	54	29	2		1	
Empower Youth	32	30	12	4		
Ten Years Future	54	28	4	2	1	7
Local/Gov Leader Commitment	31	48	4	2		9

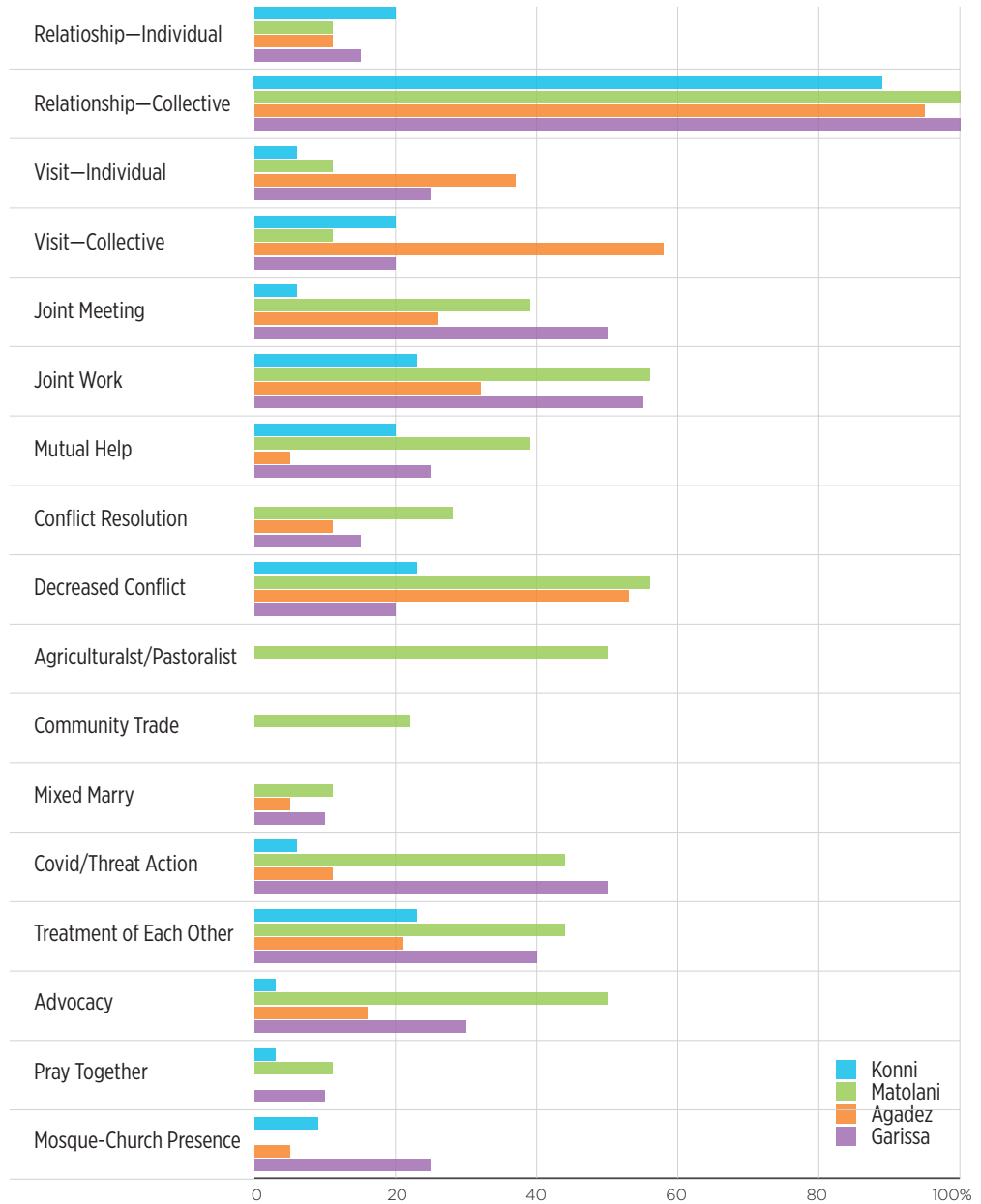
Figure 3: Perception Ratings by Project Site (averaged)



By far the most common type of behavior change—mentioned in over 90% of the interviews—was a collective shift in Muslim-Christian relationships at the group level.

