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Building Bridges in Development: USAID's Strategic Religious Engagement Policy

Building Bridges in Development: USAID's Strategic Religious Engagement Policy affirms the important role of religious actors as strategic development partners and provides a foundation from which the Agency can build and strengthen partnerships to advance shared priorities. Religious communities and faith-based organizations (FBOs) are on the front lines of development and humanitarian assistance efforts worldwide. USAID has a long history of working with religious actors, which are often embedded in communities, trusted, and first to respond to critical needs. The Agency's first-ever Strategic Religious Engagement (SRE) Policy provides guidance on building bridges with religious communities and FBOs, outlines foundational principles, and defines an operational framework for USAID staff.

The policy has three goals:

1: Improve collaboration between USAID and religious communities and FBOs to advance shared priorities and maximize sustainable development and humanitarian assistance outcomes.

2: Strengthen the capacity of USAID's workforce to conduct SRE with respect and inclusivity, in coordination with the U.S. government interagency and our partner community, and in compliance with legal requirements.

3: Increase the integration of SRE as an evidence-based, principled approach to addressing development and humanitarian challenges across sectors and in countries where USAID has a development presence.

BRIDGES: Principles for Engagement

USAID's Strategic Religious Engagement Policy is grounded by a set of principles that convey the Agency's commitment to bridge building in communities where we work.

BELONGING: We will engage with a posture of inclusion, in ways that enhance diversity and promote pluralism.

RESPECT: We will respect the autonomy and unique identity of individuals and groups with whom we engage.

INTEGRITY: We will seek to build relationships formed with integrity, engaging ethically and in a manner consistent with U.S. constitutional guarantees.

DIGNITY: We will uphold the worth of all people in all we do.

GROWTH: We will approach communities humbly and eager to learn, incorporating evidence-based practices and lessons learned in our engagements.

EQUITY: We are committed to enhancing inclusion and equity to benefit the communities we serve.

SUSTAINABILITY: We will aim to build long-term, enduring partnerships with religious communities and FBOs.

A Framework for Engagement

This policy offers a framework for USAID staff to work directly with religious communities and FBOs via a principled, evidence-based approach. This four-step framework outlines the process for implementing SRE by identifying what steps can be undertaken to invest in engagement at a local level and where staff can implement these steps relative to existing Agency guidance.



SURVEY THE LANDSCAPE: Conduct outreach and obtain contextual awareness to inform country and regional strategic planning, incorporating SRE.



SET THE FOUNDATION: Invest in training and tools across the program cycle to strengthen staff capacity to appropriately engage communities confidently, form strong partnerships on the BRIDGES principles, and enhance project outcomes and sustainable development goals.



BUILD TOGETHER: Empower local actors and share ownership of a project in equal partnership to enhance sustainability and results by incorporating input and feedback before, during, and after the launch of a project.



MAINTAIN AND REPAIR: Seek regular feedback to maintain and build our strategic alliances or to adapt and adjust interventions as needed.