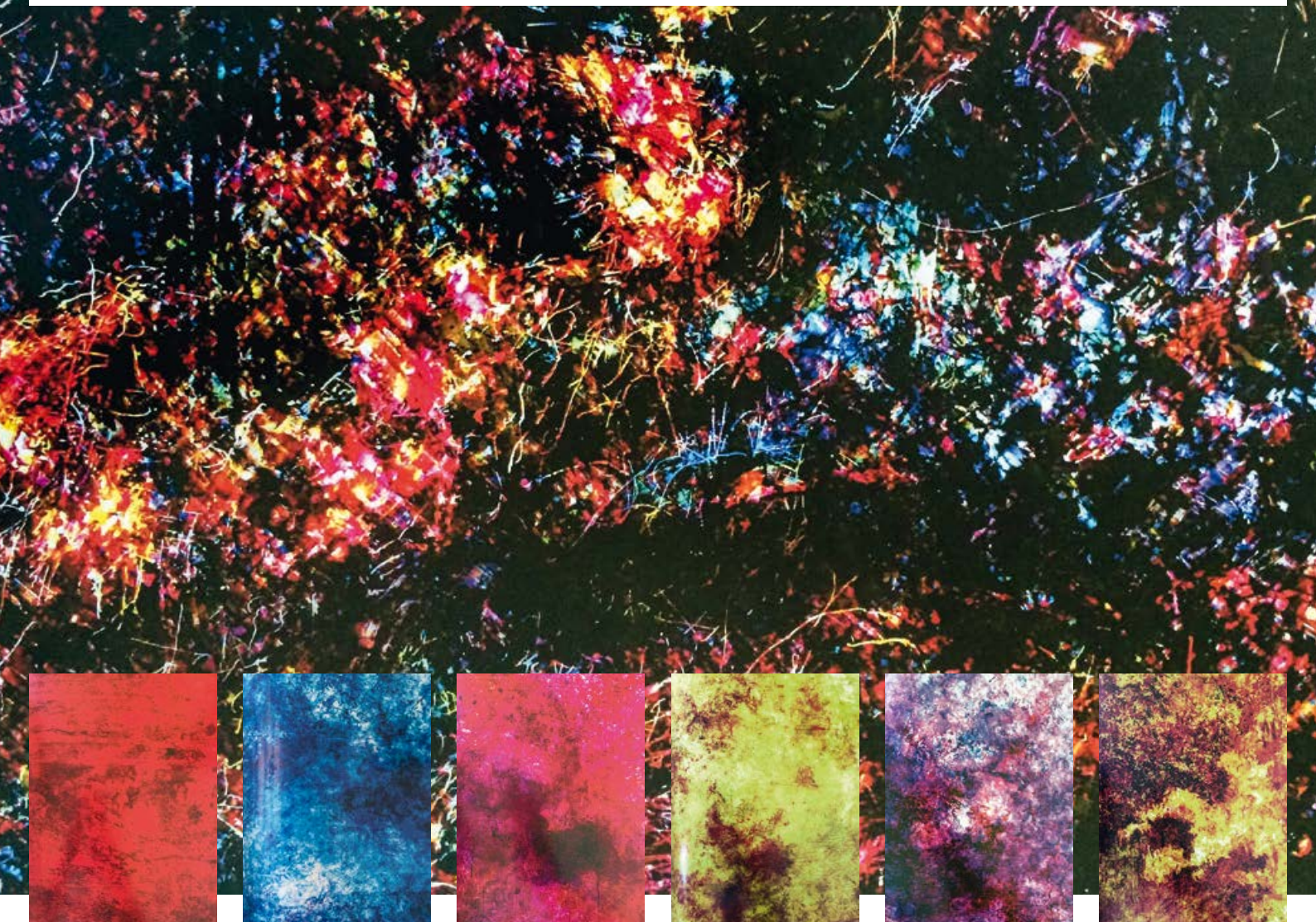




Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development



# More than anything

The contribution of religious communities to sustainable development

Published by **giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Development policy which is people-centred must also observe the importance of their cultures, religions and views of the world. Most people live in conditions characterised by cultural and religious diversity in today's networked world. Culture and religion can and should help to promote the strengthening of mutual respect and tolerance. Sustainable development can only succeed through cohesion on an equal footing. Eight out of ten people in the world feel that they belong to a particular religion, and that religion plays an important role in their everyday life. Religion can therefore drive and motivate people to become socially engaged and thus improve the prospects for successful development.

We believe it is vital to shine a light on examples of successful partnerships between development cooperation agencies and religious organisations (ROs) in order to strengthen the role of cooperative approaches based on specific values. Coming straight from the field, the examples given here will also help to increase our knowledge of religions all over the world. Indeed, the goal of improving religious literacy is explicitly built in to the German Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation's (BMZ) new series of dialogue-based events entitled *Religion matters – Rethinking the challenges of tomorrow* (also featured). In certain respects, cooperation with religious organisations is unlike any other. Based on a preliminary analysis, it is primarily centred on education, peace and security, health, emergency aid, energy and environment.

The work of religious actors is characterised by long-term cooperation with local people and by the establishment of lasting relationships based on trust through local partner communities. In authoritarian states, ROs are usually the only effective manifestations of civil society. However, religion can sometimes have a negative impact on development instead of a positive one. It is also abused as a means of legitimising domination and exploitation. For this reason, we need to be clear whether, under what circumstances and why religions either contribute to or hamper development.

We hope this brochure can help draw attention to the special nature and the potential of cooperation with religious organisations and that it encourages further initiatives.

# Interview with Vandana Shiva

## at the *Bonn Conference for Global Transformation* in May 2015

Photo: GIZ/photothek



»We have to regard ourselves as an interconnected part of nature. All world religions remind us of this fact. We need to understand that the more we give back to Mother Earth, the more we will receive. We have to move away from consumerism and this extractive and exploitative mindset and an economic model based on permanent growth. This is the only way to leave behind the path to destruction.«

### **What do we need to know to enhance sustainable development?**

Firstly, we have to understand that Mother Earth is the basis of all life. We have to become aware of our deep interconnectedness with the Earth and develop a conscious connection with it. Then we will realise and value our sacred relationship with nature. As soon as we realise that the Earth is alive, our worldview, our behaviour and our identity will be transformed. What I mean by this is Earth Democracy – coming to regard ourselves as an interconnected part of nature, as humble members of the Earth Community. This realisation is a part of our spiritual evolution and helps to unleash positive energies. It is the only antidote to the global trend of consumerism and will help us to leave behind the path to destruction that we have been following over decades.

We buy shirts for five Euro, wear them a few times and then throw them away without a thought for the difficult situation of the farmers in India and elsewhere who did not only grow the cotton but also invested money and hard work and eventually had to sell their crop for a low price. And we don't think of the many women who produce cotton clothes under extreme conditions, like those who died when the Rana Plaza in Bangladesh collapsed. Consumerism is an epidemic of heavy addiction that brings us no satisfaction. Consumerism hampers sustainable development. It produces social and environmental disasters. And its effects are brutal. So the first step is to move beyond consumerism.

### **What do the major world religions have to tell us about common values that will help us to find answers to the fundamental challenges of the future?**

Earth Democracy is very much about gaining a deeper sense of who we are. All religions remind us of the value of unity and of our spiritual needs beyond materialistic necessities. Without a spiritual rooting, satisfaction is impossible. This is a realisation based on experience. Transformation often begins after we have a personal or collective experience. People I know in the richer parts of the world have understood that consumerism is superficial and myopic only once they have met people in so-called 'less developed' countries who live a simple life. Although these people don't have much, they are more satisfied than the rich. And their environmental footprint is much smaller.

### **What is the added value that religion can contribute to achieving the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?**

Modesty becomes a natural part of us once we are spiritually rooted and learn from Mother Earth. Our environmental footprint will shrink once we move on from the fossil fuel era and stop trashing and exploiting the planet. We need to understand that the more we give back to Mother Earth, the more we will receive. So we have to move away from this linear extractive and exploitative mind-set and an economic model based on permanent growth and the mentality of consumption and waste. We need a model of a circular economy, of circular thinking. If we give more organic matter back to the soil, it will be more fertile and give us much healthier food in return. It will absorb more carbon dioxide from the air. It will help to solve climate change and help all species to thrive. So giving back to nature in fact gives us more.

All world religions remind us of our spiritual and global responsibility, including religious organisations working in the field of development cooperation. I hope we will give more consideration to the wisdom of religion in our economic and political life.

