

Working across Faiths

Despite working in a country of interfaith acceptance, World Vision still faces some challenges. In the past, several religion-based conflicts proved a barrier to bringing faith leaders together, but recently, helped in part by the Inter Religious Council, things have vastly improved. Nonetheless, Orthodox and Muslim communities are, sometimes, quite hesitant to partner with World Vision and suspect staff will want to change their religious beliefs. To counteract this misconception and to reassure people, staff need to clarify the goals of World Vision – to work in unity for the good of children. Sharing this common goal in turn helps to build trust and rapport in relationships and is vital to moving forward together. Staff have also made efforts to make workshops relevant to people of all faith backgrounds, and none, to avoid exclusion and discrimination of those who aren't affiliated with the two mainstream faith groups.

Most of World Vision Ethiopia staff are Christian, although there are several Muslim staff working in the Somali Muslim community Area Programmes. All staff are trained in and reminded of World Vision's core values, so regardless of their personal faith they are aware of what it means to be part of the World Vision team. Staff are encouraged to attend regular meetings for spiritual reflection, to provide space to nurture their personal faith and to also reflect on World Vision's ministry



Above: Amina and her children discuss issues pertaining to their life in a friendly way, guided by World Vision's work with faith leaders © 2019 Kebede Gizachew Ayalew/World Vision.

in communities. Muslim staff are also supported in their faith through similar sessions. Staff are equipped to live out their faith 'in boldness and humility' in the work they do. In 'boldness' staff are transparent and open about the organisation's values. In 'humility' staff are respectful and don't force their faith on other people. Their presence in communities aims to serve others and in their daily relationships, staff seek to embody Christian values of love, acceptance and care for the most vulnerable.

Conclusion

Ethiopia is a country whose people place immense value and social importance on religion, so overall World Vision's presence as a faith-based agency has been welcomed. World Vision Ethiopia approach faith and development with a focus on coming alongside leaders of all faiths and denominations. This engagement has had great personal impact in their faith ministry but also in the lives of their congregations and wider community, especially children. By starting from a position of faith people are inspired to see that child wellbeing and development in general is achieved holistically rather than tackling issues in isolation. Through this approach, World Vision staff have begun to tackle deeply ingrained issues such as gender discrimination, child labour and early marriages and provided medical and religious insights about maternal and child health. In Islamic communities in particular, World Vision Ethiopia employs Muslim staff in order to contextualise projects and lovingly reach vulnerable families in those areas. Given the complexity and significance of Ethiopia's faith landscape, World Vision Ethiopia have demonstrated that establishing strong faith literate partnerships, with a common goal of child wellbeing is essential to achieving inclusive development across the country.

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Front cover photo: Leaders from the Orthodox Christian and Muslim faiths brought together by World Vision for the shared goal of child development. © 2019 Kebede Gizachew Ayalew/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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World Vision 



Faith in development

A Case study from World Vision Ethiopia

Across Ethiopia, World Vision has improved the wellbeing of vulnerable children and women by tackling many of the toughest issues behind poverty and injustice. Staff have been able to discuss and address highly sensitive issues like gender equity and family planning with religious leaders from Ethiopia's diverse faith communities. World Vision Ethiopia operates almost 60 long term development programmes across the country covering multiple sectors including food and nutrition security, education, children's life skills and wellbeing. Specific faith-based projects have been tackling early marriage, gender discrimination and improving mother and child health. Through engaging with highly trusted faith leaders and their communities, numbers of early marriages and child labour cases have reduced and increased numbers of children with disabilities have been able to attend school.

Context

Ethiopia is a large landlocked country in the Horn of Africa, classified as having low human development levels. The country is the second most populous in Africa, being home to 105 million people, 97% of which profess to be from a particular faith background. Christianity and Islam are the two mainstream faiths in making up 62.7% and 33.9% of the faith population respectively, with 3% of the population, typically in the south, aligning with traditional religions. Of the Christian population, 42% are Orthodox, 19% are Protestant and 1% are Catholic. Despite this diversity of faiths, people are generally very tolerant and accepting of people from different religious groups.

Faith therefore plays an important role in the day to day lives of Ethiopians and people rely heavily on their religion and its teachings. Faith leaders are greatly respected and listened to across Ethiopia; what they choose to speak about has influence over the beliefs and actions of their community. In this context, as a faith-based organisation, World Vision is well positioned to work in Ethiopia and equipped to partner with faith leaders and their communities to transform lives. This is advantageous because, in the past, it has been hard for secular NGOs to work with faith leaders and achieve lasting impact.

Approach to Faith and Development

World Vision recognises that faith can play an important role in tackling the social, physical, emotional and spiritual issues facing children. Faith leaders have influence in Ethiopia, they are respected and listened to, so World Vision partners with them with the hope of seeing people's actions change positively towards each other and their children. Staff have opportunities to discuss mindsets about practices like early child marriage, child abuse and gender discrimination. Staff also help faith leaders have a better understanding of what their religious texts actually say about such practices which not only hinder children's development but also that of the entire community.

