

Seven Pointers

For Development Actors Navigating Religious Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights

1

Control of women's bodies, sexuality, and choice are "warning signs" of rising fundamentalisms.



Take action when women and LGBTQI* people raise the alarm that their freedoms are being eroded.



Don't dismiss women's decreasing freedoms as unimportant or "not the main issue".

Don't wait for fundamentalisms to grow stronger and more embedded in society before you take action.



Support alternative economic models that focus on redistribution, state provision of services, and place women's rights and justice at the center of their policies.

Hold states, financial institutions, and corporations accountable for the effects of their policies on human rights and gender justice.



Don't support development activities that minimize state responsibility for providing services and social safety nets.

2

Neoliberal economic policies have a particularly negative impact on women, and fuel the growth of religious fundamentalisms.

3

Choosing religious organizations as default for partnerships builds their legitimacy and access to resources, and supports their ideology, including gender ideology.



Prioritize progressive positions on human rights, women's rights, and gender equality when choosing partners for development initiatives. Be sure to thoroughly examine potential partners' views on these topics.



Don't assume that religious institutions need to be involved in your development activities, or that they have better access to or trust of the population.

Don't choose partners based on short-term expediency — prioritize long-term objectives of sustainable development and gender equality.

4

Everyone has multiple identities and should be defined by more than just their religion. Foregrounding religious identities tends to reinforce the power of religious fundamentalists.



Use non-religious language, speaking to common goals: peace, justice, rights, quality of life, an end to violence, access to water, or better health, for example.

Combine arguments from multiple sources: human rights and gender equality, constitutional law, progressive religious interpretations, and empirical data.



Don't reduce a community to a single identity based on religion.

Don't assume that a conservative religious discourse is the only one that a community can relate to.



Make sure that everyone in your organization is sensitized to a feminist, power-based analysis of religion, culture, and tradition.

Support the local actors who are enabling people to discuss alternative religious discourses that are congruent with human rights and gender justice.



Don't accept religion or culture as an excuse for human rights violations or the subordination of women.

Don't assume that religious leaders, who are often men, represent an entire religious community.

5

Religion, culture, and tradition are constantly changing, being reinterpreted and challenged. What is dominant is always a question of power.

6

Racism, exclusion, and marginalization all add to the appeal of fundamentalists' offer of a sense of belonging and a "cause."



Take a stand against both racisms and religious fundamentalisms.

Advocate for state accountability and the political, civil, and economic rights of marginalized communities.



Don't oppose fundamentalisms in ways that reinforce racist narratives.

Don't shy away from challenging discrimination and religious fundamentalisms within minority communities.



Identify the women's rights organizations who are at the forefront of challenging patriarchal religious and cultural norms and make it a priority to include them in consultations and implementation of projects.



Don't assume that large or mainstream international organizations necessarily have the know-how to address gender issues.

7

There is strong evidence that the single most important factor in promoting women's rights and gender equality is an autonomous women's movement.