



Partnership Mission to Al-Azhar University



Mission Report

Cairo-Egypt

October 2016

Supported by:

Background

The difficulty in establishing effective Reproductive Health, Gender and Population programs comes from a lack of openness, in many of the Muslim Countries, regarding sexuality, male-female relationships, illness and death, taboo subjects deeply rooted in the culture. Religion is very important, all through Egyptian history, in shaping the attitude and the behaviour of a large sector of population.

Religious Leaders are the gatekeepers for many social and cultural issues. The role of Religious Leaders is not restricted on calling for prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage and other religious commandments and juristic regulations; but this role extends to include inviting people for various medical, social, cultural and religious fields of life. In belief of the role of religious leaders, bringing them to the **RH, Gender and Population Issues Programs** and networking with them, the efforts to tackle the problems would be more successful. Most of the programs that involve religious leaders assume that, religious leaders need only information and they will be going to be involved. No attempt has been made to understand what they can offer and what their needs are? In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that religious leaders (RLs) and communities of faith play an important role in shaping health-seeking behavior. Religious leaders are often arbiters of morality and ethics, defining what is prescribed or proscribed by a faith. This is particularly relevant with respect to maternal and child health, reproductive health, and family planning as they are at the juncture where science, religion, culture and morality intersect. Consequently, maternal and child health, and family planning information and services that are supported by religious leaders and religious institutions are more likely to be accepted by the community. It is therefore imperative that religious leaders should have accurate and appropriate information and skills to help their congregations make informed choices on matters related to their health and well-being.

With this recognition, Faith to Action Network, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) in partnership with IICPSR at Al-Azhar University organised a Caravan at Kenyan Coast whose main theme was '**Child Spacing in Islamic Context**'. The Caravan aimed to build the skills of Imams

and Kadhis in addressing contemporary issues facing the Muslim Community at the Coast. It also aimed at addressing misconceptions (medical or scriptural) held by Imams and Kadhis and congregations on family planning and other contemporary issues. During the caravan, the following issues emerged:

1. Faith to Action Network is a crucial pillar in linking the work of SUPKEM with contemporary issues. Effectiveness in being this link requires partnership with Al-Azhar (human resource, joint resource mobilisation, research and programmes) and build the Network capacity to mobilise and create opportunities for education, experience sharing and learning among different organisations
2. The 1st ever Caravan created opportunities for interaction with Imams and government officials at the Kenyan Coast at intense levels not only on child spacing but other issues
3. Additional Caravans need to be organised in Kenya and other regions and countries in East, Central, Western and Southern Africa
4. The interactions with Imams, the government and the general community highlighted challenges that exist in linking contemporary issues with scriptures at the Kenyan Coast
5. These interactions also highlighted capacity challenges for Imams in interpreting issues with some of the identified gaps contributing to insecurity. The challenges in capacity were evidence that most Imams at Kenyan Coast are ill equipped to deal with contemporary issues
6. Equipping the Imams with skills can be done at two levels:
 - a. Al-Azhar University –requires scholarships making access limited due to expense
 - b. In local university or other institution in partnership with Al-Azhar University. This can include placing/attaching Al-Azhar University lecturers with a local University to run the select courses and build capacity of this local university to offer such courses with supervision of Al-Azhar University
7. Government highlighted how Islam can contribute to stabilising communities by addressing co-existence of communities and security issues.
8. The need for sensitisation in mosques to be scaled up to other Counties/regions emerged as a need

The courtesy visit and partnership discussions with Al-Azhar University

Based on the overwhelming need to build the capacity of Muslim clergy in managing contemporary issues, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), Faith to Action Network and Pwani University have planned a courtesy visit and partnership discussions with Al-Azhar University. Each of the institutions has objectives and mandate that aim to improve people's wellbeing as follows:

The International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research: The International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research was founded at Al-Azhar University, the most prestigious and one of the oldest Islamic University all over the world, in co-operation with the UNFPA in 1975.

The objectives of the center are conducting population and reproductive health studies and research in the Muslim World and to add credibility to the population/reproductive health information obtained before its dissemination in Muslim countries and to dispel misconceptions about Islam and certain population/reproductive health policies that can be adopted in the Muslim World. Furthermore it functions as an inter-regional organization with a view to serve the whole Islamic World.

