



Good practices to reduce, resolve, and prevent religious conflict

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This project was inspired by the clear needs which surfaced through research. One clear example comes from an article published in the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* (IJRF). In Petri's article, "Resilience to Persecution: A Practical and Methodological Investigation" (2017), he surveys research done on religious communities and their response to persecution. He proposes a resilience assessment tool to categorize how vulnerable communities respond to persecution, then uses empirical research in three Latin American contexts to illustrate the importance of helping vulnerable populations. In the conclusion he states:

As Stout (2010) argues, grassroots religious groups, if they adopt effective strategies, can exercise real influence over policy and promote social justice. Compiling a manual of best practices of the application of coping mechanisms, similar to Gene Sharp's (1993) catalogue of 198 'methods of nonviolent action,' could also serve a didactic purpose (Petri 2017:82).

Petri's understanding of coping mechanisms draws on several previous studies, two of which present broader categories for understanding and analyzing responses to conflict. The first is the book *Under Caesar's sword*, which groups Christian responses to persecution in categories of "survival, association, and confrontation" (Philpott and Shah 2018:11). The second study uses a human security lens. Glasius focuses on citizen's own survival responses to violent conflict through categories of "avoidance, compliance, collective action, and taking up arms" (2012). These categories are indeed helpful places to begin, but additional work is needed to compile best practices in the spirit of what Petri has proposed.

This is the gap this project seeks to fill. We have used the term "good practices" instead of "best practices" as this acknowledges the complicated problem we are addressing, in alignment with the Cnyefin framework. The name change avoids universalizing any specific practice as fitting for any context and acknowledges the reality that responding to the problem of conflict requires a range of responses.

Researchers and actors in the field of religious studies have access to many streams of information from a plethora of perspectives. Studies of conflict, their

sources and contributing factors should and will continue. However, this project aims to investigate practices that help prevent, de-escalate, or resolve conflict. This inevitably involves building resiliency, local and foreign actors, and multiple domains of society working together.

This research endeavor follows a case study approach. Rooted in studies on religious freedom, it generates and collects information on good practices for mitigating conflict that involves religion. The researcher has interviewed individuals and organizations in diverse regional contexts with known pressure against religious communities. This is a first step in an ongoing process of compiling good practices. This initial report follows pilot research in: Vietnam, Iraq, Nigeria, Colombia, and Mozambique. The case studies aim to generate descriptions of practices that might be replicated and adapted in different contexts to promote the religious freedom.

Good practices noted from pilot research include:

- Mobilizing business and the economic sector to unite communities together. The Business and Religious Freedom Foundation highlighted how the Sunshine nut company is hiring workers from North and South in Mozambique and investing profits into local communities.
- Working with multiple organizations and governments to advocate from the outside in, in difficult contexts like Vietnam.
- Developing a program like Ambassadors for Peace in Iraq and Syria, by building intentional connections with Muslim leaders to reduce active conflict. This program reportedly reduced violence by 42 percent.
- Starting a peace foundation and focusing on research in Nigeria. Creating well informed reports that avoid sensationalism helps policy makers and parliamentarians face the reality on the ground and increase accountability.

This project is still in its infancy and has several avenues for expansion. We plan to write up case studies based on interviews already conducted in phase one and re-evaluate the plan for the next phase. If you have a case you feel would be a valuable addition please contact Dr Kyle Wisdom: kwisdom@iirf.global.

References

- Glasius, Marlies. 2012. "Citizen participation in conflict and post-conflict situations." Address at the occasion of the acceptance of the Special Chair on Citizens' Involvement in War Situations and Post-Conflict Zones.
- Petri, Dennis P. 2017. "Resilience to persecution: A practical and methodological investigation." *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, 10(1/2):69-86.
- Philpott, Daniel and Timothy S. Shah (eds). 2018. *Under Caesar's sword: How Christians respond to persecution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.