

“The Role of Faith and Faith-Based Organisations in Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Affairs”

August 31st, 2018

Greeting from moderator: Nobuyuki Asai, Soka Gakkai International

- This conference is organised by Asia Pacific Faith-based Coalition for Sustainable Development (APFC). Member organisations are Arigatou International (Buddhism), Act Alliance (Christianity), World Vision (Christianity), Soka Gakkai International (Buddhism), Islamic Relief Worldwide (Islam).
- Faith/Religion tends to be a taboo in public sphere in Japan and is not discussed in regards of global issues.
It can be a sensitive topic in other countries, and even considered as a factor of conflicts.
Meanwhile, many faith-based organisations (FBOs) are operating towards sustainable development, drawing encouragements from their faith.
→APFC plans to advocate this perspective in Asia-Pacific Region.
- Today’s aim: discuss how to deal with faith within FBOs’ activities, and how to overcome challenges.

Opening Remark from Kotaro Katsuki, Director of Global Issues Cooperation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- FBOs can play a great role in achievement of SDGs
→SDGs is about “leaving no one behind” with strong emphasis on people, or “human attitude on life”.
- In the implementation of SDGs, MoFA has established 3 pillars;
1. Business, 2. Localisation, 3. Youth/Gender empowerment
→FBOs can add a lot to all 3, but especially in Localisation of SDGs, using their domestic connection.
- SDGs needs to be realised worldwide, thus the international cooperation is crucial.
→FBOs tend to have strong and healthy relationships with international partners.
- There is not yet a clear answer to the way forward: looking forward to today’s discussion.

Speaker 1: Tetsuo Kondo, Director of UNDP Representation Office in Tokyo

- UNDP recognises APFC member organisations as close partners on humanitarian relief and nuclear weapon abolishment
- In Sahel region in Africa, his previous workplace, frequent conflicts are always caused by resource-based confrontations (food, water, oil)
i.e. Scarcity of water in dry season lead people to move to water points, where many conflict occur
Due to language barrier they cannot communicate with each other
→In UN’s attempt in mediation, FBOs were vital to carry out good conversations.

- Violent extremism is spreading in Asia, FBO's work is crucial in this religious climate
- There is no Planet B. SDGs needs to be achieved
Asia Pacific is sharply aging region, rapidly changing people's ways of living.
It is also the most prone to national disasters.
→Cooperation and helping each other is necessary, for that we need to know each other better.
- This year, summer heat and typhoon were off the chart; it was beyond our experiences and past knowledge.
→Climate change cannot be ignored anymore, it is now pushing the extinction of species.
Our own extinction can be avoided with our will and cooperation.

Speaker 2: Sudarshan Reddy, South-East Asia Regional Director for Faith and Development, World Vision

- The importance of Dogma in Development and how to move towards SDGs' "Leave no one behind".
- "Leave no one behind"
→This can only be achieved if all actors commit and work together for this very important goal.
- In this globalised age, we face many issues incomparable to any previous time.
→Many look to faith for development solutions.
- Religion plays an important role in the lives of people, especially in developing countries in Asia.
Both practitioners and policy makers need to understand and explore this aspect in development.
- Faith leaders are very influential to local people in social and political aspect.
→Engaging with faith leaders in the local area is crucial to conduct critical activities.
In the right conditions, their engagement would enhance development impact and sustainability.
- How do we bring different faith communities, who are often in conflicting relationships?
→This is achieved via shared values, objectives and commitments
They also need to be included in every step of the project from design to monitoring and evaluation.
→It is important to remember we are the outsiders, while faith leaders are part of the community
- Faith leaders are often the moral imperative of the community.
→They can be critical stakeholders in raising moral voices of vulnerable populations.
- Vast amount of differences exists, even within one religion.
→It is important not to go to the differences, and try to find common issues concerned by among all faith groups.
- What can FBOs bring to development?
 - Local FBOs tend to have tremendous amount of experiences in humanitarian/development field.
 - Faith leaders have gained upmost respect from the community.
 - Even when the conflict shut out all the other actors, local FBOs would stay there.
 - Their commitment to higher purpose and aspirations to contribute to their vulnerable groups.
 - They are great advocate and representation of the voices of vulnerable people.

