

# Middleground Academy

## Intercultural Competence for Development Professionals

### What is the “Middleground“?

It is not necessarily the well-known cultural and ideological differences and stereotypes that challenge projects of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in development cooperation and humanitarian aid in the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)**. In all its nuances, culture and religion can exert a particular, often elusive, influence on cooperation between German NGOs and local partner organizations. In case of the MENA region, **secular, Muslim and Christian worldviews** are particularly relevant.

Important concepts in development cooperation, such as human progress, human dignity, or the so-called "golden rule" as the epitome of a universal global ethic, are understood, taught and lived differently in different cultures and religions. However, in the **intercultural context of the MENA region**, a **middle ground** can be found, a **common core of ethical values and humanitarian imperatives** that are relevant to **Muslims, Christians and secular people** alike. The so-called “Middleground Approach” facilitates a culture of dignity among different groups of people by promoting communication that is ethically sensitive, inspiring and conciliatory.

The Middleground Approach presumes a pronounced sensitivity to different attitudes towards development concepts that are oftentimes understood to be generally accepted. Building on this sensitivity, successful development actors need to have sufficient intercultural and interpersonal competencies and communication skills to effectively and adequately implement projects. At the heart of the Middleground Approach is **the ability to find solutions in the sense of identifying and harnessing overlapping areas between different ideological concepts from Islam, Christianity and secular worldviews**.

### What is the Middleground Academy?

In order to train project staff in the Middleground Approach and to provide them with the abovementioned skills, Vision Hope International, with the support of the PFQ program of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), has launched the Middleground Academy.

The Middleground Academy offers the following **training content**:

- (1) Teaching the relevance of belief and faith-based actors in development cooperation and humanitarian aid,
- (2) Raising awareness of ideological concepts from Christianity, Islam and secular worldviews that influence practical project implementation and,
- (3) Training in identifying and using the so-called "Middleground", the overlapping area of ideological concepts from Islam, Christianity and humanism.

Participants learn how to improve cooperation with partners with a religious background. They learn to design and implement projects that sensitively take into account the cultural and ideological situation on the ground. They gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and ideological context of the respective target groups of their projects in the MENA region - which is also expressed in a reduction of misunderstandings and less fears of contact.

## Who implements the Middleground Academy?

The organization **Vision Hope International** (VHI) and its cooperation partners run the Middleground Academy. Since 2002, VHI works as an independent charitable humanitarian organization that seeks to link aid, rehabilitation and development to promote peace in the MENA region. The focus countries of VHI's projects are Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Tunisia. Through its work in these countries, VHI has acquired special expertise in **Christian-Muslim-secular dialogue** and project implementation in this interreligious context. In a process accompanied by experts, the organization has recently developed the Middleground concept, a communication approach between Christian, Muslim and secular people. With the Middleground Academy, VHI aims at passing on its expertise to other NGOs and state institutions, thereby contributing to increasing intercultural and interreligious competences in the development sector in Germany.

## Organizational Information

The Middleground Academy is designed for **national and field staff from NGOs and government institutions** involved in development cooperation and humanitarian aid in intercultural / interfaith contexts in the **MENA region**. The participation of employees who do, or potentially will, exercise a leadership and / or multiplier function within their organizations and beyond is particularly welcome.

The participants of the Middleground Academy are trained according to the Co-Learning approach in **tandems made up of one domestic project staff based in Germany and one field staff on project site**.

The Middleground Academy consists of **four training components**:

- 1) an **introductory webinar** on **8 April 2019** from 10 to 12 am CET,
- 2) a **two-day seminar** with overnight accommodation for domestic project staff, with part-time involvement of the field staff via online media on **11-12 April 2019 in Bonn** (Group 1) and on **21-22 May 2019 in Berlin** (Group 2). The seminar starts at 11 am on day 1 and finishes at 5 pm on day 2.
- 3) the **development of a practical concept paper** in the tandems (**April, May, June 2019**),
- 4) a **review webinar** on **16 May 2019** from 10 to 12 am CET for Group 1 and on 26 June 2019 from 10 to 12 am CET for Group 2.

Group 1 and 2 are only different in terms of the date and the location. The participation fee for the domestic project staff is 70 EUR. This includes all training components (including the two-day seminar with accommodation, but excluding the individual travel costs for arrival and departure) as well as all training materials. **Participation is free of charge for the local project employees abroad, who form a tandem together with their German counterparts**. The participation fee will be charged after registration and must be paid before the start of the first training component.

The group size is limited to 20 tandems. The allocation of spots takes place on "first come first serve" basis.

**Registration** for the Middleground Academy is now available at the following link: <https://vision-hope.org/de/middleground-academy>

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Middleground Academy Team at Vision Hope International.

Email: [middleground-academy@vision-hope.org](mailto:middleground-academy@vision-hope.org)

Telephone: +49 228 30 42 636 0