The Centre does not limit its activities to Egypt but extended them to the other institutions all over the Islamic World, interested in developing and promoting awareness of population/reproductive health issues among their staff and students. IICPSR since its establishment carried a lot of activities in dispelling the rumours and correcting the misinformation that surrounded the population policies in the Muslim countries. It was awarded United Nations Award for Population, the Year 2012.

Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM)

Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) was registered on 12th November, 1973 under the laws of Kenya Society Act Section 10 as the umbrella body of all Muslims organizations, societies, Mosque Committees and groups in Kenya. It was formed in 1973 following a general conference held at Quran house, Mfangano Street in Nairobi

One major focus has been in building the capacity of its member organizations to respond to the emerging challenges and associated nuances and also to provide a viable platform for Muslim citizens in Kenya not only to voice their issues and concerns, but provide space for the pursuit of viable solutions to the myriad problems that have faced Muslims since independence. SUPKEM has also been directly implementing a variety of programs tailored at addressing challenges unique to different regions and localities in Kenya. Responding to emergencies and perennial famine and related disasters particularly in the North Eastern, Upper Eastern and northern Kenya, has been a persistent feature of its work.

The work of SUPKEM has had significant impact on issues of concern through varied approaches key amongst them being devolution as central plank of democracy and development. In its determination to leverage the socio-economic and political status of the poor and the marginalized, SUPKEM has adopted a process of organizational and context assessment and scenarios appraisal on a periodic basis. This periodic assessment has enabled SUPKEM to be contextual, relevant and led to integration of the needs and aspirations of its reference communities in its organizational and programme functions. SUPKEM commands authoritative experience in stakeholder engagements including sustained partnerships, community mobilization and sensitization and structured community dialogues, which has no doubt contributed to social transformation and participatory development. In its quest to implement Sustainable Development Goals, SUPKEM intends to activate and involve its grassroots networks and membership and will work within the purview of transformative paradigm upon which SDGs are anchored so as to cultivate a culture of sustainable human development within the Muslim Community.

Faith to Action Network (<http://www.faithtoactionnetwork.org>)

Faith to Action is a global interfaith network of faith organizations¹ (FOs) committed to improve family health and wellbeing. The network promotes dialogue, builds the technical and financial capacity of FOs and facilitates sustained joint advocacy and programming in support of family health and wellbeing. It supports families to among others have increased access to information and quality services on family planning and reproductive health consistent with their faith. Faith to Action Network's vision is 'Available, affordable and accessible quality services on family health and wellbeing for all'. Its mission is to 'mobilise faith organisations' support for integration and streamlining of policies, services and funding for family health and well-being'. The Faith to Action Network has the following internal, external and cross cutting objectives;

Internal Objectives of the Network:

- Engage leaders of FOs in dialogue and mutual learning on shared values, goals and common messages for family health and well-being

External Objectives of the Network:

- Advocate for integration and mainstreaming of family health and well-being in funding, policies and programming within governments and donors

Cross-cutting Objectives of the Network:

- Serve as a multi-faith platform to advocate for family health and well-being in collaboration with key stakeholders at global, regional, national and local levels
- Increase awareness on the role of FOs, interfaith commitment and collaboration in support of family health and well-being to internal and external stakeholders
- Improve understanding of scientific and/or faith-based evidence for family health and well-being to internal and external stakeholders
- Mobilise sustained resources for family health and well-being for the Network

¹ 'Faith organisations' (FOs) include faith based organisations, institutions or networks committed to uphold the vision and mission of the Network and accept the guiding principles of the Network.

Pwani University (<http://www.pu.ac.ke/>)

Pwani University began as Kilifi Institute of Agriculture in 1984 though the first intake of 200 students for the Two Year Certificate Course in Agriculture and Home Economics was in July 1987. By 2007, Kilifi Institute of Agriculture had graduated 3,837 students. The Institute also hosted a number of Masters and PhD research students from other national universities. On 23rd August 2007, Kilifi Institute of Agriculture was upgraded to a Constituent College of Kenyatta University, and in March 2013, it was given a charter as a full- fledged University. It is strategically placed in the heart of the Coastal region of Kenya in Kilifi Town, right on the Mombasa-Malindi Highway; and is equipped with facilities to offer quality training in Tropical Agriculture, Tropical Medicine, Marine Sciences and Education. So whether you're finishing high school, beginning university for the first time, or pursuing graduate studies, you'll find a wide range of options at Pwani University. Our University has more than five schools which all together offer a diversity of degree programmes in the Arts, Humanities, Sciences, Health and Education. The University has engaged highly qualified staff members. Its objectives are:

1. To promote high standards in research, teaching and scholarship.
2. To promote intellectual leadership.
3. To promote principles of good institutional governance.
4. To enhance science and technological development.
5. To fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS.
6. To support community service activities.
7. To optimize the use of university resources.
8. To improve the infrastructure and increase physical facilities and equipment.
9. To meet the national development needs as outlined in the national development plan.

Pwani University's **mandate** is to **“to provide quality education, training, research, outreach and opportunities for innovation for the advancement of the individual and society”**.

The University has five major schools. The Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies is among the five departments in the School of Humanities & Social Sciences.

Objectives of the courtesy visit and partnership discussions with Al-Azhar University

The visit was made by a delegation of six from Faith to Action Network, SUPKEM and Pwani University.

Goal of the visit

The goal of the visit was to **identify opportunities for partnership programming, resource mobilisation and technical areas to help address misconceptions (medical or scriptural) held by Imams and Kadhis and congregations on family planning and other contemporary issues in various African Countries.**

The specific **objectives** are:

1. Meet senior religious leaders (those will include the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Grand Mofti) and exchange of knowledge on specific topics.
2. Meet Al-Azhar University management to discuss and agree on modalities and partnership between Pwani University and Al-Azhar University for training of Imams and offering joint education courses
3. Discuss partnership opportunities (programming, resource mobilisation and technical areas) to help address misconceptions (medical or scriptural) held by Imams and Kadhis and congregations on family planning and other contemporary issues in various African Countries.

The duration of the visit was **3** working days (24-26th of October 2016)

An overview and reflections of the study tour program:

The study tour has three dimensions sharing one goal which is Building Capacity of the Religious Leaders and Strengthening Faith Based Approach.

Based on this goal the activities were as follows:

- Meeting with the senior officers of the International Islamic Centre.
- Dialogue with the Senior Professors at Al-Azhar University.
- Meeting with the University Authorities.
- Meeting with the Grand Mofti of Egypt
- Meeting with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

Results of the Meetings:

IICPSR meeting: The delegates met with the following staff:

- Prof. Dr. Gamal Serour, the Director of the Center
- Prof. Dr. Shokery El-Shershapy the Deputy Director of the Center
- Prof. Dr. Mervat Mahmoud, Professor of Biomedical Research
- Prof. Dr. Ahmed Ragaa A. Ragab, Professor of Reproductive Health



An overview was given about the IICPSR, its main services and its faith based approach activities. For two days, discussion with the delegates on ways for further collaboration and partnership, among the ideas were to conduct other caravans in Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Asian countries. The other idea was how to partner in resource mobilisation and to conduct trainings for Muslim and/or Interfaith clergy, medical personnel, conduct exchange experience sharing and learning visits, conduct experience sharing and learning workshops and conferences and conduct joint researches.

Meeting with the Senior Religious Leaders: The delegates met with the following professors of Al-Azhar:

- Prof. Dr. Taha Abu-Kerisha, ex-deputy of Al-Azhar University
- Prof. Dr. Hamed Abu Taleb, a member of Islamic High Research Academy and ex-dean of Faculty of Shari'ah
- Prof. Dr. Abdallah El-Nagar, a member of Islamic High Research Academy and ex-dean of Faculty of Higher Studies

The team discussed ways for collaboration with Al-Azhar University and the need to repeat the Caravan experience along with some clarifications with regards to religious aspects. Prof. Dr. Hamed Abu Taleb informed the delegation that after the Caravan in Kenyan Coast, he had briefed the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and written to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Egyptian Ambassador in Kenya with regards to the fellowships for Kenyan Ulama. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar had promised that the fellowships for Kenya will resume.



Rev. Canon Grace Kaiso said that the visit objectives can be summarised in an African proverb that says ***'the feet are the hoes that plough the path of friendship'***. He noted that the world is facing many challenges and people are coming-up with solutions that are not faith inspired. As such, Faith to Action Network is a resource to our religious leaders to build a base to respond to the world challenges. Faith to Action Network requests Al-Azhar and IICPSR to work with it as partners including in programming and resource mobilisation.