- What is the best practice? How do we maximise the benefit of working with them?
→ Many organisations were uncomfortable and did not know how to communicate with them.

The importance of faith in development is increasingly being discussed and promoted.

→ We should align with this trend, as well as gain benefit from this movement.

- These days, donors seem to have increasing interest in engagement of FBOs as well.
→ They are recognising the potential and effectivity of FBOs' work
- Culturally-inclusive approach to partnerships will move us ahead to achieve "Leave No one behind".
- Having recognised this, APFC, regional inter-faith network, was formed.
→ APFC is an open, inclusive group and invites others to join to work together for the shared goal.

Speaker 3: Hiroyuki Kurosaki, Professor of Kokuqakuin University & Committee member of Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief (JRPD)

- The Great East Japan Earthquake has occurred 7.5 years ago, causing a great loss and damage that still have lasting impact.
→ "Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief (JRPD)" was founded in April 2011 to increase information sharing and collaboration between FBOs.
It now holds periodic meetings once in 3-4 months, and has published a handbook etc.
- Through this experience, 2 challenges have surfaced;
 1. Coordination between FBOs, government agencies, and other civil organisations
Many FBOs and faith-related personnel offered services but denied due to "separation of church and state" principle.
→ Those in Miyagi has made inter-faith alliance and invited medical personnel in their activity.
This led to acceptance of faith personnel as proper service providers.
→ Similar coordination was seen in 2016, when an earthquake hit Kumamoto (cf. WCRP, VOWS for Kumamoto)
 2. Disaster preparedness of religious facilities
In 2011, religious facilities saved many lives by welcoming people in.
→ These facilities' preparedness as evacuation places in usual times was questioned
From this, following "Credo if Disaster Resilience and Religion" was established;
FBOs and faith personnel will
 1. Learn about disasters
 2. Be prepared for disasters
 3. Support each other when disasters occur
 4. Advance together for recovery from disasters
 5. Collaborate with wide range of actors

Speaker 4: Takeshi Komino, Co-Chairperson, Japan Platform

- Increasing trend of disasters in Japan
→The amount of rainfall appears to be increasing, and more chances of sporadic and heavy rain
 - Japan has been investing a lot in Disaster Risk Reduction
i.e. Building higher river banks
→50% of population, 75% of national asset is below river water level
 - Japan is also prone to earthquakes →Several large-scaled ones are estimated to happen in recent future
 - 66% of land is covered in forest, of which +50% is privately owned
→Poor maintenance of these areas are causing further damage when disaster hits the area
- More people will be affected and saddened by more disasters, to the grade beyond their experiences
- Japanese population, though not religious, are quite accepting of faith.
→Events, organisation, or school etc. are not necessarily connected with faith
There is also a trend of spiritual well-being →Trend in yoga, mindfulness, meditation
 - What is the role the religions can take, especially in disaster management?
 1. Spiritual perspective
After disasters, spiritual recovery is necessary for everybody
 2. Logistics perspective
Religious facilities across Japan can be a great asset for evacuation centres etc.
 3. Institutional perspective
Many of religious organisations have practical expertise that can be applied in disaster management

Speaker 5: Masaki Inaba, Managing Director, Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs

1. Is it possible to have human society equivalent for 1 earth?
Currently human society is using 1.5 earth worth of resources
SDGs exist to prevent the resources from being exhausted and limit the development for next generation

This social system is based on capitalism and secularism
→We need to seriously think about whether this system is sustainable
(Secularism: Privatisation of transcendental values)

In this secularistic system, technology and assets are considered as 2 main transcendental values.
→Current unsustainable “1.5 earth human society” stems from seeking maximisation of these values.

