



Faith in development

A Case Study from World Vision Senegal

Across Senegal, World Vision has enhanced the wellbeing of children by tackling many of the toughest issues behind poverty and injustice. Staff have been able to discuss problems like child marriage and child exploitation and abuse with religious leaders who are commonly the most trusted community members. As a result, child marriages are being stopped and faith leaders are speaking out against child abuse. As a community based Christian organisation, World Vision Senegal has helped transform situations by connecting at a deep, spiritual level with Senegalese people, particularly the highly influential religious leaders of all faiths.

Context

Senegal is a country situated on Africa's west coast and classified as having low levels of human development. Its people are highly religious with most of the population identifying as being one of the two major religions that have dominated the country for several centuries: Islam and Christianity. Senegal is a predominantly Muslim country with 95.9% of its people adhering to one of the four main Sufi brotherhoods. Around 4.1% of the population profess to be Christian and the majority of these identify themselves as Roman Catholic. Other religions make up an extremely small portion of the population but Senegal has a large variety of tribal and cultural groups each with their own beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices. These beliefs are deeply rooted in religious values and affect attitudes towards such things as marriage practices, the role of men and women, the role of youth, business practices, and many other areas. Religion, therefore, plays a key role in the development landscape in Senegal and religious leaders are extremely influential when it comes to guiding the norms and values of communities.

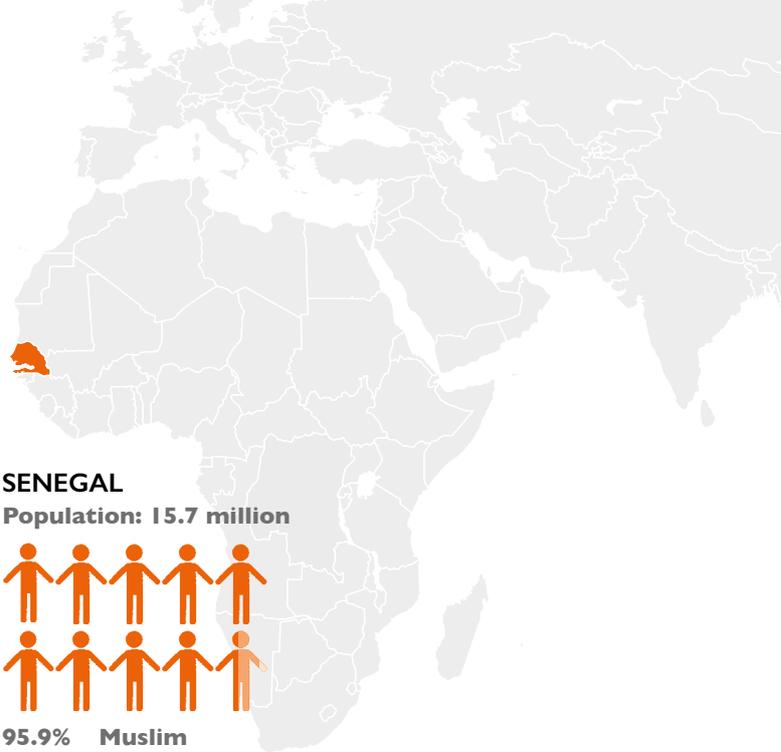
Despite the strength of religious beliefs in the country, Senegal boasts a great deal of religious tolerance and relationships between Muslim and Christian communities are characterised by understanding and collaboration. It is understood that there is a lot of commonality between the core beliefs of each of the two faiths. Interfaith marriage is accepted so it is not uncommon to see Muslims and Christians living peacefully together, even within the same family.

World Vision's experience of operating in Senegal is good; our Christian foundations serve as an advantage when it comes to working with religious leaders and communities who generally understand and appreciate our convictions. This is much less the case for secular organisations who are unmotivated or less able to engage with communities or tackle deeply ingrained harmful practices from a faith perspective. World Vision enjoys freedom to communicate our Christian mission clearly and openly and the high levels of interfaith tolerance and understanding in Senegal provide a platform for World Vision to work with multiple stakeholders and to create partnerships that support our common objectives for child wellbeing.



Right: Kany's Loan Group were provided with a World Vision Fund loan which enabled them to better care for their children.

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Approach to Faith and Development

"Living out our Christian faith with boldness and humility" has been identified as one of World Vision's global strategic priorities, set out in a global Faith and Development Framework. In alignment with this, World Vision Senegal developed a five-year plan focussing specifically on integrating faith and development into their wider strategy:

Believing that we can achieve far more for the most vulnerable children when we work in union across faith communities, World Vision played a key role in bringing Christian communities together to form the National Council of Churches. In addition to working with churches, World Vision enjoys close and mutually beneficial partnerships with Islamic organisations - such as NGO Jamra and Qur'anic schools - who help to build bridges between World Vision and the majority Muslim communities. Through partnerships like these, World Vision has been able to leverage the strong influence that religious leaders of all faiths have on the wider community, initially working with and through them to highlight doctrinal similarities concerning the care of children and then equipping faith leaders with the knowledge and understanding needed to teach on all aspects of child well-being. From time to time the historical legacy of French colonialists, who disrespected the value of Senegalese culture and religion, creates a little resistance to the work of any Christian organisation in Senegal. World Vision responds to this resistance by focussing on the issues concerning the value and worth of children around which the two faiths are united and through partnerships with Islamic organisations who help to make World Vision's motivations and purposes clear. These help to assure communities that World Vision's intentions are to help their children thrive, rather than to change their religion, and calls on them to partner with World Vision for the well-being of children.

Below are some specific examples to show how World Vision Senegal have incorporated faith and development practices into their wider operational programming.



