



Reports

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Interreligious and Multi-thematic Social
Dialogue as a Promoter of Development
in Latin America and the Caribbean

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International Institute
for Religious Freedom



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for Religious Freedom

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CONTENTS

Socioeconomic context of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)	5
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region	6
Social Dialogue as a catalyst for achieving the SDGs	8
Religious communities: An invisible actor, but with great potential for Social Dialogue.....	10
Observations for achieving the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean from the Interreligious Social Dialogue	14
Example of Interreligious and Multi-thematic Social Dialogue: National Committee for Participation and Social and Inter-sectorial Dialogue on Religious Freedom.....	20
Upcoming challenges	23
References	25

Socioeconomic context of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) is the United Nations agency in charge of promoting economic and social development in its member countries. Its last Executive Secretary, as well as its Acting Executive Secretary, pointed out the presence of a great affectation to the development of this region due to the direct and collateral effects left by the Covid-19 pandemic, stating in this regard that:

In this gloomy world scene, Latin America has turned out to be one of the regions most affected by the pandemic, a situation that is no coincidence in the framework of the internal and external asymmetries that shape its dysfunctional development style, a pattern that structuralist and neo-structuralist literatures have described in numerous writings analyzing the socioeconomic and environmental dynamics of the region in different historical stages (BÁRCENA and CIMOLI: 2020:9).

According to this organization, in 2020 there was a sharp drop in the labor participation and employment of women, as well as a scarce insertion in the labor market of the youth population, so that a large percentage of this sector has had to resort to informality; in addition, there has been an increase in the use of teleworking (ECLAC, 2021).

By 2020, a significant increase in the percentage of the population living below the poverty line was reported, corresponding to 33 %, as well as an increase in the percentage of the population whose average per capita income is below the extreme poverty line, equivalent to 13.1 %. If we take into account that, according to these statistical sources, a population of around 652 million people was projected for this period, then we can say that in Latin America more than 215 million people have been considered poor and more than 85 million people have lived in extreme poverty in this region, after the Covid-19 emergency, as shown in Graph 1.

According to the World Bank, economic growth has been sluggish since then, and has been facing situations such as the long-term negative impact of the health crisis, external wars and global inflation. This multinational organization argued that “in terms of employment, it increased to almost recover pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2021, after a 20 % drop. But the share of formal employment has fallen by almost 5 percentage points”.¹

The World Bank also points out that Latin America and the Caribbean is a region highly exposed and vulnerable to natural hazards, which also affects its development. To highlight this situation and give a general context, the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 produced 222,750 deaths; and the earthquake in Chile had an economic impact of 30 billion USD (ADAMO, RAZAFINDRAZAY and SHERBININ, 2012:179). In 2020 Hurricane Iota devastated the island of Providencia, belonging to Colombia, leaving more than 90 % of the built structures affected.

¹ See <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/region/lac/overview>

However, despite all this, Latin America and the Caribbean preserve great potentialities that generate hope for their social and economic recovery, even in the face of the crisis and the endogenous and exogenous agents that have undermined these situations.

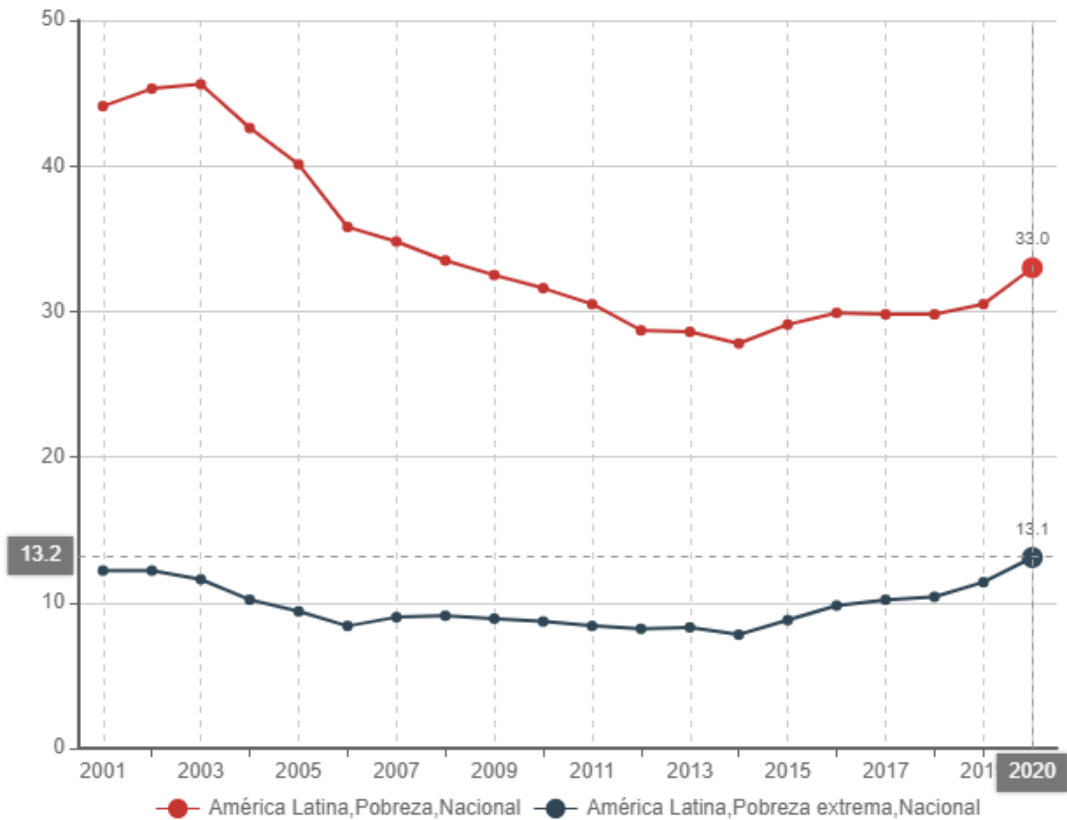


Figure 1: Trend of poverty and extreme poverty lines in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Source: statistics.cepal.org²

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region

As is recognized worldwide, in 2015 the United Nations General Assembly agreed to direct the national and sub-national policies of the Member States under the roadmap outlined in the 2030 Agenda, in which 17 Sustainable Development Goals were set out, with their respective targets and indicators for measuring progress. The aim of this projection is for governments to align and harmonize their objectives in line with the goals set out in this roadmap, and to make economic, political, environmental and social efforts to put an end to poverty, preserve ecosystems and improve people's quality of life within an initial period of 15 years, with the understanding that the development of nations will continue without compromising their sustainability.