Meeting with the University Authorities:

The delegates met with the following;

- His Excellency Prof. Dr. Ibrahim El-Hod-Hod, Chairman of Al-Azhar University
- Prof. Dr. Ashraf El-Badaway, Deputy Chairman of Al-Azhar University



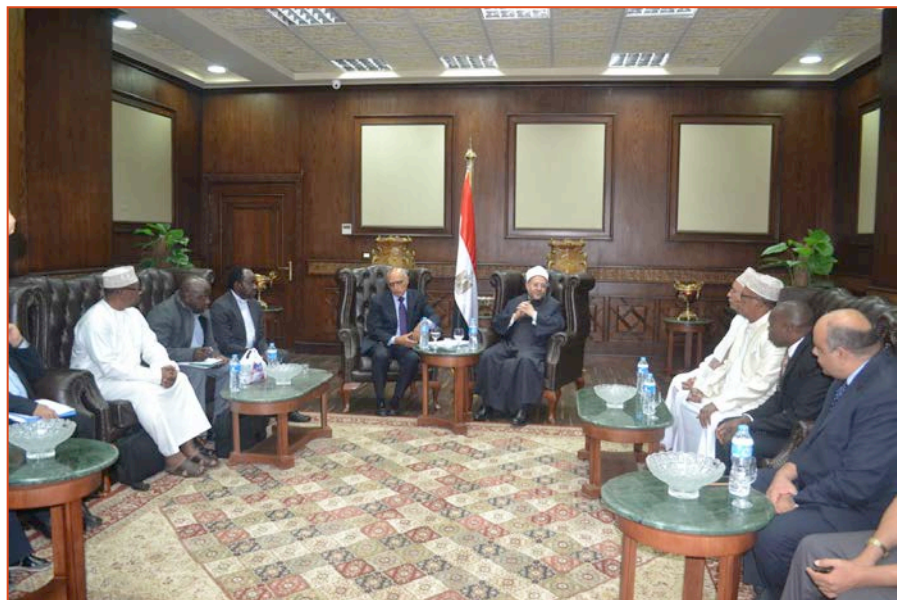
The delegates discussed ways for collaboration with AL-Azhar. The Chairman of Al-Azhar University agreed and recommended that the delegates prepare **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**. He suggested preparing **three MoUs; Faith to Action Network MoU with IICPSR, Pawni University MoU with the Al-Azhar University and SUPKEM MoU with Al-Azhar Mosque.**

Meeting with the Grand Mufti:



The delegates met with the Grand Mufti accompanied by senior staff of IICPSR led by Prof. Dr. Gamal Serour, the meeting lasted about one hour in which the delegate raised questions and opened a discussion in order

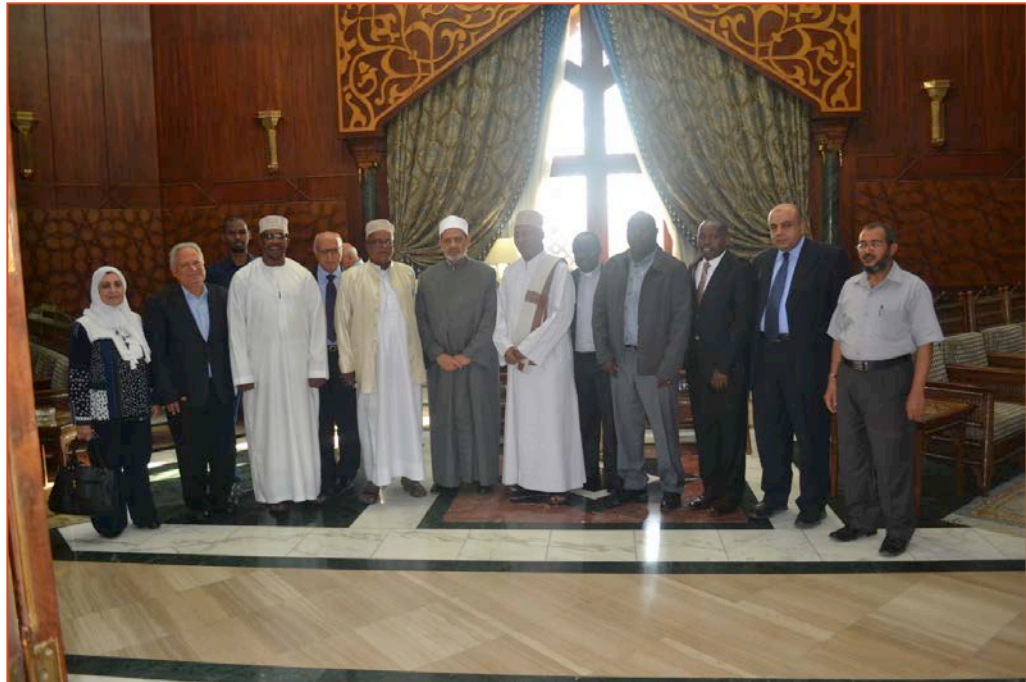
to have a better relation with Dar El-Ifta, Egypt. The Grand Mufti expressed his interest in further collaboration and explained the role of Dar El Ifta in clarifying the facts and correcting the misunderstanding and the incorrect information regarding



