COMMUNITY GENERATED INDICATOR TOOL

Understanding and Measuring Change in
Freedom of Religion or Belief Projects

January 2026

Commissioning and Funding Organizations

This tool has been developed as a part of the FoRB Learning Review commissioned by CKU and Digni and has been produced with financial support from the governments of Denmark (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Norway (Norad). The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Governments of Denmark and Norway, nor the commissioning organizations.

Published in cooperation with The FoRB Learning Platform.

Authors

The tool is written by Indira Aslanova, Shiva K Dhungana, Shabnam Moallem, Omar Salem, and Aizhan Baidavletova

Design and Layout

Ferdiemar Clacio

Photo Frontpage

Varun Gaba on Unsplash.com

Acknowledgements

Outline

List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FoRB	Freedom of Religion or Belief
GAM	Grounded Accountability Model
GERF	Global Europe Results Framework
M&E / MEL	Monitoring and Evaluation / Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
PM&E	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
SPICED	Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted, Cross-checked, Empowering, Disaggregated
ToC	Theory of Change
UN	United Nations

Photo by Asfand Yar / Unsplash.com

Framework

1. INTRODUCTION

This tool provides practical support for partners who wish to develop community generated, localized indicators to better understand and measure change in the area of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and related dimensions of religious equality[1], coexistence, inclusion, and participation. Conventional monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems frequently rely on standardized indicators designed for cross-country comparability and donor reporting. While such indicators serve important functions, they often fail to capture the nuanced, context-dependent nature of social change in complex environments where religious identity, power structures, and cultural norms intersect. This tool aims to offer a structured approach that enables communities, civil society actors, religious leaders, women, youth, and local authorities to articulate the everyday signals of progress that they consider meaningful in FoRB and related areas. These locally grounded indicators complement standard project or donor indicators by capturing subtle, context-specific shifts.

The tool has been developed as a part of the CKU and Digni 2025 **FoRB Learning Review**. The guide supports the identification of everyday indicators grounded in participatory exercises and derived from the perceived realities of local actors, capturing measurable change at the community level. This guide presents a practical, step-by-step process for generating, analysing, and using community generated indicators.

The aim is to strengthen partners' ability to:

- Recognise context-specific signs of progress

- Document changes that matter to communities

- Feed localized evidence into adaptive project /programme management

- Complement donor/global frameworks (i.e. **Global FoRB Indicator framework**, Global Europe Results Framework (**GERF**) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDG))

This tool is intended for practitioners and institutions engaged in monitoring, evaluation, learning, and implementation of projects or programmes in FoRB-related fields[2]. This includes civil society organizations, human rights bodies, local authorities, and researchers, as well as community actors - such as religious leaders, women's groups, youth networks, and minority representatives - whose participation is essential for the legitimacy and validity of community generated indicators. No specialised technical expertise is required, but the process does require some thoughtful preparation and facilitation skills. The tool presents guides to the different aspects to consider and links to external resources where further information can be found. The methods presented here are accessible and adaptable for both in-person and online engagement.

> *In this guide, the term "**community**" refers to any group sharing a meaningful common characteristic (geographical, cultural, religious, linguistic, experiential, or institutional) whose collective perspective is relevant for understanding FoRB-related change. Communities may be diverse, overlapping, or internally fragmented; in such cases, the guide does not assume a single shared narrative but seeks to capture multiple vantage points, depending on how the community is defined within a given project.*

---

1 Religious equality is interlinked with the non-discrimination aspect of FoRB and refers to the level of marginalisation and exclusion that individuals and groups may face on account of their religious or belief affiliation in various aspects of their lives, such as education, employment, participation and influence etc. This is often intersecting with other inequalities along the lines of gender, ethnicity, race, socio-economic status and geography.

2 Henceforth we only refer to projects but the guidance is equally relevant for larger programmes.

Community generated indicators are particularly important in contexts where formal M&E data sources fail to capture nuanced or sensitive dimensions of change. They are essential when projects seek to understand shifts in everyday safety, trust, belonging, acceptance, or informal pressure, and are equally valuable in settings where power relations, social norms, and community dynamics shape the realization of rights but remain invisible in administrative records or high-level surveys. This approach is especially relevant when projects address social cohesion, norm change, or identity-based tensions; and where early warning of deterioration or emerging risks is critical. Contextualized indicators provide an interpretive layer that complements policy-level and institutional indicators, ensuring that monitoring reflects how rights and freedoms are actually experienced by communities.

Community generated indicators can be used across different stages of the project cycle, serving different but interconnected functions. When used during the design phase, they help practitioners identify locally defined problems, patterns of exclusion, prevailing norms, and key actors who influence FoRB dynamics. At the baseline stage, they establish a community-validated reference point against which change can be measured, offering a more nuanced starting point than external assessments alone. During ongoing monitoring, community generated indicators function as a mechanism for continuous feedback, helping detect early signs of progress or deterioration and supporting timely adjustments, protective measures, or mitigation strategies. In midline and endline evaluations, they provide a coherent framework for assessing change from the perspective of rights-holders themselves, allowing evaluators to distinguish between nominal progress reflected in M&E frameworks and major shifts in lived experience, thereby strengthening the validity of evaluative findings.

2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1. Theoretical underpinnings

The approach to developing localized or community generated indicators has a strong foundation in research on peacebuilding, human rights, and participatory monitoring of social change. It brings together several analytical traditions, each offering important insights into how to measure complex, contextual, and sensitive changes such as FoRB.

One of the central methodological sources is the **Everyday Peace Indicators** (EPI) approach developed by a group of researchers and practitioners under the EPI platform. It argues that communities possess their own ways of recognizing signs of peace, trust, and safety – through daily, culturally meaningful signals. EPI demonstrates that bottom-up, community-defined markers often provide a more accurate and nuanced picture of social transformation. Building on EPI, a more programmatically oriented procedure was created: the **Grounded Accountability Model** (GAM). Unlike EPI, which originated as a research approach, GAM offers a project-level model of accountability rooted entirely in community-generated evidence. GAM conceptualizes accountability not as vertical reporting to donors but as a relationship between a project and the communities it serves, in which residents themselves identify what changes matter to them. GAM helps organizations translate these local signals into adaptive programmatic decisions.

These approaches are closely connected to traditions of participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E). Researchers such as **Estrella and Gaventa** have emphasized that community participation in indicator development strengthens data relevance, trust, and the legitimacy of monitoring processes. PM&E also stresses the importance of including vulnerable groups (women, religious minorities, persons with no religion, youth etc.) as equal participants in defining what progress looks like. Contemporary PM&E theory continues to uphold core principles – ownership, reflexivity, transparency, mutual learning and empowerment – while acknowledging new challenges and opportunities related to shifting contexts, institutional complexity, climate risks and social inequality. Importantly, PM&E remains one of the few methodological approaches that can facilitate inclusive, culturally sensitive and context-responsive measurement of social change – a crucial asset when dealing with sensitive issues such as FoRB, gender equality, social cohesion, and minority rights.

A further body of relevant work comes from SDG Localization, a major global effort led by UNDP, OECD, and Local2030 to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals are operationalized in ways that reflect the realities of local communities. SDG localization frameworks argue that global indicators only become meaningful when they are translated into context-specific measures that communities understand, value, and are able to monitor. They highlight the need for hybrid systems of measurement, where international standards

(such as SDG targets on peace, justice, gender equality, inequality reduction, and inclusive institutions) are complemented by locally generated indicators that capture the nuances of everyday life. This approach acknowledges that progress towards global goals can only be assessed accurately when communities participate in defining what progress looks like for them. FoRB within the SDG framework is positioned as part of a broader global movement, aligning universal goals with culturally grounded, community-driven evidence.

A crucial human rights foundation for this methodology comes from the literature on human rights measurement. Publications such as *Human Rights Indicators*, and works by scholars like **Sally Engle Merry**, highlight that indicators are tools for "translating" complex legal norms into observable practice. However, these studies also warn that global indicators risk becoming detached from reality if they do not account for cultural contexts and local interpretations of rights. **De Feyter** notes that universalist indicator frameworks can create "normative distortions" and fail to reflect lived experience unless they integrate local meanings. The philosophical grounding for this recognition is supported by Jürgen Habermas's discursive ethics, also referenced by De Feyter, argues that norms can be considered legitimate only when all affected parties agree to them through a rational and inclusive discourse. He further states that such discourse is only rational when participants acknowledge each other's equal rights to contribute to the dialogue" (Habermas 1996, 118–123). In FoRB contexts, this means that indicators must be formed with the participation of all religious and non-religious groups, including marginalized and underrepresented communities. Only then can they be considered socially and normatively legitimate. Furthermore, as De Feyter emphasises "If that process [adoption of the UDHR] takes place at the global level, and the aim is to codify rights that are universally applicable, inevitably the process will have to be cross-cultural". In other words, universal FoRB rights – enshrined in international law – must be interpreted through dialogue across cultures. Localized FoRB indicators become a key tool for such intercultural "operationalization" of universal norms.

These theoretical approaches interact with the practical framework of the **UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB**, who has proposed a comprehensive set of structural, process, and outcome indicators for assessing FoRB implementation. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that states should assess not only the formal existence of laws and institutions but also the lived reality of rights-holders. Structural indicators cover constitutional and legal guarantees, ratification of human rights treaties, and institutional safeguards. Process indicators capture the actions states take – complaint mechanisms, law enforcement training, anti-discrimination programs, consultation with communities, and resourcing. Outcome indicators measure the actual experience of individuals and communities: incidents of discrimination, access to places of worship, freedom to manifest beliefs, safety of vulnerable groups, and perceived ability to practice or not practice a religion freely. The Special Rapporteur's framework also highlights the importance of cross-cutting rights such as equality, non-discrimination, and participation. It stresses the need for disaggregated data by gender, age, minority status, and other factors to ensure that vulnerable groups are not obscured within aggregated metrics. Qualitative evidence, narratives, and community testimonies are recognized as essential components when assessing FoRB in practice.

2.2. Definition of community generated indicators

Community generated indicators are localized, context-specific measures of change defined by the people who experience that change directly. Unlike externally designed indicators, which translate global or national standards into predefined metrics, community generated indicators emerge through participatory processes in which communities articulate how progress, deterioration, or stability become visible in their everyday lives. These indicators draw on collective perceptions, shared norms, and commonly understood signals that reflect the realities of local social dynamics.

A community generated indicator is therefore not simply a "community preference," but a form of socially validated knowledge. It captures how individuals and groups recognise shifts in relationships, practices, behaviours, or conditions that matter to them. Importantly, such indicators may express dimensions of change that are not easily observable through formal reporting systems, for example, subtle changes in trust, respect, safety, or pressure – yet are essential for understanding the lived reality of FoRB.