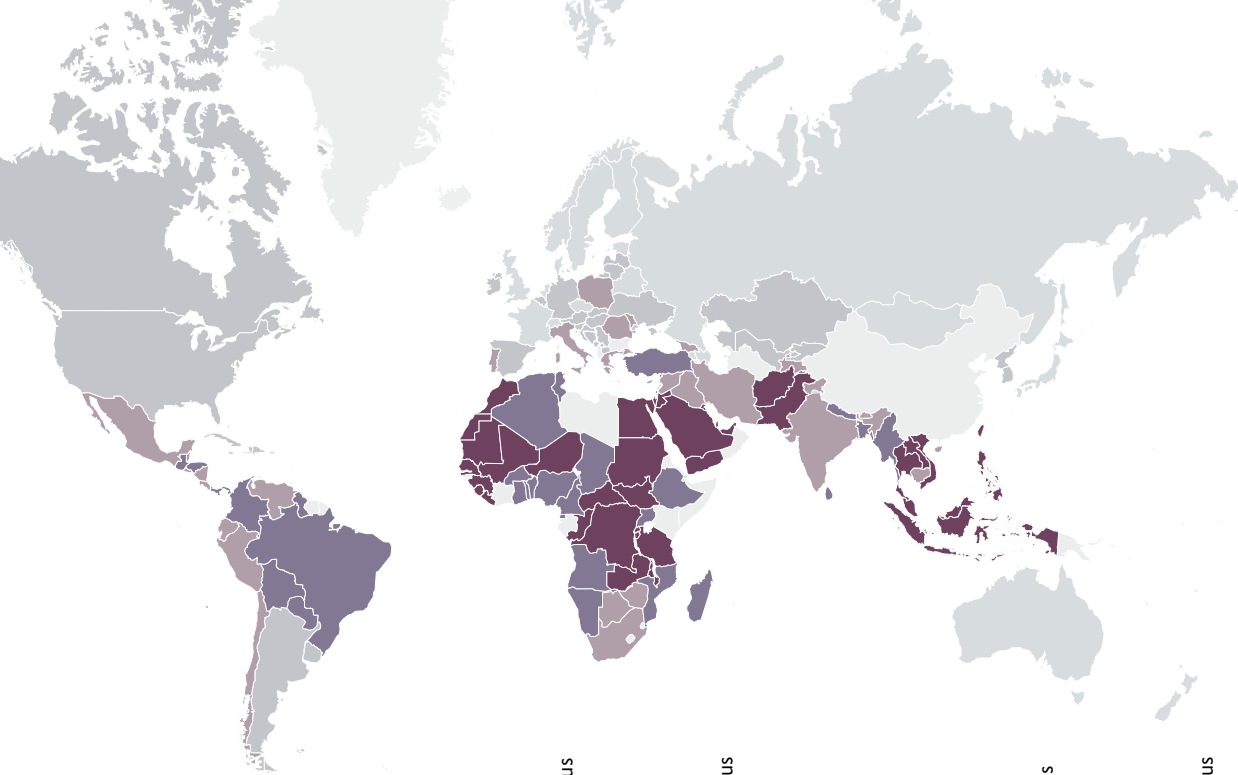
This interview was conducted by Ulrich Nitschke, Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development, during the Bonn Conference for Global Transformation on May 12<sup>th</sup> 2015.

**Dr Vandana Shiva** was born in 1952 and lives in New Delhi. She is an Indian environmental activist and ecofeminist and has authored more than 20 books. She advocates considering spiritual wisdom in development and suggests that a more sustainable and productive approach to agriculture can be achieved through a system of farming that is more centred on traditional practices and on women. Shiva is a member of various international organisations, including a Board member of the International Forum on Globalisation. She received the *Right Livelihood Award* in 1993 and has been awarded numerous other prizes.

[www.vandanashiva.com](http://www.vandanashiva.com)

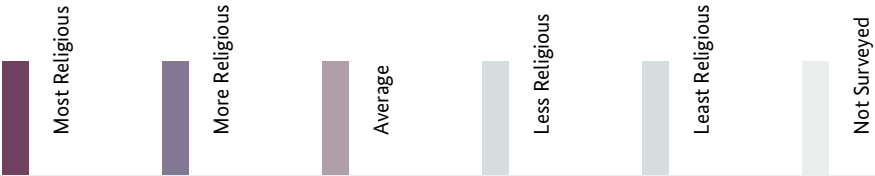
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- Vandana Shiva, *Making Peace With the Earth*, 2013, Pluto Press.