² See https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/dashboard.html?indicator_id=1&area_id=1&lang=es

The countries that make up Latin America and the Caribbean, in their entirety, are members of the United Nations, so they have been aligned from the beginning with the scope of the 2030 Agenda, implementing planning instruments for development at all levels of the State. The Regional Observatory of Planning for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean carries out a continuous analysis of this alignment within the Development Plans, outlining how many target lines of each Plan tend to comply with each of the 17 SDGs. In Graph 2, each circle represents an SDG, starting from the red one at the top (SDG 1) and clockwise are the others. The size of each circle represents the magnitude related to the number of target lines to which each Plan is committed:



Figure 2: Convergence between the Mexico Plan and the 2030 Agenda
Source: Regional Observatory³

Annually, the UN delivers a general report on the progress of compliance of member states, and we stopped to review the report for the year 2021, as it is closely related to the effects of the global emergency due to Covid-19. In this report, the Secretary General of this Organization, Antonio Guterres, pointed out that the international community is at a critical moment to comply with the 2030 Agenda and that “the current crisis jeopardizes decades of development progress, further delays the urgent transition to greener and more inclusive economies and further deviates progress on the SDGs” UNITED NATIONS (2021:2).

³ Mexican National Development Plan 2019–2024 | Regional Observatory for Development Planning, <https://observatorioplanificacion.cepal.org/es/planes/plan-nacional-de-desarrollo-de-mexico-2019-2024>.

Social Dialogue as a catalyst for achieving the SDGs

In the same vein, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Liu Zhenmin, stated that “transformative changes” are needed, and that the crisis calls for “interdependence and interconnectedness among the different dimensions of sustainability: from health, well-being, social and economic prosperity, to climate and ecosystems” UNITED NATIONS (2021: 3). Zhenmin’s main message is that sustainable development is a commitment of all and not only of governments; and for structural transformations to take place, solutions must be developed jointly.

He adds that in order to achieve these expected results, the participation of all stakeholders must be promoted: civil society, trade unions, academia and the private sector, not leaving unilateral responsibility to governments. “Rebuilding the social fabric requires effective multilateralism and the full participation of all societies. This global crisis demands a shared global response”. He adds, “In the face of the many challenges we face, a unified vision of coherent, coordinated and comprehensive responses by the multilateral system is more important than ever.” (p. 3)

Not least, Zhenmin states that “to address the vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic, governments and the international community must make structural transformations and develop common solutions guided by the SDGs”.

He suggests that this is a critical moment for humanity, so transcendental decisions must be made that will mark the course of our own and of the generations that will follow us. Finally, he makes the following invitation to all the different actors: “let us seize the moment together to make this a decade of action, transformation and restoration in order to achieve the SDGs and comply with the Paris Agreement on climate change”.

In accordance with this appreciation, I consider that the *turning point* to advance in the realization of goals that contribute to the achievement of social welfare, the improvement of the quality of life and the attainment of sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean, is the establishment of a *Social Dialogue* that involves different actors of the organized society, such as the Interreligious Sector; as well as different public and private institutions that give participation to the multilateral component remarked by the above-mentioned representatives of the United Nations.

In Colombia, I had the opportunity to carry out actions for Social Dialogue from my role as Vice-Minister within the Ministry of Labor; and later to take this experience in a new role as Vice-Minister for Participation and Equal Rights of the Ministry of the Interior, applying Social Dialogue to the multiplicity of conflicts that arise in the different social groups of the country. As a conclusion, we were able to develop new guidelines and criteria to understand and transform conflicts, make proposals for the Public Administration that contemplate the effective linkage of different actors, and promote administrative acts as intervention tools for the achievement of common objectives. In addition, we changed the structure and functions of the government agency, transforming the Vice-

Ministry for Participation and Equal Rights into the Vice-Ministry for Social Dialogue, Equality and Human Rights (MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS, 2022).

To speak of Social Dialogue, we must point out that it has its origins in the problems related to the situation of workers, and has sought since its inception to address conflict events, such as unfair wages, massive layoffs, conditions related to ergonomics, the increase of informal work, etc. In order to talk about Social Dialogue, it is necessary to quote the International Labor Organization (ILO), which has highlighted the importance of this intervention path, in order to articulate in the same scenario the actors representing informal workers, government representatives and spokespersons of labor organizations and companies, in order to reach agreements that improve the labor situation of people. In particular, the ILO highlights the importance of the Social Dialogue to achieve the goals set out in SDG 8 “Decent work and economic growth”.

This international organization clearly stated that:

The 2030 Agenda provides an opportunity to strengthen and re-energize social dialogue processes worldwide and at all levels”, adding that “in turn, social dialogue can make a considerable contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of its Sustainable Development Goals (ILO:2018:16).