In conceptual terms, community generated indicators serve two functions. First, they translate abstract rights-based or programmatic goals into markers that communities perceive as meaningful, thereby improving the relevance and cultural grounding of monitoring. Second, they offer an interpretive lens that complements structural and institutional indicators by highlighting how rights and freedoms manifest (or fail to manifest) in everyday interactions. Because they reflect shared local understandings, community generated indicators often capture early shifts that precede measurable institutional change.

Community generated indicators may be qualitative or quantitative, direct or proxy-based, and may express behavioural, relational, perceptual, or environmental aspects of change. What distinguishes them is not their format, but their origin in community-defined knowledge and their alignment with locally meaningful expressions of change.

2.3. Core principles informing community generated indicators

The development of community generated indicators should be guided by principles that ensure their validity, legitimacy, and practical usefulness. While the specific terminology may vary across participatory and rights-based frameworks, four principles are essential:

- **Community ownership**. Indicators must originate from the knowledge and experience of the communities concerned. Ownership ensures that indicators reflect reality from the perspective of rights-holders, rather than external assumptions.

- **Inclusivity.** Because FoRB dynamics affect groups differently, the development process must as far as possible also include women, youth, religious minorities, converts, non-religious individuals, and others whose perspectives are often excluded. Inclusivity enhances representativeness and prevents indicators from reinforcing existing inequalities.

- **Transparency and collective validation.** Indicators gain legitimacy when communities understand how they are generated, how they will be used, and how decisions are made. Collective validation ensures that indicators reflect shared understandings rather than isolated opinions.

- **Interpretive and contextual sensitivity.** Indicators must capture not only observable behaviours but also the meanings attached to them. This principle recognizes that social signals can differ across cultural, religious, and linguistic contexts and must be interpreted and validated accordingly.

- **Normative positioning.** Community-generated indicators are not neutral tools. They are grounded in a rights-based approach that explicitly recognizes structural inequalities and power asymmetries shaping the realization of FoRB. This includes acknowledging that some groups face systematic barriers to voice, safety, and participation, and that participatory processes intentionally prioritize the perspectives of marginalized or underrepresented actors. While engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including those in positions of authority or social privilege, the approach is explicitly oriented toward strengthening the agency, protection, and inclusion of those whose rights are most at risk.

2.4. Relation to FoRB dimensions

Community generated indicators should be anchored in the established dimensions of FoRB[3], as articulated in international human rights standards, while remaining sensitive to the way these dimensions manifest in local contexts. FoRB encompasses the right to hold or not to hold beliefs, to change one's religion or beliefs, to manifest religion or belief individually or in community, in private and in public, and the right to protection from coercion, discrimination, or violence based on one's religious or belief identity.

Communities may express these dimensions through a diverse range of localised signals such as changes in the social acceptability of visible religious expression; shifts in family or community attitudes toward conversion or non-belief; increased safety in places of worship; decreased marginalisation in various areas; shift in religious power dynamics; increased interaction between religious groups; or reduced pressure on individuals to conform to dominant norms, etc. These manifestations can differ significantly across contexts, making it essential that indicators reflect how each community understands the practical implications of FoRB.

Community generated indicators do not replace legal or institutional FoRB frameworks; instead, they help operationalize them by illustrating how rights and freedoms materialize in everyday social life. They offer granular insight into the relational, behavioural, and environmental aspects of FoRB and related dimensions that are not captured by formal legal analyses.

3 Article 18 of UNs Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Convention of Civil and Political Rights as well as 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

Photo by Ian Macharia / Unsplash.com

3. PREPARATORY STEPS

Developing community-generated indicators requires time for preparation, facilitation, and reflection. This includes activities such as stakeholder mapping, understanding local dynamics, engaging selected groups, and collectively analysing the inputs that emerge.

At the same time, many of these steps are not entirely new or additional to activity implementation. Similar processes are often already undertaken during design, inception phases, or regular monitoring and learning activities.

Where possible focus group discussions or interviews can be integrated into existing meetings, reflection sessions, or monitoring processes. This allows teams to make more effective use of time already invested in engagement and learning, while recognising that meaningful participation and ethical facilitation require adequate time and care.

The overall time and resources required will depend on context, sensitivity of the issues, group composition, and existing levels of trust.

3.1. Map stakeholders

A comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise is essential to identify the individuals, groups, and institutions that shape FoRB dynamics at the local level.
Roll over on the dots to read the description of the various stakeholders:
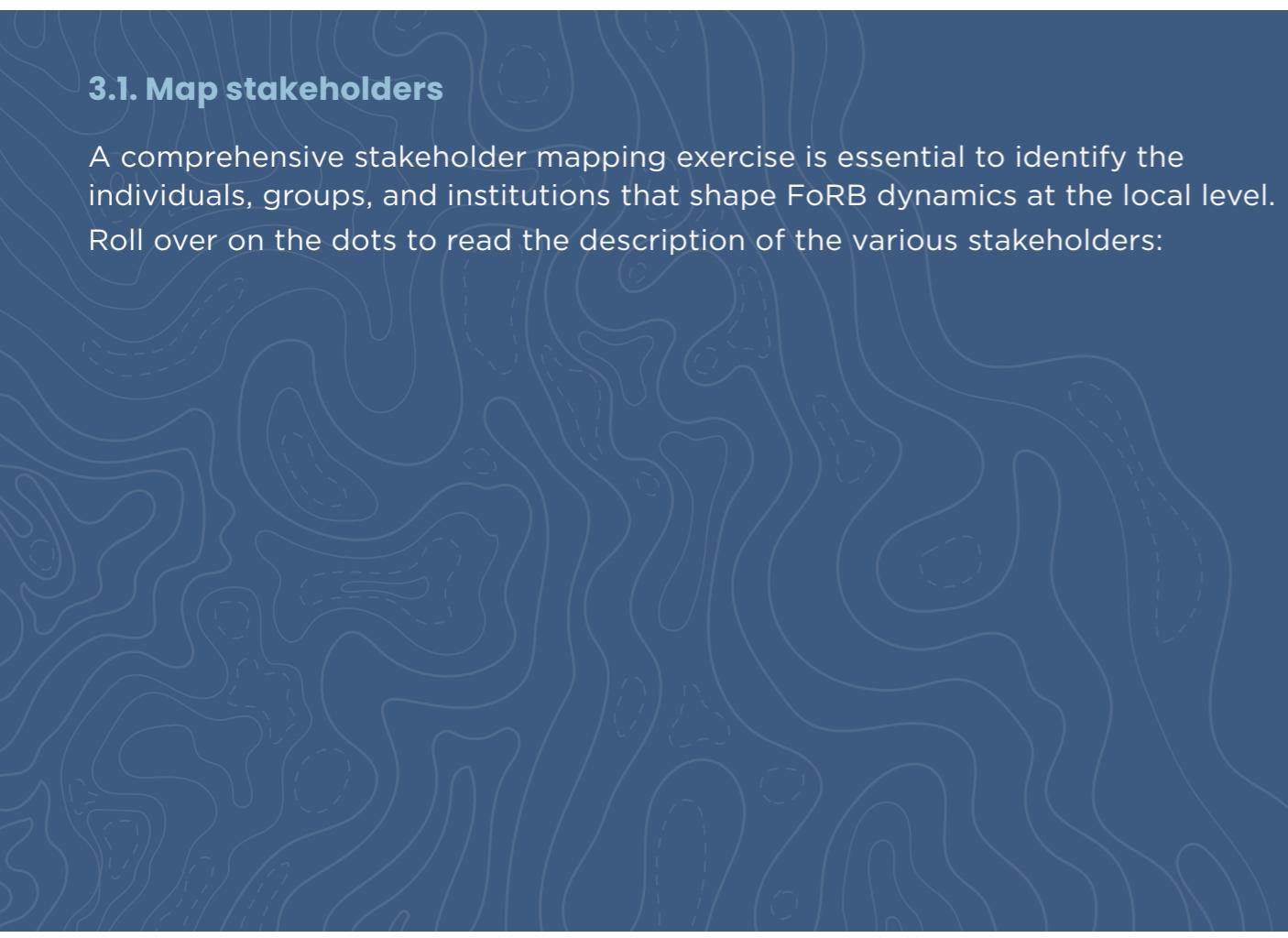
Mapping should focus not only on identifying actors but also on understanding power dynamics, pathways of influence, and relationships among stakeholders, since these factors directly affect which indicators are meaningful and who can safely participate in defining them. Importantly, stakeholder mapping also helps determine which groups can participate safely together in FGDs and which may require separate or individual engagements.

3.2. Gather existing evidence

Before engaging communities, teams should collect and analyse existing sources of information that provide initial insight into local FoRB dynamics and related areas. This may include previous reports, testimonies, media monitoring, conflict analyses, perception surveys, academic studies, or reports from Ombudsman and human rights institutions. Reviewing existing evidence allows practitioners to identify relevant themes, anticipate sensitive topics, refine facilitation questions, and avoid duplicating data already available. This step also supports the identification of information gaps that community generated indicators should address. By grounding subsequent engagement in a preliminary and reflective understanding of the context, teams ensure that participatory processes are both efficient and responsive to local realities.

3.3. Select participants

Participant selection directly affects the validity and safety of community generated indicators. Building on insights from stakeholder mapping, the participants should not be limited to the potential activity participants only, rather the larger target community. Practitioners should also determine which groups can speak freely in mixed settings and which require separate FGDs to avoid intimidation or self-censorship. For example, religious minorities may not feel safe speaking in front of majority groups; women may be constrained in male-dominated spaces; and converts, religious dissidents, or individuals facing stigma may require individual interviews.

Some actors are best engaged through one-on-one conversations, especially when group settings may provoke risk, silence certain perspectives, or create social pressure. Diverse representation – across gender, age, religious identity, linguistic group, and social role – strengthens the quality of the indicators produced. Above all, the configuration of groups must be designed to enable participants to express themselves without fear.

Special consideration should be given to the inclusion or exclusion of duty bearers (such as state officials, law enforcement representatives, religious authorities, or institutional leaders). Where significant power asymmetries exist, the presence of duty bearers in participatory settings may inhibit open discussion or influence how participants frame their experiences. In such cases, it is often more appropriate to engage duty bearers separately, or at a later stage, once community-defined concerns and indicators have been identified.

At the same time, duty bearers play a critical role in the realization of FoRB, as they are often responsible for designing, implementing, or enforcing laws, policies, and practices that affect the exercise of these rights. Engaging duty bearers at an appropriate stage of the process can support accountability, mutual understanding, and the translation of community-defined concerns into institutional or policy-level responses.