Equipping faith leaders to tackle such issues is effective because they are then able to speak about what they have learnt from a faith perspective to their congregation and wider community. World Vision believes in working with people of all faiths and none and this is clearly demonstrated in Ethiopia. The Inter Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) exists to bring together people from different faith groups. This is hugely beneficial as it promotes healthy and peaceful interfaith coexistence and understanding. Through partnering with the IRCE and other groups like the Trinitarian Forum, World Vision is able to build relationships with different faith leaders to cover the country's broad religious demographic.

ETHIOPIA

Population: 108.1 million

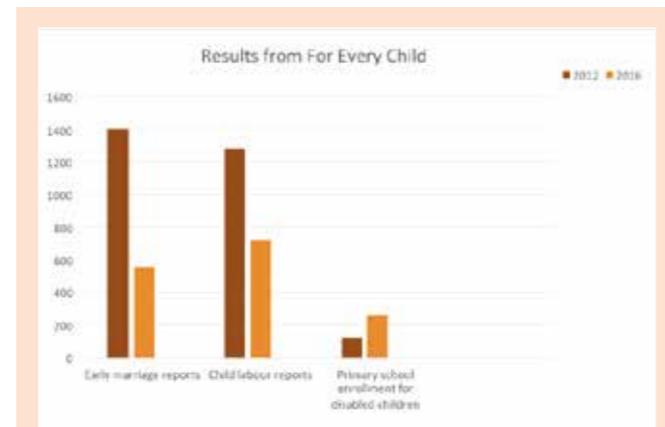


62.7% Christian
33.9% Muslim
3.4% Traditional/other

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

For Every Child Campaign

The 'For Every Child' Campaign (FECC) was set up in Ethiopia from 2012-2016 in five APs: Mersa, Guraghe, Digeluna Tijo, Shashemene and Abaya. This focussed on five areas: child protection, child health, economic development, spiritual wellbeing, and water, hygiene and sanitation to holistically provide children the resources they need to experience fullness of life.



A survey was taken at the start and end of the campaign to track the progress across the five APs. The following bar chart shows some significant change that has taken place from 2012-2016.



Transforming Gender equity and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

Channels of Hope (CoH) is a faith and development model which gives faith leaders the opportunity to share their attitudes towards difficult issues and learn about the scriptural approach to tackle them. This training also equips leaders to mobilise and empower community members into action groups.

In Ethiopia, several CoH models have been used successfully. In particular, CoH for Gender was implemented in four regions, training more than 20,000 faith, government and community members from 2010-2014. In addition, CoH for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health was implemented in Ethiopia from 2015-2017 training 6,000 faith leaders.



Above: Mrs Mereseit Kelew providing health advice to pregnant mothers who are regularly following prenatal care. © 2018 Akilulu Kaseye/World Vision.

CoH-Gender workshops help faith leaders to apply scripture to social issues and move men and women towards healthier relationships. They take a holistic approach to interpreting gender in the Bible to address common misconceptions that lead to gender discrimination. When training Muslim Imams in Ethiopia, World Vision staff find verses in the Quran which support the message of CoH.

Aberra Golo, an evangelical minister in the Oromiya region, and his wife Shitaye believed that family planning was going against the Bible; Genesis talks about being fruitful and multiplying. But having multiple children consecutively weakens the mother's health as her body has little time to recover. In a household with many children, parents may not be able to meet everybody's basic needs.

After being involved with World Vision training, Aberra realised that family planning does not go against the Bible. It is about taking responsibility and care of the family. This mindset change is best seen in his youngest daughter who was born within a five-year planned pregnancy gap. The spacing of pregnancies meant that the family could save money and care well for their only young child.

Shitaye commented: *"If God gives you a gift, you should care for it. All children need to be healthy, clothed, fed, educated and loved – and to do that you have to plan"*

Aberra is able to speak about family planning and maternal care in his services and Shitaye meets with a group of her neighbours to discuss health-related topics.

Ali Hussein, a Muslim leader in Agena town, viewed women as domestic labourers and expected his wife Shitu to do everything at home. This often caused arguments at home and meant their children were growing up in a hostile environment. Previously people in his community only sent their sons to school and did not see any value in educating daughters. Daughters were also subjected to harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Through World Vision training Ali learnt what the Quran teaches about gender; a man is credited for supporting his wife and family. This saw a positive change in his marriage. Shitu said that now they share everything: *"Our income from farming is increasing because we share the workload. I am happy, Ali is happy, and our children are happy."*

The training also changed Ali's attitude about his daughters, and he sends them to school. He has also been talking to people about the harm FGM does to the health of women and girls. He acts as a delegate on his regional faith-based forum.