



Summary

Status Quo Report: Religion and Development

The Bahá'í Gardens in Haifa are regarded as a symbol of peace and a place of tranquillity.

1. Introduction

In the field of international development cooperation, little systematic research has been carried out to date on the potential of religion for development and peace. With a secular approach considered the norm in development cooperation, engaging with the topic of religion is deemed unprofessional in some quarters. However, the fact is that 8 out of 10 people worldwide express a religious affiliation, with religion playing a significant role in their everyday lives. A number of donors have identified faith-based organisations (FBOs)¹ and religious communities as agents of change. In many cases, these organisations have been carrying out wide-ranging development-related activities for significantly longer than official development cooperation agencies or non-governmental organisations. They are particularly active in the fields of welfare, emergency aid, education and health. In authoritarian states, FBOs are usually the only effective civil society actors. The work of religious organisations is typically based on a long-term cooperation with people and establishing mutual trust and lasting relationships with local partner communities. Nevertheless, the relationship between religion and development is an ambivalent one. Religion may also be misused in order to legitimise hegemony and exploitation. For this reason, it is important to take a differentiated approach when considering whether, why and in what circumstances religions further or hamper development processes. Although donors such as the World Bank, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been engaging with this topic for some years now, large knowledge deficits remain. Questions arise in part because many FBOs do not evaluate their work systematically. Many donors and research institutions stress that training for development experts should place more emphasis on improving skills and increasing awareness. Religious literacy – i.e. the ability to engage with religion in an informed manner – needs to be improved. To date, however, the only available training programme is offered by UNFPA for UN staff. Further systematic analysis of cooperation among donors, religious communities and FBOs and of the outcomes of such cooperation could serve to address the current knowledge gaps. Efforts to increase cooperation between state donors and FBOs have attracted the criticism that the donors are exploiting religious representatives to advance their own development goals. Transparency and open exchange on common goals and ideas can counteract this risk. Religion has only recently become part of the development debate and thus the subject of research and discussion. According to Carol Rakodi, head of DFID's research project on religion and development, it will therefore take several more years and considerable investment – as was the case with the topic of gender – before it gains its place as a cross-cutting issue in development policy.

¹ *Faith* and *faith-based organisation* are not entirely unproblematic terms. They are based on the western understanding of faith as the essential characteristic of religion. As a result, they negate other world religions that do not define themselves via their faith. However, as *faith based organisation* is a long-established term in the international debate, we shall nevertheless use it here. For us, the concept of FBO encompasses all religious communities, including those which define themselves via spirituality rather than faith, cf. the definition of FBO by the UNFPA (2009) Global Forum of Faith-based Organisations for Population and Development, p.12.

However, overcoming the key challenges facing humankind not only requires new forms of cooperation and technical expertise but also a shared value base. If development is to be sustainable, it must appeal to people's mind-set. Religion can make an important contribution here.

2. Why does religion matter?

The major world religions have international structures going back centuries and their influence extends to the most remote regions.² They offer their communities support and advice that goes well beyond local contexts and national boundaries, and confer a sense of identity.³ Furthermore, the number of people with an affiliation to a religion is growing due to the expanding global population and increasing conversions.⁴

It is not only the global presence of religions that make them an important factor in people's lives. In many cases, religious actors have been carrying out development-related activities for significantly longer than official development cooperation agencies or secular non-governmental organisations. They do not necessarily belong to a formally organised religious community or a specific organisation. Rather, they are often characterised by great spiritual diversity. Most secular donors and development organisations are not aware of this.⁵ Overall, we can conclude that religious actors are contributing to development processes in complex and varied ways:

- It is often religious institutions and communities that people in extreme need turn to for refuge and assistance. According to a 2008 Gallup poll, 82% of people in sub-Saharan Africa say that they trust religious organisations more than other social institutions.⁶ Credibility, acceptance and legitimacy lie at the core of the work of religious organisations.⁷
- The activities of religious organisations are extremely wide-ranging. They focus particularly on the fields of welfare, emergency aid, education and health. They supply 30% to 40% of global health services. In conflict regions, this figure is as high as 75%.⁸ In sub-

² JLI (2013), p.4.