This statement is not unrelated to reality, if we take into account what was recently expressed by the United Nations in reference to the need to articulate the efforts of many actors, which help to cohere and interrelate the different dimensions of sustainability, as well as to align the efforts made by all to unblock the bottlenecks that prevent the achievement of the objectives related to the social and economic development of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The problems related to the inability to achieve the 2030 Agenda are, for the most part, structural problems, which is why a long-term Social Dialogue must be proposed. In this regard, Vargas-Petri (2009) point out that “two categories of social dialogue can be distinguished, corresponding to two different approaches to consultation: management social dialogue and advisory social dialogue” (p. 198). They argue that management social dialogue is that which takes place at a given moment in time in response to a social conflict in which the parties must come together to agree on solutions. The social dialogue of advice corresponds to more solid and sustained processes over time, focused on the creation of public policies and long-term actions. Both types of dialogue are important, but in order to advance in structural transformations, we must call for a dialogue such as the council dialogue that is more sustainable over time, and that in turn involves a great multiplicity of actors who have most likely never talked about common problems, which is what we have called Multi-thematic Social Dialogue as an instrument for the Public Administration exercise (BAENA, 2021).

In addition to the above, I have argued that the Social Dialogue should be based on the application of human values by each of the actors participating in it, so as not to fall into the error of simply instrumentalizing the dialogue as if it were

the application of a culinary recipe, but to see it as a path for the transformation and management of conflicts.

We have called the application of values to sensitize the Social Dialogue. What I mean is that the actors must be sensitized to understand the problems, not on the basis of simple figures, but by showing solidarity with the effects that people feel as a result of their conflicts; and here we are talking about the problems that affect human beings as well as those related to the detriment of ecosystems. Focusing on values can be considered as something very important, since in multiple occasions dialogue is not sustainable in time, because the actors desert and joint negotiations and agreements cannot be reached, simply for not recognizing their differences, or for not finding common points and not applying values such as patience, humility and responsibility, for example. Thus, the non-application of values can reduce a dialogue of advice into one of management, or even lead to no agreement at all.

Thus, some types of Social Dialogue can be established according to the theme, actors and time of solution of each problem. For our central problem, which is the need to take joint action to achieve common goals, and under a framework outlined by the 2030 Agenda, we are talking about a dialogue that must be sustainable over time, which also involves multiple actors, so I would dare to call it “multi-stakeholder”, which seeks to connect multiple issues that apparently were not connected, we call it “multi-thematic” and think more about being than statistics, which we call “sensitizing Social Dialogue” or Social Dialogue with values. This central problem underlies conflicts related to each of the 17 SDGs, which will require different moments for the Social Dialogue, and knowing how to involve the most appropriate actors to deal with each conflict.

The Social Dialogue is thus focused on the general characteristics described above, as the path par excellence for the transformation of social conflicts and the acceleration of the achievement of the SDGs. Usually we have spoken of conflict resolution, but recently other possibilities of conflict treatment have emerged, given the real circumstances of the tensions presented, the impossibility of resolving social, economic and environmental conflicts with immediacy; and the inability to generate positive results from a unilateral work; therefore, it must be accepted that many of the goals of the 2030 Agenda are not achieved overnight, but must be achieved gradually and multilaterally. The Social Dialogue, as it has been proposed, is in line with the requirements that have been urgently proclaimed in the face of the global crisis that the region and the planet are facing. To strive for a dialogue in which society and institutions are strengthened, while each objective and goal is achieved, is the way to achieve it.

Religious communities: An invisible actor, but with great potential for Social Dialogue

In general terms, religious communities are founded on some religious belief and have some internal organizational structure; they are composed of ascribed members and, for the most part, use physical places for worship. According to

a research by PEW RESEARCH CENTER (2014) in which it conducted 30,000 surveys in 18 countries in the region, it shows how in Latin America and the Caribbean there is a large presence of religious communities, mostly belonging to Catholicism and Protestantism, and among which 87 % of Christians stated “doing charitable works in favor of the poor”. However, religions other than Christianity are also present, such as Buddhism, Bahaism, Islam, Judaism, among others; it is worth noting that their communities also perform charitable work for other people, often through foundations and other faith-based organizations, or even through the religious communities themselves. Thus, these communities not only develop activities of a cultural or ceremonial nature, but also of a social nature and impact on their environment.

In other words, it can be affirmed that religious communities belonging to different faiths, seen as a whole as a single sector (interfaith), generate an incalculable added value to the sustainable development of Latin America and the Caribbean, due not only to their altruistic vocation or service to people, but also to the important presence they have in this study region, which impacts with great coverage and territorial distribution. Unfortunately, most countries in the region do not have an analysis of the contribution that religion makes to development, with a few exceptions such as Argentina, Honduras and Colombia. There are other countries such as Mexico, Chile, or Peru, which have carried out related studies, not only from the government, but also from academic research, however, three advances in the region concerning sustainable development are mentioned.

In a research conducted by the Argentine Government with the leadership of UNDP and CREAS (2019:5), the Vice President of the latter cited organization, Doctor Shikiya, asserts that:

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and Religious Organizations (ROs) play a fundamental role in sustainable development because they have a significant presence and outreach through their humanitarian and social service actions, especially in the midst of communities in both rural and urban areas.

This is a very interesting research because it shows how only 41 initiatives in the social, educational and environmental order impact a population of 710,474 people, which shows that the Interfaith Sector produces a great impact that can help catalyze the goals of the 2030 Agenda. It also specifies the SDGs that are aligned with the work of the FBOs.

In Honduras, the World Vision International Organization conducted in 2021 a study on the social impact of the Christian Church, involving 1,271 religious leaders and identifying a total of 6,274 social action initiatives related to emotional support, emergency humanitarian aid, food security and nutrition, support for women, environmental protection, sanitation supply and hygiene promotion, participation in the Outreach Centers⁴, employment and employability and even

⁴ CDA Outreach Centres are community spaces in Honduras that promote citizen participation and the empowerment of leaders and authorities to drive community development USAID (2014).

others related to communications technology. This study also demonstrates the potential of volunteerism within religious communities to carry out social actions, which promotes a greater impact compared to other sectors of the population.