Specifically, in Niger, over time, after participating in project activities and trainings, *‘they decided to become one group.’*⁷

Figure 4: Behavior change in Muslim-Christian relations—percentage of participants (interviewee mentions, qualitatively coded)



Muslim and Christian project participants at all four sites demonstrated this change publicly and there were sporadic, albeit not particularly consistent, reports of participants becoming proponents by actively advocating peace to others. Other frequently mentioned types of behavior change included collective visits, joint

7 The interviewee excerpts, formatted with italics through the report, are tight paraphrases rather than verbatim quotes. In most cases they were documented and then translated by local interviewers. In some cases, their grammar was edited to support reader comprehension.

meetings, joint work, mutual help, changed treatment of each other, and decreased conflict. Also, many interviewees described changes in their beliefs about God and the inclusion of other people as being closely related to their growing interreligious cooperation. Also, Christians were more likely to mention most types of behavior change in general. However, Muslims were more likely to mention the more purely relational types of behavior change, including individual and collective social visits, and changes in one-on-one relationships. In retrospect, the gains in Muslim-Christian relations started during CIRCA I. The additional marginal improvement during CIRCA II appears to be substantial in terms of deepening cooperation and broadening (albeit within limits) the number of people engaged.

Also, across the project, non-participants often observed these new developments with great interest, giving rise to an awareness that a better way of relating and cooperating was possible between Christians and Muslims.

QUESTION 2: To what extent have interreligious committees that include men, women and youth jointly managed community initiatives as incubators for constructive interreligious engagement on issues of mutual concern?

Participants communicated moderate success (relative to their other perception ratings) with regard to constructively engaging on issues of mutual concern. The connector projects appear to have made significant progress in improving participant economic wellbeing and the economic empowerment of women through income generation and micro-finance, which also led to some gains in social empowerment. In contrast, the lowest relative perception ratings apply to the empowerment of youth through connector projects; they did not develop as hoped, except in Garissa, where the youth group excelled at income generation and peace advocacy. Participants, implementers and CRS staff were all concerned about the challenges in the youth component, given the importance of the youth to future peace and development.

Project management committee members and mid-level interviewees provided more optimistic perception ratings on certain project components relating to economic empowerment and sustainability. However, they were also more likely to report unexpected or negative events.

QUESTION 3: To what extent did CIRCA II respond to the needs of the project beneficiaries, in light of religion, age and gender considerations?

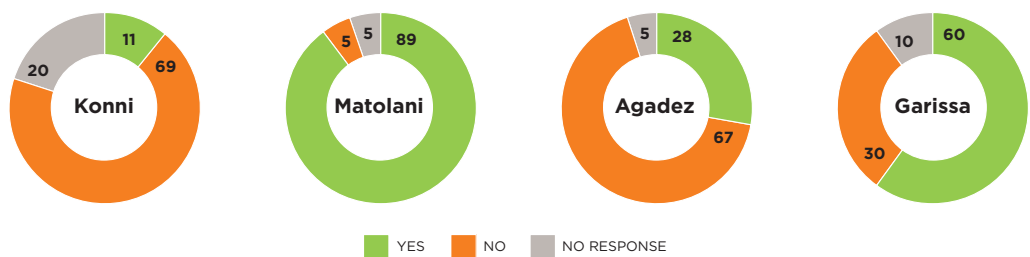
The women's groups brought about economic benefits and also social empowerment through the connector projects; notably in Garissa, women also became aware of their rights. The use of shared savings schemes such as the merry-go-round was particularly successful. The youth projects presented the most challenges. That said, the pro-peace mindset of those participating youth and even young children were influenced by their participant mothers. The separation between women's groups and predominantly male youth groups, while necessary for cultural reasons at the outset of the project, may later have unintentionally deprived the groups of key opportunities to support each other's momentum.

There are cases in which the limitations of remote evaluation inhibit a fully nuanced interpretation of important comments, particularly in Niger where there were signs that some participants' expectations were not met, and that some experienced communication gaps and tensions in relation to project leadership. The frequency with which such comments appear indicates the importance of exploratory follow up in the form of local listening by the project leadership.

QUESTION 4: To what extent have CIRCA partners jointly brought Muslim and Christian community perspectives and faith values to influence policy and practice on issues of social justice and religiously driven violence?