# Importance of Religion

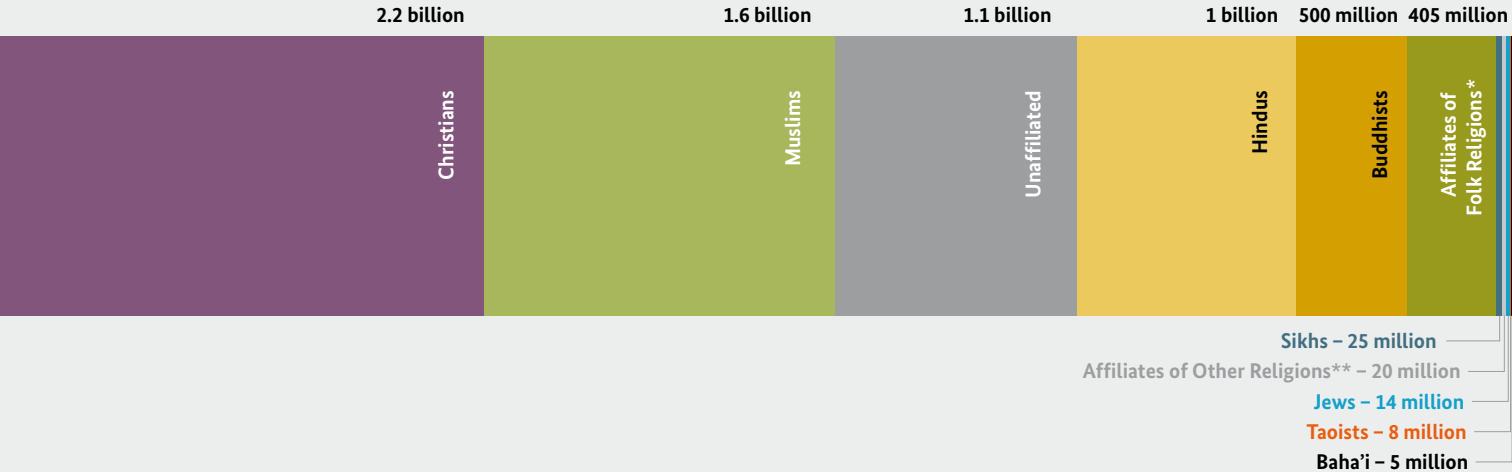
Gallup Poll 2009



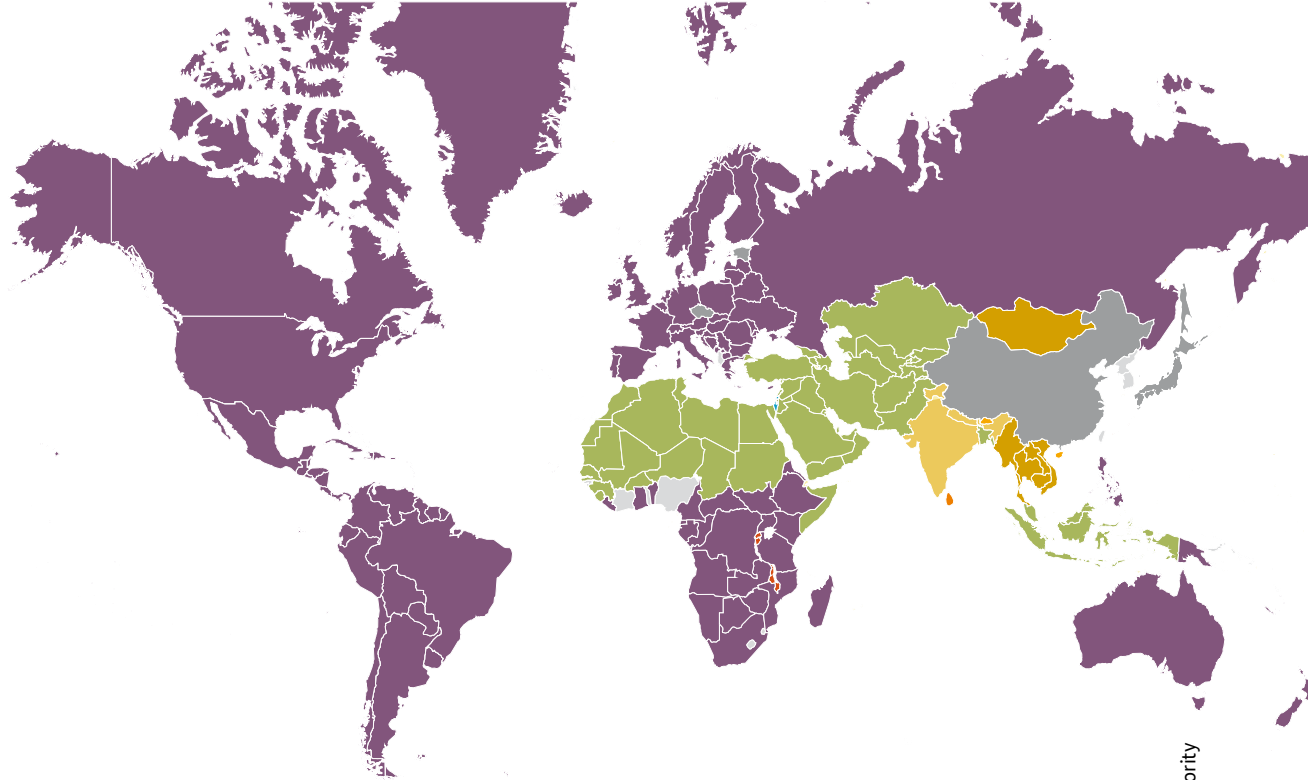
# Size of Major Religious Groups

Percentage of the global population

Pew Research Center 2012

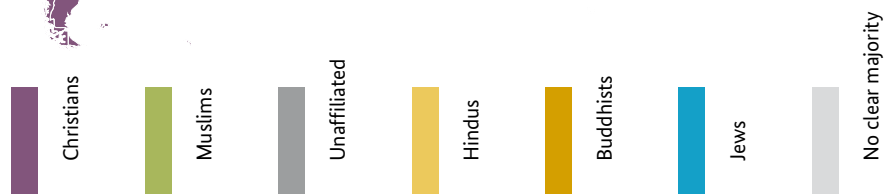


\* Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.  
 \*\* Includes Jains, Shintoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and many other religions.



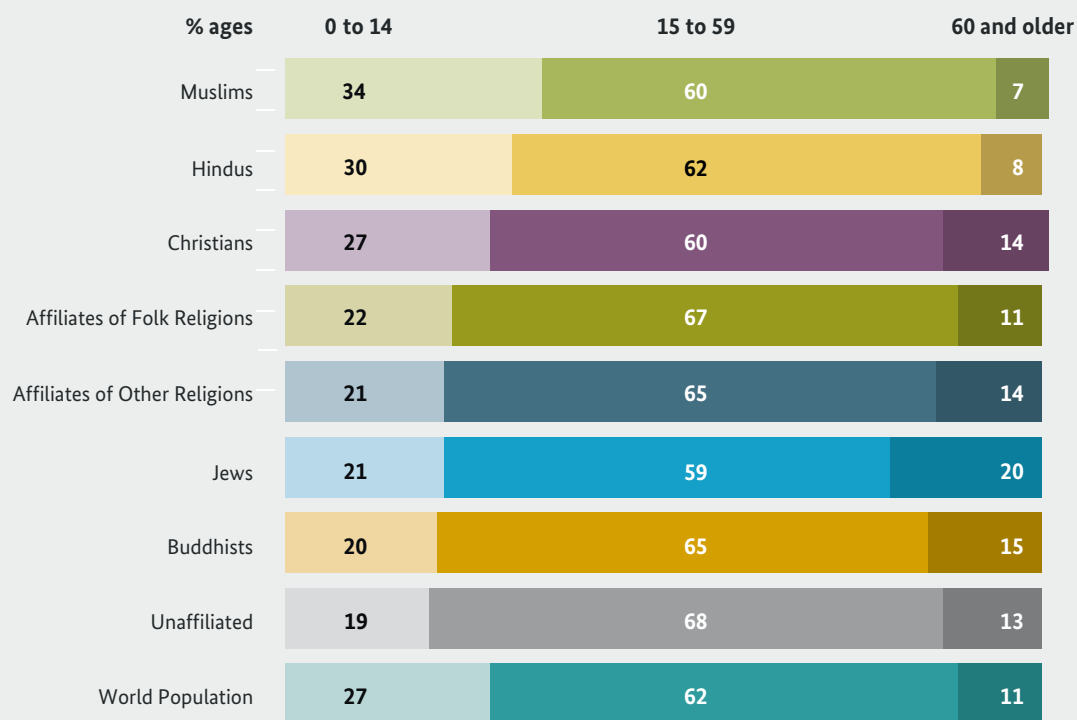
## Majority Religion, by Country

Pew Research Center 2012



## Age Distribution of Religious Groups

Pew Research Center 2010



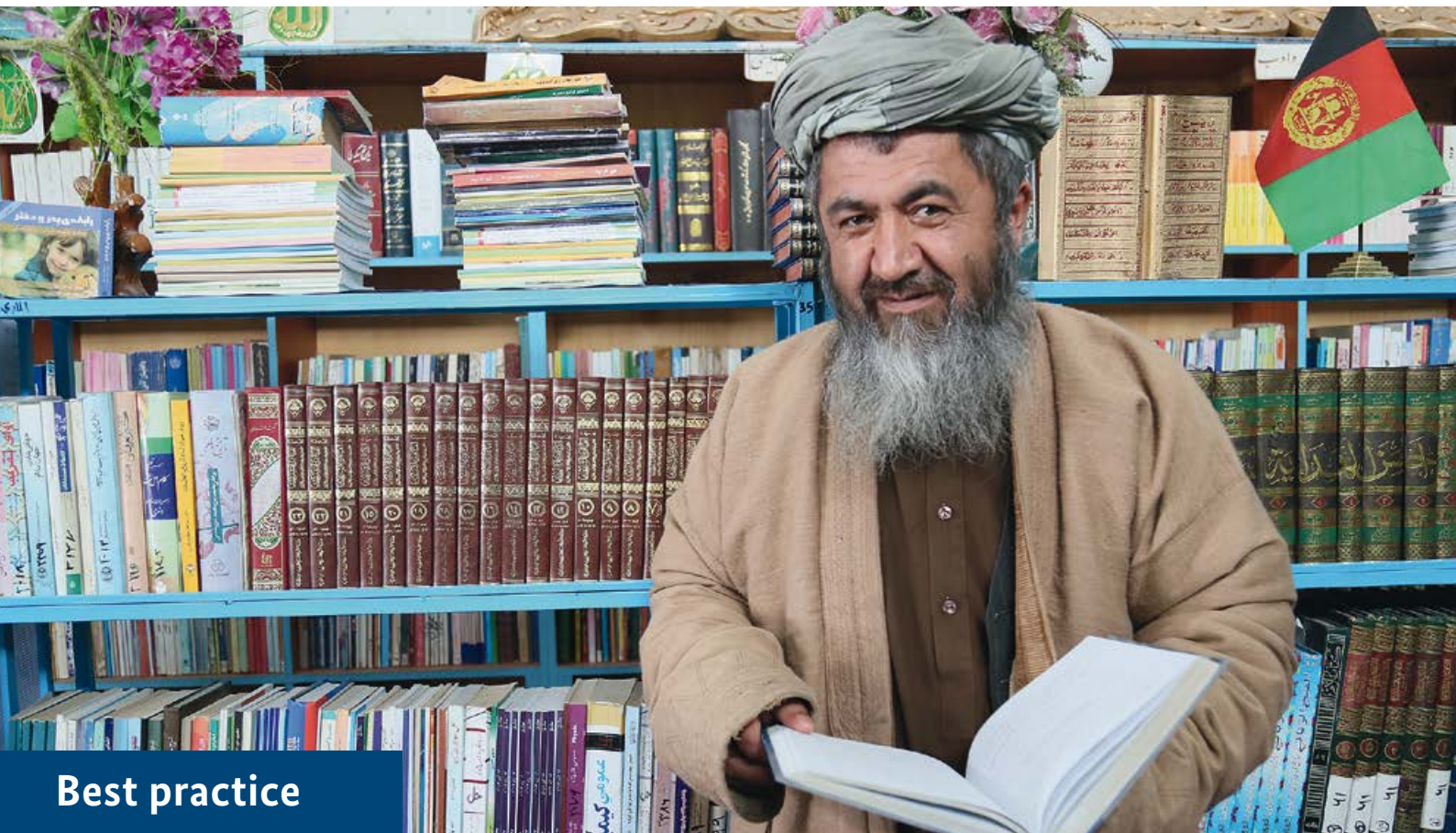
Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