It is concluded that these relatively new studies provide a starting point for understanding the integral work of the Interfaith Sector in the scope of sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that this facet of the Interfaith Sector is unfortunately still very unknown in the countries of the region, and the potential that emerges from its social vocation is still not valued.

After a review of the Latin American and Caribbean region, I was able to find that not many mechanisms have been created for the interconnection of this sector with other institutions, in order to achieve actions in synergy for the achievement of common objectives. In fact, one of the results of the study conducted in Honduras shows that 83 % of the leaders surveyed indicated that they are not part of any association, organization or local network within the community, so that the Social Dialogue would be a very propitious dynamizer to achieve the connection and articulation of a fabric that helps to achieve common goals.

For its part, the GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA (2018) included within its national policies, to carry out actions to know the measurement of the social impact⁵ that religious communities have both from their Religious Entities and their FBOs (Faith-Based Organizations), which in the country are known as Religious Sector Organizations (RSO). A phased work has been carried out with the leadership of UNDP, in accordance with the availability of annual investment, preparing 3,718 surveys to the Interreligious Sector with the purpose of knowing their social, cultural and educational work in alignment with the 2030 Agenda. This work is very important, because it not only determines the impact of the Sector on the achievement of the SDGs, but also a review of each departmental development plan was made⁶ in order to seek the embedding of this work within the various programs, public policies and actions aimed at meeting the global agenda in question.

Finally, this exhaustive review has made it possible to identify the actions of the Interfaith Sector that are characterized by having a high, medium or low multiplier effect on the achievement of the SDGs. Figure 3 shows the grid with which UNDP identified the impact of the Interfaith Sector on the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

⁵ National Development Plan 2018–2022.

⁶ Colombia is divided into 32 departments.

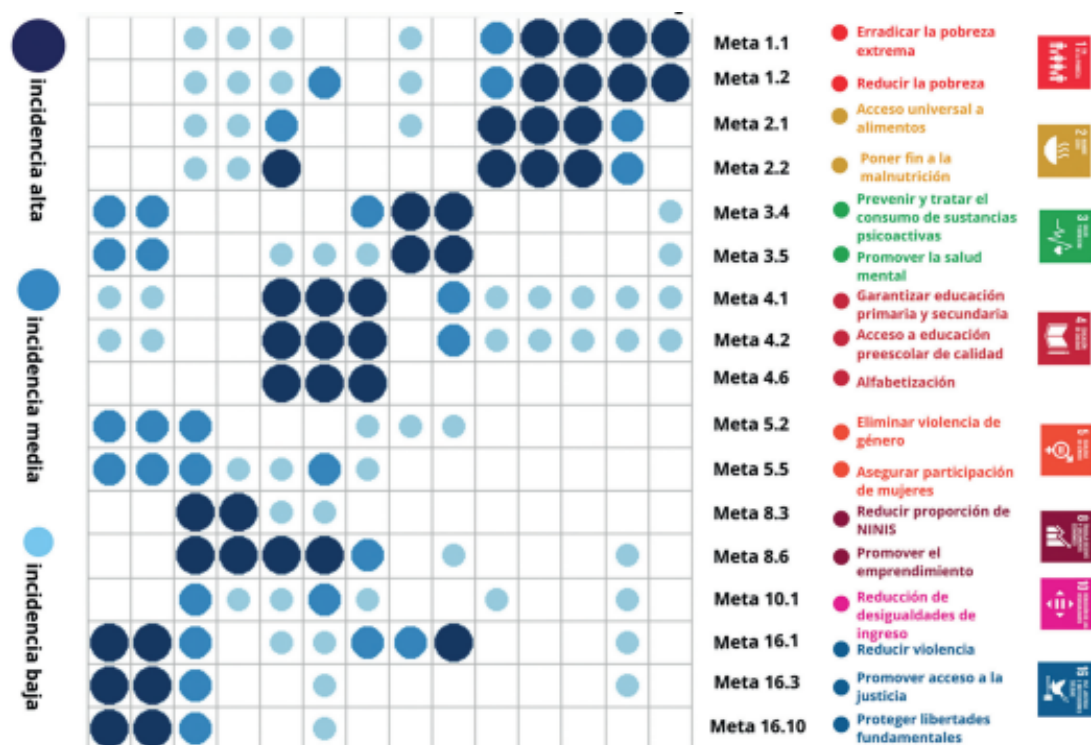


Figure 3: Identification of SDG impact and activities of the Interfaith Sector
Source: UNDP-MinInterior (2021)

The next step is to find the path or paths to move from identification to action, and it is there where we propose the realization of a Social Dialogue aimed at transforming the various conflicts that prevent the effective progress of each of the goals of the 2030 Agenda, which values the Interfaith Sector as a key player and is based on the relationship of multilateral scenarios. An example of this is that in Colombia we have developed Social Dialogue between the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Universities, to integrate the Interfaith Sector within the National Strategy on the behavior of suicidal behavior, in order to help improve the indicator 3.4.2 *Suicide mortality rate of the 2030 Agenda*⁷.

We have also promoted Social Dialogue exercises between the Interreligious Sector, the National Risk Management Unit, the Ministry of the Interior, the School of Military Engineers and the local Planning Secretariats, in order to prepare communities for natural hazards with the support of the Interreligious Sector, as well as to link religious leaders within the local Disaster Risk Management Committees (BAENA, 2022a) and (BAENA, 2022b); thus contributing to the fulfillment of indicator 1.5.4. *Proportion of local governments adopting and implementing local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies*.