Channels of Hope for Child Protection

Channels of Hope is an interactive process which aims to create a safe space for faith leaders and communities to learn, share and debate. It reaches to the root causes and deepest convictions that impact attitudes, norms, values and practices toward the most vulnerable. Channels of Hope mobilises and builds on the existing competencies of faith leaders to respond to some of the most difficult issues affecting their communities. Through this process they are exposed to additional capacity-building efforts and they commit to action plans which will help them to strengthen their own faith community responses. World Vision Senegal uses the Channels of Hope model to tackle child protection issues that are prevalent in Senegal, such as child marriage, corporal punishment and unregistered births; training and equipping faith leaders to raise awareness of these issues with their own communities.



Citizen Voice and Action

Citizen Voice and Action is a World Vision model that mobilises and equips communities to monitor government services and facilitates an advocacy methodology that results in the improvement of inadequate government services. In Senegal, World Vision works through faith leaders to help communities



Above: Men socialising in the centre of Tonguia village, Senegal. © 2018 Jeff Arnold/World Vision.

understand their legal rights and to mobilise advocacy groups which aim to hold the government accountable. A notable achievement within this area is that a group of 100 children visited the Presidential palace to speak about early child marriage and to present the president with a memorandum. The President was so moved by their words and the cause they spoke of that he set up a new ministry of children as a direct result.



Above: Teenage girls in school, Tonguia village, Senegal. © 2019 Jeff Arnold/World Vision.



Kids' Clubs and Celebrating Families

In 2017, World Vision Senegal launched a faith-based project to enhance children's life skills and spiritual awareness, promoted primarily through Kids' clubs.

In Senegal, World Vision runs over 300 Kids' Clubs with the objective of educating children on their rights, empowering them to advocate for themselves in their communities, teaching them important life skills based on Christian values and Bible-based examples which are in common with Islamic values. In general, local Imams have recognised the benefits of values-based Children's Clubs and the positive difference seen in the children who take part. Imams have actively encouraged local Muslim children to attend and they now form the majority of participants.

Across all their long-term Senegal Programmes, World Vision is also implementing 'Celebrating Families' an approach that seeks to ensure that all families enjoy positive and loving relationships

Channels of Hope – early results: An assessment measuring changes in the thinking, knowledge, attitudes and practices of faith leaders and their spouses with regard to child protection found that many leaders have successfully carried out the actions they had committed to take after just one year. Examples include solidarity funds, awareness raising, civil registration, tackling child marriage, promoting positive parenting, challenging female genital mutilation, and promoting girls' education. In some cases, participants have passed their learning on to other local organisations such as schools, councils and women's groups. Results measured between the baseline assessment and a year later showed a 51% reduction in the number of faith leaders and spouses who think that child abuse committed by a faith leader should not be exposed or penalised and a 22% reduction in those who agreed that they would prefer their daughter to be married off young than see her fall pregnant before marriage. In addition, faith leaders and spouses, mosques and churches are now more engaged with parents and caregivers on child protection and child well-being issues, with some Imams deciding to stop conducting marriages of children in their communities.

and have hope for the future. It supports families to allow children to experience love by addressing the beliefs, convictions and cultural norms that contribute to harmful practices in child rearing. Through Celebrating Families parents are equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to create safe and nurturing environments within the family home and community, enabling children to experience positive and peaceful relationships.

Savings and Loan Groups

In Senegal, saving groups were initially established in order to strengthen World Vision's partnership with the Church in the fight against poverty. Through them, World Vision has harnessed various faith communities to establish groups that enable members, primarily women, to access credit and generate their own wealth to help them become financially self-sufficient. These groups have emerged as an effective approach for the socio-economic empowering of the most vulnerable people and have even been extended to Kids' Clubs to help children to pay for their school supplies and improve their access to nutritional lunches.



Above: Fatoumata, pictured with her family, has benefitted from loans to grow cash crops and set up her own small shop. © 2019 Megali Nanayakkara/World Vision.

Faith at work

Given the predominantly Muslim context of Senegal, around half of the staff at World Vision Senegal identify as Christian and the other half as Muslim. All staff of all faiths participate in World Vision's Mission Immersion Programme, which is designed to equip staff with both an understanding of World Vision's organisational beliefs and commitments and a humble

boldness to live out our Christian faith and calling. Annual refreshers are provided for all staff to ensure continued engagement around the Christian identity of World Vision and its core documents.

Staff meetings are held with the intention of being inclusive and, as with meetings with communities and faith leaders, World Vision Senegal seeks to highlight the common ground between Christianity and Islam. World Vision Senegal provides staff with opportunities for spiritual reflection and thanksgiving three times a week and regular spiritual retreats. These gatherings focus mainly on tackling issues faced by communities based on Christian values and are open to all staff. To further demonstrate World Vision's commitment to interfaith solidarity, both Christian and Muslim faith leaders are, from time to time, invited to join staff and share their views on specific topics.

Conclusion

World Vision Senegal provides a strong example of the ways in which World Vision's strong Christian mission and values can enable it to create lasting change in the lives of children, families and communities. Across Senegal, World Vision is well known and highly respected for its values, actions, and commitments to partners, the State and other actors. World Vision's openness to share and discuss faith issues with religious influencers, and to explore the implications of both Christian and Islamic scriptures on the value placed on children, enables them to ask faith leaders to partner with them for the well-being of children and to tackle some of the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision's success as a Christian organisation in a majority Muslim context is thanks to both the religious tolerance enjoyed across Senegal and the professional conduct of World Vision's leaders and employees who consistently operate with sensitivity, understanding and humility.

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Front cover photo: Mosque near Yoff beach, Senegal. © 2016 Jon Snyder/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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