Islam, reproductive health and family planning. In response to the request for materials, the Grand Mufti gave five groups of materials for them. The meeting was successful and achieved its objectives.

Meeting with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar:

The delegates met with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar accompanied by senior staff of IICPSR led by Prof. Dr. Gamal Serour, the meeting lasted more than two hours in which the



delegate raised questions and opened a discussion in order to have a better relation with Al-Azhar. The Grand Imam expressed his interest in further collaboration and explained the role of Al-Azhar in clarifying the facts and correcting the misunderstanding and the incorrect information regarding Islam, reproductive health and family planning. The delegates requests and responses:

- The delegates requested that **Al-Azhar mission for Kenya** to be resumed: The Grand Imam explained that, the mission stopped since the school that was in Kenya was closed upon the request of its owner, he promised if they would find an alternative, the work of the mission will be resumed.
- The delegates requested that, the number of the Kenyan students to be increased. The Grand Imam, proved with evidence that **20 scholarships** were offered to Kenya and only **11** applied for them. He affirmed that Al-Azhar communicates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is represented in Kenya by the Embassy and the Embassy cannot deal with individuals, by definition it deals with Governmental Institutions. However, the

delegates were promised that SUPKEM will get a copy of communication to Embassy and follow-up with Kenyan government and Egyptian Embassy in Kenya for their administration. In this regard, the delegates will contact their government in order to make better arrangements.

- The delegates requested training of religious leaders and the Grand Imam responded positively by awarding **20 scholarships**, the delegates will end their official request and the office of the Grand Imam will take the necessary arrangements. The meeting was successful and achieved its objectives.

Annex 1: Media Coverage:

www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1029488

<https://www.elfagr.org/2323648>

www.klansi.com

www.arabi.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/94840.aspx

www.roayahnews.com/

www.i2arabic.com/newspapers/egypt/elfagr

Annex 2: Programme of visit

24th - 26th of October, 2016

Day one:

- 10 00-11.00 Opening Session and welcome remarks and general discussion
- 10.00-10.10 Professor Gamal Serour: Welcome Remarks and Meeting Objectives
- 10.10-10.20 Representative of the Delegates Introduction and Expectations
- 10.20-10.30 Prof. Dr. Ashraf Attia, Deputy Chairman of the University
'Collaboration and Partnership with Other Universities for supporting women's health and Wellbeing'.
- 10.30-11.30 Faith Based Organizations to Support Reproductive Health and Sexual Health, the experience of IICPSR by Prof. Gamal Serour
- 11.30-11.45 Break
- 12.00-12 45: Meeting with Grand Mofti of Egypt, His Excellency Dr. Shawki Allam
- 1.00-2.00 Meeting with Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, His Excellency Dr. Ahmed El-Tayeb

NB: The visits to Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Grand Mofti were accompanied by: Prof. Gamal Serour, Prof. Shkery Abdel_Aziam, Prof. Mervat Mahmoud and Prof. Ahmed Ragab.

