**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.

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

**✓** 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.

**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.

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

**✓** 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

**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

**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.**

**✓** 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.

*This brief was produced by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) in May 2016 and was adapted from AWID’s publication* [The Devils is in the Details: At the nexus of development, women’s rights, and religious fundamentalisms](http://www.awid.org/publications/devil-details%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)*(Ayesha Imam, 2016).*