



THE STATE OF THE EVIDENCE IN RELIGIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

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Joint Learning Initiative
on Faith & Local Communities



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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Setting the scene: The state of evidence in religions and development

This introduction orients readers to essential information in religions and development to avoid having to read through hundreds of other articles and reports. In essence, we have summarized the state of evidence in religions and development for practitioners and policy makers in what follows.

Why a “state of the evidence”?

As a joint learning network focused on evidence in religions and development, we (i.e., JLI) are often asked to summarize the “evidence” on religions and development. While that may seem like a simple request, it is, in fact, a complicated question due to the diversity of evidence in the wide-reaching area of religions, humanitarianism, development, and peace, which is the full scope of this report.

While JLI has published multiple scoping studies over the years,¹ these studies were not meant to provide a complete picture of the “state of the evidence” in religions and development in one place. A state of the evidence in religions and development is needed, therefore, because:

- The amount of evidence for faith activity and contributions in the development and humanitarian spheres has increased over the last decade. It is increasingly difficult for newcomers to understand the breadth and depth of the evidence base, and for those already in the field to stay on top of new developments.
- There is a frequent demand from governments, international agencies, and international NGOs for evidence on religions and development, especially relating to examples of replicable and scalable projects with faith actors. It is commonly stated in meetings and consultations on religions and development that there is a need for more evidence. While further research is always needed, we believe that the perceived evidence gap is more about the accessibility and use of evidence rather than a lack of it. Providing a state of the evidence will allow policymakers and practitioners to understand more fully the breadth and depth of available information.
- There is an evidence imbalance. A balanced picture of the evidence is needed, including successes and failures, the positive and challenging aspects of faith engagement in religions and development, as well as a diversification of the evidence base. JLI is working to correct this evidence imbalance through its Fair and Equitable Initiative.²

We aim to re-package, re-frame, and add to our previous evidence work to make it concise, accessible, and available in one place. A “state of the evidence” is intended to give a summary overview of the reliable evidence in our field to provide an insight into major debates and themes without the need for deep dives. It is akin to a “state of the art” in that we will cover the latest developments in the field, but we use the term “state of the evidence” to also convey that we will provide some history on the evidence base and contextual understanding of how stakeholders in religions and development have used (or not) the evidence.

The JLI will update the state of the evidence every two years to keep it current. We do not claim that this report comprehensively cites every article or report relevant to religions and development, but we do highlight the major papers that are shaping the field and trends for the future of the field.

1 All JLI scoping studies can be found here: <https://jliflc.com/about/learning-hubs/>.

2 Information on JLI's Fair and Equitable Initiative can be found here: <https://jliflc.com/jli-fair-and-equitable-initiative/>.

What is “evidence”?

Defining “evidence” is difficult as there can be many different sources and standards for what counts as good evidence and what should be included in an evidence base. Some may cite randomized control trials as the “gold standard” for evidence, but these are expensive and not common in religions and development research (they have also been criticized for other reasons).³ Others may see that peer-reviewed journal articles are the standard for evidence, but much of the research on religions and development has been published as grey literature (e.g., NGO research reports) and uses equally valid and reliable methodologies. Multiple experts often review these reports before publications. There are also debates about the methods used, with disagreements about the comparable validity of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The JLI therefore understands evidence and research as follows, recognizing that there are interlinkages and overlaps between these categories and widespread fuzziness regarding the use of language:

- **Evidence** is the overarching umbrella term that encompasses all “the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.”⁴ For JLI’s purposes, evidence is all the information available on religious beliefs and practices as they relate to humanitarian and development work - this is the evidence base.
- **Research evidence** is rigorous, explains its methods, and undergoes review. As the Alliance for Useful Evidence states, “the conduct and publication of research involves documentation of methods, peer review and external scrutiny. These features contribute to its systematic nature, and they provide a means to judge trustworthiness of findings.”⁵ Research evidence can use many different quantitative and qualitative methods, but researchers must explain the methods they have used so that there is the possibility to replicate the study and test the results the research puts forward.
 - According to the Standards of Evidence⁶ from the Alliance for Useful Evidence, some evidence will be stronger than other types of evidence, i.e., research evidence, particularly evidence that uses randomized samples and has control groups (randomized control trials). The evidence hierarchy tends to privilege some groups (not least those with finance and expertise to achieve higher standards of evidence), potentially unfairly disadvantaging organizations with a strong impact but inability to demonstrate it according to the standards of evidence.
- In humanitarian and development sectors, “evidence of impact” is seen as a gold standard of a sort. Researchers can use evidence of impact to refer to evidence that demonstrates causality (e.g., the direct result of a development intervention can be demonstrated as a significant percentage change in a community’s behavior or practices) and comes from randomized samples and control groups. However, “impact” is also understood in a wide variety of ways that can lead to confusion.⁷ For us, “evidence of impact” refers to the demonstration of causality from a development intervention to change, but “impact” can more broadly refer to any long-term effect of development work.