## Factsheets **Best Practice**

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- Algeria: Teaching about biodiversity →
- Burkina Faso: Rural development based on interfaith cooperation →
- India: New energy-saving technologies →
- Jordan: Religious authorities help to use water efficiently →
- Lebanon: Promoting dialogue and reconciliation →
- Sudan: Overcoming conflict in West Darfur →
- South Africa: Preventing youth crime →
- West Africa: Giving back dignity to Ebola victims →

## Factsheets **Rethinking the challenges of tomorrow**

- Dharam Singh Nihang Singh →
- Dr. Ahmad Milad Karimi →



## Best practice

Ghulam Jelani, Head of Mosques in Balkh Province  
Directorate of Hajj and Religious Affairs. Photo: GIZ

# Afghanistan: Asserting women's rights

Women in Afghanistan find it hard to assert their rights. For the vast majority of women, the right of access to education, health and social protection only exists on paper. This is because in Afghanistan several legal systems exist side by side: traditional, Islamic and constitutional law. The Afghan constitution privileges the Hanafi School of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, but offers broad scope for realising women's rights despite its religious orientation. However, traditional jurisprudence still prevails in many rural areas of Afghanistan. This has a strong patriarchal tendency and gives little consideration to women's rights.

The BMZ project entitled *Promotion of the Rule of Law in Afghanistan* therefore promotes access to formal legal institutions for women and girls. Its initial focus is on the provinces. To ensure that women can successfully assert their constitutionally guaranteed rights, the first prerequisite was to achieve a consensus in the Ulema Shura. The Ulema Shura is a national council of religious scholars appointed by the state, which acts in a subordinate capacity in all of Afghanistan's

provinces. Once a consensus on constitutionally enshrined women's rights had been reached among Ulema Shura members in Badakhshan and Takhar Provinces, they agreed to actively promote women's rights through their networks and by addressing this subject in their Friday sermons.

*The biggest barrier to asserting women's rights is men, whether they are husbands, fathers or colleagues.*

Shafiq Akbari, Public Prosecutor

"The aim is to reduce discrimination and violence against women," says Shafiq Akbari, public prosecutor and consultant to the project. "90 per cent of Afghan women are victims of violence at some point in their lives." This violence may



take different forms, ranging from domestic, physical and sexual violence to mental cruelty and economic abuse.

Awareness-raising campaigns are also used to bring women's rights to the attention of village councils and councils of elders as well as religious authorities. In this context, it has proved very important to bring men on board as cooperation partners. Akbari would like men in particular to do more to



Meeting of a local council of religious scholars (Ulema) on the subject of women's rights. Photo: GIZ

promote women's rights. "The biggest barrier to asserting women's rights is men, whether they are husbands, fathers or colleagues." This is where there is a need to create greater awareness. Women's rights can only be realised if they are accepted by men and if men are involved in the work that is needed to achieve them. In order to convince men, emphasis is placed on the opportunities that women and their families can gain from being able to assert these rights. Civil mediators, public prosecutors and lawyers receive training in family law and inheritance law, and are made aware of the legal situation of women in the process. The number of women who turn to judicial offices and legal advice centres is now constantly growing.

Another activity of the project involves taking a stand against the practice of traditional law, a legal system that conflicts with the Afghan constitution. The challenge encountered here is that large sections of the population nevertheless approve of traditional law. In this field, targeted public education work was carried out with support from the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, local Ulema Shura members and civil society. Together with officials from the ministerial gender units, they were trained at workshops in how to distinguish between traditional law and constitutional law. Appropriate teaching material was also provided. Involving the general public in this process is extremely important, and

*90 per cent of Afghan women are victims of violence at some point in their lives.*

Shafiq Akbari, Public Prosecutor

it is the only way to ensure that constitutional law will really become part of everyday life for Afghan women. And wherever women enter the public arena and take part in policy-making processes, they always change society and the lives of women in general.

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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
Registered offices  
Bonn and Eschborn  
Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development  
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 36  
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As at June 2015



## Best practice

Qur'anic school teachers during a field trip. Photo: GIZ

# Algeria: Teaching about biodiversity

Algeria's economic development and the strong growth of urban agglomerations are leading to drastic environmental pollution, the overuse of water resources, high volumes of refuse and rising levels of exhaust fumes.

Yet respect for creation is firmly embedded in Islam, as in all of the other major world religions. This was the starting point for BMZ's Integrated Environmental Management project, which was launched in Algeria in 2007. In cooperation with Islamic authorities, the aim was to raise environmental awareness among the Algerian people in order to deal more effectively with environmental challenges. Since then, Islamic theologians of both genders have been addressing the subjects of environmental awareness and environmental protection in their Friday sermons to a broad section of the public. One example is the eastern Algerian city of Annaba with its 270,000 inhabitants, which was selected as a pilot region. Twenty imams and Qur'anic school teachers took part in a seven-day workshop that was organised for local representatives of the Algerian Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endow-

ments and the city government. "Religious institutions and Islamic office-holders have grown in importance in recent years. In many places, these actors provide basic social services and thus contribute to poverty reduction, education and medical care," says Peer Gatter, coordinator of the Programme

*Religious institutions and Islamic office-holders have grown in importance in recent years.*

Dr. Peer Gatter, Coordinator of the GIZ Programme Office for Intercultural Relations with Muslim Countries

Office for Intercultural Relations with Muslim Countries, which provides conceptual support to the programme. The workshop informed participants about national and international environmental problems and encouraged them to



define shared values and perspectives. The event was a new experience for participants, both in terms of its format and content. They were given an opportunity to put into practice the Qur'anic obligation of unity of word and deed in their mosques and Qur'anic schools, and to motivate believers to act in an environmentally friendly manner by addressing the themes of water, hygiene, refuse, green spaces and environmental education.



Stork's nest on an old minaret. Photo: GIZ

Many of the themes discussed at the workshop were then incorporated into a handbook for imams on the role played by mosques in defining our relationship with the environment. This handbook supports imams in preparing their Friday sermons (*khutbah*) on the subject of water and resource conservation. It was written by Islamic scholars and environmental experts, and was distributed on a large scale in 2011 among imams in Annaba Province. Bouabdallah Ghoulamallah, the Minister of Religious Affairs, made a personal effort to ensure the handbook was disseminated throughout the country. The imams were also trained in mediation and conflict management and in negotiation and communication management. This gave rise to the network *Green Hand*, in which the imams developed an action plan designed to raise awareness of environmental protection issues among believers.

In 2010, a textbook was developed at Qur'anic schools on the theme of biodiversity. The importance of the environment and of biodiversity was explained in an appropriate manner for Qur'anic school students and was underpinned by religious arguments. More than 30 imams and Qur'anic school teachers were trained in how to use the textbook and in suitable teaching methods. They now apply this knowledge in their lessons and on excursions, and pass it on to students. By the end of 2011, over 4,000 textbooks had been distributed at the roughly 120 Qur'anic schools in the city of Annaba. Apart from fostering a growing awareness of the need for environmental protection and the conservation of biodiver-

*The textbook on biodiversity is now well-known in Jordan, Morocco, Yemen, Pakistan and other countries, too.*

Dr. Peer Gatter, Coordinator of the GIZ Programme Office for Intercultural Relations with Muslim Countries

sity in Annaba, this approach has also made a name for itself in other Muslim countries. "The textbook on biodiversity is now well known in Jordan, Morocco, Yemen, Pakistan and other countries, too," Gatter points out. It is also meant to serve as a foundation for new projects in cooperation with religious office-holders. A regional exchange on this topic was initiated in Pakistan. BMZ supports this South-South cooperation.