Advocacy, defined as efforts to influence both government decision-making and public opinion, at any level ranging from micro to macro, was explored through several interview questions. Interviewees reported advocacy with medium high perceived frequency in the Kenya sites, and medium low perceived frequency in the Niger sites, as seen in Figure 5. There were numerous mentions in the Kenya sites of advocacy activities. Examples included the work of the youth group in Garissa to “lobby officials for peacebuilding between groups, across boundaries,” and their success in prompting government responses to trouble, as well as advocacy in Matolani around water and education. The frequency of advocacy mentions in the Niger sites were fewer due in part to staggered starting points and different social-political contexts. Still, Niger participants’ high perceptions of government and local leader commitment to and support for their efforts suggests that advocacy and influencing may in fact have been taking place in contextually unique forms that were not detected through remote interviews.

Figure 5: Advocacy—percentage of participants responding to the question “Have you seen any project participants seeking to influence government decisions or public opinion?”



Women made fewer mentions of advocacy and conflict resolution; they also made many more mentions than men of mutual help and actions taken against COVID-19. This could imply that women were less likely to participate in or observe the advocacy and conflict resolution, which traditionally are considered male activities.⁸ All reported cases of project participants advocating with community and government leaders were carried out by male participants, because male participants were the ones who enjoyed the privilege of potentially being heard in the context of the project sites.

PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED CHANGES IN LIVING THEOLOGY

- “We... share some Bible and Quran verses. We came to realize that we have some things in common, like serving one God. I realized that the negative beliefs were created by someone.”
- “As we learned that we have one God, we started working together. We learned that we had such small differences that made us hate each other. Then we decided to let go of the hatred and start working together and living peacefully.”
- “The Islamic religion teaches us that God wants us to be together, which is also the same as the Christian teachings. Unity is strength.”

⁸ Staff associated with the project also hypothesized that some women might be less likely to describe their advocacy and conflict resolution activities in traditionally male terms, even when they were in fact engaging local leaders and officials and/or addressing disputes.

CATEGORY 2: LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

QUESTION 5: To what extent have CIRCA partner organizations *improved capacity to manage, monitor, and sustain interreligious initiatives to address violence, promote peace and work for justice through integration of development and peacebuilding?*

All three implementing partner organizations, despite their diverse histories, strengths and contexts, perceived their own capacity as meaningfully improved. Both partner organization staff and connector project management committee members shared a strong appreciation for conflict analysis training, perceived as the most useful of all the training themes offered by CIRCA II. All three partner organizations also experienced learning how to work with community members in an empowering way. CRS staff provided coaching on principles such as working with community members rather than for them, inviting them to choose their own activities and priorities, and encouraging their self-reliance.

The question of gender balance in leadership is important for projects that seek to empower women. While women were well represented in the CIRCA II project management committees—which represents a very significant step forward—that was not typically the case among partner organization staff. AOSK offers the gift of modeling what a gender-balanced staff leadership team might look like, since the primary on-site implementation team consisted of one male priest and one female nun.

QUESTION 6: To what extent have efforts undertaken by partners and/or connector project participants strengthened social cohesion to respond to other *crises or stressors, such as/including COVID-19?*

Covid-19 attacked the gains of the project itself, undermining the economic progress of the connector project group participants, and preventing people from meeting together in groups. At the partners' suggestions some of the Garissa and Matolani participants carried out modest but meaningful campaigns to educate their neighbors and to provide key supplies such as handwashing stations in public places. The Garissa and Matolani experiences also included positive responses to stressors such as security incidents⁹ and flooding.

Additionally, one participant from Agadez—where participants prized the memory of their CIRCA I-era (2015) joint success in coming together to resist provocations related to the controversial publications of the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*—shared: *'Well since we got in (the project), we never had any problem, but we had a man from Saudi and we felt like he had a different opinion. So we tried to get his mind, and we told him what he sees has been going on for a long time.'* It is likely, though unconfirmed, that the “man from Saudi” was promoting a less tolerant interpretation of Islam, and questioning the legitimacy of interreligious cooperation. The Agadez participants perceived his views as a threat, and neutralized them with kindness.

QUESTION 7: What is the likelihood that the benefits of the project will endure over time (*sustainability*) after the completion of the project?