In addition to safety and power-dynamic considerations, participant selection could also reflect the thematic focus and strategic direction of the project. When an intervention aims to work with specific actors – such as journalists, teachers, youth leaders, religious leaders, duty bearers, or civil society advocates – it may be appropriate to organize dedicated FGDs with these groups. Their professional roles and contextual experiences often shape distinct perspectives on FoRB dynamics, including the challenges they face, the barriers to exercising their roles, and the types of change they consider meaningful.

3.4. Establish your team structure

During preparation for the sessions, clearly define team roles. You will need at least three team members with the following responsibilities:

- **Mobilizer** – organizes the session logistics and recruits participants based on agreed selection criteria. The mobilizer should ensure diverse representation and avoid relying on individuals easily accessible or solely from their personal networks. Their strong connection to the community helps bring in voices that reflect the local context and ensures participant buy-in for the process.

- **Facilitator** – leads the discussion by asking guiding questions, encouraging participation, and using follow-up prompts to deepen understanding. The facilitator monitors group dynamics, making sure that no one is silenced due to power imbalances and that marginalized participants feel safe to contribute.

- **Notetaker** – documents the conversation in detail, capturing stories, examples, and emerging indicators as they appear. The notetaker records concrete details that make indicators measurable, avoids paraphrasing, and ensures the session is audio-recorded (when safe and agreed on) for accurate transcription and later analysis. Since the notetaker plays a key role in capturing the inputs for indicators, it is beneficial for this role to have M&E experience.

- **Translator** – if translation is required, translators must be familiar with FoRB-related terminology, and capable of conveying culturally embedded meanings rather than literal phrases. Facilitators may need to work with translators to adapt metaphors, examples, or question formats to ensure accessibility and cultural resonance. They must ensure that the indicators produced reflect community understanding rather than externally imposed language.

3.5. Create a safe and inclusive environment

Safety is essential for meaningful participation. Practical steps include:

- Selecting neutral and accessible venues

- Arranging seating to avoid reinforcing hierarchies

- Ensuring that sessions are not observed by authority figures who may influence responses

- Using language (verbal and non-verbal) that signals respect, confidentiality, and openness

- Allowing participants to choose the level of personal disclosure

- Providing translation for participants who speak minority languages

While this guide does not require specialized legal expertise, teams engaging in the development of community-generated indicators should share a basic understanding of FoRB principles and dimensions as defined in international human rights standards. Where such understanding is limited, teams are encouraged to consult existing resources, partner organizations, or subject-matter experts.

*For an overview of FoRB standards, country-specific analysis and tools, see reources at the **FoRB Learning Platform**.*

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because FoRB intersects with identity, belief, social norms, and power relations, indicator-generation processes must follow strict ethical standards. Key considerations include:

- **Do no harm**: Situations do not expose participants to stigma, retaliation, or pressure, and facilitation prevents confrontation, stereotyping, or politicization.

- **Confidentiality and anonymity**: Discussions do not expose individuals' beliefs or experiences in identifiable ways.

- **Voluntary participation**: Participants feel able to decline questions or withdraw at any time.

- **Sensitivity to norm hierarchies**: Recognize that some participants may be constrained by intra-community expectations or power structures.

- **Trusted facilitator**: Participants may only feel safe sharing their experiences if the facilitator is someone they trust. This may require engaging individuals who are known to the community, speak the local language, understand cultural and religious nuances, or are perceived as neutral and respectful.

At the same time, practitioners must ensure that facilitators do not reproduce local hierarchies or exert influence that could inhibit open discussion. Balancing community trust with impartiality is therefore essential to creating an environment in which participants can speak freely without fear of judgment or repercussions.

Photo by Abhishek Rai / Unsplash.com

4. DATA COLLECTION: THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

Participatory data collection in this guide refers to a process through which indicators are generated collaboratively with community members. The purpose of this stage is not to collect "answers," but to create a space for collective reflection on how FoRB-related change becomes visible in everyday life.

In this approach, data emerges through dialogue, interaction, and shared interpretation. Stories, examples, language used by participants, points of agreement or disagreement, and the social dynamics observed during discussion all constitute valuable forms of data. These elements help reveal how rights, restrictions, safety, or inclusion are experienced and understood within a specific context.

The insights generated during this stage provide the raw material for subsequent analysis and synthesis. They inform the identification, clustering, and formulation of community-generated indicators, which are further refined in later steps of the process.

4.1. Data collection method

Choose the data collection method that best fits your context and participant needs. Depending on safety, sensitivity, and accessibility, you may use FGDs, individual interviews, or online approaches to gather community perspectives. In practice, teams combine different data collection methods to balance depth, safety, and inclusivity.

- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**. FGDs are a main tool for generating community generated indicators. However, the FGD approach is not the same as a traditional FGD for data collection. These FGDs will have a larger number of participants (to ensure a representative group from the community) and a longer time frame to ensure the line of questioning is able to probe deep enough (see section 4.2). The FGDs create space for participants to collectively reflect on how changes in FoRB become visible in their everyday environment. By bringing together individuals with shared or diverse identities, FGDs help reveal how community members interpret signals of acceptance, discrimination, safety, agency, or institutional

responsiveness. This collective interaction often uncovers subtleties – tone of voice, gestures, community rumours, small shifts in behaviour – that are difficult to capture through structured surveys. In the FDGs, both what is said, how it is said and what is omitted become relevant data to reflect on.

- **Individual interviews**. Individual interviews **complement FGDs** by creating a confidential space for participants who may not be able to speak openly in group settings. This method is essential for FoRB-sensitive contexts where discussing personal experiences of pressure, non-belief, discrimination, or conversion may place participants at risk. Interviews are preferable when: power dynamics would silence individuals in a group; topics are highly sensitive or reputationally risky; participants belong to groups facing stigma or surveillance; theological or community norms prohibit participation in mixed or interfaith dialogues; or personal experiences need to be explored in depth. Interview questions should follow the same logic as group discussions, focusing on observable signs, everyday experiences, and changes participants notice in their environment, while allowing for greater depth and sensitivity.

> *i*
>
> ***AI-Assisted Transcription:*** *If you are doing the session online, consider using **Zoom's AI-assisted transcription, Read.Ai**, or other transcription tools to transcribe the session and better capture participants' inputs.*

- **Online methods (for remote locations)**. When in-person engagement is not possible due to distance, safety concerns, travel restrictions, or limited community mobility, the Online FGDs or interviews could be a good alternative. However, this requires smaller groups for FGDs and strict confidentiality protocols, or employment of collaborative tools (such as Mentimeter, Remesh, Polis.ai) to allow participants to anonymously share information or reflections that can later be clustered. In low-bandwidth environments, facilitators may use short audio questions sent via secure messaging applications, allowing participants to respond with individual voice messages at their own pace and without revealing their identity in a group setting.

FGDs should include 10-15 participants. *When conducted in person, the process typically requires* **at least four hours**, *depending less on participants' technical knowledge of the topic and more on how quickly trust is established and participants feel safe to openly share their experiences, as well as on the facilitator's skills.* **For online formats, the number of participants should not exceed 10**, *and the session generally* **takes two or more hours**. *In addition, facilitators should allocate preparatory time (approximately one to two days) and time for indicator refinement and finalization (up to one day).*

Please note: In Annex 1 and 2 you will find examples of outlines and facilitation guides for in-person and online FGDs for creating community generated FoRB indicators.

4.2. Defining the scope

The scope of a participatory session should be purpose-driven and linked to the project or organization's objectives. Defining the scope helps clarify the main thematic area or concept of the discussion and provides direction for both facilitation and subsequent analysis.

Depending on the context and focus, the scope may be framed broadly around FoRB as a whole, or more narrowly around specific dimensions of FoRB, such as freedom to manifest beliefs, non-discrimination, safety, or access to rights and services. In some contexts, however, explicitly framing discussions around FoRB may be sensitive or may limit open participation. In such cases, it can be appropriate to anchor the session in related or adjacent themes, such as peace, religious equality, safety, coexistence, or inclusive citizenship.

When using such proxy themes, facilitation can gradually guide participants toward discussing the underlying factors that shape FoRB-related experiences. This may include reflections on what enables or hinders religious equality, inter/intra religious relations and power dynamics, the roles of state institutions, communities, and individuals, and the visible signs or signals that indicate change in these areas. This approach allows participants to engage in a less confrontational entry point while still generating insights relevant to FoRB.

An alternative or complementary approach is to maintain a broader scope during the session itself and prioritize FoRB-relevant indicators during the analysis stage. In this case, indicators emerging from discussions are later clustered and categorized according to thematic or analytical frameworks relevant to the project (see Section 5.3). Both approaches are valid and should be selected based on contextual sensitivity, participant safety, and the project's learning objectives.

4.3. Develop guiding questions

Guiding questions determine the quality and depth of the signals that emerge from discussions. Good questions help participants move from abstract ideas to concrete, observable experiences. The facilitation guide should include:

1. **Begin with introductions and scope-setting.** Start by clearly explaining the purpose of the discussion: that the goal is to explore how people recognize changes in their daily environment, not to evaluate the project or test their knowledge.

2. **Open with 1–2 broad framing questions:**

   "What does [core concept] mean in this community?"

   "What helps you understand whether there is more or less [core concept] here?"

3. **Use probing questions to elicit concrete everyday signs**

   "What does that look like in daily life?"

   "What do you see or hear when that happens?"

   "Where or when do you notice this?"

   "Can you describe a recent moment that made you think so?"

4. **Distinguish general statements from usable indicators.** Participants often begin with abstract statements. The facilitator's task is to guide them toward practical examples. For instance: "People now feel more free to join events from other religions." This is too general to use as an indicator. Probing questions can be:

> *"What tells you they feel more free?"*

> *"What exactly have you seen that shows this change?"*

This leads to a much more concrete response: "Before, monks avoided attending Muslim ceremonies, but now they come to funerals. People say this is a good sign." This second statement contains an everyday signal that can be used for indicator formulation.

5. **Keep probing until concrete, observable data emerges.** Here probing helps refine what initially seems vague., for example: "Women don't talk about discrimination." Probing questions can be:

> *"How do you know?"*

> *"What do they do instead?"*

> *"Where does this happen?"*

This leads to a much more concrete, grounded response: "They only tell close relatives; they do not raise issues in community meetings because they fear being judged. "This is a shift from an abstract statement to a concrete behavioural pattern.

After each FGD or interview, revisit and revise your facilitation guide to continuously improve the probing questions to enhance the responses gathered.