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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
Registered offices  
Bonn and Eschborn  
Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development  
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 36  
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Design kipconcept GmbH, Bonn

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As at June 2015



## Best practice

Donkey carts make it much easier to transport water. Photo: Misereor

# Burkina Faso: Rural development based on interfaith cooperation

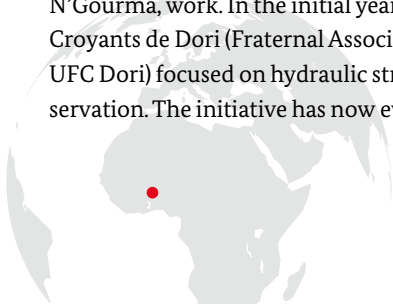
The northern part of Burkina Faso lies within the Sahel region. Rainfall here is rare and sparse. The groundwater level is decreasing, desertification is advancing relentlessly, and soil fertility is declining. Over 90 per cent of the constantly growing predominantly Muslim population in this part of the country depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Usually they produce just enough for their own needs. Recurring droughts regularly threaten the very existence of large sections of the population. Even in normal years, the income they make is barely enough to satisfy their basic needs. Against this backdrop, local leaders in the provincial town of Dori in the extreme Northeast of the country formed already in 1969 an association to improve the living and working conditions of the local people and to preserve their habitat. This is where Cissé Nassourou, Grand Imam of Dori, and his Catholic counterpart Paul Ouédraogo, Bishop of Fada N’Gourma, work. In the initial years, the Union Fraternelle des Croyants de Dori (Fraternal Association of Believers in Dori, UFC Dori) focused on hydraulic structures and resource conservation. The initiative has now evolved into an integrated

regional rural development project that serves some 400,000 people. Priority is given to water management in order to improve people’s access to drinking water and water for producing crops. This involves building rainwater reservoirs and installing solar systems to operate pumps. The reservoirs

*Now we can harvest during the dry months too, so much so that we can sell the surplus on the market.*

Ibrahim Ouedraogou, Djomga’s village chief

collect rainwater in natural and artificial conduits. That is sufficient to water the surrounding fruit and vegetable plots for five months of the year. In addition, a number of farmers’ organisations are trained in self-management methods and



vegetable growing. Learning groups composed of members from the different farmers' organisations share their knowledge with each other. The creation of plots for irrigated horticultural crops and training for micro enterprises and craftworkers are geared particularly towards women, who are especially disadvantaged in this region. As incomes increased, school enrolment for girls rose from around 40 to 60 per cent in some of the region's villages. Altogether, general levels of



Market day in Dori. Photo: Misereor/Käfer

nutrition have improved significantly through consumption of the newly cultivated vegetables. "We only used to grow crops in the rainy season, and then it was mainly millet. When harvests were poor, we were hungry by the middle of the dry season if not before. Now we can harvest during the dry months too, so much so that we can sell the surplus on the market," says Ibrahim Ouedraogou, village chief in Djomga.

This involvement by the religious communities in Dori is vital because the state does not offer any comprehensive extension and support programmes for rural areas. But above all, the cooperation between Muslims and Christians is a model of good practice in terms of interfaith dialogue. Today, they perceive their differences as enriching and fruitful rather than as a threat. "Muslims and Christians realise that each of their religions motivates them to become involved in social activities, and that there is a shared social ethic, that also promotes development," says Paul Ouédraogo. Interfaith cooperation and intercultural dialogue also work so well because they

*Muslims and Christians realise that each of their religions motivates them to become involved in social activities, and that there is a shared social ethic that also promotes development.*

Paul Ouédraogo, Bishop of Fada N'Gourma

are not pursued as a separate or possibly as the sole objective of the project. In Dori, they are a natural by-product of joint practical development work.

#### Project executing agency

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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
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 Design kipconcept GmbH, Bonn

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As at June 2015



## Best practice

Young woman is proud of her new stove. Photo: Klima-Kollekte

## India: New **energy-saving technologies**

Nagamanni starts her day early. The 23-year-old Adivasi woman gets up before 6 am to take care of the household and prepare breakfast together with her mother-in-law. She lives in Paderu in Visakhapatnam District, in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The two women almost always have Nagamanni's eight-month-old daughter with them. Cooking is becoming an increasingly onerous task for the women of the indigenous tribes in Visakhapatnam. Since there are fewer and fewer trees, they have to walk a long way to collect wood. In India alone, some 800 million people use wood, coal or cow dung as fuel for their cooking stoves, which is exhausting and time-consuming. To make matters worse, over-exploitation of the remaining forests is continuing at an increasing pace.

Normally Nagamanni would have to collect firewood every day, but that has changed since she was given a fuel-saving stove. Although it consists of nothing more than a clay block with a small opening for inserting pieces of wood, two cooking rings and a fire-resistant stove pipe flue, its effect is enormous: "The new stove produces a lot less smoke in the

kitchen, so my children and I don't have to cough so much," says a delighted Nagamanni. She now has time for other things, too: "Now I only have to drag heavy bundles of wood from the forest once a week."

*The new stove produces a lot less smoke in the kitchen, so my children and I don't have to cough so much.*

Nagamanni, Woman from Andhra Pradesh, South India

"In all, we have built almost 4,000 energy-saving stoves in more than 100 villages," reports Christian Griebenow, Managing Director of Klima-Kollekte. The stoves are made of locally available clay and can also be heated with biomass



fuels rather than wood. “In ten years from now, all these stoves together will have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by more than 47,000 tonnes,” Griebenow points out. The new stoves have to be adapted to traditional cooking methods for people to accept them. They are also decorated with intricate kolams, patterns that call on the goddess Lakshmi to bring good fortune and avert evil.



The new stoves are also decorated with traditional rice flour patterns.  
Photo: Klima-Kollekte/Püschner

The new stoves offer significant ecological and health benefits. They require 25 per cent less wood than traditional stoves. The resulting fall in demand for wood reduces deforestation, which is already very advanced, as well as the over-exploitation of forest resources. They also offer health benefits. Every year, some two million people worldwide continue to die from respiratory diseases that are caused in part by smoke from cooking indoors. Since the stoves are more energy-efficient and better insulated, they produce less smoke. That results in fewer respiratory diseases and improves the health of women and children who spend most of their time inside their huts. The project also supports the efforts of villagers to find, use and disseminate other local energy resources.

Another advantage is that jobs are created. Local women are trained to build and service the stoves, and can then go on to offer workshops themselves, where they train others in the construction and use of the stoves.

The Adivasis differ in many ways from other tribal groups in India. The name “Adivasi” means “original inhabitant”, and the Adivasis do indeed believe they were the first people to inhabit the subcontinent. The various Adivasi groups in India number some 70 million people, most of whom live in harmony with nature. Their way of life, which protects the environment, is unique and closely connected with their

*In all, we have built almost 4,000 energy-saving stoves in more than 100 villages. In ten years from now, all these stoves together will have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by more than 47,000 tonnes.*

Christian Griebenow, Managing Director of Klima-Kollekte

endangered culture. At their festivals, the Adivasis worship creation in its seasonal manifestations. The new stoves thus fit in with the Adivasis’ traditional and spiritual convictions.

#### Project executing agency

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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
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Design kipconcept GmbH, Bonn

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As at June 2015



## Best practice

Water plays a key role in many religions. Photo: Depositphotos

# Jordan: Religious authorities help to use **water** efficiently

Jordan ranks among the world's most water-poor countries. Population growth, rising economic development and the growing number of Syrian refugees are all adding to water consumption. Yet despite the tense water supply situation, neither the Jordanian people nor the Syrian refugees are sufficiently aware of the need to conserve water. Since water scarcity is exacerbating social tensions between the two groups, there is an urgent need to lay the foundations for more efficient water consumption. Their religious convictions provide a very specific way of achieving this. Over 90 per cent of the Jordanian population and Syrian refugees living in Jordan are Muslims. Their religion acts as a guideline both for their individual conduct and for political discourse. Small wonder, then, that religious office-holders exert considerable influence on public opinion and are highly respected social figures. Water plays a central role in the sources of Islamic revelation. These sources are the Qur'an and the Sunnah, but also the consensus of scholars on a particular point of Islamic law (*ijma*) and juristic reasoning through analogy (*qiyas*). "The term 'water' is mentioned over 60 times in the Qur'an,

which highlights its importance for life on earth," explains Sheikh Abdel Majid, a lecturer at the Faculty of Sharia and Islamic Studies at the University of Jordan in Amman, who supports the project. The stories about the life of the prophet Mohammed (*hadith*) also provide numerous examples of the

*The term "water" is mentioned over 60 times in the Qur'an, which highlights its importance for life on earth.*

Sheikh Abdel Majid, Lecturer of Sharia and Islamic Studies at the University of Jordan

sparing use of water. Furthermore, given that Islam arose in an arid desert region, it is very conscious of the importance of water as the origin of all life. This faith-based concept of how



to live a good life calls for the careful management of natural resources. The core idea of the BMZ project implemented by GIZ is therefore to help imams and female teachers of religion to become water ambassadors, especially in communities in the north and centre of the country that take in a large number of refugees. Teachers of religion are in direct touch with the population. They can mediate wherever tensions and resource conflicts arise and disseminate the idea of saving

A code of ethics goes hand in hand with this pragmatic view of reality. Encouraged by the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Friday sermons are to be held throughout the country on water conservation and water efficiency. This will make it possible to reach up to three million believers who attend the Friday sermons in the country's roughly 7,000 mosques. Selected mosques will also be equipped with systems for collecting rainwater and recycling greywater. The potential savings offered by these "water-collecting" mosques are intended to demonstrate the positive benefits of resource conservation. At the same time, faith-based teaching materials are being developed for schools and universities in order



Participants at a workshop in Amman. Photo: GIZ/Rababah

water from an Islamic perspective at grassroots level. "No Muslim has the right to steal water from the community," Sheikh Abdel Majid underlines, adding that everyone should follow the prophet's example and conserve water.