→To realise “1 earth” worth of human society, capitalism needs to stop benefitting from disparity.
We need to align our transcendental values without risking secularism which is the base of democracy.
→This debate requires intervention from FBOs.
2. How can we manage to “leave no one behind” with technological innovations
Two variables;
- Science and technological innovation

- Economic development and political shifts of emerging countries
- These two can change the world quite drastically.

Contradiction;

- Globalised income generation (supported by IT) vs. domestic distribution system
- Maldistribution of wealth and widening wealth gap →Global governance is facing crisis

Challenges that likely to face us soon;

1. Widening wealth gap at the global level
 2. Mass unemployment
 3. Human alienation
- Many people find their self-worth by contributing to the society through labor
 - What happens when the labour is replaced by machineries
 - Resources are limited, and new technologies require resources (electricity etc.)

How do we create human-centred society in the aftermath of technological innovations

The Japanese government seems to be rather optimistic that innovations will automatically solve many social issues

→Here, religion and faith will play a great role in helping people who feel lost after losing their jobs to find the purpose or worth in life

Speaker 6: Megumi Mizusawa, Manager of Advocacy and Communication Group, JANIC

- JANIC: A network of various organisations (about 200 organisations, including FBOs)
- SDGs' Goal 16 and "Civil Society Space and NGOs"
The society that "Leave no one behind"
→Basis is a society formed by free, equal and independent individuals
"Civil Society Space (CSS)" is where this premise can exist.
- CSS is a very important space that is being threatened in this political climate
→Main target is the realisation of Goal 16 and 17
- According to CIVICUS, only 26 countries have open CSS, and the space is being narrowed down in 63 nations, the rest has very limited space for civil activities
→60/73 million people live in the area with some or complete restrictions
- Situation of Japan's NGO
NGOs should be able to work in conflicted areas by taking responsibility of their safety
→JANIC is working on the security system of Japanese NGOs
Japan is ranked 72nd, lower than before in free speech in media
→Implementation of laws that could limit civil activity, hate speech, etc. are its background
- Although JANIC is working hard for the advocacy of SDGs, it is moving quite slowly
→Request for the help of FBOs who have close relationships with civil population
- Research activity: Restriction on some NGO's operation during election in Cambodia.

- In this era of SDGs and globalisation, the border between domestic/international issues are thinning, and actors in this field are becoming more diverse.
 - However, the interest of Japanese population is facing inwards
 - Discussion on this matter is anticipated, especially with great opportunities such as SDGs High Level Political Forum and G20 that are approaching

Free Discussion

Koichi Omori, World Bank Tokyo Office

- I have worked with Japanese NGOs from 2000 to 2009
 - Although it was in the agenda to work with FBOs, there were no opportunities during that time
 - In Washington, there were such events in 2014, attended by the World Bank's representative
- I look forward to this discussion as the starting point of the related dialogue.
 - Please do involve us in further conversation of this topic.

Hiroyuki Moronaga, Director, JICA

- We have not really thought about how best to incorporate FBOs in the achievement of SDGs.
 - Despite of FBOs' engagement must exist at the field level, there are rooms for improvement in JICA's perspective on this as well.

Sachiko Matsuoka, Partnership Officer, FAO of United Nations Liaison Office in Japan

- Transcendental Values: quite interesting concept
 - In the perspective of UN, they are considered as human rights, especially in religious context
- From my own experience, working with FBOs has not been difficult
 - It was rather easy to find common ground with them, such as personal peace and value
- How do FBOs think of transcendental values, respective faith and human rights?
 - How could we collaborate with each other, for example in high-level forums such as TICAD, G20 etc.?

Kotaro Katsuki, MoFA

- SDGs is about inclusion and diversity →Faith in this aspect is important.
 - How do we incorporate that in the whole concept of SDGs?
- Japanese people's concept (attitude) of life, he believes, aligns with SDGs.
 - SDGs are about attitude, and faith is also about attitude.
- "Japanese government's view on technological innovation = leads to human centred life"
 - I believe that this is not necessarily the case, the government does recognise the negative aspect of technological innovation.
 - It is the matter of how to use the technology to minimise the negative influence.