The same has been done between different actors and the Interreligious Sector, opening doors in different agencies under the umbrella of the social, cultural

⁷ Projection results of the Non-Profit Institutions' Satellite Account (CSISFL) with emphasis on religious entities (2021).

and educational mapping of this important sector. In this way, we have carried out Social Dialogue with many entities, such as the Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labor, among others.

Similarly, an intersectoral work was carried out between the Ministry of the Interior and the National Administrative Department of Statistics – DANE to project the value that the Interreligious Sector contributes to the economy in Colombia within the National Accounts System. It was possible to project that religious congregations and associations provided paid employment to 262,743 people, which allows inferring that the Interfaith Sector is helping to improve the 2030 Agenda indicator: “8.5.2 Unemployment rate, disaggregated by gender, age and persons with disabilities” as well as “8.5.1 Average hourly income of employees, disaggregated by occupation, age and persons with disabilities”.

The study also managed to determine that this sector projects a total of 1,760,378 people performing some volunteer work. This last figure is very important, if we take into account that volunteering is also an important factor for the achievement of peace and development, which is why the United Nations issued Resolution 10/129 “Integrating volunteerism for peace and development: action plan for the next decade and beyond” in 2015. Added to this, it could be evidenced that the Interfaith Sector in 2020, generated a gross added value of a little more than 1.2 billion Colombian pesos (219 million USD), demonstrating that the sector generates contribution not only from its social and educational initiatives, but also in what is related to the economic growth of the country. UNDP-MININTERIOR (2022) found that the Interreligious Sector since the pandemic in Colombia, with humanitarian aid and mental health care, in a value close to 350 billion pesos (76 million USD).

Thus, we affirm that the Interfaith Sector has a great potential for the achievement of sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean, but at the same time, this contribution is still very invisible in most countries of the region. In the following lines we will try to explain personal appreciations that could be considered to achieve this Social Dialogue with the Interreligious Sector and multiple actors, in order to achieve a multiplying effect of the SDGs, an important purpose for the time of social and economic recovery after the crisis caused by Covid-19.

Observations for achieving the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean from the Interreligious Social Dialogue

From the experience we have built in the roles I have played in the National Government and which have generated positive results for the territories and the country in general, I propose two main points to consider for the contribution to the 2030 Agenda:

We must move from the Interreligious Dialogue model to the Interreligious Social Dialogue model.

Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) is known as the encounter between different communities or confessions whose spiritual identity is different. Meetings have been held around the world to deal with different issues, some of them of a dogmatic nature on theological questions about interpretations of books that are sacred to them; to the search for common points to discuss social, environmental or peace-related problems, among others. In some countries of the region, different scenarios of interreligious encounter are being promoted for different purposes, but not in all of them.

In 2020, the United Nations General Assembly issued Resolution 75/26 “Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace”, which states in paragraph 3:

Recognizes the importance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and its valuable contribution to fostering social cohesion and inclusion, peace and development, and calls upon Member States, as and where appropriate, to consider interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an important tool in working towards peace and social stability and the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals” (United Nations, 2020).

This would generate a very important advance for the sum of the contribution to the sustainable development of the region, but we must take into account that in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean there is still no promotion of interreligious meetings, through official spaces that promote and with the specific purpose of maximizing the social, educational and economic work of the Interreligious Sector. Therefore, it is affirmed that the efforts made to date are important, but not sufficient for the purpose of sustainable development; it is necessary to move from Interreligious Dialogue to Interreligious Social Dialogue in order to achieve it.

This statement is explained by the following description: In Colombia there are 305 official spaces for dialogue between religious communities in departmental and municipal instances, namely, there are 28 departmental interreligious committees, and 277 district, municipal and/or local interreligious committees. At the beginning, the religious communities met for the first time, which was a process that generated a lot of learning together, regarding their mutual treatment, recognition and acceptance. Over time, we have been learning about the great usefulness of the Interreligious Dialogue to develop humanitarian actions, environmental practices, forums for prevention in strengthening mental health, local enterprises of the Interreligious Sector, the importance of religious women as social managers, youth entrepreneurship, etc. However, the other great learning is that the initiatives of the Interreligious Dialogue can have a greater impact and incidence as long as they are done in synergy not only among religious communities, but also with other organizations and institutions, which have offers on topics related to those of the Interreligious Sector.

For this reason, the Interreligious Dialogue should move from being a dialogue between actors of the Interreligious sector, towards the development of dialogues with multiple agents outside the sector, according to the problems and goals that have been outlined, which in this case would be those that are aligned

with those of the Sustainable Development Goals. This requires training of the Interreligious Sector, so that it can understand the public language; as well as training and education for state entities, among other actors, who must understand the concepts of multidimensionality, which circumscribe Religious Freedom. The academy then becomes another key actor to help understand these joint actions, as well as to find the nodes of articulation. For example, in order to establish a Social Dialogue for risk management, a diploma course was held in the first semester of 2022 aimed at 1,437 religious leaders in the country with the leadership of the School of Military Engineers, with the following percentage participation (Graph 4).

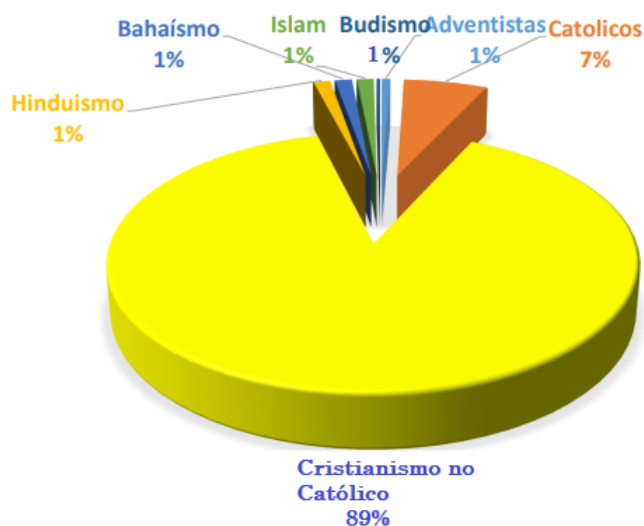


Figure 4: Percentage of participation by religion in the diploma program
Source: School of Military Engineers. Master's Degree in Risk Management and Development (2022)

In view of the above, it is necessary to promote in Latin American countries the configuration of Interreligious Social Dialogues (ISD), whose purpose is not the discussion of purely religious topics but under a multi-thematic connotation whose meetings may favor the sustainable development of the region and through the application of values.