³ Religions and Development (2007): Understanding the Roles of Religions in Development: The Approach of the RaD Programme, Working Paper 9, p.11.

⁴ Pew Research Center (2015): The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections 2010-2050.

⁵ Berkley Center (2012): Faith-Inspired Development Work: Lessons Learned and Next Steps, Summary Report, p.5ff.

⁶ Based on: Danish Institute for Human Rights et al (2014): Religion, human rights and democratization: A mapping of faith-based organizations and donor initiatives. Final Report, Danish Institute for Human Rights, Knowledge Center for Religion and Development, Nordic Consulting Group A/S, p.40.

⁷ JLI (2013), p.4.

⁸ Karam, Azza (2013): Religion as part of energizing the UN, p.88, in: Moksnes, Heidi/ Melin, Mia (eds.): Faith in Civil Society. Religious Actors as Drivers of Change, Uppsala University.

Saharan Africa, religious communities provide over 50% of services in the education, health and social sectors.⁹

- In authoritarian states, religiously motivated organisations are often the only effective civil society actors. On the other hand, religious ideas may also be misused for the legitimisation of hegemony and exploitation. For example, there are religious movements that equate material wealth with divine benevolence.
- Religious organisations can call upon large numbers of voluntary helpers and are therefore well placed to mobilise social forces; at the same time their staff costs are low. In some instances, women provide up to 90% of the services delivered by religious organisations.¹⁰
- Since religious actors do not think in terms of project phases, they work with people on a long-term basis. As part of the local community, they often succeed in building long-term relationships based on trust and are able to contribute to sustainable change.¹¹ Their approach focuses on transforming attitudes and behaviour rather than on structural developments.¹²

3. Main findings and recommendations

Knowledge and context

- Reliable data on the contribution of religious actors to development are scarce. It is difficult to decide whether an actor is motivated by religious or secular reasons. Uncertainty also exists about exactly which work can be considered relevant to development. Many organisations, especially small, grass-roots ones, are not registered and seldom or never publicise their work.¹³
- Many FBOs do not evaluate their work systematically. Initial studies show that their work achieves similarly mixed results to the work of secular organisations.¹⁴
- Research on the topic of religion and development is time-consuming and often fails to deliver swift results for policymakers.
- There is no unequivocal interrelationship between affiliation with a religious community, personal values and convictions, and individual action.¹⁵ Differences in approach are

⁹ Moksnes, Heidi/ Melin, Mia (eds.)(2013): Faith in Civil Society. Religious Actors as Drivers of Change, Uppsala University, p.13f.

¹⁰ Karam, Azza (2013): Religion, civil society and women: Reflections from the Middle East and North Africa, p.56, in: Moksnes, Heidi/ Melin, Mia (eds.): Faith in Civil Society. Religious Actors as Drivers of Change, Uppsala University.

¹¹ JLI (2013), p.4.

¹² Wilton Park (2014), p.9; JLI (2013): Joint Learning Initiative On Faith & Local Communities – Theory of Change, p.3.

¹³ Religions and Development (2007): A Guide to Analyzing the Relationship between Religion and Development, Working Paper 69, p.102f.

¹⁴ Berkley Center (2012): Faith-Inspired Development Work: Lessons Learned and Next Steps, Summary Report, p.24.

¹⁵ Religions and Development (2011): Inspirational, Inhibiting, Institutionalized: Exploring the Links between Religion and Development, Working Paper 66, p.17.

highly dependent on the context. They are mainly evident when comparing smaller, local welfare organisations and larger, professional development organisations, regardless of whether these are motivated by religion or acting on other value-based convictions.¹⁶

