G20I Fellows and Youth Forum – 8 October 2020
Topic 3
Youth Education and Women Empowerment
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During the 2018 G20 Summit in Mendoza, Argentina, the Ministers of Education from the invited countries affirmed the unique role of education as a key factor for sustainable development for all nations. They recognized the need to place education at the center of the global agenda and call for collective action. They affirmed their commitment to ensure an inclusive and equitable quality education for youth, men, and women and to promote lifelong opportunities for all. However, the Ministers of Education missed recognizing the importance of religious communities and institutions as influential partners that can provide multi-religious and multicultural education through interreligious dialogue (hereafter IRD).

In our day, access to schooling depends on a country's educational infrastructure. In many instances, the foundations of that infrastructure are based on facilities originally built by religious leaders and religious organizations that promote learning and spread the faith. Most of these institutions have become secular in orientation in recent years. Apart from their roles in creating educational infrastructure, religious groups were foundational in fostering societal attitudes toward education. As a result, these institutions can be used as a platform to promote and train the young generation, who are the future of our world in IRD.

By IRD we mean all forms of interaction and communication through speech, writing, and/or shared activities that help promote mutual understanding and/or cooperation between people who self-identify as adherents of religious traditions. With this definition, IRD can be an essential tool to promote active citizenship, inclusion, and equality. This tool can therefore contribute to the creation of peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous societies worldwide that work toward reducing gender inequality.

For these reasons, we recommend adding IRD as a necessary tool to achieve the fulfillment of the unique role of education as a key factor for sustainable development for all nations. This can be done through:

- Multi-religious and Multicultural Education for Youth
- IRD engagement opportunities for Youth
- IRD as a tool to reduce gender inequality

Multi-religious and Multicultural Education for Youth:
Background:
The members of the young generation are the future leaders in every aspect of society. We thus have the responsibility to prepare them to be leaders that can make multi-religious and multicultural policies. This preparation starts with education in schools and universities.
Challenge:
In some countries, religion is taught only at religious schools. Not all public and private schools and universities include religious studies in their curriculum. By that, students tend to miss out on multi-religious and multicultural aspects of education. This in turn hinders the multi-faceted understanding of diversity and inclusion. In addition, without formally educating about various religions, there often prevails misinterpretations of religious Holy Books and the tenets of faith of different religions. This, in turn, often leads to misunderstanding, stereotyping, gender

discrimination, prejudices, and extremism. The lack of emphasis on the importance of education about religions also leads to a lack of collaboration between religious leaders, NGOs and the education sectors to support/promote multi-religious and multicultural education.

Recommendation:

- ==Create and ensure that women and youth have a platform where they can be justly represented, where they can enter into dialogue and have their voices heard.==
- ==Include "Religious studies" in the curriculum of both private and public schools and universities==
- ==Promote Multi-religious and multicultural education through collaboration between various religious leaders, NGOs and the education sectors==

IRD engagement opportunities for Youth:

Background:

We live in a secular world where youth are becoming less interested in religion. One reason for this is because of confusion between the tenets of faith and the actions of the faithful. With this confusion, religion can unfortunately be misused to brainwash the minds of the youth into extremism. Coupled with this reality, often if religious studies is offered in school, the courses are dogmatic and try to convince students to follow a particular religion rather than academic in nature where the focus is on understanding various religions and how they can enhance a person's perspective and understanding.

Recommendations

- ==To include both formal and informal learning opportunities through collaboration and constructive partnership between religious institutions, NGOs and governmental organizations, in order to increase both intra and inter religious literacy among the youth.==

  - Examples of Formal Education:
    - Religious studies should be considered a branch of knowledge and have a place in schools and universities.
    - A training for religious educators on the following topics:
      - The importance of emphasizing humanity, despite religious difference, in multi-religious and multicultural education.
      - How to include the positive values of various religious traditions in multi-religious education?
      - This history of various religious traditions so as to promote a comprehensive understanding of the religions.

  - Examples of Informal Education:
    - Community Engagement: Participants engaged in dialogue of life - where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, as well as their human problems and preoccupations.

- To create an award of excellence in multicultural, and multi-religious education, to be given to one school and one university every year during the World Interfaith Harmony week organized by the U.N.

- The government should encourage research, discussions, and training to better understand the local religious contexts in order to develop and execute community-driven policies and recommendations for curriculum development.

- To create youth-driven policy platforms.
  - Example: To organize activities such as sports/exhibitions/food festivals that can motivate and mobilize youth to participate in IRD on the local/global level.

- To encourage and develop youth organizations, youth councils or parliaments, clubs, youth networks and youth committees dedicated to IRD through:
  - Including youth in media and technology endeavors related to IRD.
  - Organizing training programs/workshops for youth.
  - Identifying youth leaders in IRD to be role models.
  - Creating an intergenerational and interactive platform for youth dialogue.

- To organize a World Youth Peace Summit, emphasizing the role of IRD among the youth to develop clear targets to be included under SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

IRD as a tool to reduce gender inequality:
Background:
"Valuing the wisdom and capabilities of women is critical to the development of any organization or society. Organizations where women are full, contributing participants are open and energized by a wide range of opinions and approaches"[1]. Throughout history, women have been among the most vulnerable people because men have paid too little attention to the views and efforts of women. Additionally, women have been excluded from IRD because of their social status as not being equal to men. Perspectives and opinions related to IRD are often biased towards the patriarchal perspective. But although the participation of women in IRD is often denied, women are undeniably active practitioners of faith on a personal level. They are caregivers and pillars of both the family and community. Their exclusion from IRD puts the future of gender equality in danger.

A global platform on Gender Equality and Religion was launched at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) session in March 2017. It aimed to elevate recognition of the importance of women's rights and contributions through faith-based discourse and to shape policy and legislative efforts for gender equality on the local, national and international levels. However, this platform has not reflected much progress in women's involvement in IRD. This is because gender inequality is still very much ingrained in some traditional religious and cultural practices.

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[1] Ikeda, D. (2006). Equal Rights for Women: Moving toward a Creative Partnership. (The Japan Times, Jul. 13, 2006). https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2006/07/13/commentary/world-commentary/moving-toward-a-creative-partnership/

Recommendations

- Include the participation of women in the decision making in IRD in the current Gender Action Plan (2018 – 2021) as well as in any future Gender Action planning.

- Government organizations should cooperate with religious leaders in order to ensure an active participation of women in IRD.

- Activate the Global Platform on Gender Equality and Religion (launched in 2017) and ensure that it is fully functional by:
  - Promoting gender equality and women empowerment at the community level
  - Recognizing women's roles in IRD and religious education
  - Creating local role models to inspire other girls/women
  - Creating opportunities (initiatives) and policies to encourage women to come forward and break gender stereotypes
  - Strengthening women participation in IRD in SDG 5

- To proclaim an international decade for women's empowerment (2020 – 2030) to intensify efforts to empower women and to increase their involvement in peace processes through IRD.

- Funding and budgeting IRD projects that are gender sensitive and gender responsive.

- Local communities and/ or NGOs should organize different activities that aim to encourage women to have active participation and self-empowerment in IRD.