ILLUSTRATIVE LINE OF QUESTIONING FOR FoRB

The questions below illustrate how general facilitation prompts can be adapted for discussions focused on FoRB. They are loosely anchored in the core FoRB dimensions reflected in the framework of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief – including freedom from coercion, manifestation of religion or belief, non-discrimination, and protection under the rule of law – but are intentionally framed in everyday language. They should be adapted to the local context and used flexibly, with probing tailored to participants' safety, positionality, and willingness to engage. **These are illustrative examples only and facilitators can make necessary adjustments/additions/removal depending on the context and the types of participants in the discussion.**

Opening framing questions (FoRB as lived experience)

- What does freedom to practice (or not to practice) one's religion or belief mean in everyday life in your community?

- When people say that religious life has become "easier" or "harder," what are they usually referring to?

Probing by key FoRB dimensions

A. Freedom from coercion and pressure (non-coercion, choice, conversion, non-belief)

- Are there situations where people feel pressured to hide, change, or prove their religion or beliefs?

- How do people know when someone is not fully free to choose and express their religion or beliefs?

- What happens in daily life when someone's beliefs are seen as "different"?

Probes:

- What do people do to avoid problems related to their religion or beliefs?

- Where does pressure usually come from – family, community, authorities, others?

- What has changed recently in how such situations are handled?

B. Manifestation of religion or belief (worship, dress, rituals, holidays, places of worship)

- How easy or difficult is it for people to practice their religion openly here?

- Are there religious practices or expressions that people avoid doing in public? Why?

- How do people know when it is "safe enough" to practice their religion or belief?

Probes:

- What do you see people doing differently than before?

- Where do these practices take place – at home, in public, online?

- Have there been changes in attendance at religious events or ceremonies?

Photo by Riccardo Mayer / Shutterstock.com

C. Non-discrimination and equal treatment

- In which situations does religion or belief make a difference in how people are treated?

- Where do people feel treated fairly regardless of their religion or belief? Where not? Why?

- How do people notice discrimination when it happens?

Probes:

- What happens when someone applies for a job, education or seeks a public service, or document?

- Who is affected most – women, youth, minorities, converts?

- What do people say privately that they do not say in public?

D. Safety, trust, and social relations (social pressure, coexistence, everyday interactions)

- How comfortable are people interacting with those of different religions or beliefs?

- What signs show that relations between groups are improving or worsening?

- When do people feel the need to be cautious because of religion or belief?

Probes:

- What has changed in everyday interactions – visits, greetings, ceremonies?

- Where do people feel safe speaking openly, and where do they stay silent?

E. State actors and institutions (handled carefully)

- How do people experience interactions with authorities when religion or belief is involved?

- What helps people feel protected, and what makes them feel vulnerable?

Probes:

- What happens when problems arise – where do people go?

- What makes people decide whether or not to report an issue?

Closing reflection

- If things were improving in a meaningful way, what would you notice first?

- What would worry you as an early sign that things are getting worse?

> *i*
>
> ***Additional illustrative question guides are provided in the Annex 1 and 2.*** *These include facilitation questions tested during the FoRB Learning Review and developed using the GAM clustering approach, which focuses on thematic areas such as personal agency, physical violence, collective polarisation, institutional legitimacy, and access to resources. This framing can be adapted to broader themes including peace, equality, safety, coexistence, and institutional trust. It is particularly useful in sensitive contexts where discussing FoRB explicitly may be difficult or risky, while still allowing practitioners to surface FoRB-relevant signals indirectly through everyday experiences.*

4.4 Facilitation considerations

> *i*
>
> *For general facilitation techniques (e.g., managing group dynamics, active listening, visual facilitation), practitioners may consult existing facilitation guides. This section focuses specifically on facilitation challenges related to facilitating FGDs on religion, belief, and identity-sensitive discussions.*
>
> *The facilitator should have key skills in handling highly sensitive groups, along with the basic facilitation skills. S/he should have good knowledge and practical skills of conflict sensitivity, especially Do No Harm and trauma informed approach, cultural competence, empathy, multipartiality and conflict management, among others.*

1. Setting expectations and building trust

In FoRB-related discussions, the introduction phase plays a critical role in addressing mistrust, power asymmetries, and concerns about how information may be used. Participants may reasonably question who is convening the discussion, who funds it, how it benefits them, and whether participation could expose them to risk.

Facilitators should therefore be transparent from the outset about:

- who they are and whom they represent;

- who supports the activity;

- the purpose of the discussion and how the information will be used;

- what the discussion is not intended to do (e.g., assess beliefs, evaluate participants, or trigger immediate action);

- voluntary participation and the right to decline questions or withdraw;

- how confidentiality and anonymity will be respected.

Trust in the facilitator is particularly important when discussing religion or belief. Where possible, facilitators should be individuals who are known to the community, speak the local language, and understand religious and cultural nuances. Familiarity and perceived neutrality can significantly influence participants' willingness to speak openly.

When such familiarity is not possible, facilitators should intentionally allocate time at the beginning of the session to build trust. This may include brief grounding or relationship-building exercises, informal conversation, or other culturally appropriate practices that help reduce distance and establish a respectful tone before moving into substantive discussion.

2. Creating a safe and inclusive discussion space

As mentioned, in discussions involving religion or belief, safety is closely tied to fear of judgment, misrepresentation, or social and institutional repercussions. Participants may self-censor not because they have nothing to say, but because they are uncertain about how their words will be interpreted or used.

Facilitators should explicitly acknowledge these sensitivities and establish ground rules that emphasize respect for difference, non-judgment, and the absence of "right" or "wrong" opinion. Participants should not be expected to speak on behalf of an entire religious or belief group, nor to justify their convictions or practices.

Inclusive facilitation also requires sensitivity to internal diversity within religious communities. Differences based on gender, age, theological orientation, or degree of observance may shape who feels entitled to speak. Facilitators should remain attentive to whose voices dominate and whose perspectives remain marginal, and adapt the discussion format where necessary to avoid reinforcing existing hierarchies.

Photo by freepik / Freepik.com

At the outset of the session, facilitators should explicitly clarify the boundaries of the discussion. It is important to state that the session does not aim to debate theology, assess the validity of beliefs, or compare religious doctrines. The focus is on how religion or belief is experienced in everyday life, and on observable changes in behaviour, relationships, safety, or inclusion. Making this distinction early helps reduce competition over religious authority and signals that no participant is expected to defend or justify their beliefs.

3. Managing power dynamics and sensitive interactions

Power dynamics may stem from majority – minority relations, religious authority, gender norms, social status, or proximity to state institutions. If not addressed intentionally, these dynamics can silence certain participants, distort discussion, and compromise both safety and data quality. Hence the facilitator should be very strategic in managing these power dynamics and ensure smooth conversation in equal footing.

Preventing power dynamics through session design

The most effective way to address power imbalances is to prevent them at the design stage. As noted in the participant selection section, facilitators should avoid mixed-group discussions where power asymmetries are likely to inhibit open participation. This may require organizing separate FGDs for:

- majority and minority groups;
- women and men in contexts with strong gender hierarchies;
- religious leaders and lay community members;
- duty bearers and rights-holders.

Separating groups should be understood as a protective and enabling measure, not as a limitation. It allows participants to speak more freely and reduces the need for corrective interventions during the session itself.

Responding to power dynamics when they emerge during a session

Even with careful preparation, power dynamics may still surface during discussions.

Facilitators should remain attentive to early warning signs, such as:

- prolonged silence or minimal responses from certain participants;
- repeated deference to authority figures or dominant voices;
- reliance on abstract or normative language instead of concrete examples;
- visible discomfort when sensitive topics arise.

When such dynamics emerge, facilitators can take the following practical steps:

- **Redirect the focus of questions**. Shift from general or evaluative questions to concrete, experience-based prompts (e.g., "What do people usually do in this situation?" rather than "Is this allowed?").

- **Use indirect or third-person framing**. Invite participants to speak about "people in the community" or "typical situations" rather than personal experiences, reducing perceived risk.

- **Actively manage airtime**. Gently limit dominant speakers and intentionally invite input from others, without forcing participation.

- **Pause or slow the discussion**. A short pause, clarification, or change in pacing can reduce pressure and allow participants to re-engage.

- **Adapt the format if needed**. If power dynamics continue to constrain participation, facilitators should consider shifting to smaller sub-groups, individual conversations, or follow-up interviews.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to discontinue a particular line of discussion altogether if it risks exposing participants to harm or reinforcing existing hierarchies.

4. Working with contradictory indicators

In discussions, participants may identify signs or indicators of change that appear contradictory or even opposing. What one group experiences as increased freedom, safety, or inclusion may be perceived by another as loss of status, exclusion, or threat. Such contradictions are common in contexts marked by religious diversity, inequality, and shifting power relations.

In other cases, participants may articulate indicators that, while meaningful to them, appear to conflict with FoRB principles, equality, or the "do no harm" standard. It is important to distinguish between these two situations, as they require different forms of attention during facilitation and analysis. While any opinion contradicting the FoRB fundamental principles need to be taken into consideration for analysis, they should not be considered for indicator development.

On the other hand, contradictory indicators should not be treated as errors, facilitation failures, or data quality issues. Instead, they represent valuable analytical signals that reveal how change is experienced differently across groups positioned unequally within social, religious, or institutional structures. Facilitators should not attempt to resolve, reconcile, or judge these differences during the session. The purpose of participatory indicator development is not to establish a single, agreed narrative of change, but to surface multiple perspectives on how change is perceived and lived.

When contradictory or polarizing indicators emerge, facilitators can take the following practical steps:

- **Acknowledge differences explicitly.** Recognize that participants may experience the same situation in different ways, without validating or invalidating any particular viewpoint.

- **Avoid pushing for consensus.** Attempts to harmonize or "balance" opposing views during the discussion may silence minority perspectives or reinforce dominant narratives.

- **Document indicators as expressed.** Record contrasting signals separately and in participants' own language, rather than merging them into neutral or generalized formulations.

- **Use clarifying rather than corrective questions.** When divisive or polarizing statements arise, probing can be used to move beyond the statement itself toward the underlying needs, fears, or concerns participants are expressing. This allows facilitators to explore conditions shaping perceptions – such as insecurity, lack of recognition, economic pressure, or fear of exclusion – without endorsing harmful or exclusionary framing.

- **Flag contradictions for later analysis and adaptive management.** Competing indicators should be carried forward into the analysis and clustering stage, where differences can be examined in relation to power, position, and context. Beyond analysis, such contradictions may signal uneven impact, emerging tensions, or gaps between intended and experienced outcomes, and therefore warrant closer programmatic attention.

- **Triangulate indicators against FoRB principles and Do No Harm.** Indicators should be carefully triangulated during analysis. This includes cross-checking perspectives across different groups (especially those in less powerful positions), situating signals within broader contextual dynamics, and assessing whether perceived improvements align with rights-consistent and non-harmful change.