- Actors motivated by religion use secularised language in order to align themselves with the standards of state donors and multilateral organisations.
- The question of whether FBOs are more successful than other NGOs in reaching the truly poor sections of the population has so far been neither clarified nor substantiated. Religious actors appear to bring particular added value to activities carried out at grass-roots level. They are active in places where the state or private-sector providers have no presence.¹⁷
- When secular development organisations engage with religion, their assumptions about religion and faith are often influenced by the Christian understanding of religion.
- Taking a theoretical approach to the topic of religion and conveying knowledge on that basis are of little use in practical development cooperation work. Any understanding of religion and spirituality and their influence on development and change processes must be based on people's everyday experience of religion in the local context.
- Neither whole organisations nor individuals can be sorted readily into secular and religiously motivated groups. Often, the distinction between liberal and conservative attitudes, irrespective of religious boundaries, has a greater impact on people's views than affiliation with a particular religious community.¹⁸ Even within the same religion, there may be substantial differences in how faith is manifested, which are reflected in differing impacts upon development activities.
- There is generally little representation of women and children, and religious elites frequently neglect their concerns and interests. This omission needs attention and should be addressed wherever possible.¹⁹
- FBOs have longstanding, comprehensive experience in interreligious dialogue and cooperation and in some cases they use innovative methods and instruments.
- Further work is needed on determining the added value FBOs and religious organisations contribute to sustainable development. Only then the benefits can be maximised and misunderstanding and manipulation be avoided.

→ The sector programme recommends that gaps in knowledge are addressed by means of a research project.

¹⁶ Religions and Development (2007): A Guide to Analyzing the Relationship between Religion and Development, Working Paper 69, p.100ff

¹⁷ Berkley Center (2012): Faith-Inspired Development Work: Lessons Learned and Next Steps, Summary Report, p.23ff.

¹⁸ Religions and Development (2011): A Guide to Analyzing the Relationship between Religion and Development, Working Paper 67, p.13.

¹⁹ Wilton Park (2014), p.5f.

Organisation

- Identifying suitable partners is a further challenge as it is often unclear who is a legitimate spokesperson for a religious community. Detailed knowledge of the local context is essential.
- Religious communities have widely differing organisational structures. Christian religious communities generally have a hierarchic, patriarchal framework, while others – especially smaller religious communities – are significantly more decentralised and lack extensive structures.
- North American and European FBOs focus their efforts mainly on representing the interests of their members and on lobbying, while their partners in the South concentrate on operational work.²⁰
- Research conducted to date by other donors shows that there is no reason to regard FBOs as morally superior actors in development cooperation. They are faced with the same potential pitfalls and problems as state organisations and NGOs – corruption, for example – and must justify themselves towards their clientele in the same way as state organisations are accountable to their supervisory authorities and taxpayers.

→ A better understanding is needed of the structures and working methods of individual religious communities and more attention must be paid to their distinctive characteristics.

Policies and strategies

- The key finding of assessments conducted to date is that many donors have set up specialised units to deal with the cross-cutting issue of religion. As a result of this specialisation, the topic is often neglected by other units and is not always given consideration at programme level or in the standard procedures of the donors and implementing organisations.
- There is a need to improve mutual understanding and increase both religious (faith) literacy and policy literacy (development literacy), and to disseminate successful cooperation models.²¹
- FBOs are generally not integrated into official coordination structures either nationally or internationally, although they have been performing development work for decades.²² As a result, effectiveness and potential synergies are compromised. This is a further argument for more systematic analysis of the role of FBOs in international cooperation.

²⁰ Berkley Center (2012): Faith-Inspired Development Work: Lessons Learned and Next Steps, Summary Report, p.22.

²¹ Wilton Park (2014), p.2; 7.

²² Marshall, Katherine (2013): Aid Effectiveness and Faith Inspired Organizations, Berkely Center, Policy Brief, p.2.

- Christian FBOs have pre-eminence over non-Christian organisations, which often have less formal structures and lower public visibility.²³ This is clearly linked to the history of Christian missionary work and Christianity's size and distribution worldwide.
- Religious and secular actors have differing interpretations of where to draw the line between missionary work (proselytism) on the one hand and development-oriented, social engagement on the other. Here too, an open dialogue should be conducted, as this is often one of the most critical issues affecting potential cooperation between purportedly neutral and religious actors.
- Efforts to increase cooperation between state donors and FBOs have attracted the criticism that the donors are exploiting religious representatives to achieve their own development goals.²⁴ Transparency and open exchange on common goals and ideas can counteract this risk.
- If political decision-makers and development cooperation actors wish to cooperate more closely with religious communities, they will need to engage with religious and spiritual convictions openly and seriously. This is crucial because researchers have established that many of the weak points in development cooperation originate from an inability to take account of the metaphysical concerns of human existence.²⁵

→ Trust-building measures and a more intensive exchange of views among state-run development cooperation institutions, academia, NGOs and FBOs are needed to enable potential for cooperation in the field of sustainable development to be identified jointly.