What this “state of the evidence” will not offer

If you are seeking the definitive piece of evidence that ultimately proves or disproves whether religions are necessary or important for development, you will not find it in this report. No such evidence exists – no statistic proves religions are conclusively, always, and everywhere, either more or less effective in development interventions. The state of the evidence in this field demonstrates the complexity of religions around the world. Even the application of randomized control trials can only show how religion works in development in a specific place or in a handful of places. The evidence base shows the diversity of religions in development with the evidence base established through many multiples of context-specific examples, from which we can observe key trends.

3 Angus Deaton and Nancy Cartwright, “Understanding and Misunderstanding Randomized Controlled Trials,” Working Paper, Working Paper Series (Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, September 2016), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w22595>.

4 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “evidence.”

5 Sandra Margaret Nutley, Alison Elizabeth Powell, and Huw Talfryn Oakley Davies, “What Counts as Good Evidence,” Report (London: Alliance for Useful Evidence, February 2013), 6, <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/3518>.

6 Ruth Puttick and Joe Ludlow, “Standards of Evidence: An Approach That Balances the Need For Evidence With Innovation” (London: Nesta, October 2013), https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards_of_evidence.pdf.

7 Simon Hearn, “What Do We Mean by ‘Impact’?,” Research to Action (blog), February 18, 2016, <https://www.researchtoaction.org/2016/02/what-do-we-mean-by-impact/>.

What is “religions and development”?

- We use the term religions to refer to all religious (reference to a divine, transcendent, or spiritual concept) beliefs and practices that can form, influence, and hinder social transformation. We use “religions” in the plural because we are referring to the multiple and different types of religious beliefs and practices that people hold and participate in, in countries and cultures around the world.⁸ We understand that religions are not monolithic, nor are they static, but religious beliefs and practices change over time and are embedded in their context.⁹ Likewise, there are many forms of religious beliefs and practices that do not have overarching institutions and therefore do not fit into a concept of “religion” as large-scale religious institutions alone. Religions and development studies, for example, have only scantily addressed indigenous/traditional “religions.”
- Frequently, people use the term “**faith**” interchangeably, e.g., for faith-based organizations, faith communities, or faith leaders, or to refer to spiritual traditions that are not as institutionalized as “religions.” Actors in the development sector use the term “faith” again as an umbrella term to refer to anything related to religions. It is not wrong to use the term “faith,” but we refer to the religions and development evidence base because, in research and academia, religions and religious beliefs and practices are the more widely used and appropriate terminology. We use the term “faith” to refer to faith actors because it is broad enough to encompass a wide range of actors and does not limit us to religious institutions alone. We offer a typology of faith actors in a later section.
- We use the term “**development**” as shorthand for all the socially oriented work that religions might undertake to improve or protect human dignity, society, and wellbeing. In the language of international affairs, the evidence base spans broad thematic areas including humanitarianism and peace. More fully, we could call it the religions, humanitarianism, development, and peace evidence base, but that is lengthy. From the perspective of faith actors themselves, it might be truer to call it the “religions and community transformation” or the “religions and social change or social justice” evidence base, because faith actors tend to frame their work in more holistic ways than according to the silos of humanitarianism, development, and peace. The religions and development evidence base spans many types of activity and topics of debate, for example, increasingly including action on climate change. The rest of this report includes overviews of religions and development as they relate to key thematic areas, from children to gender, to refugees.

What are the main publications from over the last 20 years of religions and development evidence and what do they tell us?