There appear to be several significant risks to sustainability. Despite the establishment and training of local connector project management committees, and twelve months of discussion on the transfer of responsibility to the community, interviewees across all project sites lacked a self-reliant ‘transition’ mindset. They did not talk about how they might draw on the assets, skills and capacities that were strengthened within their own communities. Covid-19 exacerbated the situation, undermined the project's

⁹ When the abduction of a foreign volunteer sparked a security crackdown on Muslim communities in and around Matolani, project participants responded with courageous solidarity. See Al Jazeera coverage at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/10/italian-volunteer-kidnapped-in-kenya-freed-after-18-months>

economic gains, and brought project activities to a slowed down or halted project activities during the critical transitional time in which activities needed to retain their forward momentum. This has put the project at risk in terms of maintaining and expanding its connector projects and other cooperative community efforts. Additionally, Garissa faces some ongoing opposition from an important community sub-group which was not engaged in the projects' constituency, and Matolani features an inconclusive water supply effort with sustainability implications, as explained under Question 9.

When asked specifically which project achievements will last the longest, participants spoke of key themes including the relationships between Christian and Muslim women, the use of shared savings schemes such as the merry-go-round, and the pro-peace mindsets of participating youth and even young children influenced by their participant mothers.

QUESTION 8: What are the *medium and long-term effects (direct and indirect, positive and negative, intended and unintended) of CIRCA II project interventions?*

Many of the medium-term effects of CIRCA I and II, both direct and indirect, can currently be seen. Direct effects, those that consistently reach the lives of project participants, appear to include: transformed mindsets around Muslim-Christian relations, transformed Muslim-Christian relationships at both group and one-on-one levels, and significant progress toward the ongoing economic and social empowerment of women. Medium-term indirect effects, those that reach beyond the project participants to influence the broader community, include the finding that the project demonstrated and created awareness within its respective communities that peaceful, friendly and cooperative relationships between Muslims and Christians are possible.

In the long-term, the only 'safe' gains are the transformed mindsets and one-on-one relationships. Everything else—the level of public cooperative activity that endures over the long term—will depend on intentional follow-up. There is also a latent vision for expansion that appears to be untapped. That is, many interviewees expressed a vision for reaching more people within their communities, and in Kenya also for expanding to neighboring communities. Yet they did not appear to have developed a plan or mechanism for using their newly acquired skills to help make that happen.

CATEGORY 3: LEARNING APPLICABLE TO OTHER PROJECTS¹⁰

QUESTION 9: What *lessons* can be learnt on CIRCA experience to enhance interreligious—specifically Muslim-Christian—social cohesion efforts in the program areas, and specifically what works well when working with faith actors?

Choosing Connector Projects: CIRCA II raises important questions about the relative benefits of different types of connector projects as it combined several women's economic empowerment efforts with the one very different undertaking, a daring bore hole well attempt in Matolani. The latter, while unsuccessful, had a vastly broader influence within its community because it aimed to benefit everyone rather than just a priority few. However, if unsuccessful, that broad influence carries with it a significant risk of doing harm.

¹⁰ See Annex C for Recommendations.

Overall, the connector project work in Matolani involved both individual and collective benefits, which is certainly a positive thing. Yet there may have been some unintentional clashes of expectations around specifically who would benefit individually, and to what extent. The original project a bore hole water well—aimed to address the community’s lack of water, a key driver of violent conflict. The envisioned benefit was collective, large and tangible, aimed to directly address a known key driving factor of conflict. It captured the whole community with a hopeful vision for peace and development. Unfortunately after many attempts, the did not produce water.

CICC shifted the CIRCA II project to women’s microfinance group project, while advocating with the government to address water needs. There have been multiple reports of the county government preparing to install a system of pipes and tanks to draw water from a nearby river. If this effort is successful, it will be a tremendous victory for the community and the contribution of CICC. In the meantime, there is a sense of unfinished business, and a wide range of opinions on the possibility that the ongoing lack of water could lead to a resumption of potentially violent conflict. About 15% of the interviewees expressed concern over that possibility.

In the alternative microfinance project, the women did well. In fact, they did so well that several interviewees voiced concerns about the lack of economic assistance for youth and men. This potential social jealousy towards the women’s’ groups appeared unique to Matolani, and it may have been spurred by the uniquely high profile nature of the original connector project which was intended to directly benefit all. Other creative alternatives to the well—the agriculturalists (Christian Giriama) and pastoralists (Muslim Orma) were building a school and a market—were incomplete at the project’s end. This left participants with a desire for further support.