## *No Muslim has the right to steal water from the community.*

Sheikh Abdel Majid, Lecturer at the Faculty of Sharia and Islamic Studies at the University of Jordan

to mainstream the topic of water scarcity and water conservation at religious teaching institutions. To this end, the project is working together with the Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments, the Ministry of Education and water service providers.

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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
Registered offices  
Bonn and Eschborn  
Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development  
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 36  
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As at June 2015



Mural in Beirut. Photo: GIZ

## Lebanon: Promoting **dialogue and reconciliation**

Stroll around Beirut and you will find people of just about every religion including Christians, Sunnis, Druze and Shias. Members of all eighteen of Lebanon's officially recognised religious groups live here in close proximity. At first sight, it may not be obvious which religion a person belongs to. The general picture is one of harmony. Yet in many ways Lebanese society is highly fragmented, with each religious group occupying its own districts, partly obeying its own laws, and running its own schools and social institutions. All this creates divisions among the population and reinforces existing prejudices. There has been little effort to process the experience of the civil war between 1975 and 1990, and politicians have exploited this fragmentation for their own ends. On top of all this, the Syrian refugee crisis threatens to undermine the country's delicate balance.

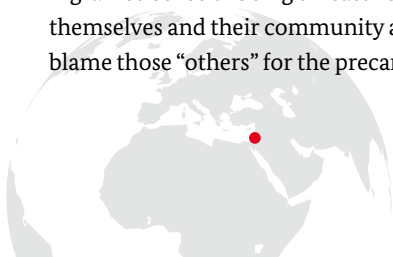
Many Lebanese adults and young people still have an ingrained sense of being threatened by "others". They see themselves and their community as the only victims and blame those "others" for the precarious situation in which

they live. That makes it even more necessary to break down xenophobia and stereotypes, highlight alternatives, strengthen links between people and between institutions and bring about changes in behaviour that encourage people to live together rather than simply alongside each other.

*I never thought we could possibly talk about religious and political issues in an atmosphere of freedom and mutual respect such as we have here.*

Media workshop participant

The BMZ project entitled *Strengthening of the Civil Conflict Transformation* helps to break down taboos by establishing a structured dialogue and bringing people together in a secure environment: very cautiously at first, but then gradually in



a more direct manner. It takes time to build up the required trust. Once it has been established, however, young Shias, Sunnis and Christians will openly discuss conflicts and possible responses, question their own prejudices and gradually cast them off together, to be replaced by non-violent forms of communication. "I never thought we could possibly talk about religious and political issues in an atmosphere of freedom and mutual respect such as we have here," said one



Young women taking part in a project workshop. Photo: GIZ

media workshop participant. Another participant summed up the experience as follows: "Inviting others into your home and being invited are a part of our tradition. Praying together could become perfectly normal. Being invited to a mosque, though, is very unusual, and praying here together is something quite unique."

As centres of education, schools can play a key role in efforts to bring about social change and overcome the divisions between communities. A teacher's handbook has been developed with ideas on how to deal with the past. Entitled *Tell me – I am listening! Memories of War*, it is used with

associations, in schools and even with the youth organisations of Lebanon's political parties. By openly addressing the ingrained cultural memories of different religions in relation to the Lebanese civil war, the resulting dialogue can help to foster a shared cultural memory and thereby prevent the emergence of new faith-based narratives rooted in violence. The conflict is analysed in cooperation with religious partners such as Makased University and the Islamic University of Lebanon. The goal of the project *Documenting and Popularizing Experiences of Non-violent Activism in Lebanon* is to open up this neglected period of Lebanese conflict to the public in the form of video material and a database. Target groups

*Inviting others into your home and being invited are a part of our tradition. Even praying together could become perfectly normal. Being invited to a mosque, though, is very unusual and praying here together is something quite unique.*

Workshop participant

from every religion are given training and are encouraged to participate in a dialogue with the aim of raising awareness for the social potential of constructive conflict transformation in Lebanon.

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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
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As at June 2015



## Best practice

Camp Kerinding in West Darfur. Photo: Islamic Relief

# Sudan: Overcoming **conflict** in West Darfur

Sudan's West Darfur region is characterised by a system of local conflicts. Its infrastructure has been largely destroyed. Access to basic services such as water, health care and energy is extremely limited. Violence can flare up suddenly and at any time. Weapons circulate freely and are easy to obtain. This decades-long state of emergency has created tension – especially between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities – over access to water, grazing land and healthcare services. The tension is exacerbated by the fact that aid is limited to IDPs even though the needs of host communities are equally great.

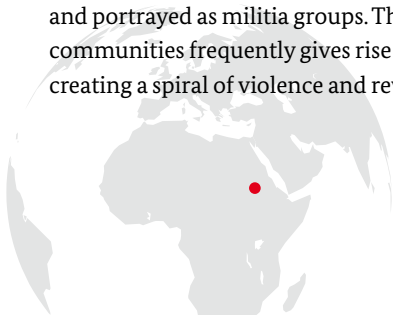
Conflict between different local groups is so entrenched that people have few opportunities to come together and communicate. Their sense of trust is badly damaged, and nomadic pastoral communities are often wrongly treated and portrayed as militia groups. The marginalisation of these communities frequently gives rise to thefts of land and cattle, creating a spiral of violence and revenge.

Civil society actors such as religious leaders, village elders and the media want to counter this vicious circle in order to re-establish a sense of community and promote peace. Unfortunately, existing mechanisms for resolving conflict – for example by involving the local police – have proven

*People who didn't even say  
hello before have now become friends.*

Umda Abderhaman, Member of a village committee

largely ineffective. There has been no reduction, for example, in the number of reported cases of violent confrontations over water resources.



Islamic Relief's *Peace and Community Conflict Resolution* project starts at the community level. It has revitalised village committees and persuaded all the affected groups – including women – to join them. The focus is on shared Islamic values and kinship. As the shared religion of all these different villages and groups, the role of Islam is to inspire reconciliation. Islamic religious leaders enjoy tremendous respect within these communities and play a crucial role when it comes to



Peacebuilding workshop for a village committee. Photo: Islamic Relief

avoiding conflict. The village committees (*jawiid*) form part of a regional tradition.

The committees are trained in peacebuilding measures. They identify the needs of their particular region and draw up their own village plans, which are subsequently used as the basis for dealings with the local government authorities. This analysis also helps to identify the root causes of conflict, available peacebuilding capacity and potential contributors to the peace process. In order to prevent situations that could trigger resource-based conflict, peacebuilding efforts are always linked to municipal development initiatives involving, for example, the provision of water, sanitation and education.

Sub-committees are now responsible for managing the water facilities and establishing common grazing routes. There has been a dramatic fall in the number of confrontations. "People who didn't even say hello before have now become friends," observes Umda Abderhaman, who sits on one of the village committees. Thanks to the contribution made by women, the programme has particularly strengthened the way women are perceived in the wider community. When asked how the committees benefited from the involvement of women, Abderhaman replies: "Beforehand, we had no respect for women. Only men were involved in resolving such problems, especially when they were about access to water. We have now

*Beforehand, we had no respect for women. Only men were involved in resolving such problems, especially when they were about access to water. We have now realised that it is important to have women on the committees.*

Umda Abderhaman, Member of a village committee

realised that it is important to have women on the committees. Once a woman intervened, and everything calmed down straight away."