The Interreligious Social Dialogue model is outlined in Figure 5:

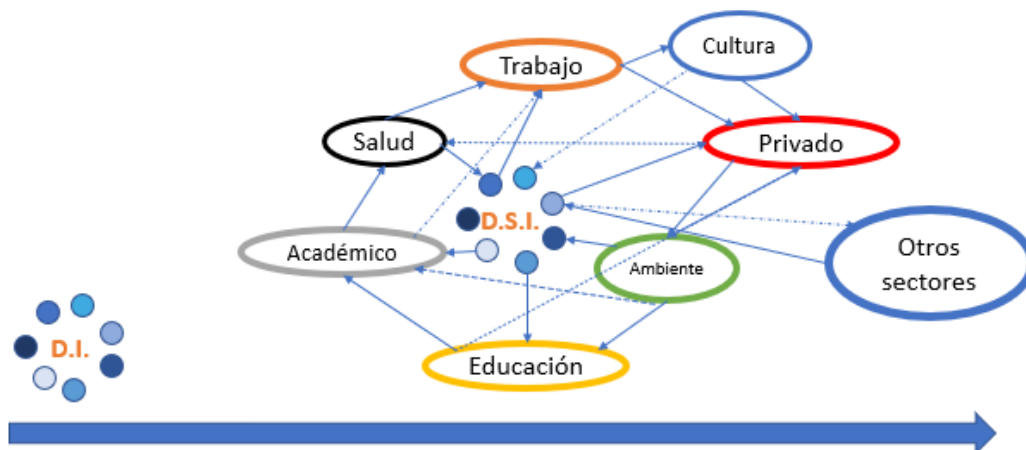


Figure 5. Proposed Model: Moving from DI to ISD

The Social Dialogue is multi-thematic in the moment that it achieves contact between actors addressing different thematic lines, who may not even have had meetings before. For example, when the health and education sectors join forces, they can talk about educational campaigns to prevent suicide with the support of the Interreligious Sector, or when the labor and culture sectors join forces, they can promote a culture of respect for different beliefs in the workplace. In conclusion, the Multi-thematic Social Dialogue becomes a practice of immense value for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda hand in hand with the Interfaith Sector.

We must promote the multidimensional conception of RL in Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The other observation to be highlighted is that in each country actions are generated according to the conceptualization of the scope of Religious Freedom, so that a broad understanding of this right will set the course in its guarantee in each territory of the region, and will facilitate the participation of the Interreligious Social Dialogue. From this point of view, academic research plays an important role in the comprehensive understanding of the Right to Religious Freedom, which in many countries, not only in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also in the world, is limited to the possibility of granting a religious community legal life so that it can establish places for religious observance. But an important point of Religious Freedom is also the possibility that people of the religious communities have to materialize their social work, understanding this, not as an isolated act, but consequent to the spiritual identity.

As can be seen in recent social mapping studies of religious communities carried out by organizations such as UNDP in some Latin American countries, religious communities have as a priority the service to society from different social, economic, humanitarian, educational and cultural approaches. The root of this priority is found in the very essence of religion, for example, in Christianity this work is the implementation of love of neighbor, which is part of the internal teaching that is part of the spiritual identity. For this reason, it is possible to

consider the existence of a close relationship between the social field of people belonging to religious communities and their own Religious Freedom. According to the Government of Colombia through MININTERIOR (2018), Religious Freedom is a right that goes beyond the performance of worship, and has a broader spectrum by considering that this “comprises a greater scope that involves the social, educational and cultural sphere, as an essential part of the integral expression of their beliefs, both in the individual context and through organizational forms” (p. 6).

It would seem that it is a concept understood homogeneously among countries, since it is a right immanent to the human being, and because it has its shared foundation in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, however, this is not the case. Some countries may consider it a sufficient guarantee of Religious Freedom, by allowing religious institutions legal life, however, it is a much broader concept that some authors have classified as multidimensional. FORNÉS (2005: 35), for example, states about Religious Freedom that “it is not only a personal or individual right, but also has a collective or community dimension and an institutional and organizational dimension”.

Now, Colombia is a country that separates religion from the State, so it teaches that the creation of mechanisms for the social participation of religious communities does not break with this separation and can be used in every country of the region. With this, it is intended to show that this concept of the multidimensionality of Religious Freedom can be used to generate integral actions to guarantee Religious Freedom in Latin American countries and for other purposes. The Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America-OLIRE (2019), through its founder specified in its Annual Report “The Multidimensionality of Religious Freedom”, that religious freedom has multiple dimensions that go far beyond the political and academic debates on the relationship between religion and State or interreligious conflicts” (p. 3).

To this end, it is important to identify and make known in each country the role played by religious communities in achieving common objectives, such as strengthening the social fabric, conflict transformation, the pursuit of social welfare and sustainable development, among others, in order to understand that their role in society has a transcendence beyond the spiritual help provided within places of religious worship. In this sense, the Interreligious Social Dialogue can be established with greater or lesser ease depending on the understanding of the broad spectrum of work of the Interreligious Sector, and Religious Freedom can be guaranteed in a comprehensive manner, according to the understanding of the multidimensional nature of the right. The present director of OLIRE stated that:

At the Inter-American level, this right is usually contemplated from a restrictive view, disregarding its multidimensional nature, with which, a comprehensive study of it hardly finds a place in the universe of human rights in the region, putting at risk the improvement of the guarantees that allow its enjoyment and effective exercise (OLIRE: 2019: 4).