Day Two:

9.30-10.00 Feedback and open discussion Prof Dr. Shokery Abdel_Azeem

Prof. Dr. Mervat Mahmoud

Prof. Dr. Ahmed Ragab

10.00-10.30 His Excellency Prof. Dr. Ibrahim El-Hodhod, Chairman of the University
“Role of Al-Azhar University in the Muslim World to dispel misconceptions about Islam and Reproductive and Sexual Health”

10.30: 11.00 Break

11 00-1.00: Towards correction of Misinformation and Misconception on Reproductive and

Sexual Health: Faith Passed Approach to Reproductive Health: Round Table Interactive I

Discussion

Moderator: Prof. Gamal Serour

Discussants: Professor Taha Abu Kerisha Ex Deputy of the University

Professor Dr. Hamid Abu Taleb, ex Dean of Faculty of Shariah

Professor Dr. Abdallah El-Nagar ex Dean of faculty of Higher Study

Professor Dr. Shokery Abdel-Azim, Deputy Director of IICPSR

Professor Dr. Mervat Mahmoud, Professor of Biomedical Research

Professor Dr. Ahmed Ragab, Professor of Reproductive Health

1.00-1.30 Closing Session

Day Three

- Meetings with Kenyan students at Al-Azhar University
- Meeting with Arch Bishop Moneer, Arch Bishop of Egypt and Alexandria

Annex 3: Concept paper of visit

Concept paper for partnership discussions and courtesy visit to Al-Azhar University

Background

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that religious leaders (RLs) and communities of faith play an important role in shaping health-seeking behavior. Religious leaders are often arbiters of morality and ethics, defining what is prescribed or proscribed by a faith. This is particularly relevant with respect to maternal and child health, reproductive health, and family planning as they are at the juncture where science, religion, culture and morality intersect. Consequently, maternal and child health, and family planning information and services that are supported by religious leaders and religious institutions are more likely to be accepted by the community. It is therefore imperative that religious leaders should have accurate and appropriate information and skills to help their congregations make informed choices on matters related to their health and well-being.

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10. The 1st ever Caravan created opportunities for interaction with Imams and government officials at the Kenyan Coast at intense levels not only on child spacing but other issues
11. Additional Caravans need to be organised in Kenya and other regions and countries in East, Central, Western and Southern Africa
12. The interactions with Imams, the government and the general community highlighted challenges that exist in linking contemporary issues with scriptures at the Kenyan Coast
13. These interactions also highlighted capacity challenges for Imams in interpreting issues with some of the identified gaps contributing to insecurity. The challenges in capacity were evidence that most Imams at Kenyan Coast are ill equipped to deal with contemporary issues

14. Equipping the Imams with skills can be done at two levels:
 - a. At Al-Azhar University – this requires scholarships making its reach limited due to the expense
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15. Government highlighted how Islam can contribute to stabilising communities by addressing co-existence of communities and security issues.
16. The need for sensitisation in mosques to be scaled up to other Counties/regions emerged as a need

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mobilization and sensitization and structured community dialogues, which has no doubt contributed to social transformation and participatory development. In its quest to implement Sustainable Development Goals, SUPKEM intends to activate and involve its grassroots networks and membership and will work within the purview of transformative paradigm upon which SDGs are anchored so as to cultivate a culture of sustainable human development within the Muslim Community.

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External Objectives of the Network:

- Advocate for integration and mainstreaming of family health and well-being in funding, policies and programming within governments and donors

Cross-cutting Objectives of the Network:

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Goal of the visit

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The specific **objectives** are:

4. Meet senior religious leaders (those will include the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Grand Mofti) and exchange of knowledge on specific topics.

5. Meet Al-Azhar University management to discuss and agree on modalities and partnership between Pwani University and Al-Azhar University for training of Imams and offering joint education courses
6. Discuss partnership opportunities (programming, resource mobilisation and technical areas) to help address misconceptions (medical or scriptural) held by Imams and Kadhis and congregations on family planning and other contemporary issues in various African Countries.

The duration of the visit is **3** working days. Al-Azhar will suggest different dates when the visit can be made. The three organisations will review and confirm the dates most convenient within the month of October between **24th - 27th October 2016**.

Expectations and logistics

Faith to Action Network, SUPKEM and Pwani University expect Al-Azhar to assist with the following logistics.

1. Hotel reservation (modest cost at least a three-star hotel)
2. Airport transfers to and from hotel
3. Local transportation to meeting venues and back to hotel

IICPSR will communicate with Faith to Action Network on budget required for the visit.