The rich learning experience in Matolani suggests that in choosing a connector project, questions such as the following should be asked: What is the desired scope and footprint of impact? Should it benefit and influence a small carefully targeted group, or the entire community? Which types of connector project activities would lend themselves to the scope and level of impact that are appropriate in this situation? What is the group’s capacity to undertake the project, and when and how should outside technological advisors be engaged?

Relationship between Peace and Development Objectives: In CIRCA II, the peace and development objectives did mutually strengthen each other. The development objectives served as a ‘hook’ to help attract estranged groups to come together. Their coming together infused their business efforts with new possibilities (such as Muslim women considering whether there might be a religiously acceptable way to charge interest) and with expanded trade opportunities and customer bases (such as the Matolani improvements in livelihood-related conflict and trade relations that appear to have gone well beyond the circle of direct project participants).

The emergent CRS learning on connector projects stresses the importance of giving a strong and equal emphasis to both development objective and peace objectives,

while weaving them together. This sounds very appropriate. Yet in reality it seems likely that every connector project will be stronger on one set of objectives than the other. As CRS develops guidance resources on connector projects, it should instruct both community development staff who are seeking to integrate social cohesion into their programming, and peacebuilders who are seeking to integrate development activities to enhance and expand their peace outcomes.

Advocacy and Vertical Social Cohesion: Horizontal social cohesion was transformed in highly significant ways, but changes in vertical social cohesion were fewer and smaller. The project activities that developed one did not automatically develop the other. Future versions of CRS' flagship '3B' peacebuilding model—binding, bonding and bridging—could preferably make a stronger distinction between horizontal and vertical social cohesion.

Connector projects focused on women must, in many contexts, be realistic in their advocacy goals and creative in their approach given that cultural sensitivities on gender limit women's engagement in activities traditionally defined as advocacy, yet this may also change over time. Empowering advocacy by women may require that women and men work together to an extent not seen in CIRCA II, and that male participants help by actively create space for women to speak and lead.

Story-Based Monitoring and Evaluation: CRS project staff recognize that the complex and technically demanding monitoring system designed for CIRCA II may not have been the best fit, and so for similar future contexts they suggest a monitoring system that integrates the use of stories. Storytelling supports African oral tradition, which is still much stronger than the written word. Further, stories are more intuitive for grassroots partners and often for faith-based partners, since all religious traditions value accounts of attitudinal, spiritual and behavioral transformation. The stories are motivating, so when partners tell stories they are not only fulfilling a monitoring requirement, but also breathing life back into the project. Faith leaders tend to be more skilled at storytelling than statistics, so use of a storytelling method can build their confidence rather than tear it down.¹¹ While many stories are positive, they also have the potential to surface and capture problems or unintended project effects. Most storytelling approaches can coexist with and complement some forms of results-based management, assuming the combination is carefully designed.

Conflict Sensitivity: Conflict sensitivity was included in the CIRCA II conflict analysis training package, but it did not necessarily appear to be emphasized. Conflict sensitivity was not included in the project monitoring system, thus missing the opportunity to surface unintended effects and adapt plans accordingly. Fortunately, the evaluation did not surface any significant conflict sensitivity problems in CIRCA II.

QUESTION 10: To what extent has CIRCA II contributed to the overall CRS interreligious action portfolio, and to addressing social cohesion and social justice within CRS?

Both CIRCA I and CIRCA II have been among the flagship projects that raised the level of visibility and capacity within CRS on both interreligious peace and on connector projects. The number of CRS projects that focus on interreligious peace as either a primary or secondary component is growing, despite funding constraints.

¹¹ For more on how faith communities perceive and experience evaluation, see: David Steele and Ricardo Wilson-Grau. 2016. "[Supernatural Belief and the Evaluation of Faith-Based Peacebuilding.](#)" Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium.

CONCLUSION

CIRCA II demonstrated an unusually high level of effectiveness in improving Muslim-Christian relations and cooperation, and medium-high effectiveness in the economic empowerment of women, but low effectiveness in the empowerment of youth. Its potentially broader impact may include contributions toward a nascent cultural awareness that cooperation is possible between Christians and Muslims, and toward improvements in livelihood-related conflict and trade relations that appear to have gone well beyond the circle of direct project participants in Matolani. In terms of duration, impact is closely tied to sustainability, where there is a need for attention to the longevity of connector projects and other cooperative community efforts.

