

Final Report on the „African Dialogues on Faith and Demography“

How Faith Actors are Driving Demographic Change in Africa

A new report published by Religions for Peace, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the German Federal Foreign Office and the Berlin Institute for Population and Development shows how religious actors in Africa contribute to creating the foundations for demographic change through family planning, education and youth development –and which strategies they are pursuing in the process.

Berlin, December 5, 2024

Africa faces unique demographic developments today. The continent's population is growing rapidly: from currently 1.5 billion people to almost 2.5 billion by 2050. Sixty percent of the population is under 25 years old. This dynamic can hold enormous opportunities for the economic development of African countries, but at the same time places high demands on education, health and employment opportunities for the young generation. The final report of the international dialogue series “African Dialogues on Faith and Demography” shows how these challenges can be addressed and what role religious actors play for sustainable development.

In Africa, where 95 percent of people identify with a religion, faith actors and religious organisations are deeply rooted in many communities. “In addition to providing spiritual guidance, religious leaders are often the driving force for social change and already work on population issues. They are active in their communities in matters of health, education, humanitarian aid and psychosocial support, and thus already work on demographic issues. Their proximity to the people makes them indispensable partners in shaping social and demographic change,” says Colette Rose, author of the report.

The African Dialogues on Faith and Demography, an event series organised by *Religions for Peace*, the German Federal Foreign Office, UNFPA and the Berlin Institute, aimed to shed light on the potential at the intersection between religion and demography. It provided an opportunity for experts, faith actors and members of religious initiatives and associations from across Africa to engage in dialogue. The report is based on the findings of the six dialogues and highlights key areas for action:

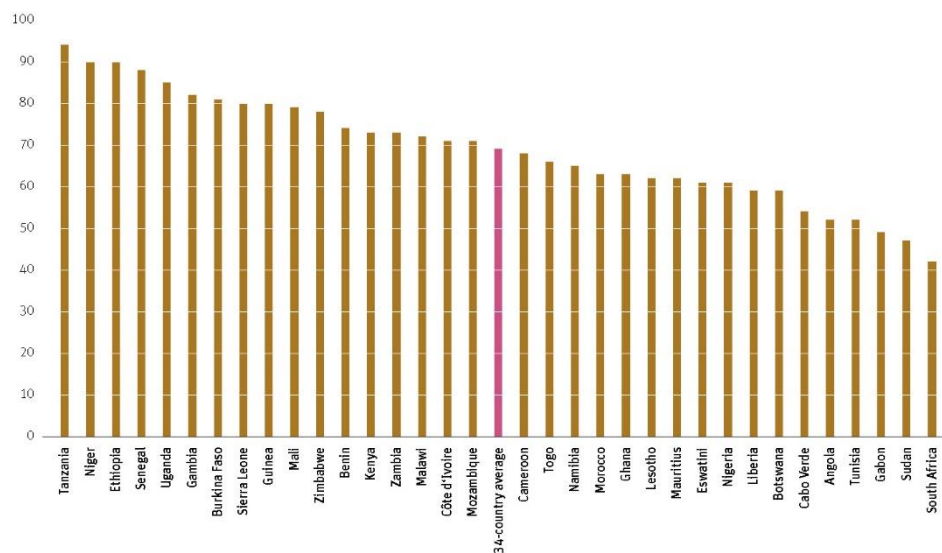
- **Promoting gender equality:** Religious leaders work against harmful practices such as child marriage, gender-based violence and female genital mutilation and advocate for gender equality.
- **Strengthening sexual and reproductive health:** Religious organisations correct misconceptions about family planning and other health issues, for example through interpretations of religious texts that support birth spacing.
- **Ensure education for girls:** With gender-sensitive approaches and better infrastructure, such as free menstrual products, faith communities can ensure that girls can attend school.
- **Empowering young people:** Religious leaders can make space for and amplify the voices and needs of young people by appointing them to leadership positions in religious organisations.

Religious Actors Are Agents of Change

“Faith actors should be more closely involved in development cooperation strategies. They are critical agents of change who should be engaged alongside partners in governments and civil society to ensure campaigns to, for example, end gender-based violence or child marriage are successful,” explains Rose. The report offers political recommendations for action and presents good practice examples that can guide future investments in this work.

Percentage of people surveyed who trust religious leaders “somewhat” or “a lot”, by country, 2019/2021

Data source: Afrobarometer



The report **“The Role of Religious Actors in Population Dynamics: Insights from the African Dialogues on Faith and Demography”** will be available at

www.berlin-institut.org/en/publications

Media Inquiries:

Nele Disselkamp, disselkamp@berlin-institut.org, +49 (0)30 31 01 73 24

Contacts:

Colette Rose, rose@berlin-institut.org, Tel. : +49 (0)30 31019591

Catherina Hinz, hinz@berlin-institut.org, Tel.: +49 (0)30-22 32 48 45

About the Berlin Institute

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