5. DATA SYNTHESIS: TURNING SIGNALS INTO INDICATORS

Data collection will provide you with rich insights from stories, observations, reflections, and everyday experiences. Transforming raw community input into community generated indicators involves a concise, structured analytical process. The goal is to identify what people themselves consider meaningful evidence of change and translate these community-defined signals into short, safe, and usable indicator statements.

5.1. Organize the data

Begin by cleaning and structuring transcripts, separating descriptions of events, everyday signals, and interpretations. This helps avoid treating opinions as indicators and keeps the analysis grounded in observable elements. Any potentially identifying details should be removed to ensure safety.

Example: "People attend ceremonies of other religions only when invited because they fear judgement."

This contains: (1) a behaviour (attendance only by invitation), (2) a signal (fear of judgement), and (3) an interpretation (social pressure). Only the first two are relevant for indicator creation.

> *AI-Assisted Analysis: You can use AI tools to quickly scan large sets of transcripts and stories, highlight repeated everyday signals (e.g., "women only speak about discrimination privately"), and group similar phrases together as draft clusters. Practitioners then review and adjust these suggestions, keeping interpretation, safety, and contextual nuance firmly in human hands.*

5.2. Identify everyday signals

Everyday signals are short, concrete observations participants use to recognise change—behaviours, interactions, gestures, or patterns that are visible in ordinary life. Extract them exactly as phrased, without interpreting or categorising yet.

Example: _"A Buddhist monk coming to a Muslim funeral is now seen as a good sign."_

Signals: _increased cross-religious attendance; positive interpretation of such gestures. These signals become the building blocks for analysis._

5.3. Code and cluster

Once everyday signals are identified, they need to be grouped into meaningful clusters that help reveal patterns of change. Coding and clustering are interpretive processes: practitioners assign short labels to signals and then organise them into thematic groups. Importantly, this step is adaptive and should reflect the project's conceptual framing, the FoRB dimensions relevant to the context, and the intended use of indicators. No single coding system is required; rather, the method should match the project's analytical needs. There are three approaches practitioners can use when clustering signals:

1. Clustering using the Grounded Accountability Model (GAM)

GAM provides a simple structure for sorting signals into:

- Concepts (broad domains such as FoRB, Peace, Coexistence, Justice),

- Categories (mid-level themes such as personal agency, physical violence, collective polarisation, institutional legitimacy, resources),

- Indicators (concrete, observable signs of desired change (knowledge, attitude, behaviour) derived from community input).

This approach is useful when indicators must align with broad programmatic domains but remain grounded in lived experience.

2. Clustering using CKU/Digni Outcome Clusters

The CKU/Digni FoRB Learning Review identified eight recurrent cross-country patterns of change, including:

- Changing perceptions of FoRB through contextual framing

- Religious leaders initiating or modelling inclusive behaviours

- Youth increase engagement in FoRB dialogue and civic life

- Women increase agency and participation in FoRB dialogue and leadership

- Public discourse and media narratives shift toward inclusion and minority rights

- Interfaith collaboration and institutionalized platforms strengthen

- Local ownership and sustainability of FoRB projects increase

- Legal empowerment and institutional engagement on FoRB

These clusters reflect real patterns observed across global CKU and Digni FoRB portfolio and may serve as analytical "buckets" for organising community signals as well.

3. Clustering using FoRB dimensions proposed by the UN Special Rapporteur

The UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB has outlined a set of recurring dimensions that shape how FoRB is experienced in practice. These dimensions include freedom to manifest belief (worship, observance, teaching, and practice), freedom from coercion, non-discrimination and equality, access to religious spaces and resources, community life and intergroup relations, and the role of state regulation. These thematic areas provide a rights-based structure for organising community signals, especially when indicators need to reflect international human rights standards rather than programmatic themes.

Across all three approaches, the key principle is the same: coding should remain flexible and responsive to context and project's focus.

For example, signals from Cambodia such as "Women only speak about discrimination privately" may fall under:

- GAM category: Personal agency
- CKU/Digni cluster: Women increase agency and participation in FoRB dialogue and leadership
- UN Special Rapporteur dimension: Freedom from coercion / freedom to express belief

This flexibility allows practitioners to honour community generated meaning while organising indicators in a way that supports project-specific analysis, cross-country learning, and rights-based monitoring.

5.4. Formulate indicator statements

Translate signals and clusters into short, clear indicator statements. Indicators should reflect the meaning expressed by participants while presenting the change in a form that is usable for monitoring. When refining the wording, practitioners may draw on elements of the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) and SPICED (subjective, participatory, interpretable, cross-checked, empowering, diverse) principles, not as rigid templates, but as guidance to ensure the indicators are both meaningful and practical. In practice, this means indicators should be specific and observable (SMART), stay

*Custom AI Co-pilots: A custom AI Assistant can be trained on your preferred framing (GAM, CKU/Digni clusters, FoRB dimensions) to act as a "coding assistant" and "indicator editor." It can propose short, clear indicator formulations based on community signals and flag potentially sensitive wording, while you and community partners make the final decisions on what to keep, change, or discard. There are a variety of tutorials and directions on creating custom AI tools within **Open AI's platform** (Custom GPTs) as well **Google's platform (Gemini Gems)***

grounded in community interpretation rather than external jargon (SPICED), and remain safe to use in FoRB-sensitive contexts.

Example transformation:
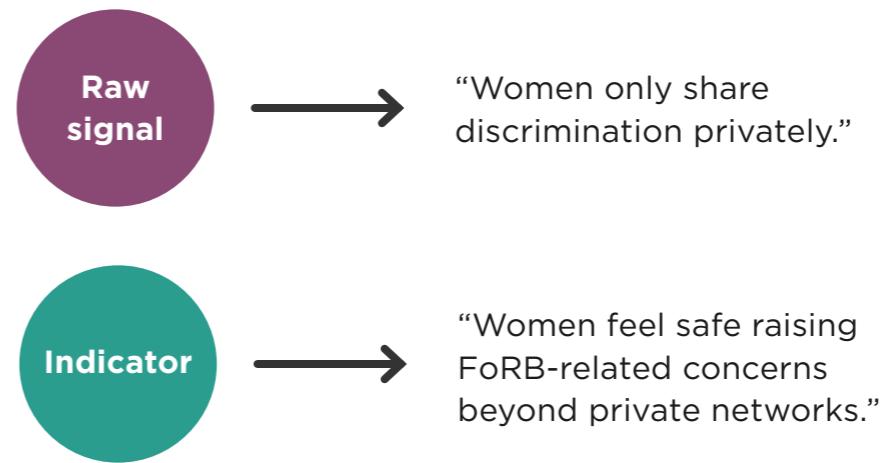
This process can result in both process indicators and outcome indicators. Process indicators measure whether activities are implemented as planned and focus on the project's actions and delivery, such as trainings conducted, participants reached, materials distributed, or policy reviews completed. Outcome indicators, in contrast, measure the changes that occur as a result of these activities, including improvements in knowledge of FoRB rights, reductions in religious discrimination, increased inter-faith trust, or fairer application of policies. Process indicators show what the project does, while outcome indicators show what difference the project makes.

5.5. Validate and prioritize

Share draft indicators back with participants or trusted representatives to confirm that they accurately reflect lived experience. Simple methods – ranking, marking key items, remote confirmation – help ensure indicators are meaningful and legitimate. If possible, it is best to share the formulated indicators for validation and prioritization during the session with participants, for example after a refreshment or lunch break, to ensure all participants' responses are captured.

The facilitator does not decide which indicators are included in the final list; all decisions are made through a transparent voting process among the participants. Based on the discussions, the facilitation team compiles a long list of indicators, which is then presented to the participants for validation and refinement. After the list is validated, participants individually vote to select their top 10, 15, or 20 priority indicators. The votes are tallied to identify the highest-ranked indicators,

> ⓘ
>
> *Online Survey Tools: To facilitate the validation and prioritization process, consider using free and accessible tools such as **Google Forms** or **Microsoft Forms** to send out a quick survey to participants to allow them to vote on the indicators that resonate with them the most. This can be done live both during in-person or online sessions to ensure higher response rates.*

which together constitute the final list. As a result, the participants are the ultimate decision-makers in finalizing the indicators.

Finally, align the validated community generated indicators with the project's Theory of Change and monitoring needs and determine which indicators are qualitative, which can be tracked quantitatively, and which serve as early warning signals. While finalizing the selected indicators, the team should exercise discretion to preserve the community's intended meaning while ensuring feasibility and clarity for M&E systems. If relevant, map the indicators to higher-level frameworks (GERF, SDGs, etc).

5.6. Methodological scope and boundaries

What this approach does not aim to do

- ■ It does not aim to produce statistically representative or generalizable findings; participant selection is guided by programmatic relevance, inclusion considerations, and safety rather than sampling requirements.

- ■ It does not replace a full context or conflict analysis and does not seek to explain structural drivers, power relations, or causal mechanisms shaping FoRB-related change.

- ■ It is not a research methodology intended to generate comprehensive or academic knowledge claims.

- ■ It does not function as a standalone M&E system and does not replace routine monitoring, reporting, or institutional indicator frameworks.

How this approach fits within project implementation

- ■ Community-generated indicators constitute one component of the overall project implementation and learning process, complementing – rather than replacing – context analysis, ongoing monitoring, and evaluation activities.

- ■ They provide an entry point into understanding how communities define relevant change and recognise success, particularly in relation to sensitive, informal, or everyday dimensions of FoRB.

- ■ During implementation, they serve as a sense-making and learning layer, helping teams interpret monitoring data and understand unexpected outcomes.

- ■ When combined with other qualitative and quantitative sources, community-generated indicators strengthen analysis by clarifying how change is experienced and perceived by different groups within the context.

6. RISKS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

In all phases of the indicator generation process there are several risk areas that need attention. Below is a list of some of these, together with suggested mitigation measures.

Area	Risk	Mitigation Measures
1. Participant safety and social retaliation	Participants may face backlash, stigma, or punishment for sharing experiences related to discrimination, conversion, pressure, or FoRB-sensitive issues. Mixed-identity groups may increase exposure.	■ Conduct a risk assessment before selecting participants. ■ Avoid direct questions about personal belief; focus on community-level observations. ■ Use homogenous groups where necessary; offer individual interviews instead of FGDs. ■ Avoid recordings if risky; rely on skilled notetakers. ■ Do not collect identifying data unless essential and consented to.
2. Psychological distress and traumatization	Discussions may surface painful experiences or memories of discrimination, exclusion, or coercion, causing emotional harm.	■ Use trauma-informed facilitation. ■ Allow participants to skip questions or withdraw at any time. ■ Avoid probing into personal trauma; focus on everyday signals.
3. Reinforcing harmful norms or power imbalances	Dominant or majority actors may silence others or steer discussions to reflect existing power hierarchies rather than lived experiences.	■ Conduct stakeholder mapping to design safe group compositions. ■ Facilitate with awareness of gender, age, caste/class, and religious hierarchies. ■ Use turn-taking or small groups to ensure equal voice. ■ Engage trusted local facilitators.
4. Political or institutional sensitivity	FoRB discussions may be perceived as political critique or foreign influence, creating risk for communities or staff.	■ Frame discussions around everyday life, not political evaluation. ■ Use neutral language when needed ("changes", "signals", "experiences"). ■ Avoid naming institutions during FGDs. ■ Engage authorities proactively if appropriate. ■ Store all data securely.
5. Misinterpretation or instrumentalization of indicators	Indicators may be misread as representative of entire communities or used to justify political narratives or comparisons.	■ Clarify that indicators reflect perceptions, not statistics. ■ Validate with multiple groups when safe. ■ Triangulate with additional data. ■ Apply SPICED principles to ensure interpretability. ■ Present aggregated findings only.

