



Faith in development

A Case study from the Central African Republic

World Vision began operations in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2014 in response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis resulting from civil war. As well as humanitarian projects focusing on Water infrastructure, Food Security and Nutrition and Child Protection, World Vision has implemented a number of social cohesion and peacebuilding projects. Over three years, World Vision CAR reached 700,000 crisis affected people including 42,500 people benefitting from water infrastructure and 5,360 children previously recruited or impacted by armed groups being trained as peace promoters. As a Christian organisation, World Vision CAR seeks to integrate their faith-based values in all they do which has enabled stronger connections to be fostered for increased social cohesion and peacebuilding.

Context

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a landlocked country in Central Africa. Despite significant natural resources, CAR is officially the second poorest country in the world. The country has struggled with recurrent insurgencies and army mutinies since the 1990s and in 2013 civil war broke out resulting in the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Despite returning to stability with the election of a new president in 2016, the situation in CAR remains extremely volatile and unpredictable. Armed groups continue to carry out violent attacks across the country, plunder resources and prevent the provision of state services. This rise in violence has seen more than 13,000 children exploited by armed groups with even more subjected to sexual abuse, gender-based violence, injury, displacement and being separated from their families.

The majority of people in CAR are Christian, with 89.5% of the population belonging to the Christian faith. 2% of people follow indigenous beliefs and 8.5% of people are Muslims. While religion may be a driver of conflict in CAR, with divisions along religious lines, humanitarian and religious actors alike insist that religion is not the root of the conflict. Instead, many who observe the conflict in CAR are adamant that the violence is rooted in economic and political disputes.

Approach to Faith and Development

WorldVision CAR aim to live out their Christian values through their deeds. WorldVision CAR are proud of their Christian identity and staff expressed how their faith motivates them to work with integrity to 'do more' to reach the most vulnerable people in their communities. WorldVision's Christian identity means that engaging faith values in their work is part of their DNA. It also means that WorldVision recognises the important role that faith plays in the lives of their beneficiaries. While a faith component may not always be an explicit part of WorldVision's programming, they seek to integrate faith into their work as much as possible. This fosters a more holistic approach to tackling the problems faced in CAR. WorldVision's care for both people's material and social needs has been described by many as an expression of its Christian identity and the value of caring for neighbours.

"Humanitarian activities deal with the exterior but need to use faith to change mindsets. It is a complementary dimension of their work"

Catholic Priest from a rural town

Working with faith leaders is an integral part of the work-life of WorldVision CAR; their Christian identity helps them partner with and train faith leaders at the national and local level to build their capacity as agents for local development. Training Christian and Muslim faith leaders is an integral component of WorldVision CAR's work in the sector of Child Protection. As trusted community

**CENTRAL
AFRICAN REPUBLIC**
Population: 5.9 million



89.5%
8.5%
2%

Christian
Muslim
Other

Source: Central Intelligence Agency website, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html> accessed January 2020

leaders, faith leaders are trained to be Child Protection Champions so that they can share the messages of child rights and protection as widely as possible. WorldVision has trained 40,025 people on child rights and protection in CAR between March 2014 and September 2017. Through receiving training on WorldVision's Celebrating Families Curriculum, faith leaders can help teach parents about the importance of caring for their children so that they can grow up in safe, peaceful environments with their neighbours.

An important part of WorldVision's approach to Faith and Development is to strengthen the capacity of staff through training in faith-based approaches, so that they can lead by example in their communities. WorldVision CAR staff members are motivated by their faith to work honestly to achieve their objectives. WorldVision CAR facilitate regular internal meetings where staff members of different faiths can come together to share scriptures, reflect and celebrate their faith. This allows staff members to experience other faith perspectives which can in turn strengthen their own values.



Above: Imam Dennis and Christian leader "Mama" Elizabeth are leading a WorldVision interfaith farming group which is building much more than food security in the midst of chaos in Batangafo. © 2018 Corey Scarrow/WorldVision.



Above: Children from the Peace Club and Child Friendly Space, Damara. World Vision trained 4,940 children on peace and social cohesion including 300 former child soldiers. © 2018 Corey Scarrow/World Vision.

Social Cohesion Initiatives

Faith is an integral, if not explicit, part of World Vision CAR's work to empower people to do peacebuilding and reconciliation between groups. The situation in CAR testifies to the fact that limited livelihood opportunities, competition over scarce resources and poverty can be drivers of conflict and can also lead to abuses of power and influence, even among faith leaders. World Vision strives to promote social cohesion through both sensitisation and relief efforts. World Vision views livelihoods activities as opportunities to promote social cohesion messaging and provide spaces for divided communities to connect.

“World Vision contributes to [promote] social cohesion through these activities by giving us what we need, because we lost everything and we were desperate so are now recovering ourselves.” Protestant Pastor from a rural town

For example, World Vision is working with faith leaders to create farming groups that work across religious divides to promote acceptance. Another example of this is World Vision CAR's Food Security activities, which have mobilised faith leaders to help successfully facilitate communication with beneficiaries, explain selection criteria and generally alleviate tension at distribution points.