It should be noted that all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are members of the United Nations, and in turn, most of them have signed the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, and include in their Political Constitution the protection of Religious Freedom. In general, the countries of the region have embedded in their Constitution at least one article to protect the right to Religious Freedom, even so, not all of them have developed a legal framework with actions, such as: religious freedom law or public policy on religious freedom. The call will be then to project this framework, taking into account the social strength that arises from the identity of religious communities.

For the Colombian case, the Colombian law of religious freedom and worship, or Law 133 of 1994, in its Article 7 contemplates that:

The right to freedom of religion and worship also includes, among others, the following rights of the Churches and religious denominations: To carry out educational, charitable and assistance activities that allow putting into practice the precepts of moral order from the social point of view of the respective denomination.

Article 14 also stands out: “Churches and religious denominations with legal personality, among other rights, the following: To create and promote associations, foundations or institutions for the realization of their purposes in accordance with the provisions of the legal system”. CONGRESS OF COLOMBIA (1994)

In the Bolivian law, Article 6, among the rights of religious organizations, states in paragraph “i) of point II of the article: “To provide religious assistance or spiritual beliefs in prisons, hospitals, asylums, orphanages, and other similar institutions, in compliance with the specific regulations in force”. These extensions to the right of Religious Freedom are important to open the Social Dialogue between the Interreligious Sector, state actors, academia and other participants, with articulation towards a focused work for sustainable development. PLURINATIONAL STATE OF BOLIVIA (2019).

The Peruvian law of religious freedom also integrates in its Article 6 the “Collective dimension of religious entities” and allows in its literal b “To create foundations and associations for religious, educational and social assistance purposes in accordance with national legislation” CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC OF PERU (2010).

Example of Interreligious and Multi-thematic Social Dialogue: National Committee for Participation and Social and Inter-sectorial Dialogue on Religious Freedom

In 2021 we developed in Colombia from the Vice Ministry for Participation and Equal Right⁸, the *National Committee for Participation and Social Dialogue and intersectorial of Religious Freedom*, created through Resolution 2245 of the Ministry of the Interior, and installed on July 07, 2022. This scenario seeks to meet the conditions described throughout this writing, and will have the following members to carry out the interreligious Social Dialogue:



Figure 6: Members of the National Committee for Interreligious Social Dialogue
Source: Resolution 2245 of 2021 (MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS: 2021).

This model seeks to place the Interfaith Sector at the center, so that it can interact in a multi-thematic Dialogue that includes national and local representatives, as shown in the table above. To this end, seven Social Dialogue Subcommittees were initially designed, determining for each of them the themes that will help promote the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs that impact each Subcommittee and the members of the Government and other sectors that will be part of each Social Dialogue Subcommittee.

⁸ Today transformed into Vice-Ministry for Social Dialogue, Equality and Human Rights (Ministry of Interior: 2022).

See Table 1.

	TEMÁTICAS	ODS	ENTIDADES
1	Subcomité de diálogo social y participación para la educación, la formación y el trabajo.	Bancos de Proyectos Emprendimiento Formación para el trabajo Capacitación en habilidades blandas Protocolo de protección a la libertad religiosa para las instituciones educativas mediante Diálogo Social Sello rosa para fortalecer los emprendimientos de la mujer religiosa Promoción de líneas investigativas y/o proyectos en el marco de la protección y garantía de la libertad religiosa. Sello de No discriminación en organizaciones Catedra de Libertad Religiosa en instituciones	Ministerio del Trabajo Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo. Ministerio de Educación Nacional Ministerio del Interior
2	Subcomité de diálogo social y participación para el desarrollo y la planeación urbana.	Proteger el entorno de los lugares de culto en acciones urbanísticas y en los Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial Posición en el territorio a través de los Sistema de Información Geográfica Seguridad e iluminación alrededor Movilidad, reductores de velocidad en pasos peatonales Mesas de Diálogo Interreligioso para el Urbanismo, Diálogo Social en POT Permisos transitorios de parqueo en las zonas adyacentes al templo a petición de la entidad religiosa. Comités de Gestión del Riesgo Protección a lugares de culto Temas de Hacienda	Ministerio de Vivienda, Ciudad y Territorio Ministerio de Transporte Unidad Nacional para la Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres Dirección de Impuestos y Aduanas Nacionales DIAN Departamento Nacional de Planeación DNP Ministerio del Interior
3	Subcomité de diálogo social y participación para la salud.	Articulación para Diálogo Social con los Consejos territoriales de salud Prevención del suicidio y disminución de consumo de sustancias psicoactivas SPA Ruta integral de atención para la salud mental Planes Nacionales y Territoriales de Salud Articulación de la libertad religiosa y programas de medicina preventiva	Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social Ministerio de Educación Ministerio del Interior
4	Subcomité de diálogo social y participación para los temas migratorios.	Pasaporte Diplomático para líderes religiosos Protocolo de atención ante casos de persecución y discriminación por motivos de religión y creencia de connacionales en el exterior. Estrategias para dar cumplimiento a recomendaciones de instancias internacionales, respecto a la libertad religiosa de personas en condición de refugio, migrantes, y extranjeros en Colombia. Articular estrategias para la garantía y promoción del derecho fundamental a la libertad religiosa de colombianos en el exterior y de extranjeros en Colombia.	Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores Ministerio del Interior
5	Subcomité de diálogo social y participación para la tolerancia, la convivencia y la paz territorial.	Protocolo para el ejercicio del derecho a la libertad religiosa y de cultos y combatir todas las formas de discriminación por motivos religiosos. Centro de Altos Estudios de Libertad Religiosa Defensoría delegada para Asuntos de Libertad Religiosa Observatorio "Colombia es de Todos" y Sello para la No Discriminación. Capacitación a funcionarios en temas de libertad religiosa y promoción de la tolerancia, la no discriminación y la igualdad en el servicio público. Libertad religiosa como escenario de paz, perdón, reconciliación y no estigmatización.	Fiscalía General de la Nación Ministerio de Educación Procuraduría General de la Nación Defensoría del Pueblo Comando General de las Fuerzas Militares Policía Nacional Instituto Nacional Penitenciario y Carcelario INPEC
6	Subcomité de diálogo social y participación de promoción de buenas prácticas ambientales.	Comités de Gestión del Riesgo Conciencia ambiental Gestión de energías limpias para los lugares de culto (Ejm. Paneles solares en donación al sector religioso)	Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible Unidad Nacional para la Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres Ministerio de Educación
7	Subcomité de diálogo social y participación de mapeo e incidencia social de las entidades religiosas.	Caracterización del sector Medición del aporte social de las entidades religiosas a nivel territorial Cumplimiento de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible Agenda 2030 desde el ODS 17 Ayudas humanitarias y donaciones	Departamento Nacional de Planeación - DNP Programa De Las Naciones Unidas Para El Desarrollo PNUD Unidad Nacional para la Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres

Table 1: Social Dialogue Subcommittees

This model has already begun to produce some products that will be reflected very soon, such as guidelines for urban planning with the participation of the Interreligious Social Dialogue, integration of the Interreligious Sector in the Strategy for the Prevention of Suicidal Behavior, Protocols for the protection of RL in educational institutions based on the Interreligious and Multi-thematic Social Dialogue, as well as preventive actions in different scenarios, integration of the Sector in Risk Management Committees, among others. Many other proposals will emerge from the Multi-thematic Social Dialogue that could never be carried out without this multilateral meeting.

Table 2 is part of a review of how each country in the region has counterpart actors with whom the Multi-Thematic Social Dialogue could be carried out.

COUNTRY	INTERIOR	WORK	ENVIRONMENT
Argentina	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development
Bolivia	Ministry of Government	Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Welfare	Ministry of Environment
Brazil	Ministry of Justice and Public Security	Ministry of Economy	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development
Chile	Ministry of the Interior and Public Security	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare	Ministry of the Environment
Colombia	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development
Costa Rica	Ministry of the Interior and Police	Ministry of Labor and Social Security	Ministry of Environment and Energy
Cuba	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor and Social Security	Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment
Ecuador	Ministry of Government	Ministry of Labor	Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition
El Salvador	Ministry of Government and Territorial Development	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources
Guatemala	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources
Honduras	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare	Secretariat of natural resources and environment
Mexico	Ministry of Government, Justice and Decentralization	Ministry of Labor and Social Security	Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources

Nicaragua	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources
Panama	Ministry of Government	Ministry of Labor and Labor Development	Ministry of Environment
Paraguay	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development
Peru	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion	Ministry of Environment
Puerto Rico	State Department	Department of Labor and Human Resources	Natural Resources Department
Dominican Republic	Ministry of the Interior and Police of the Republic	Ministry of Labor	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources
Uruguay	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Labor and Social Security	Ministry of Environment
Venezuela	Ministry of the People's Power for Internal Relations, Justice and Peace	Ministry of the People's Power for the Social Process of Labor	Ministry of the People's Power for Eco-socialism

Table 2. Counterpart actors in selected countries of Latin America and the Caribbean

Among many other benefits, it is expected that this strategy will support the lines of the Public Policy on Religious Freedom.

Upcoming challenges

A critical panorama is shown for the scope of the 2030 Agenda in the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region, as a result of the pandemic produced by Covid-19, but in parallel, a very significant contribution of the Interreligious Sector is shown, aimed at meeting the goals and indicators of this global agenda, which presents hope and provides a promising look in the acceleration of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, this contribution is still largely unknown in the countries of the region, and in some of them there is not a sufficient legal system that allows a glimpse of their understanding of the multidimensionality of Religious Freedom, and that in turn promotes the articulation of social, educational, humanitarian, economic, environmental and cultural work of the Interfaith Sector in synergy with other sectors, in order to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. The academy has an

important challenge there, and that is to permeate this broad concept of law in each country, as well as its relationship with the multiple functions that religious communities develop in a transcendent way to the cultic space.

The States must make alliances for the achievement of the SDGs, as stated in SDG 17 “Partnerships for the achievement of the Goals”, seeking to join efforts with multiple institutions, so that this is a shared effort, and being the Interfaith Sector, as presented in this paper, a strategic ally for the achievement of the proposed mission. However, we are aware of the many challenges that this implies for the region, so we propose the Interreligious and Multi-thematic Social Dialogue as an assertive and effective way to generate inter-institutional and inter-sectoral ties that lead to the goals set, and to achieve the multilateral dynamization of diverse actors in favor of sustainable development.

The challenge on our part will be to seek that the States of the region implement dialogue scenarios analogous to the Social Dialogue Committee and intersectoral Religious Freedom of Colombia, as a positive experience for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, based on the model of Multi-thematic Social Dialogue. Undoubtedly, this philosophy and multidimensional structure will be the platform for new governmental, national and sub-national actions in Colombia to guarantee Religious Freedom in a comprehensive manner, being able to change the name of the Social Dialogue Committee, but not the learning acquired in the country, as well as its early results.

The call then to the countries of the region is to seek the appropriate mechanisms to establish actions aimed at enabling the Interreligious and Multi-thematic Social Dialogue, in order to enhance the work of the Interreligious Sector and generate strategic alliances that accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

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