- Personally, I have quite an interest in Blockchain, and how this new technology could possibly affect the current society system
 - The whole bank system could be turned upside down, but banks are also fighting to find coping methods
 - Such technological innovation cannot be reversed. We could only try to cope with it well and keep moving forward.

Atallah FitzGibbon, Global Advocacy Manager, Islamic Relief Worldwide

- Secular system has privatised the religion for the past 60-70 years
 - Religious leaders and FBOs are required to address this challenge that we face
- The current society system is founded on the contract b/w individuals and the state
It can often overlook other relationships such as those among neighbours, families, etc.
 - Those are usually recognised better by religious bodies.
- Faith leaders tend to be educated in different institutions. →isolation/alienation from science etc.
 - Breaking down the barriers and resolve the alienation would be necessary

Ajit Hazra, East Asia and Pacific Region Director for Faith and Development, World Vision International

- It was interesting to hear different perspectives in this issue, some from political level and others from ground level
- What does faith mean in Japanese context?
Are we talking about religion as a system, faith, or spirituality?
- Human centre values seem to come from elsewhere.
 - Those with a particular faith tend to recover faster from disasters.
- Disaster and SDGs and violence against children and women
 - Both are matter of preparedness, as well as of spirituality

Sudarshan Reddy, World Vision International

- Educational system related to development
In religious schools, there are a lot of talks of spirituality, but they rarely mention that specific faith's role in development.
 - Is it possible to advocate to religious bodies to include education on "religion and development" in their curriculum? This would balance the religious belief and humanitarian relief and prepare the youth.
- WV started to engage with bible universities and lobby to them to teach about how Christian communities can contribute to the communities' development.

Yoshiaki Horie, Senior Managing Director, Association for Aid and Relief

- We have only 12 years until the deadline of SDGs, it is time to start changing the world.
 - Children who cannot get education right now will be left behind when 2030 comes around

- We cannot sustain this way of living →FBOs role may become even more important

Katsuhito Okubo, Youth Division Director, Japan Youth Platform for Sustainability

- Gender/youth balance of this meeting was not as inclusive as I hoped.
I hope this committee will not be a place where only elderly men gather for discussion.

Kazumi Yamauchi, Japan Youth Platform for Sustainability

- I find this alliance of religious leaders from different faiths very important
→There may be differences in their beliefs, but opportunities like this can create a place to find common interests and goals
- How do we approach those who do not have a specific faith?
→Although it is important to aim inclusion of religious population, I assume it is the aspiration of all faiths to achieve “peace and happiness for all people”.

Yoshinori Shinohara, NGO Support Project Manager, Religions for Peace

- FBOs are not government bodies, NGOs, nor Civil Society
→What is the originality of FBOs?
- The common ground of all faith as I understand is that “everyone is connected”
→This should be voiced more by FBOs, or more division will spread
When mosque was bombed and the faith leader could not keep delivering this message, the community became more divided.
- Even in economic negotiation, the basis of “everyone is connected” should not be ignored.
- For all this, freedom of faith should be protected at all cost.
→In China, there seems to be some restriction on youth to access Catholic churches.
- Separation of church and state, although itself is non-problematic, seems to be interpreted wrong.
→It does not mean that the gov. bodies cannot be associated with FBOs or any religious matter.

Reiko Hori, Shinnyoen (Buddhism)

- The meaning of the involvement of religious groups: “overseeing efficiency”.
→It is relatively less important to hold accountability to other communities.
We are not inclined with the trend and the preference of donors as much.
- Using discrimination to our advantage may be allowed more for us than government bodies etc.

Nishide Takeshi, Kyodo News Agency

- It has a great implication that this meeting was held in the first place.
→Very impressed to see the progress FBOs have made over the years to be able to sit together for discussion.

- The Great East Japan Earthquake may have sparked FBOs' aspiration to do something for disaster relief/development.

The system is being established to include faith-based personnel more and more.

→I hope this will keep spreading even more.

- We hope that we can push more collaboration, including government, NGOs, etc.