In retrospect, the gains in Muslim-Christian relations started during CIRCA I. The additional marginal improvement during CIRCA II appears to be substantial in terms of deepening cooperation and broadening (albeit within limits) the number of people engaged, yet the data is not robust enough to permit measurement of those trends. The gains in inter-faith connector project management capacity, economic and social empowerment of women and social justice advocacy are all primarily attributable to CIRCA II. The difference between CIRCA I and CIRCA II is the difference between an impressive level of individual change and an encouraging (though fragile) level of collective community-based change in progress. Despite some ongoing challenges, this speaks well of the difference that it makes when civil society organizations and donors make a commitment to a medium- or long-haul approach of peacebuilding and development.

Annexes

ANNEX A: INSIGHTS BY PROJECT SITE

PROJECTS	
LOCATION/ IMPLEMENTING PARTNER	OBSERVATIONS
Konni, Niger / ICDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment of women led to increased economic independence and social empowerment • Behavioral change motivated more for practical reasons than spiritual or cognitive factors¹² • Not many reports of advocacy activities; however, those few reported appear quite significant • Significant level of interpersonal tensions—horizontal disputes among participants around loan payments, use of shared monies, and project plan did not negatively affect Muslim-Christian relations but development goals were affected; interpersonal conflict led to disbanding of the project's first Konni youth group; indications of potential vertical tensions, expressed in the form of hierarchical language and complaints of gaps in communications between participants and project leadership • Neighbors watching with interest • The emergence of ICDC as a multi-faith organizational structure
Agadez, Niger / ICDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim-Christian social visits (both individually and collectively), centered around food (including sharing meals), family customs, and neighborliness, and as well as decreased conflict • Fifty-eight percent of interviewees mentioned collective visits—more than double the proportion of mentions at any other project site • Neighbors watching with interest and influenced to interact with members of another religious tradition • Women's groups generated income and supported savings through a merry-go-round, helping each to begin accumulating her own assets • While women's economic empowerment improved, there were signs of unmet expectations and some tension in relation to project leadership • Youth group did not develop as hoped • While local and government leaders showed up and engaged positively with connector project participants, perceptions varied how engaged they were • ICDC emerged as a multi-faith organizational structure

¹² Konni's location—near the Nigerian border and operating areas of Boko Haram—may be a factor in the striking prominence of practical motivations among its site's participants. This analysis was based on qualitative coding. The distinction between practical, cognitive and spiritual motivations was prominent in the CIRCA I evaluation (Mark M. Rogers, 2017). In the CIRCA II evaluation, it proved difficult to distinguish.

PROJECTS	
LOCATION/ IMPLEMENTING PARTNER	OBSERVATIONS
Garissa, Kenya / AOSK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Powerful youth group resulted in high perception ratings on youth empowerment • High perception ratings on economic wellbeing and empowerment of women • Women's groups brought not only an economic benefit but also social empowerment and awareness of their rights • Muslim-Christian collaboration transformed, manifested in changes such as Muslims beginning to feel comfortable attending community meetings at the church and accessing other locations that they did not previously go and in Muslim warning Christians when they heard rumors of upcoming attacks • Opposition from persons within the community, mainly a sub-group of Somali Muslims, some of whom were influenced directly or indirectly by the philosophies of Al Shabab; they were not engaged as part of the project's Muslim constituency and yet could be key to peaceful relations in the future • Neighbors watching with interest
Matolani, Kenya / CICC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High perception ratings of success, in most aspects except where otherwise noted below • Relative pessimism on economic wellbeing was due to a dramatic change in their connector project • While the planned connector project (drilling a borehole for water) had a powerful, connective effect—capturing the vision of and potentially benefiting a collective community, rather than just individuals—its failure to date created a sense of unfinished business and poses the risk of resumption of potentially violent conflict • Project's conflict analysis and resolution training resources used to equip participants in each sub-location and brought them together to serve on a sixty-person peace committee; community members sought out to resolve disputes, reducing dispute resolution workload of CICC religious leaders • General perceptions of decision makers that engaging local chiefs were more responsive and trustworthy than national government apparatus • Youth work did not include the economic empowerment benefit that they had hoped; there may have been some unintentional clashes of expectations around individual vs. collective benefits

ANNEX B: QUALITATIVE CODING FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE

All coded behavior changes focus on Muslim-Christian relations. Code definitions are as follows.