Focused attention given to religions and development evidence during certain periods

Several articles trace the history of the religions and development evidence base over the last 20 years or so.¹⁰ This section provides a summary of major publications that mark the field’s progression.

Pre-2000: Avoiding/ignoring religions in development

- We use the last 20 years as our time marker because that is when most religions and development evidence was published, but it is also useful to include some information on what happened before then. Very little was written or researched specifically about religions and development until the early 2000s. A special issue of *World Development* in 1980 was ahead of its time; there, Denis Goulet referred to development experts as “one-eyed giants,”¹¹ suggesting inter alia their ignorance of religious influences. An article from Ver Beek¹² in 2000 marks the start of more publishing in this area. Ver Beek analyzed prominent development journals from 1982-1998 and found that there were no religion-focused articles in any journals during that time, except for the 1980 special issue.

8 Emma Tomalin, *Religions and Development* 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2013).

9 Diane Moore, “Our Method: Religious Literacy Project,” Religious Literacy Project (Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School, 2015), https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/files/hds-rlp/files/rlp_method_2015.pdf.

10 Séverine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi, “Revisiting Religion: Development Studies Thirty Years On,” *World Development* 39, no. 1 (January 2011): 45–54, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.05.007>; Elsbé Nell and Ignatius Swart, “Religion and Development: The Rise of a Bibliography,” *HTS : Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (January 1, 2016): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3862>; Barbara Bompani, “Religion and Development: Tracing the Trajectories of an Evolving Sub-Discipline,” *Progress in Development Studies* 19, no. 3 (April 3, 2019), 1464993419829598, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993419829598>; Katherine Marshall, “Impressions & Indications of Religious Engagement in Development,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 19, no. sup1 (November 1, 2021): 12–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1983358>; Katherine Marshall et al., “Religious Engagement in Development: What Impact Does It Have?,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 19, no. sup1 (November 1, 2021): 42–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1983347>.

11 Denis Goulet, “Development Experts: The One-Eyed Giants,” *World Development* 8, no. 7 (July 1, 1980): 481–89, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(80\)90033-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(80)90033-9).

12 Kurt Alan Ver Beek, “Spirituality: A Development Taboo,” *Development in Practice* 10, no. 1 (February 1, 2000): 31–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520052484>.

- While the 80s and 90s were largely devoid of religions and development publications, there were some indications that religion was beginning to become a topic of interest for international affairs. In the 90s, examples such as Huntington's much critiqued argument about the Clash of Civilizations¹³ and the publication of "Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft"¹⁴ alerted those in international affairs to the "religions" gap. The events of 9/11 marked a paradigm shift, largely towards a securitized focus on religion and discussions of countering and preventing violent extremism, with a subsequent upswing in the amount of research and number of publications on that topic.¹⁵

2000-2010: Making the case that development should pay attention to religions

- As documented by Nell and Swart's bibliography of religion and development publications, more research started to be published around 1999-2000 and the number of publications have grown year on year since then.¹⁶ In Bompani's analysis of publications in the field, she states that "it is clear that 2005 and 2006 are the years in which, given the rise in the number of publications and the debates sparked, we can really discern the establishment of the sub-discipline [of religions and development]."¹⁷
- Markers around 2000 include the Voices of the Poor studies from the World Bank that asked over 60,000 people in 23 countries about their experiences of poverty and noted the roles of religious institutions, trust for religious leaders, religious coping mechanisms such as prayer, and social groups within religious institutions.¹⁸ While the research demonstrated that religion was an important factor in people's lives, it also underlined that religious institutions can be "limited" and "non-inclusive."¹⁹ The World Bank also published the 2003 book, "Faith in Conservation," which explored how religious perspectives could help shape environmental policy,²⁰ in connection with the work of the Alliance for Religions and Conservation to bring the major world religions together to understand how they could work on environmental issues.
- In 2000, Appleby's "The Ambivalence of the Sacred"²¹ made the case for understanding the diversity of religious dynamics – there is a full spectrum of potentially positive, negative, and neutral influences of religions. This nuanced point is still reiterated over 20 years later and makes this book a foundational text for many.
- Between 2000 and 2010, several major projects and activities resulted in a fuller base of evidence in religions and development, with case study examples from around the world. Notable projects include:
 - Emerging from work at the end of the 90s and into the early 00s, the World Bank's religions and development work led to the formation of the World Faiths Development Dialogue. Early publications from this group include two major works in the 00s: "Mind, Heart, and Soul in the Fight Against Poverty"²² and "Development and Faith: Where Mind, Heart, and Soul Work Together."²³ Both works offer numerous examples from around the world of religions in development projects, from the World Bank's engagement with the Jubilee 2000 Debt Campaign²⁴ to Sarvodaya's Buddhist approach to tsunami response and development in Sri Lanka.²⁵ They demonstrated the widespread nature of religions and development work and how religious influence can be found in every sector of development work.
 - The UK's then-Department of International Development (DfID) funded the University of Birmingham to conduct a project on Religions and Development (2005-2010). This project resulted in a large number