Area	Risk	Mitigation Measures
6. Digital risks: poor connectivity and incomplete participation	Participants may lose connection, miss key parts of the discussion, or be unable to contribute fully, skewing the data.	■ Conduct a connectivity test before the session. ■ Give participants the guiding questions in advance. ■ Use smaller groups or one-on-one follow-up if needed. ■ Assign a co-facilitator to reintegrate participants who rejoin. ■ Accept voice notes or text responses as supplementary data.
7. Risks of relativism and dilution of rights	Religious actors may frame discriminatory norms as tradition, shifting the discussion into doctrinal justification and weakening rights-based interpretation.	■ Anchor the entire process in a human rights and "do no harm" approach. ■ Avoid theological debates; focus on lived experience in everyday life. ■ Ensure diverse representation; separate vulnerable groups when needed. mi ■ Cross-check findings with other data sources. ■ Keep facilitators neutral regarding doctrine. ■ Pause or restructure sessions if they become doctrinal.
8. Risks for facilitators and implementing staff	Staff may face community resistance, suspicion from religious actors, or political pressure.	■ Provide staff with context briefings. ■ Use facilitators trusted by the community. ■ Establish supervision and safety protocols. ■ Rotate facilitation roles in polarized contexts.
9. Risks when using AI technology	Staff and communities may feel reluctance based on perceived or real risks associated with using AI tools such as data being used by companies for unintended purposes.	■ Use AI tools/systems that explicitly say they do not use inputs for "training data" or to train new models. ■ Build a working knowledge and familiarity with AI tools and ethics ■ Ensure digital data risks are mitigated by ensuring that participants only share information that they would be comfortable stating publicly and/or analysts must make sure data are not attributable to any single participant or group before running data through an AI system.

Using Indicators in Project Design and Implementation

7. INTEGRATION WITH PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The integration of community generated indicators into an M&E plan ensures that all metrics are rooted in shared, locally relevant definitions of change, moving beyond generic rights-based metrics to capture the specific nuances of FoRB in a given context. This alignment can be achieved in multiple ways and different stages of M&E implementation.

7.1. Participatory Program Design

Integrating community generated indicators in the program design stage can ensure the "why" and "what" of the project is determined based on community inputs. The community generated indicator development process can be conducted with project staff, implementing partners, or community representatives as a means of unpacking concepts behind a FoRB project. This participatory process builds trust and ensures shared ownership.

It can be a means of joint analysis, collectively examining local context and evolving dynamics around FoRB, identifying challenges, and potential opportunities to inform program design. For example, rather than limiting themselves to checking if a law addressing FoRB rights exists, they assess how it is applied in practice (e.g., local barriers to registering a place of worship, or specific local forms of discrimination against a minority religious or belief group or state response towards FoRB rights etc) and what implication it has on people's lives.

The outcomes of the community generated process can result in the joint development of a Theory of Change that collaboratively articulates the desired FoRB outcomes and the pathways to achieve them. Since the outcomes are defined jointly (e.g., 'Increased positive interaction between groups X and Y,' or 'Decreased reporting of administrative or security agencies' harassment'), the resulting indicators can be used to determine the project objectives that align with community priorities.

7.2. Contextualized Indicators for M&E Framework

Once finalized, the community generated indicators can be seamlessly integrated into the formal M&E plan, including in indicator tracking matrix or monitoring frameworks, defining the "how much" and "how" of measuring success. This transforms community-defined concepts into operational M&E elements

Both quantitative indicators (e.g., number of interfaith dialogue events, or percentage increase in successful FoRB-related legal aid cases) and qualitative indicators (e.g., narratives of personal change, or perceived sense of security/tolerance) can be collected from the community generated indicator development process. These indicators can be further elaborated, adding definitions and determining data collection methods and tools to include them in an M&E framework under the objectives that are most aligned.

If your intention is to develop indicators for a project that has predetermined outcome areas, consider adapting the question, coding and clustering step in section 5.3 to align with your project's outcome areas to make this process easier.

These aspects can be used to scale the indicators down to the level of the project's scope and ensure feasibility with available resources and sensitivity to cultural and contextual realities.

For example, the broad indicator "Women feel safe raising FoRB-related concerns beyond private networks" can be limited to the target location or target participants of the project to be "Women leaders in [target location] feel safe raising FoRB-related concerns beyond private networks."

(Please see Annex 3 for an example of translation of indicators).

7.3. Learning, Adaptation, and Accountability

Integration of the results from the community generated indicators process into learning and reflection processes for adaptation and accountability closes the loop, ensuring the M&E system drives the project's relevance and effectiveness.

- **Community Feedback and Response Loops:** Results and insights from the co-created indicators are regularly shared with the originating communities and other stakeholders. This is a core mechanism for transparency and strengthens accountability to affected populations.

- **Adaptive Management:** Regular reflection meetings and learning sessions allow the program team to analyse trends captured by the indicators, identify emerging FORB-related challenges, and make evidence-based adjustments to the program strategy and approaches.

- **Organizational Learning:** Documenting lessons learned - both from the process of co-creating the indicators and the results that emerged - supports organizational knowledge and contributes to improving future FORB program design.

> *By following this approach, the locally co-created FoRB indicators are not just metrics; they are locally validated benchmarks of success that are directly aligned with program objectives, deeply embedded in local realities, and fully integrated into the technical monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system, enhancing the relevance, ownership, and sustainability of the project.*

Photo by rawpixel.com / Freepik.com

Annexes

Annex 1 and 2 are the step-by-step guides used in the nine in-person and online focus group discussions conducted as a part of the FORB Learning Review commissioned by CKU and Digni.

The guiding questions presented in these guides are illustrative examples developed and tested during the FoRB Learning Review of CKU and Digni's FoRB portfolio, using the Grounded Accountability Model (GAM) clustering approach. They are intended to support facilitators in designing participatory discussions around FoRB or broader themes such as peace, equality, safety, coexistence, inclusion, etc.

These examples are not meant to be used as fixed templates. Facilitators are expected to adapt the questions based on their specific context, project objectives and scope, the sensitivity of the topic, participant composition, available time and resources, and the level of trust within the community. The annexes should therefore be understood as a flexible reference rather than a prescriptive guide, requiring contextual judgement and adjustment in practice.

Annex 3 is a bank of illustrative FoRB indicators generated through these nine focus group discussions. These can be used as inspiration when developing community generated indicators in a specific context.

Photo by/ Amol Sonar /Unsplash.com

ANNEX 1 – GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (IN-PERSON)

The purpose of this document is to offer guidance on how to develop community-generated indicators using the participatory approach through an Indicator Generation Workshop, which consists of a focus group discussion and voting exercise.

LOGISTICS

Before you go into your workshops, make sure to take a look at the checklist:

Checklist for the workshop:

- ■ Audio-recorder (please have spare batteries or make sure your phone is charged if you're using a phone to record)

- ■ Pen and pencil for facilitator and note-taker

- ■ Markers, pens, pencils and paper for participants and their discussions

- ■ Flip-charts to write down indicators for voting.

- ■ Snacks/lunch and beverages for participants.

(Please note: There is further guidance on creating a safe and inclusive environment as well as ethical considerations in the Tool Document section 3.5)

The suggested total time for the workshop is 4 hours. While a duration is recommended to allow for meaningful discussion and probing, facilitators should remain flexib le and responsive to group dynamics and energy levels. A planned schedule could look like this:

Activity	Time required
1. Introducing objective of the workshop followed by Q&A	20 minutes
2. FGD to generate list of community generated indicators of FoRB	90 minutes
3. Break to allow developing a list of indicators for verification	30 minutes
4. Verification and correction of compiled indicator statements	30 minutes
5. Presentation of list of indicators and voting of selected top 10-15 indicators by the participants (30 Minutes).	30 minutes
6. Preparing the final list of selected top 10-15 indicators on FoRB (30 Minutes)	30 minutes

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

The goal of the workshop is to conduct an efficient discussion with an ethnographic approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences on a variety of domains or categories related to our concepts. The interaction should be more like a conversation where the participants do most of the talking and you as facilitators and note-takers engage them by listening and asking many probing questions.

Even though you are telling the participants you want to have a conversation with them, you as facilitators are not doing most of the talking. The facilitators should ask open ended questions that will elicit thorough responses. Do not share your personal beliefs during the discussion or challenge what the participants say. While facilitators conduct the discussion, the note-takers will be responsible for audio recording (with permission from participants), having all materials ready to hand the facilitator and for writing down all the signals/indicators that they hear come out during the discussion.

The key concepts that you will be focusing on in the workshops are: Freedom of religion or belief or religious equality/inequality. The aim is to understand how participants themselves interpret these concepts and which everyday signs they associate with religious equality or inequality in their communities, as well as the signs they use to describe whether people feel more or less free to practice the religion of their birth or choice.

You will discuss the following domains that relate to the broader concept of FoRB:

- What FoRB or religious equality means to participants

- Personal agency on FoRB

- Polarization and violence related to FoRB

- Institutional legitimacy and FoRB

While the discussion guide lays out these discrete domains, expect the participants to weave in and out of them, as well as bringing up other topics that should be explored. Some of the discussions may apply to multiple domains.

- Spend as much time as you think you need to on each domain within the time, so that there is (enough) rich information to generate sufficient indicators within each domain.

- Ask many probing questions and clarification questions to go deeper into themes and domains.

- Make sure everyone in the workshop has a chance to speak their mind.

QUESTION GUIDE

SETTING THE TONE

1. **What does Freedom of Religion or Belief / religious equality mean to you?**

Allow participants to really explore this word and let them give you various specific examples of what they think FORB is. You can ask probing questions such as "can you tell me more about that?" "Then what happened?" "Do others agree with this and have similar experiences?" "why is that so?" and so forth. Once you feel you have enough examples from participants you can ask various follow-up questions like below.