#### Project executing agency

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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
Registered offices  
Bonn and Eschborn  
Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development  
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## Best practice

Young detainee in prison. Photo: GIZ

# South Africa: Preventing youth crime

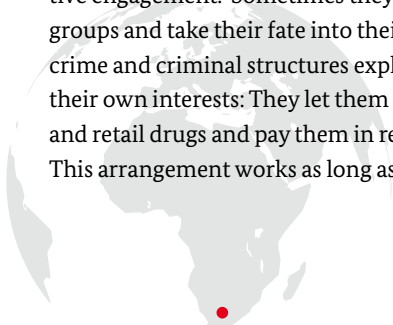
Twenty years since the end of apartheid, South Africa's sprawling inner cities face considerable challenges. The townships around the metropolitan municipality known as Nelson Mandela Bay are inhabited by approximately 1.4 million residents. 50 per cent of all young people in this area belong to a gang or see themselves as part of a gang. Gangs offer young people a home and attention. It is here that they organise their social and economic networks, find recognition and can obtain what they need to meet their day-to-day needs if this is not available in their own home. Among those of working age in the townships, 45 per cent are unemployed and the level of violence is high. The outlook for many children and young people is not promising and there are few positive role models and opportunities for constructive engagement. Sometimes they join together in loose groups and take their fate into their own hands. Organised crime and criminal structures exploit such youth gangs for their own interests: They let them extort protection money and retail drugs and pay them in return with cash or drugs. This arrangement works as long as there is no alternative and

the state, or in this case the city authorities, fail to intervene. Municipal policies focus primarily on adults – providing water supplies and new social housing – but leave young people without a perspective.

*It is important that we work  
with our partners to meet  
the immediate, day-to-day needs of  
young people.*

Rene Uren, Advisor at the GIZ Programme Office

85 per cent of all South Africans see themselves as part of a religious group. Most of them are organised in one of the African Independent Churches. They mostly originate from colonial-era Christian churches, today known as Apostolic,



Ebenezer or Zionist churches. There are some 4,000 independent churches across the country. Only five per cent of those with a religious affiliation are Muslim, while a further three per cent adhere to one of the Asian religions, and around two per cent follow Judaism.

The BMZ project *Violence and Crime Prevention* implemented by GIZ endeavours to reflect this religious character. Repre-



Burning tires on the street. Photo: GIZ

sentatives of civil society, including members of the Interfaith Forum, are regularly invited to round table meetings at which they discuss and agree on joint measures to establish safe communities and prevent violence. In this process they practice the traditional way of youth participation. "It is important that we work with our partners to meet the immediate, day-to-day needs of young people," observes Rene Uren, a South African advisor at the GIZ programme office in Nelson Mandela Bay. Pastor Neville Goldman notes that they have first-hand experience of the problems of those who live in the township. "Indeed, it is the local councillors who come to us and ask us to keep up our involvement with young people." Often churches and mosques open their premises and organise small income-generating activities to create the conditions for a value-oriented development of young people.

Neville Goldman and youth pastor Russel Viljoen meet every month on the Interfaith Forum with representatives from industry, the city council, socially active NGOs and religious groups. They exchange views and discuss how to fund their next projects. The Forum also regularly speaks about various spheres of activity, including education and primary health care.

It is discussed openly, how religious communities, as well as politics and city administration are accountable for the projects and their financing. The participating organizations monitor their finances mutually. "At the same time, we offer

*There really is only one condition:  
We don't allow any party politics  
to interfere with  
our projects or meetings.*

Imam Yussuf Counon, Member of the Interfaith Forum

and demand transparency about everything that the municipal authorities and the council do with the taxes they collect and with the money they receive from central government," says Viljoen. In this respect, the Ebenezer community is a model of good practice for other non-governmental organisations. "There really is only one condition," says Imam Counon from the Interfaith Forum, "we don't allow any party politics to interfere with our projects or meetings."

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Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
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## Best practice

A reverend and an imam during a workshop. Photo: World Vision/Bundu

# West Africa: Giving back dignity to Ebola victims

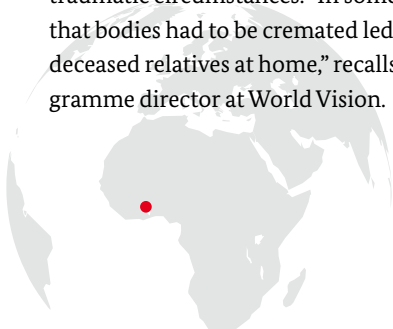
For many people in West Africa, it is impossible to imagine having to say goodbye to a recently deceased loved one without physical contact. Indeed, that last touch is regarded as a final sign of respect and a blessing for the dead person. It is a deeply rooted tradition in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, the three West African countries worst affected by the Ebola virus. Yet it was precisely funeral rites such as this that allowed the virus to spread so quickly, since the risk of infection from dead bodies is very high. It is estimated that up to two-thirds of all Ebola cases can be traced back to these burial practices. The virus is transmitted through physical contact. The dilemma facing medical personnel, crisis teams and the religious authorities was how to prevent the virus from spreading while still allowing people to pay their last respects in an appropriate and dignified way under such traumatic circumstances. "In some cases, hastily devised rules that bodies had to be cremated led to people hiding their deceased relatives at home," recalls Christo Greyling, programme director at World Vision.

In countries with poor levels of state health care, medical services are often provided by non-governmental organisations affiliated to religious groups. The national health care systems of those countries affected by the Ebola outbreak had largely collapsed. Increasingly, this role was taken over by families as

*In some cases, hastily devised rules that bodies had to be cremated led to people hiding their deceased relatives at home.*

Christo Greyling, Programme Director at World Vision

well as by religious organisations, which are trusted by local people and have built up effective networks even in remote areas. When the crisis erupted, it therefore made sense for medical experts and international aid organisations such as Act Alliance, Brot für die Welt, the World Health Organization, World Vision, Islamic Relief and Médecins sans Frontières to



turn to religious groups and to both Christian and Muslim clerics to help them fight the virus.

Meetings and workshops were held to enable those affected by the outbreak to disseminate information about the virus, the typical progress of the disease and the ways in which it can spread. In workshops religious leaders were given a safe place where they could explore specific issues with the help of



Children were also struck down by the disease.

Photo: World Vision/Bundu

local moderators. This allowed them to gain new insights and examine new strategies. Those involved were able to share their personal experiences in a series of confidential discussions that also tackled prejudices and provided objective information. Once the workshop participants had built up trust in each other, they addressed their common challenges from a religious perspective. "The need to work together on a response and to draw up guidelines on how to deal with problems such as funeral rites led key actors in the Ebola regions to rethink their traditional practices. As a result, those guidelines quickly found their way into the various local communities," Greyling concludes. In Sierra Leone there is now widespread acceptance of the trained burial teams in their protective outfits, and the mourners keep a distance of one metre from the deceased. Everyone knows that the rules are designed to

protect them and that the souls of deceased family members will still find peace.

Through the work with religious leaders and local communities, religious groups have developed appropriate techniques for looking after the sick and burying the dead that take into account the high risk of infection. These practices comply with the medical standards and hygiene requirements in place to prevent any further spread of the disease while still allowing families to mourn and bury their loved ones in a dignified manner. Working together, health experts and representatives of religious organisations communicated their

*The need to work together on a response and to draw up guidelines on how to deal with problems such as funeral rites led key actors in the Ebola regions to rethink their traditional practices. As a result, those guidelines quickly found their way into the various local communities.*

Christo Greyling, Programme Director at World Vision

messages through a variety of channels including interfaith training events, community meetings, religious services, flyers, radio, megaphone and many face-to-face meetings. This allowed them to raise awareness among the general population, other clerics, care workers, doctors and traditional healers and to highlight the need for a modified set of burial rites. It is largely thanks to these joint efforts and the sensitivity shown towards religious and cultural practices that the spread of the virus was finally halted.