13 Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49.

14 Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, 1st ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

15 Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion and International Relations: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?," *Religions* 12, no. 5 (May 2021): 328, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050328>.

16 Nell and Swart, *Religion and Development*.

17 Bompani, *Religion and Development*, 172.

18 Deepa Narayan et al., Can Anyone Hear Us? *Voices from 47 Countries, Voices of the Poor* 1 (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 1999), <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/kts4ekt>; Deepa Narayan et al., *Crying Out for Change, Voices of the Poor* 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. for the World Bank, 2000), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/13848>; Deepa Narayan and Patti Petesch, eds., *From Many Lands, Voices of the Poor* 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. for the World Bank, 2002), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPOVERTY/Resources/335642-1124115102975/1555199-1124115210798/full.pdf>.

19 Narayan and Petesch, *From Many Lands*.

20 Martin Palmer and Victoria Finlay, "Faith in Conservation: New Approaches to Religions and the Environment" (Washington, DC: World Bank, August 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1596/0-8213-5559-7>.

21 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

22 Katherine Marshall and Lucy Keough, *Mind, Heart, and Soul in the Fight against Poverty* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/14927>.

23 Katherine Marshall and Marisa Bronwyn Van Saanen, *Development and Faith: Where Mind, Heart, and Soul Work Together* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2007).

24 Marshall and Keough, *Mind, Heart, and Soul*, 35.

25 Marshall and Saanen, *Development and Faith*, 117.

of working papers²⁶ and journal articles, with a special double issue in the journal *Development in Practice* devoted to religions and development.²⁷ A 2009 book “Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script”²⁸ argues for the idea that “religion is not to be considered only as a significant force in development – the position adopted in the existing development studies literature – but has to be engaged with in its entirety and not only to the extent that it is conducive or detrimental to pre-defined development goals.”²⁹

2010-present: Challenging and exploring the complexity of religions in development

- In the 2010s, publications increased considerably. Several edited volumes and special issues in academic journals laid out the shape of religions and development work more concretely by bringing different authors together and demonstrating the types of research and thinking that added to knowledge. They also demonstrate the growing range of scholars able to publish in this field and the variety of topics that can be tackled. Annex 1 lists edited volumes, special issues, and country studies/case studies on religions and development since 2010.
- To take “The Routledge Handbook on Religions and Global Development”³⁰ as a good example, the handbook approaches a diverse number of topics including research methodologies most appropriate to examine religions and development, religions and development in broader development theory, religions across different development goals from education to health, and religions in development in major world regions from Latin America to Southeast Asia. Efforts have also aimed to provide a landscape of religions and development at country level. Notably, the World Faiths Development Dialogue has a series of country papers that have provided contextual information for Bangladesh, Cambodia, Guatemala, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania.
- With the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, much research started to investigate both how faith actors were (and were not)³¹ involved in the consultations leading up to the formalization of the goals and how faith actors were beginning to use the framework of the goals to shape their work.³²
- Scholars in the field started to take a more critical approach, contesting the state of the evidence as driven by either development or faith-based agendas. Jones & Petersen’s 2011 article “Instrumental, Narrow, Normative”³³ has become a particularly well-known article and summarizes many of the current frustrations with religious engagement in development. They make the case that the literature on religions and development up until then had been
 1. instrumental in its interest “in understanding how religion can be used to do development ‘better’,”
 2. narrow in that it had a “focus on faith-based organizations, which is in many ways a consequence of the need to understand religion instrumentally,” and
 3. normative in that it makes normative assumptions about religion as “apart from ‘mainstream’ development” and development as “that thing that development agencies do.” The critique is that development organizations’ interests and agendas had driven some of the evidence building.
- Likewise, a later critique of the evidence base focused on what was seen as an undue focus on faith-based organizations’ interests to promote religious engagement in development. Olivier noted that there had been a rush to advocacy about religions in development from faith-based organizations that was, in fact, based unduly on the limited evidence then available.³⁴