²³ DEZA (2010): Religion Matters – Why and How? Starting points for discussion and practice in development cooperation. Synthesis report, DEZA conference, 26 November 2010, p.5.

²⁴ Wilton Park (2014), p.4; Berkley Center (2012): Faith-Inspired Development Work: Lessons Learned and Next Steps, Summary Report, p.9.

²⁵ Ter Harr, Gerrie/ Ellis, Stephen (2006): The role of religion in development: Towards a new relationship between the European Union and Africa, in ter Haar, Gerrie (2006): Religion and Development – What's in Two Names. Symposium on the 10th Anniversary of the Chair of Religion and Development, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, p.66f.

4. Overview of the activities of relevant organisations

World Bank	
1998	World Faiths Development Dialogue
2000	Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics
2015	Launch: Roundtable with Faith-Based Organizations and Religious Leaders
2015	#Faith2EndPoverty
	Various publications (see bibliography)
United Nations UN	
1986	Launch: Position of Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at the UN
2009	Launch: Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith Based organizations for Sustainable Development (IATF-FBOs)
2010	World Interfaith Harmony Weeks
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	
2001	Launch: Culture-sensitive approaches, the 'cultural lens'
2006-2008	Review of own involvement with FBOs
2008	Establishment: Interfaith Network for Population and Development
2008	Publication: Culture Matters. Lessons from a Legacy of Engaging Faith-based Organizations.
2009	Foundation: Inter-Agency Task Force on FBOs and the Millennium Development Goals
2009	Training programme focusing on religion and development for UN staff
2009	Publication: Guidelines for engaging faithbased organisations (FBOs) as agents of change
2009	Publication: Global Forum of Faith-based Organisations for Population and Development
2011	Report: Religion and the United Nations
2014	Conference: Religion and Development Post-2015
2014	Foundation of a network for those interested in Religion and Development Post-2015
2014	Publication: Religion and Development Post-2015
2015	Conference: Religion, Development and International Relations [Post 2015] – Donor-UN-FBO Consultation II
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)	
2009	Website: Education about Religions and Beliefs
2012	Conference: Religion, Spirituality and Education for Human Flourishing

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	
2012	Publication: Partnering with Religious Communities for Children
UN-AIDS	
2009	Publication: Partnership with faith-based organizations: UNAIDS strategic framework
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	
2014	Publication: Partnership Note: On Faith-based organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders
European Union	
2013	Publication: EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief
2015	Launch: European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance
African Union	
2009	Publication: Draft Concept Facilitating Dialogue among Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs)
2010	African Union Interfaith Dialogue Forum
2013	Publication: Memorandum of Understanding between the African Union Commission and Faith-Based Organisations
2014	Publication: The African Faith Leaders Position Paper Beyond Post-2015 Development Agenda
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)	
2005	ASEM Inter-Faith Dialogue
2012	ASEAN's Concept Paper on Global Movement of Moderates
United States (State Department)	
2003	Foundation: Office of Faith Based Community Initiatives/Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives; today: Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI)
2006	Launch: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs
United Kingdom (DFID)	
2005-2010	Research programme: Religions and Development Program (RaD)
2005	Publication: Faith in Development