2. **How do local communities understand freedom of religion and belief?**

   Does the community you live in feel the same way you just described about your understanding of FORB and religious equality?

When exploring this question, facilitators should remain attentive to whether participants are speaking from a majority, minority, or specific subgroup perspective. Where appropriate and safe, follow-up questions can be used to explore differences in experience across groups, without assuming that perceptions are shared by all.

- *Follow-up/clarification question (use selectively):*

   Do different groups in the community experience this in the same way, or differently?

   Whose experience is reflected in this description, and whose might be different?

3. What does religious freedom look like in everyday life?

■ *Follow-up/clarification questions:* When you go about your day, cooking for your family, or buying groceries, going to the market, working, meeting your neighbors or local officials, going to hospital, being at school, listening to a sermon, reading the newspaper or listening to the radio, going to the police station, taking the bus and so forth - what are some of the things that you have observed recently that signified/indicated?) that people in your community are more respectful OR less respectful towards others' religious or belief identities than before?

■ *Follow-up/clarification questions:* Where / When does that happen?

■ *Follow-up/clarification questions:* What are the signs that indicate there is more religious equality and FORB in your community now than before? What are the signs that indicate that there is an increase or decrease in the level of freedom of religion and belief or religious equality now in your community than in the past?

4. How can you tell that a person in your community has the desired freedom of religion or belief and religious equality/inequality?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* Are there situations in this community where people from religious minorities or people with no religion seem able to practice their beliefs freely? What tells you that this is possible? What do you see people doing in such situations?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* Do you know women in your community that have freedom of religion and belief? How would you describe them? What do they do? What are the signs that tell you they have freedom of religion or belief? How do you know if they have equal access to freedom of religion or belief as men?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* What does women's participation in promoting FORB look like to you in your community? How do women participate in establishing or maintaining peace, FORB and religious equality in your community?

5. Do people in your community believe they have the power to make a positive difference and increase their access to FORB and religious equality?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* Do they feel they have a voice in the government or societal responses on religious matters at local and national level? How can you tell?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* Do people from minority religious or belief groups, those not confessing any religion in your community believe they can make a positive difference?

6. Do people want to engage and address the problems related to FORB and religious equality that they face in their community?

■ What problems (related to religion) are they typically facing?

■ What could potentially help them if they want to do this more? Do they have the necessary confidence and skills?

Allow participants to explore this domain and let them give you various examples of how they decide that someone has agency. You can ask probing questions such as "can you tell me more about that?" "Then what happened?" "Do others agree with this and have similar experiences?" "why is that so?" and so forth. Once you feel you have enough examples from participants you can ask various follow-up questions like below.

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* What do people from different religious or belief identities that have agency do in your community? What makes you think that they have more "agency"? Can you give examples?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* How do people from different religious identities/beliefs systems address issues related to FORB and religious inequality in your community? Can you give examples?

4 Personal agency refers to the experience of agency at a personal level when being followers of specific religious or belief community, being a woman, managing relevant projects or having a leadership role at the local level.

INSTITUTIONAL LEGITIMACY AND RESOURCES

10. How do local leaders, religious leaders and government officials act in matters of FoRB violation in your community? How do you want them to respond?

Participants may initially associate FoRB violations with extreme or violent incidents. Facilitators can gently broaden the discussion to include non-violent restrictions, social hostilities, or unequal treatment that affect people's ability to practice their religion or beliefs in everyday life.

11. Which agencies/institutions have responded better to the community's needs on religious issues?

12. In your community, do people seem to have trust in authorities when it comes to religious matters? How can you tell?

Allow participants to explore this domain and let them give you various examples of how they decide that an organization or institution has legitimacy. You can ask probing questions such as "can you tell me more about that?" "Then what happened?" "Do others agree with this and have similar experiences?" "why is that so?" and so forth. Once you feel you have enough examples from participants you can ask various follow-up questions like below.

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* Which organizations and networks have you gotten support from in some way?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* What are the signs the community is more or less tolerant towards the religious 'others' and their work?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* What type of help and support would you want to receive in the future to be able to promote religious tolerance and religious freedom in your community?

PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF POLARIZATION AND VIOLENCE

7. What types of conflicts/tensions between people from different religious groups (related to religious or belief issues) have you observed in your community most recently? Have there been incidents of violence?

8. How do members of religious or belief minorities in your community typically act when incidents of violence happen? How do the majority react?

9. Which side in the conflict do most of your community members take?

Allow participants to explore this domain and let them give you various examples of how they decide that there is more conflict and tension in their community. You can ask probing questions such as "can you tell me more about that?" "Then what happened?" "Do others agree with this and have similar experiences?" "why is that so?" and so forth. Once you feel you have enough examples from participants you can ask various follow-up questions like below.

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* Who gets left out and neglected, with no help when these adversities happened?

■ *Follow-up/probing questions:* What are the signs that you see that give you hope that conflicts and violence will be prevented in the future?

GENERATING AND PRIORITIZING INDICATORS

The goal now is to translate the rich insights from the discussion into concrete, localized indicators of FoRB. These indicators should reflect how participants recognize FoRB or religious inequality in their everyday lives – based on real examples, behaviours, or social signals.

This process includes two parts:

Generating indicators – collecting short statements from participants that describe visible signs of religious freedom or inequality, based on the group discussions.

Prioritizing indicators – selecting the most relevant or widely agreed-upon statements that can serve as the basis for future monitoring or learning.

Ideally, this involves a careful review of the session transcript, followed by the compilation of draft indicators and a subsequent validation or prioritisation exercise with participants. This allows indicators to be grounded in the full range of inputs and expressed in participants' own language.

In practice, however, logistical and time often require these steps to be combined into a single session. In such cases, it is recommended that the note-taker be a MEL specialist who is able to translate emerging signals into draft indicator statements in real time. Breaks (such as a coffee break) can then be used to consolidate and refine these draft indicators and prepare them for prioritisation.

(Please note: There is further guidance on how to use AI tools to speed up the process of generating indicators from signals captured in the FGD in the Tool Document section 5.1.)

It is important that participants are able to recognise themselves in the indicators that are generated. Wherever possible, draft indicators should use the language, expressions, and framing that participants themselves used during the discussion, as this strengthens ownership, validity, and trust in the process.

Indicator prioritisation can be conducted using different techniques, depending on available resources and the setting. For example:

- **Digital voting tools** (e.g. Google Forms) can be used to allow participants to rank indicators, with results displayed immediately on a screen.

- **Paper-based ranking** can be done by printing indicators and asking participants to rank or score them (e.g. from 1 to 10) then adding up the total scores manually and sharing back the results.

- **Visual prioritisation** can be facilitated by writing indicators on flipcharts and asking participants to place stickers or marks next to those that resonate most strongly with them.

Regardless of the method used, the purpose of prioritisation is not to eliminate diversity of perspectives, but to identify which indicators participants collectively consider most meaningful and relevant for understanding change within the scope of the project.

Selected indicators are not expected to be transferred word-for-word into a project's formal MEL framework. Translating them into MEL-ready indicators may require further refinement to meet technical requirements (e.g. clarity, measurability, timeframe, or alignment with project objectives). This adaptation is the responsibility of the project team and should take place after the participatory process, when integrating the indicators into the MEL plan.

Photo by Iwaria inc./ Unsplash.com

ANNEX 2 – GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (ONLINE)

The purpose of this document is to offer guidance on how to develop community-generated indicators using the participatory approach through an Indicator Generation Workshop online, which consists of a focus group discussion and voting exercise.

LOGISTICS

Before you go into your workshops, make sure to take a look at the checklist:

Checklist of things for the workshop:

- ■ Zoom link + calendar invite
- ■ One facilitator + one note-taker (or co-host)
- ■ Consent for recording (verbal at start of call)
- ■ Slide or shared screen with key questions
- ■ Google Doc or chat window for collecting indicators
- ■ Google Form for anonymous feedback
- ■ Plan for interpretation if needed (see below)

The suggested total time for the workshop is 2 hours. While a duration is recommended to allow for meaningful discussion and probing, facilitators should remain flexible and responsive to group dynamics and energy levels. A planned schedule could look like this:

Activity	Time required
1. Introducing objective of the workshop followed by Q&A and warm-up	15 minutes
2. FGD to generate list of community generated indicators of FoRB	60 minutes
3. Break to allow developing a list of indicators for verification	30 minutes
4. Reading and prioritizing indicators	15 minutes
5. Thank participants, explain next steps, and share feedback from the link.	10 minutes

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

The goal of the workshop is to conduct an efficient discussion with an ethnographic approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences on a variety of domains or categories related to our concepts. The interaction should be more like a conversation where the participants do most of the talking and you as facilitators and note-takers engage them by listening and asking many probing questions.

Even though you are telling the participants you want to have a conversation with them, as facilitators you are not doing most of the talking. The facilitators should ask open ended questions that will elicit thorough responses. Do not share your personal beliefs during the discussion or challenge what the participants say. While facilitators conduct the discussion, the note-takers will be responsible for audio recording (with permission from participants), having all materials ready to hand the facilitator and for writing down all the signals/indicators that they hear come out during the discussion.

The key concepts that you will be focusing on in the workshops are: **Freedom of religion or belief or religious equality/inequality**. The aim is to understand how participants themselves interpret these concepts and which everyday signs they associate with religious equality or inequality in their communities, as well as the signs they use to describe whether people feel more or less free to practice the religion of their birth or choice.

You will discuss the following domains that relate to the broader concept of FORB:

- What FoRB or religious equality means to participants
- Personal agency on FoRB
- Polarization and violence related to FoRB
- Institutional legitimacy and FoRB

While the discussion guide lays out these discrete domains, expect the participants to weave in and out of them, as well as bringing up other topics that should be explored. Some of the discussions may apply to multiple domains.

- Spend as much time as you think you need to on each domain within the time, so that there is (enough) rich information to generate sufficient indicators within each domain.
- Ask many probing questions and clarification questions to go deeper into themes and domains.
- Make sure everyone in the workshop has a chance to speak their mind.

SETTING THE TONE

1. **Share a word or image that comes to mind when you hear 'freedom of religion or belief'.**

2. **What does Freedom of Religion and Belief and religious equality mean to you in your community?**

3. **Does the community you live in feel the same way you just described about your understanding of FORB and religious equality?**

   What are signs in daily life that people are more (or less) free to practice their religion?

   What are examples of increased or decreased religious equality?

4. **What tells you that people in your community – like women, minorities, or youth – have (or don't have) religious freedom and equality?**

   Do women in your community feel free to follow their religion or beliefs? What do they do that shows this? Are their rights and freedoms equal to men's when it comes to religion?