26 See UK Government, “Research for Development Outputs,” https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs?keywords=religions%20and%20development&research_document_type%5B%5D=working_paper&first_published_at%5Bfrom%5D=2004&first_published_at%5Bto%5D=2012

27 See *Development in Practice* 22, no. 5-6 (2021), <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cdip20/22/5-6>.

28 Séverine Deneulin and Masooda Bano, *Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script* (London: Zed, 2009).

29 Deneulin and Bano, *Religion in Development*, 6.

30 Emma Tomalin, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development* (London: Routledge, 2015), <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of-Religions-and-Global-Development/Tomalin/p/book/9780415836364>.

31 Emma Tomalin, Jörg Hausteine, and Shabaana Kidy, “Religion and the Sustainable Development Goals,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 102–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1608664>; Emma Tomalin and Jörg Hausteine, “Religion, Populism, and the Politics of the Sustainable Development Goals,” *Social Policy and Society* 20, no. 2 (2021): 296–309. social, political, and economic factor in many official development assistance (ODA

32 Emmanuel Adelekan Ojewunmi and Akeem Amodu, “Sustainable Development Goals and the Baptist Convention in Nigeria: A Critical Overview,” *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 5, no. 8 (August 2021), <https://www.rsisinternational.org/virtual-library/papers/sustainable-development-goals-and-the-baptist-convention-in-nigeria-a-critical-overview/>; Mohd Ma’Sum Billah, *Islamic Wealth and the SDGs: Global Strategies for Socio-Economic Impact* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021).

33 Ben Jones and Marie Juul Petersen, “Instrumental, Narrow, Normative? Reviewing Recent Work on Religion and Development,” *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 7 (August 1, 2011): 1291–1306, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2011.596747>.

34 Jill Olivier, “Hoist by Our Own Petard: Backing Slowly out of Religion and Development Advocacy,” *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3564>.

- There are now several university centers that work on topics of religions and development, such as the Unit for Religion and Development Research at Stellenbosch University, the World Faiths Development Dialogue at Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University, the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds, the Centre for Religion, Conflict and Globalization at the University of Groningen, and the Religion and Public Life program at Harvard Divinity School looks into religious literacy and humanitarianism. Likewise, research groups such as the JLI add to the evidence base in this field and work with university centers on research efforts.

Major themes emerging from the evidence over the last 20 years

- **Religions matter and faith actors have important assets.** A major line of argumentation in the first years of religions and development evidence was that “religion matters” – arguments made the case that religions should not be ignored in development and that religions had a vast array of advantages that should be recognized as aiding development overall.³⁵ Some commonly noted advantages of religions for humanitarian, development, and peace work include:
 - **Access and networks:** In the Philippines, research found that national non-governmental organizations that worked closely with communities, particularly local faith actors with extensive networks and community cohesion roles throughout an affected area, had better access to areas considered off-limits either for reasons of security or because they were located some distance from access roads.³⁶ Access to areas off-limits to NGOs because of security offers a key advantage to local faith actors in South Sudan.³⁷ However, access cannot be assumed and information will not necessarily “cascade” through religious structures to hard-to-reach areas and populations.³⁸ Instead, it is important to understand how access and information flows in certain religious groupings and tailor programs appropriately.
 - **Trust and authority:** The intangible qualities of trust and authority in communities is something external actors value but hard to achieve within short timelines and histories of mistrust and exploitation from outsiders. Religious leaders are seen as trusted insiders and this trust and authority can lead to strong results when the aim is to change knowledge, attitudes, and practices on a topic. Surveys, such as those from Afrobarometer, demonstrate common widespread trust in religious leaders in certain countries and regions,³⁹ although others also note how understanding data on religious affiliation can be problematic in countries where censuses are politicized, for example.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the influence of religious trust and authority was clear in Ebola response in 2014-2015,⁴¹ where “exposure to religious leaders’ messages was associated with a nearly twofold increase in the intention to accept safe alternatives to traditional burials”⁴² and in decreasing vaccine hesitancy, such as in Northern Nigeria with polio,⁴³ and with randomized control trials showing effects of training and including religious leaders in childhood vaccines uptake⁴⁴ and other health

