Ch. 5: Recommendations for Potential Practitioner Responses

Accounting for religion more thoroughly in electoral support organizations could involve several practical steps. Here we propose several, grouped into three categories: general interest, those focused on assessment, and those focused on engagement. Rather than spotlighting particular engagement examples as best practices, this recommendation section attempts to set out a flexible approach that could generate more specific organizational responses drawing on examples highlighted in Chapter 4 of this report.

General

- **Build staff capacity.** The electoral support community should consider following institutional staffing practices that they already utilize in areas such as gender, disabilities, and youth considerations to integrate religion into electoral assessments and engagements. This could involve committing internal staff time and resources or building staff capacity via internal training. It could also draw on consultations with outside subject matter experts.
- **Liaise with religion and development specialists.** Electoral support organizations should proactively build relationships with experts in religion and development in government, civil society, and academia. Expertise in religion and development exists but has not generally involved significant focus on projects related to the electoral support community.
- **Clarify legal and organizational standards.** Different members of the electoral support community have distinct legal or mission-based standards when interacting with religious actors and organizations. Governments in different donor countries have vastly different legal frameworks regulating religion-state contact. While standards will not be universal, having publicly available organizational guidelines regarding religious engagements can clarify the potential scope of those relationships for both staff and external actors.

Assessment

- **Integrate religion into organizational assessment.** Various assessment frameworks structure data collection via pre-electoral assessments, election observation missions, and post-election reviews. The electoral support community should ensure nuanced attention to religion in these frameworks by revising existing documents or producing religion assessment supplements.
- **Develop guidelines on religion and assessment consultations.** Religious leaders and networks can be useful interview subjects or information sources in the assessment process. Organizations in the electoral support community involved in assessment should develop guidelines for recruiting religious leaders into the assessment process to ensure the inclusion of a diverse spectrum of viewpoints.
- **Disseminate assessment results.** Religious leaders and networks also consume knowledge from the electoral support community. When assessments or observation reports are complete, organizations in the

electoral support community should consider targeted dissemination through religious networks to share best practices and lay a foundation for potential future engagements.

Engagement

- **Develop strategic religious engagement plans matched to organization priorities.** Various planning processes exist across the electoral support community to prepare for upcoming elections. Organizations involved in programmatic engagement should develop strategic religious engagement guidance that matches religion to the organization's broader planning process for a given election, both as a challenge and an opportunity.
- **Integrate religious engagement with broader attempts to involve civil society.** The electoral support community views CSOs as central partners in building a stable democracy. In many contexts, religious organizations are woven intricately into domestic civil society. In others, ties between CSOs and religious institutions are less robust. Rather than isolating religious leaders, engagements should prioritize coalition building to maximize impact.
- **Develop a community of research practice to strengthen monitoring and evaluation.** The electoral support community should stay abreast of breaking scholarship, perhaps by convening a community of research practice, to ensure that religion-related interventions reflect rapidly developing research in this area. This would improve religion's integration into existing organizational M&E practices related to stakeholder interactions.