World Vision have also set up Child Protection Committees made up of adults. A faith dimension has been integrated into this initiative to help adults learn about what their faith says about peace, social cohesion and why it is necessary for Muslims and Christians to live together and eradicate conflict. Parents, members of the community and religious leaders have also been trained on ways to protect children from harm. Since integrating a faith component to this work, World Vision CAR have seen tensions between communities and children of different faiths decrease significantly. By April 2019, World Vision CAR had trained 115 faith leaders on the basic principles of child protection. World Vision also work with faith leaders and religious institutions to provide child friendly spaces in which to help children understand the importance of faith, living together and forgiveness.

Empowering Children as Peacebuilders

World Vision CAR recognises that children are disproportionately affected by conflict. It is against this background that World Vision began their Empowering Children as Peacebuilders (ECaP) project, in line with a broader strategy to address longer-term social cohesion issues. Since 2013, Peace Clubs have been established in seven villages in the sub-prefecture of Damara. The aim of ECaP is to empower and equip children as agents of change, healing and peace for themselves, their families and their communities. World Vision CAR have set up Peace Clubs, where, three afternoons a week, children of different faiths and denominations are brought together to learn from World Vision's Peace Road Curriculum and play games about social cohesion, peacebuilding and equality. ECaP has reached approximately 2604 boys and 2346 girls who have been trained in the culture of peace and social cohesion. 302 of these children were rescued from the armed forces or armed groups. Since implementation, no demobilised children or adolescents have returned to armed groups. World Vision CAR's Peace Clubs are an opportunity to make a long-term impact by facilitating the interrelation between Christian and Muslim children.

“I think the (Peace Club) project just opened a door in which Muslims and Christians living in the same community have to seize the chance to keep it open for a better future.”

Mady, a Muslim woman living in Trangue

‘It Takes A World’ - to protect children from armed groups

The rise in violence since 2013 has seen over 13,000 children exploited by armed groups in CAR. In response, World Vision CAR launched their 'It Takes A World' (ITAW) campaign in May 2019. Faith leaders were invited to the launch and received sensitisation training on the dangers of the enrolment of children into armed groups and its negative consequences. This training uses evidence from the Bible and the Qur'an that condemns the use of violence. Faith leaders were also trained on World Vision's Celebrating Families methodology for them to share with their communities. Celebrating Families reminds parents that it is their responsibility to educate and care for their children and in CAR, to ensure that they are not enrolled in armed groups. World Vision CAR staff speak of children who say that because of what faith leaders told them in churches, at home and in their communities, they decided to leave armed groups. World Vision CAR have also helped faith leaders create a united platform so they can go to the government and advocate for changes in policy and law to protect children from being enrolled in armed groups.



Above: Muslim and Christian leaders stand hand in hand in Yaloke, CAR, members of the Interfaith platform supported by World Vision.
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Working across faiths

Given the interfaith dynamics at play in the conflict in CAR, World Vision acknowledges the importance of working with people of different faiths. Armed groups tend to be exclusively Muslim or Christian in CAR. Therefore, World Vision's Christian identity requires caution when being introduced to certain groups and operating in certain areas. However, World Vision CAR believe that they are well equipped to deal with these risks, adapting their approach, depending on the context.

For example, World Vision CAR's Muslim members of staff, their good relationships with faith leaders and equitable, needs driven approach has helped to sensitively introduce World Vision to certain armed groups or to Muslim-majority communities. Staff interviewed believe that the respect, neutrality and quality demonstrated through their work allows them to successfully work across these divides. Also, having people of different faiths

in the same teams is itself an educational experience that helps promote faith literacy, helping people operate in religiously different contexts. This helps to minimise mistakes in the field, especially those of a religious nature.

World Vision partners with faith actors at all levels to promote social cohesion and peacebuilding and deliver humanitarian and development programs. As well as partnering with religious leaders and institutions at the local level, World Vision works with other NGOs, humanitarian actors and organisations of different religious backgrounds at the national level in CAR to deal with key problems that have led to the crisis. Since 2015, World Vision CAR has worked in consortium with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Central African Inter-Religious Platform, Aegis Trust and Islamic Relief Worldwide, as part of the Central African Republic Interfaith Peacebuilding Partnership (CIPP) project. CIPP supports interreligious platforms of religious leaders across the country by building their capacity and partnering with them to implement a variety of humanitarian and recovery activities.

Conclusion

While the faith component of World Vision CAR's work is not always explicit, or operational, it is integrated wherever possible in their programmes. World Vision CAR recognise the importance of faith leaders as respected 'gatekeepers' to their communities, working with them in all they do. This approach helps World Vision access vulnerable communities more efficiently and effectively and advocate at the national and local levels for social cohesion, peacebuilding and child protection. World Vision's desire to work with people of different faiths at all levels recognises the significance of religion for people in CAR and enables those most in need to be reached. Faith is also an important motivator in the lives of World Vision CAR staff members who are inspired to live out their faith values in their work for the wellbeing of some of the world's most vulnerable children.

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Front cover photo: Palm Sunday procession in Damara, CAR where World Vision has worked since the conflict in 2014 to promote peacebuilding through Peace Clubs and interfaith dialogue. © 2018 Corey Scarrow/World Vision.

World Vision is a Christian organisation, working with people of all faiths and none, to transform the lives of the world's most vulnerable children.

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