#### Project executing agency

World Vision

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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
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As at June 2015



Berlin | February 2015

*»Without the wisdom of religion,  
successful development is impossible.  
Good development is like good  
medicine: it has no side-effects.«*

## Dharam Singh Nihang Singh

*Rethinking the challenges of tomorrow*

### Dharam Singh Nihang Singh's insights

- **Truthfulness:** Our actions must match our words. Honesty and sincerity are prerequisites for peace, justice, solidarity and good governance.
- **Holism:** True religion is holistic and shaped by selfless devotion. It is committed to the long-term welfare of all the world's people and is neither group-led nor interest-led.
- **Dialogue:** The wisdom of religion is an offer to others. As people of religion, we should never impose our convictions on others through missionary zeal, either directly or through subtle persuasion.
- **Development:** Successful development is modest in its approach and is guided by the humble insight that we are all guests on Earth. It focuses on essentials, takes place in harmony with nature, and is always mindful of the finite capacities of people and the Earth itself. Development activity is retrograde when it leads to over-complexity, causes problems rather than solving them, and disturbs inner peace.
- **Tranquillity:** A rapidly beating heart is just as unhealthy as a heart that beats too slowly. Natural development is achieved step by step. It is guided by the pace of evolution itself.
- **Responsibility:** Everyone makes mistakes. This is true not only of individuals but also of nations. The key is to avoid repeating these mistakes and to take responsibility for correcting them.
- **Circumspect exercise of power:** Those who have the power to govern, or the power of knowledge or wealth, have a particular responsibility, for all three areas are especially vulnerable to abuse.
- **Responsible politics:** Policy-makers should draw on the wisdom of religion to ensure they are farsighted in their actions, and should support the dissemination of knowledge about religion at schools and universities. At the same time, policy-makers must look critically at religion. If suffering is inflicted in the name of religion, they must intervene resolutely.
- **Competition:** Policy-makers and society must encourage competition between the religions. If religious topics are presented transparently, it is easier to ascertain which insights from the various religions are true, of service to humankind, and deserving of wider circulation.
- **Transformation:** True change always begins within the individual and is founded on insight. Religion can help with this. Its very essence is the eradication of what is bad in us and society: selfishness and short-termism. This requires antiquated attitudes to be put aside in a process of deconditioning. People who consider themselves religious have the responsibility to study their religion and history impartially, self-critically and thoughtfully.
- **Nature conservation:** Environmental destruction is the outcome of our alienation from our souls. If we listen consciously to the soul's voice in our hearts, this will have a positive effect on the environment and our relations with one another.
- **Unity:** Spiritual knowledge brings people together. German unity can be regarded as a religious act. It helped to set the people of two nations on a course towards reconciliation and thus contributed to successful development.

## Dharam Singh Nihang Singh's vision

»We need an independent world council in which the most knowledgeable representatives of the world religions reach agreement on the values and basic principles of coexistence that will best serve humankind in the long term. The advice provided by this council must be taken into account by all governments as they endeavour to overcome the challenges facing humankind. It would be the responsibility of the council to draw attention to erroneous political and societal developments and to arbitrate in conflicts.«

## His life

Dharam Singh Nihang Singh belongs to the Sikh Religion and is renowned for his comprehensive knowledge of spiritual and historical matters. He was born in Panjab in India in 1936 and comes from the Nihang tradition, which is committed to preserving the wisdom of religion. Dharam Singh Nihang Singh is the founder of the *Sach Khoj Academy*, which is dedicated to the pursuit of truth and has published thousands of hours of lectures as well as numerous articles. He conducts holistic, critical exegesis of existential issues, such as what it means to be human, the nature of spirituality and religion, and our global future.

## The Sikh Religion

The Sikh Religion (*Sikhi*, Sikhism) is a monotheistic religion founded in the 15th century in northern India. Today, it has almost 25 million followers, making it the fifth largest world religion. The Sikh Religion is based on spiritual, timeless insights preserved in written form, known as *Gurbani*. These provide inspiration for spreading unity among people, assuming responsibility within society, abolishing discrimination based on origin, leading a virtuous, modest life in harmony with nature, and gaining spiritual wisdom.

## Links

- [www.sachkhojacademy.net](http://www.sachkhojacademy.net)
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Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn  
Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development  
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GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.  
As at August 2015



Berlin | June 2015

*»It is not the Muslims who are protecting God and saving Islam; it is God who protects them, and Islam gives them freedom and peace.«*

## Dr Ahmad Milad Karimi

### Rethinking the challenges of tomorrow

#### Ahmad Milad Karimi's insights

- **Dialogue:** I need my rabbi as a counterpart to engage in enlightened and insightful debate about truth, clarify my own position, and thereby contribute to understanding. There is a purpose behind the fact that there are different religions. Muslims are trained in dialogue as a result of Islam's pluralism and their historical bond with Judaism and Christianity.
- **Values:** It is not institutions and laws alone that hold a society together but values. From the viewpoint of Islam, these include confidence, patience, humility, abstinence, consideration, justice, dialogue, welfare, creativity, humour as well as responsibility for the soul, family and society.
- **Sustainability:** Growth for its own sake means poverty. Sustainability demands an holistic approach and binding values. The values of justice, abstinence and patience alongside an awareness of those in need play an important role in Islam and simultaneously contribute to sustainable development. The Qur'an is a book of life that requires a commitment to all that is good, affirms life, prizes diversity and rejects hate and destruction. Imams, religious instructors and theologians can act as key figures in imparting the values that secure sustainability.
- **Policymaking:** Coherent policies are the prerequisite for sustainability. Governments should not emphasise the importance of human rights and at the same time use taxes to finance arms exports to countries that fail to respect human rights and oppress women. State legislation applies to everyone. Religious norms apply to religious communities. If this leads to conflict, a process of rapprochement must bridge the gap between religious commandments and state legislation.
- **Society:** Religions can be abused. Ignorance among believers plays a key role. Religions cannot be understood by consulting Wikipedia. We need more space for religious dialogue and the communication of values face to face, so that an alternative narrative to the predominant image of Islam can emerge.
- **Religion:** Religion is a breathing space free of any sense of triumph. It inspires a desire for abstinence and retreat. Religion imparts significance beyond productivity. It lends meaning to the apparently meaningless: to suffering, failure, ageing and death, and to those cast out or in pain.
- **The claim to truth:** A pious Muslim does not claim to represent absolute truth but aspires to share in that truth. It is essential for Muslims to engage with Islam more intensively and without prejudice, and to enter into a dialogue on values with other religions. Truth manifests itself in action that is sincerely performed for the benefit of humankind, the environment, and in the commitment to peace. If a claim to absolute truth is enforced in the name of religion through perversions like terrorism, it is the duty of Muslims to speak out in opposition.
- **Representation:** Islam thrives on diversity. There is no supreme religious authority. It would therefore be inappropriate to impose a structure on Islam that is alien to it. But this is the case when the state calls for a central Muslim authority as a dialogue partner.

## Ahmad Milad Karimi's vision

*»I would like to see a Muslim ethics council in Germany. It should discuss fundamental and current issues from the Muslim perspective in the spirit of a culture of constructive debate. The council should select the topics it discusses itself and not pursue topics set from outside. Taking the thought further, I would wish to see an interreligious ethics council in which all world religions are represented.«*

## His life

Dr Ahmad Milad Karimi is a religious philosopher, a scholar of Islam, translator of the Qur'an and poet. He completed his doctorate on the philosophers Hegel and Heidegger at the University of Freiburg. Karimi was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1979. As a young boy, he fled from the Mujahideen with his parents and sister, leaving Afghanistan for India. Via Russia, he arrived in Germany at the age of 13, where he initially lived in a home for refugees. Karimi refers to his flight as a »spiritual experience«. Reciting surahs from the Qur'an granted him, he says, recurrent moments of peace and respite. Since 2012 Karimi has held the position of visiting professor for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism at the University of Münster.

## Islam

With 1.6 billion followers, Islam is the second largest of the world's religions. Islam came into being in the seventh century on the Arabian Peninsula. It is a monotheistic religion in which a single God imparts his message in the Qur'an, through a human being whom he has chosen as his messenger. The basic values that can be drawn from Islam are equality, justice, solidarity, patience, abstinence, trust and forbearance, as well as forgiveness. Based on this, Islam promises a fulfilled life founded in freedom and responsibility towards all of creation.

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- [www.miladkarimi.de](http://www.miladkarimi.de)
- [www.uni-muenster.de/ZIT/Personen/Professoren/personen\\_karimi\\_milad.html](http://www.uni-muenster.de/ZIT/Personen/Professoren/personen_karimi_milad.html)
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Design kipconcept GmbH, Bonn

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As at August 2015

Published by

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices

Bonn and Eschborn

Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development

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Cover

Pictures symbolizing a creation mythology.

A commissioned piece of Sarah Hugo-Hamman on the meaning of Values, Religion and Sustainable Development.

Design

kipconcept GmbH, Bonn

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August 2015

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