   Do people from smaller religious groups or with no religion feel free to live by their beliefs? How do they behave or express their beliefs in public? Are there signs that they are treated equally – or unequally?

   Optional: Do young people have space to explore and express their religious or belief identity? Can they speak openly about their beliefs in school, online, or at home?

PERSONAL AGENCY

5. **In what ways do people in your community feel they can (or cannot) make a positive difference when it comes to promoting freedom of religion or belief and religious equality?**

   Do people want to engage and address the problems related to FORB and religious equality that they face in their community?

PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF POLARIZATION AND VIOLENCE AROUND FORB

6. **What types of conflicts/tensions between people from different religious groups (related to religious or belief issues) have you observed in your community most recently? Have there been incidents of violence?**

7. **How do members of religious or belief groups in your community typically act when incidents of violence happen? How do the majority react? How does the government act and which role do they take in the situation?**

8. **How do tensions or divisions between religious groups affect you personally? Do you ever feel like you must take a side when conflicts arise? If so, how does taking one side affect you?**

INSTITUTIONAL LEGITIMACY AND RESOURCES

9. **How do local leaders and government officials act in matters of FORB violation in your community? How do you want them to respond?**

10. **Which agencies/institutions have responded better to the community's needs on religious issues?**

11. **In your community, do people seem to have trust in authorities when it comes to religious matters? How can you tell?**

GENERATING AND PRIORITIZING INDICATORS

The goal of this step is to translate the rich insights from the discussion into concrete, localized indicators of FoRB. These indicators should reflect how participants recognize FoRB or religious inequality in their everyday lives – based on real examples, behaviours, or social signals.

This process includes two parts:

Generating indicators – collecting short statements from participants that describe visible signs of religious freedom or inequality, based on the group discussions.

Prioritizing indicators – selecting the most relevant or widely agreed-upon statements that can serve as the basis for future monitoring or learning.

Depending on the time, tools, and facilitation style, this can be done in different ways – either interactively during the session or supported by AI-assisted methods. Two facilitation options are described below.

Option 1: Using AI Tools

Uses AI tools to analyze the recorded discussion and generate indicators for voting (live or post-session).

BEST FOR

- Sessions with recording permission
- Teams comfortable with transcription and AI tools
- Deeper processing and refinement of raw discussion content
- Voting can happen either after the session or at the end of the same session

Instructions:

STEP 1 **Record the FGD session (with consent)**

> Ensure you have clear audio recording (Zoom or other)

> Let participants know the purpose is only for internal analysis

STEP 2 **Transcribe the discussion using an AI tool**

> Use tools like Zoom transcript, Otter.ai, Read.ai or Whisper

> Review and lightly clean the transcript if necessary

STEP 3 **Extract indicator phrases using a custom GPT prompt**

> Upload the transcript into GPT (or another AI) with one of the following prompt options:

> *"Please analyze this transcript and extract short phrases or statements that reflect participants' lived experiences of freedom of religion or belief and religious equality or inequality . Rephrase these as potential localized FoRB indicators, grouped by theme."*
>
> *"I am running a focus group discussion with community representatives from X and Y in order to generate indicators of change in relation to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and religious equality in their context in country/region X. Be an experienced MERL expert with considerable knowledge of FoRB in this context and analyse the transcript from the focus group discussion. I want you to extract X short phrases or statements that reflect participant's lived experiences of FoRB and religious equality; rephrased as potential indicators of change and grouped by theme."*

STEP 4 **Prepare a Google Form for voting**

> Create a form listing 20–30 possible indicator phrases

> Allow participants to vote for their top 5 indicators

STEP 5 **Voting timing – two options**

> **Option A** (in-session): If time allows, prepare and share the form during the 10–15 minute break and ask participants to vote before the session ends

> **Option B** (asynchronous): Send the form to participants after the session with a clear deadline (e.g., within 3 days)

STEP 6 Analyze voting results and compile a final list of top 10–15 indicators

Option 2: Participant-Written Indicators

Participants write and vote on indicator statements directly during the session using chat, polling, or shared documents.

THIS IS POSSIBLE WHEN

■ Groups that are comfortable using chat or interactive tools (e.g., Mentimeter, Padlet, Google Docs, Zoom chat, Slido)

■ Participants or teams who prefer not to use AI-based tools for transcription or analysis

■ Situations where immediate reflection and group consensus are helpful

■ Teams that prefer a simple, low-tech setup without post-session processing

Instructions:

STEP 1 **After each discussion segment, collect indicator phrases**

At the end of each of the three discussion segments, ask: "Please write 1–2 short statements in the chat that describe a sign that someone in your community has — or doesn't have — freedom of religion or belief."

› Participants can respond in their preferred language

› The note-taker copies all phrases into a shared list in a digital tool (see suggestions above)

STEP 2 **After final discussion — during a 10–15 minute break**

› Use this time to:

o Review and lightly clean or group the collected statements

o Prepare the final list for voting (15–20 phrases max)

STEP 3 **Voting on top indicators (after the break)**

Display the full list of indicator statements on screen.

Ask participants to select their top 3 indicators, either by:

› Writing "+1" in the chat next to their favorite statements

› Voting through a live tool like Mentimeter, Padlet, Slido, or Google Forms

STEP 4 **Tally and finalize top 10–15 indicators**

Selected indicators are not expected to be transferred word-for-word into a project's formal MEL framework. Translating them into MEL-ready/SMART indicators may require further refinement to meet technical requirements (e.g. clarity, measurability, timeframe, or alignment with project objectives). This adaptation is the responsibility of the project team and should take place after the participatory process, when integrating the indicators into the MEL plan.

Photo by EqualStock /Unsplash.com

ANNEX 3 – BANK OF ILLUSTRATIVE FoRB INDICATORS

INTRODUCTION

This indicator bank presents 158 illustrative examples of indicators based on everyday signals that emerged during Focus Group Discussions conducted in 2025 as a part of the FORB Learning Review to pilot and test the Community-Generated Indicator Guides in Annex 1 and 2. The primary purpose of these FGDs was methodological testing – to examine how the tool functions in practice, how participants interpret the questions, and what kinds of signals and indicator formulations are generated through facilitated discussion.

The FGDs were not designed as representative community consultations. Participants were not selected as members of specific local communities or rights-holder groups in a defined geographic location. Instead, they primarily included project participants, implementing partners, and practitioners involved in FoRB-related programming within the CKU and Digni portfolio under review. In regional discussions, participants drew on experiences from different countries and contexts, often speaking from diverse professional or project-based perspectives rather than a single shared local setting.

As a result, the indicators included in this bank should not be understood as localized or community-validated indicators in the strict sense. They do not represent comprehensive assessments of FoRB conditions in any specific country, community, or location. Rather, they illustrate the types of signals, framings, and indicator formulations that can emerge when the guide is applied, and the kinds of FoRB-relevant insights participants may surface through the process.

The indicator bank therefore serves as a learning and reference resource, demonstrating what outputs it may generate when the process is used in different contexts. As the discussions were conducted for methodological testing purposes and across different project and regional contexts, variations in wording, level of abstraction, and framing reflect differences in country contexts, facilitation approaches, participant groups, project scopes, and sensitivities. This diversity is intentional and should be understood as a strength, as it captures the

context-specific ways in which FoRB-related change is interpreted and articulated.

Users are encouraged to draw inspiration from the indicators, adapting or reformulating them only where they resonate with their own context, project objectives, and locally grounded engagement with communities. Any use of these indicators for monitoring, evaluation, or learning purposes should be preceded by context-specific validation, ethical reflection, and adaptation.

HOW TO USE THE BANK

- Treat the indicators as illustrative outputs of a piloting exercise, not as finalized or locally validated indicators.

- Use them to understand:

  o how participants interpret FoRB-related concepts
  o what kinds of everyday signals may emerge
  o how guiding questions can lead to indicator formulation

- When drawing on indicators from this bank, consider:

  o whether they resonate with your specific context
  o whether additional local engagement and validation are required
  o how they would need to be adapted to meet project objectives, risk considerations, and MEL requirements
  o They have been categorised using the 8 outcome clusters developed during the **FORB Learning Review** (see page 26) to provide illustrative examples of the types of results you may want to capture if working on these outcome areas.

- Do not assume that indicators reflect the situation of a particular country or community; they reflect perspectives shared during a methodological testing process.

Example:

This example illustrates how a single, illustrative indicator from the bank later can be translated into SMART output- and outcome-level indicators during MEL integration, as long as it is relevant to the project and resonates with the context. While the wording and structure may change to meet technical requirements, the core meaning should remain grounded in how participants originally described the issue.

Illustrative indicator from FGD: Instances of land disputes escalating into religiously motivated violence.

Translating the indicator into a SMART Outcome-level indicator:

❯ **Percentage / change-oriented:** By the end of the project, the proportion of reported land-related disputes that escalate into religiously-motivated violence in the target area decreases compared to baseline.

❯ **Perception-based measurement:** By the end of the project, at least X% of community members in the target area report a decrease in land-related disputes escalating into religiously-motivated violence, compared to baseline.

   o **Specific:** focuses on land disputes and escalation into religious violence.

   o **Measurable:** proportion or percentage change.

   o **Achievable & Relevant**: aligned with peacebuilding / FoRB-related outcomes.

   o **Time-bound: end of project.**

Translating the same signal into a SMART Output-level indicator:

❯ Number of land-related disputes in the target area that are addressed through project-supported mediation or conflict resolution mechanisms before escalating into religiously-motivated violence.

❯ Number of mediation sessions or dispute resolution processes supported by the project to prevent land disputes from escalating into religiously-motivated violence.

Note on Negatively Worded Indicators

Some indicators may appear negatively phrased illustrating a deterioration of FoRB and/or religious equality – for example:

■ *"Media can either escalate or de-escalate religious conflict through storytelling that emphasizes commonality."*

■ *"Patriarchal control in interfaith marriages limits women's religious freedom, especially when husbands advance in mosque leadership."*

This is intentional and valid, as indicators reflect the tone, content, and concerns expressed during discussions.When integrating into MEL frameworks, these indicators can be adapted — for example, by framing them as:

■ *"Decreased media amplification of religious conflict", or*

■ *"Increased autonomy for women in interfaith marriages."*

THE INDICATOR BANK

Click **here** to access the bank with 158 illustrative indicators that can be used as described above.

CKU
Center for Church-Based Development

Digni

FORB
Learning Platform

Centre for Church-Based Development
Peter Bangs Vej 5B
DK-2000 Frederiksberg, Denmark

+45 3961 2777
cku@cku.dk
https://cku.dk

Digni
Arbins gate 11, 0253 Oslo,
Norway

+47 24 11 11 50
post@digni.no
https://digni.no/

The FORB Learning Platform

info@forb-learning.org
https://www.forb-learning.org/