2011	Publication: Faith Partnership Principles
2014	Wilton Park Conference: Religion, foreign policy and development: making better policy to make a bigger difference
	Support: Humanitarian Forum
	Various publications within the RaD programme (see bibliography)
Netherlands (DGIS)	
2006	Launch: Knowledge Center on Religion and Development
	Policy Platform on religion
	Funding: FBOs network: Religions for Peace
	Various publications within the KCRD (see bibliography)
Switzerland (DEZA)	
2002-2009	Research programme on religion and spirituality
	Initiator of the Montreux Initiative
2005	Publication: Role und importance of religion and spirituality in development cooperation
2008	Publication: Key questions and quality criteria in relation to the potentials and risks of engaging with religion and spirituality in development cooperation
2008	Publication: Experiences in contexts influenced by Christianity: four case studies on dealing with potentials and risks
2009	Publication: Final paper. Conclusions for practical application: Methods and instruments
2010	Publication: Religion Matters – Why and How? Starting points for discussion and practice in development cooperation. A synthesis report.
2013	Publication: Aid as a religious mission. The role of religions is a contentious issue in international cooperation.
Denmark (DANIDA)	
	University of Copenhagen sets up a research unit on religion and politics
2010	Various seminars on the subject
2014	Establishment: Network on religion and development of the Danish Mission Council Development Department
Sweden (Sida)	
2004	Workshop on the role of religion in development cooperation
2009-2013	Project: Civil Society in International Development: Research and Practice
2009	Publication: The Role of Religion in Development Cooperation
2010	Publication: Faith, Freedom and Change. How Freedom of Religion or Belief can be integrated into Swedish Foreign Policy

2012	Conference: Faith in Civil Society: Religious Actors as Drivers of Change
2014	Publication: Religion, human rights and democratisation: A mapping of faith-based organizations and donor initiatives
Norway (Norad)	
2011-2012	Project on religion and development
2013	Publication: Lobbying for Faith and the Family. A Study of Religious NGOs at the United Nations
Finland (Formin)	
2013	Funding for the secretariat: Peace mediation network of religious and traditional leaders
Germany (BMZ)	
2012	Publication: Trusting in the strength of the poor. 50 years of cooperation between state and church in development cooperation
2014	Foundation: Task Force
2014	Commission awarded: GIZ sector programme Values, Religion and Development
2014	Launch: National team on the topic
2015	Commission awarded: Research project
2015	Launch: Dialogue series 'Religion matters'
2015	Conference: 'Treffen der Weltreligionen' (meeting of world religions)
2015	Publication: BMZ strategy

5. Entry points, opportunities and questions for the sector programme

Field of activity 1: Conceptual and empirical foundations

- It is important to **analyse and disseminate successful approaches** in state-run development cooperation in order to communicate information on the results achieved and the potential offered by religion and its formal communities to people at local level, and to dispel the scepticism towards religion that is evident in many areas of development cooperation.²⁶
- To date, the **training of development cooperation personnel** has not given sufficient consideration to the interrelationship between religion and development or to appropriate means of utilising the potential of religions and factoring in the possible risks; this needs more systematic attention.²⁷ Specific schemes for initial and continuing training must be developed to address this issue, as they do not exist at present.

Field of activity 2: Cooperation

- **Establishment of a group of like-minded actors** or a **donor dialogue** with the purpose of exchanging information and coordinating activities.
- There are very few platforms that can be used to establish links or coordinate activities and general exchange between FBOs and secular organisations and actors. Yet these are essential for mutual understanding and the creation of synergies. The sector programme therefore intends to launch new **dialogue formats**.²⁸

Field of activity 3: Practical implementation

- Many studies on religion and development underline that a **case-by-case approach** appears to be the best way to obtain valid findings on the potential of religion for advancing development processes. This confirms the importance of pilot projects, which the sector programme Values, Religion and Development will conduct in consultation with BMZ.
- Pilot projects should address **specific thematic areas and forms of cooperation** between FBOs and government institutions in partner countries. Once the pilot project are completed, it will be possible to specify conclusions for the strategic direction of German development cooperation.

²⁶ Berkley Center (2012): Faith-Inspired Development Work: Lessons Learned and Next Steps, Summary Report, p.32.

²⁷ Berkley Center (2012): Faith-Inspired Development Work: Lessons Learned and Next Steps, Summary Report, p.33.

²⁸ Berkley Center (2012): Faith-Inspired Development Work: Lessons Learned and Next Steps, Summary Report, p.33.