35 For example, Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings, eds., *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, International Political Economy Series (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Gerard Clarke, “Faith Matters: Faith-Based Organizations, Civil Society and International Development,” *Journal of International Development* 18, no. 6 (2006): 835–48; Wendy R. Tyndale, *Visions of Development: Faith-Based Initiatives* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006); Bruno De Cordier, “Faith-Based Aid, Globalisation and the Humanitarian Frontline. An Operational Analysis of Western-Based Muslim Aid Organizations,” *Disasters* 33, no. 4 (2009): 608–28; Gerrie Ter Haar and Stephen Ellis, “The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa,” *The European Journal of Development Research* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 351–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09578810600893403>; Leah Selinger, “The Forgotten Factor: The Uneasy Relationship between Religion and Development,” *Social Compass* 51, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 523–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768604047872>; Jenny Lunn, “The Role of Religion, Spirituality and Faith in Development: A Critical Theory Approach,” *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (2009): 937–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590902959180>.

36 Andy Featherstone, “Missed Again: Making Space for Partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan Response” (London: Christian Aid; CAFOD; Oxfam GB; Tearfund; Action Aid, 2014).

37 Olivia Wilkinson et al., “Faith in Localisation? The Experiences of Local Faith Actors Engaging with the International Humanitarian System in South Sudan,” *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 7, no. 1 (January 11, 2022): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00113-8>.

38 Elisabet le Roux and Jill Olivier, “Cascading Theology: Experiences of the Implementation of a Training-of-the-Trainers Model for Faith-Based Gender-Based Violence Intervention,” in *International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters*, ed. Kathryn Kraft and Olivia J Wilkinson (London: Routledge, 2020).

39 Brian Howard, “Religion in Africa: Tolerance and Trust in Leaders Are High, but Many Would Allow Regulation of Religious Speech,” *Dispatches* no. 339 (Afrobarometer, 2020), <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad339-religion-africa-tolerance-and-trust-leaders-are-high-many-would-allow-regulation>.

40 Yonatan N. Gez, Nadia Beider, and Helga Dickow, “African and Not Religious: The State of Research on Sub-Saharan Religious Nones and New Scholarly Horizons,” *Africa Spectrum* 57, no. 1 (April 1, 2022): 50–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00020397211052567>.

41 Andy Featherstone, “Keeping the Faith: The Role of Faith Leaders in the Ebola Response” (London: Christian Aid; CAFOD; Teddington: Tearfund; Birmingham: Islamic Relief Worldwide, 2015), <http://jilflc.com/resources/keeping-the-faith-the-role-of-faith-leaders-in-the-ebola-response-full-report/>.

42 Padraig Lyons et al., “Engaging Religious Leaders to Promote Safe Burial Practices during the 2014–2016 Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak, Sierra Leone,” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 99, no. 4 (April 1, 2021): 271–79, <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.20.263202>.

43 Sani-Gwarzo Nasir et al., “From Intense Rejection to Advocacy: How Muslim Clerics Were Engaged in a Polio Eradication Initiative in Northern Nigeria,” *PLOS Medicine* 11, no. 8 (2014): e1001687, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001687>.

44 Angela Oyo-Ita et al., “Effects of Engaging Communities in Decision-Making and Action through Traditional and Religious Leaders on Vaccination Coverage in Cross River State, Nigeria: A Cluster-Randomised Control Trial,” *PLOS ONE* 16, no. 4 (April 16, 2021): e0248236, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0248236>.

measures.⁴⁵ However, a community's trust of a religious leader is not guaranteed. Some higher-level leaders are distanced from communities, religious leaders may selectively use their trusted position for some topics and not want to use it for others (e.g., family planning⁴⁶ or responses to sexual violence⁴⁷) or there may be a history of mistrust for other reasons. It is crucial to know the dynamics of the religious landscape and which faith actors hold authority in different areas and on different topics.

