

● ● ● WASHINGTON, DC / JULY 7-9, 2015  
**RELIGION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**  
Building Partnerships to End Extreme Poverty

**Building Faith Enriched Partnerships**

Faith-based resources for sustainable development

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Our challenge at this conference is to find ways to build robust partnerships to end extreme poverty. Saul Alinsky – the American community organising pioneer and now linked with President Obama – argued that to sustain faithful relationships and prevent their subordination to either politics or economics, moral traditions and institutions are required.<sup>1</sup> Salvation Army practice around the world confirms Alinsky’s thesis – sustainable development needs people to have resilient, authentic relationships in all dimensions of life plus moral traditions and institutions to sustain those relationships. They prevent people being used as mere instruments of the state or commodities of the market. The world’s religions and faith based organisations have a vital role in building a better world. However, the draft zero Post-2015 SDG document released on June 2nd does not mention the words ‘faith’, ‘religion’ or ‘spirituality’.

I am an ordained minister of religion in The Salvation Army. We are celebrating 150 years this year and now work in 126 countries. I appreciate we are very new and very small in comparison with other faiths. However, The Salvation Army is part of the Christian church and it is from that perspective that I speak. I do not intend to make generalisations for other religions or faiths but I hope, as I speak, you will hear echoes in your tradition.

As a practical theologian I note two key insights that are vital in building partnerships for sustainable development:

1. **Motivation:** People of faith have a moral and spiritual imperative to address extreme poverty. This motivation extends well beyond Christianity as exemplified in the declaration by global faith leaders launched at the 2015 Spring Meetings of the IMF and World Bank. Fighting poverty and injustice is not merely a personal preference for people of faith – it is a divine demand.
2. **Theological Anthropology:** Who did God create us to be? Christianity places great value on the human person – the belief that people are made in the image of God. This appreciation of the human person and the value placed on relationships are key in the fight to end extreme poverty and increase shared prosperity.

I will not spend time on motivation – we would not be here if we were not convinced there is an urgent problem to be addressed. I wish us to reflect on the value of the human person and the need to prioritise relational capacity building from a faith perspective. For sustainable development to be achieved, people need resilient, authentic relationships in all dimensions of life.

Building deeper relationships starts with understanding ourselves – dealing with the fractures in our own personalities; resolving damaged relationships with others and building quality, resilient relationships; being good stewards of the resources at our disposal – especially our planet. And, most importantly, for people of faith deepening our relationship with God and being the people God wants us to be.

**Building Deeper Relationships**

All people – irrespective of race, gender or sexuality, ability or disability, age or class, educated or uneducated, healthy or sick, rich or poor, saints or criminals – are made in the image of God and are beings of intrinsic worth.

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<sup>1</sup> Bretherton, Luke “Resurrecting Democracy – Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life”, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p35

While resources such as the Declaration of Human Rights remind us of these eternal truths, our rights are not given by a parliament or court – they are a gift from God.

### Institutional Isomorphism

This rich appreciation of people is, unfortunately, easily lost in practice. Churches and FBOs can easily slip from the standards they profess and God's desired identity. This highlights a broader point. One of the dangers of partnerships – particularly with powerful governments or wealthy donors – is that faith groups may lose their identity. The process of institutional isomorphism is real – the weaker partner adopts the characteristics of the powerful partner and loses its identity.<sup>2</sup> A partner losing its identity does not help the powerful partner nor, most importantly, in the interests of people living in extreme poverty who often share the faith.

Paul Gifford, in an ethnography of contemporary African Christianity, provides detailed analysis of the extent to which the Kenyan Church is engaged in the 'development business' but notes very few FBOs in Kenya "seem interested in even asking whether there is any specifically Christian way of or contribution to development"<sup>3</sup>. Gifford, who claims not to have a theological or denominational interest in his study, reaches a disturbing conclusion: "[The] increasing identification of mainline Christianity with Western development aid is something whose significance needs to be acknowledged. As Africa has become increasingly marginalised, excluded from globalising movements and processes, these aid flows and what they involve have become increasingly significant for, even constitutive of, parts of mainline Christianity. This is the sense in which one can talk of secularisation in Africa. It is not that Africans are notably becoming secularised, but much of mainline Christianity effectively is."<sup>4</sup>

### Encouraging faith enriched practice

For some, the secularisation of the church and FBOs is good news. I believe it is very bad news particularly in parts of the world where extremists are hijacking religion for evil ends. This is not the time to leave a vacuum – it will be filled not by peace-loving secularists or evangelical atheists. In reality, the space is being filled by narrow minded extremists who abuse faith for their own ends. It is in the interest of governments, the UN and World Bank to partner with mature, responsible religious people and institutions and encourage faith enriched practice.

How? I mention a few tools developed in the past 5 years and being rolled out across The Salvation Army to encourage faith enriched practice – more details are on the conference web portal:

1. **Faith Based Facilitation** – a way of working that encourages reflective practice and intentionally includes the resources of the Scriptures, faith tradition and the Spirit (Kairos Experience). See [www.salvationarmy.org/fbf](http://www.salvationarmy.org/fbf)
2. **Mission Accountability Framework** – a six dimension framework with common questions to be answered by all people engaged in Salvation Army programmes that encourage faithfulness, transparency and accountability.
3. **Unified Framework for Measurement** – an attempt to develop a tool for impact measurement which includes relational measures as well as contextual outcomes. This is still in the early stage of development.

My central argument is that sustainable development is impossible without a rich valuing of people and intentional strengthening of relational capacity. While market and state are vital in achieving sustainable development, they have a tendency to undervalue people and human relationships through processes of instrumentalisation and commodification. Faith specific habits and practices – sustained by religious institutions – have a proven track record of building trust, resilience, care and hope. These characteristics – and the faith practices that produce them – should be valued and sought after to a much greater extent by all who seek sustainable development and the end of poverty in all its dimensions.

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<sup>2</sup> Pallant, Dean "Keeping Faith in Faith Based Organisations – a practical theology of Salvation Army health ministry", 2012, Wipf and Stock

<sup>3</sup> Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, London, Hurst, 2009), p49.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p50.