Relationship—individual	New or improved relationships, one-on-one. (Yes / Null).
Relationship—Collective	Behavior Change: New or improved relationships, in which at least one party is a group rather than an individual. (Yes / Null)
Visit—Individual	Behavior Change: Social visits between individuals or households. (Yes / Null)
Visit—Collective	Behavior Change: Social visits / events at the group level. (Yes / Null)
Joint Meeting	Behavior Change: Joint meetings. (Yes / Null)
Joint Work	Behavior Change: Joint work. (Yes / Null)
Mutual Help	Behavior Change: Mutual help. (Yes / Null)
Conflict Resolution	Behavior Change: New mechanisms or achievements for peacefully resolving conflict. (Yes / Null)
Decreased Conflict	Behavior Change: Reduced conflict (whether violent or nonviolent). (Yes / Null)
Agriculturalist / Pastoralist	Behavior Change: change in agriculturalists' and/or pastoralists' ways of working to prevent or resolve conflict. (Yes / Null)
Community Trade	Behavior Change: increased M-C trade that appears to involve not just project participants, but others in the community. (Yes / Null)
Mixed Marry	Behavior Change: interreligious marriage. (Yes / Null)
Covid/Threat Action	Behavior Change: working together to respond to Covid or another emergent threat. (Yes / Null)
Treatment of Each Other	Behavior Change: actions towards each other, ways of interacting. (Yes / Null)
Advocacy	Behavior Change: instances of undertaking advocacy (public awareness or gov't influencing). (Yes / Null)
Pray Together	Behavior Change: praying together. (Yes / Null)
Mosque-Church Presence	Behavior Change: visiting or being physically present in each other's places of worship. (Yes / Null)
Motivation for Ind. Change	Apparent primary motivation in response to question: What motivated you to change your actions in that way? (Practical / Cognitive / Spiritual)

ANNEX C: RECOMMENDATIONS

TO AOSK, CICC AND THE ICDC:


1. Make an extra effort to ensure **sustainability** by following up with the women's and youth connector project groups to encourage and support their transition to local self-leadership, as soon as possible after Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. Also, consider talking with participants about the interest of their neighbors, and creative ways possibly to expand activities.
2. Continue to develop your **transformational capacities** by nurturing the skill sets to work with community-level participants in empowering ways that promote self-reliance, and the shared multi-faith organizational structures that allow Christians and Muslims to equitably co-lead.
3. In **Matolani** (CICC), continue advocacy to encourage the water provision efforts of the county government, and if necessary other government units, until the problem is sustainably resolved. Conduct this advocacy in collaboration with likeminded partners to increase its effect.
4. In **Garissa** (AOSK), work collaboratively with CRS to study and learn from the success of the youth group in Channa Chena, including the factors that allowed this youth group to succeed.
5. In **Agadez and Konni** (ICDC), be assured that it is not unusual to have participants express potential concerns; however it is important to respond in a proactive way. Consider exploring this through the use of feedback loops to listen deeply, understand, adapt and respond.

TO CRS ON FOLLOWING UP CIRCA II

1. Assist partners in considering the recommendations outlined for them, and in adopting and implementing them if they choose to do so.
2. During transition meetings with partners, make it a priority to talk about **advocacy**. How useful did they find the CRS training on social justice and advocacy? What challenges did they encounter? What are their ideas and suggestions?
3. Consider how CRS might broker linkages to support the development of the ICDC's emergent **multi-faith shared leadership organizational structure**. For example, is there an established multi-faith organization in francophone West Africa that could be a helpful mentor?

TO CRS ON PREPARING SIMILAR PROJECTS

1. Forthcoming **connector project guidance** should encourage reflection on questions such as: What is the desired scope and footprint of impact? Should it benefit and influence a small carefully targeted group, or the entire community? Which types of connector project activities would lend themselves to the scope and level of impact that are appropriate in this situation?
2. Consider testing a participatory, **story-based approach to monitoring and evaluation** for grassroots interreligious peacebuilding, possibly Outcome Harvesting plus Attitude Change.
3. Consider alternative ways of **engaging youth** that cater to their mobility and changing interests. Link them to supportive older adults where appropriate. If youth engagement continues to be difficult, consult expert peers such as the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY).

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4. Consider creative and culturally appropriate ways to engage male project participants in actively supporting **women's empowerment**—again, if not at the beginning of a project, then later as the project unfolds. If there are gender transformative aspirations that are too sensitive for CRS to address directly, consider collaborating with gender-focused partner organizations.





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