- **There is a secular bias/avoidance of religions.** The literature speaks widely of the avoidance of religions in many humanitarian, development, and peace discussions, and an avoidance of faith actors, particularly those that are deemed too expressive in their faith identity, by international organizations. As Bompani puts it in her analysis of the religions and development evidence base, "it was repeatedly argued that the lingering secular, western, neoliberal biases in development thinking fostered an approach that neglected religion and tried to apply ill-fitting, ethnocentric concepts globally."⁴⁸ This topic has been much discussed in development⁴⁹ and somewhat discussed in humanitarianism, with a focus on how the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality have inadvertently fostered an avoidance of religions.⁵⁰ Studies show that, in fact, avoidance of religions makes humanitarians seem less impartial and neutral as it affects their knowledge of a context.⁵¹
- **Instrumentalization.** This term is often repeated in debates on religions and development. It refers to the observation that development actors can "use" faith actors to meet their goals or push their agendas.⁵² This happens when development actors do not work with faith actors as equal partners in developing goals and agendas.⁵³ It is apparent in processes of subcontracting faith actors to implement pre-defined work rather than partnering with them to develop projects. Similar arguments have been made in localization debates in terms of international actors working with local actors.⁵⁴ Development actors are interested in faith actors because of faith actors' assets (e.g., their infrastructure, their human resources in forms of large volunteer networks, their influence in communities) and essentialize "religion" as a solution to a development problem.⁵⁵ However, this can lead to fatigue, burnout, and an unwillingness from faith actors to engage with international actors again.⁵⁶

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- 45 Jennifer A. Downs et al., "Educating Religious Leaders to Promote Uptake of Male Circumcision in Tanzania: A Cluster Randomised Trial," *The Lancet* 389, no. 10074 (March 18, 2017): 1124–32, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)32055-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)32055-4); Lincoln Leehang Lau et al., "Exploring Trust in Religious Leaders and Institutions as a Mechanism for Improving Retention in Child Malnutrition Interventions in the Philippines: A Retrospective Cohort Study," *BMJ Open* 10, no. 9 (September 1, 2020): e036091, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-036091>.
- 46 Mohamed Yunus Rafiq et al., "I Let Others Speak about Condoms: Muslim Religious Leaders' Selective Engagement with an NGO-Led Family Planning Project in Rural Tanzania," *Social Science & Medicine* 293 (January 1, 2022): 114650, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114650>.
- 47 Elisabet le Roux and Laura Cadavid Valencia, "Partnering with Local Faith Communities: Learning from the Response to Internal Displacement and Sexual Violence in Colombia," in *International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters*, ed. Kathryn Kraft and Olivia J Wilkinson (London: Routledge, 2020).
- 48 Bompani, *Religion and Development*, 173.
- 49 Clarke and Jennings, *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations*; Ingie Hovland, "Who's Afraid of Religion? Tensions between 'Mission' and 'Development' in the Norwegian Mission Society," in *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 171–86; Deneulin and Bano, *Religion in Development*; Andrea Paras, "CIDA's Secular Fiction and Canadian Faith-Based Organizations," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue Canadienne d'études Du Développement* 33, no. 2 (2012): 231–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2012.689253>; Gilles Carbonnier, "Religion and Development: Reconsidering Secularism as the Norm," *International Development Policy | Revue Internationale de Politique de Développement*, no. 4 (March 1, 2013): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.1351>; Elisabet le Roux and Lizle Loots, "The Unhealthy Divide: How the Secular-Faith Binary Potentially Limits GBV Prevention and Response," *Development in Practice* 27, no. 5 (July 4, 2017): 733–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2017.1327023>; Brenda E. Bartelink and Ton Groeneweg, "Advocating the Value-Add of Faith in a Secular Context: The Case of the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development in the Netherlands," *HTS Theologesie Studies / Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (December 11, 2019): 9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5510>.
- 50 Alastair Ager and Joey Ager, "Faith and the Discourse of Secular Humanitarianism," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (2011): 456–72; Alastair Ager and Joey Ager, *Faith, Secularism, and Humanitarian Engagement: Finding the Place of Religion in the Support of Displaced Communities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Olivia Wilkinson, *Secular and Religious Dynamics in Humanitarian Response* (New York: Routledge, 2019), <https://www.routledge.com/Secular-and-Religious-Dynamics-in-Humanitarian-Response-1st-Edition/Wilkinson/p/book/9780367188337>.
- 51 Olivia Wilkinson, "As Local as Possible, as International as Necessary: Investigating the Place of Religious and Faith-Based Actors in the Localization of the International Humanitarian System," in *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*, ed. Jayeel et al. (London: Routledge, 2020); Nusrat Jahan Mim, "Religion at the Margins: Resistance to Secular Humanitarianism at the Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh," *Religions* 11, no. 8 (August 2020): 423, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11080423>.
- 52 Jones and Petersen, *Instrumental, Narrow, Normative?*; Gerard Clarke, "Agents of Transformation? Donors, Faith-Based Organizations and International Development," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 77–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590601081880>.
- 53 Jonathan Wiles and Nathan Mallonee, "Mobilisation towards What? Moving beyond an Instrumental View of Local Faith Actors in WASH Programmes," in *International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters*, ed. Kathryn Kraft and Olivia J Wilkinson (London: Routledge, 2020).
- 54 Elena Fiddian-Qasmieh, "The Localisation of Aid and Southern-Led Responses to Displacement: Beyond Instrumentalising Local Actors," *Southern Responses to Displacement* (blog), July 16, 2018, <https://southernresponses.org/2018/07/16/the-localisation-of-aid-and-southern-led-responses-to-displacement-beyond-instrumentalising-local-actors/>.
- 55 Cassandra Balchin, "Religion and Development: A Practitioner's Perspective on Instrumentalisation," *IDS Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (2011): 15–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2011.00196.x>.
- 56 Olivia Wilkinson and Joey Ager, "Scoping Study on Local Faith Communities in Urban Displacement: Evidence on Localisation and Urbanisation" (Washington, D.C.: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, 2017): 21; Roux and Valencia, *Partnering with Local Faith Communities*, 246.

- **Defining faith-based organizations (FBOs).** The 2000-2010 period often saw efforts to sort organizations and types of religious denominations into categories and typologies⁵⁷ and to run through world religions to analyze what each one might have to say about development.⁵⁸ Typologies of faith actors are discussed in the next section. While it is important to understand all the types of actors that can be described as linked to “faith,” publications focused on typologies are less frequent now. These typologies were written early in the field’s development when more definitional work was needed about what constitutes a faith-based organization. We should not forget that religious influence has been present in development throughout its history. Many articles and books highlight the pros and cons of the work of missionaries at the start of international development and humanitarian activities.⁵⁹ In the “quiet” period between World War II and the 90s where religions were not widely spoken of in development, large faith-based organizations were founded and grew, wrestling with their religious identity continuously throughout these decades. Some recent histories of FBOs reveal more about the shaping of religious identity and practice within FBOs, including World Vision⁶⁰ and Tearfund,⁶¹ demonstrating an increased interest in FBOs evaluating and stating their faith identity.
- **Major topics with the most evidence.** Some thematic areas have developed the most evidence over the years due to varying factors such as their prominence in global development trends, the influence of these trends on FBOs, and the amount of research funding available in that area. Religions as related to health and HIV/AIDS have strong evidence bases. While more will be covered on these topics in this state of the evidence’s thematic sections, we highlight two review articles here that summarize much of the evidence in these fields:
 - **Health:** Olivier et al.⁶² published in *The Lancet* that while faith-based healthcare providers in sub-Saharan Africa are widespread, their prevalence is not as high as sometimes assumed, varies greatly by country and region, and shows promising results in patient satisfaction but weaknesses in integration and adaptation. They warn against making generalizations about faith-based healthcare providers, hence why we do not give a statistic on the percentage of faith-based healthcare providers among all providers (which is a number often sought out and misquoted).⁶³ The article does offer some estimated percentages for different countries in the region.
 - From 2015 onwards, there was also an uptick in publishing on faith engagement in Ebola response.⁶⁴ The early response to Ebola in West Africa did not include faith actors, but towards the end of 2014 the need to work with faith actors on burial procedures and community engagement was acknowledged and processes changed, which had notable positive effects. Various groups have undertaken research to document and better understand faith engagement in this emergency health response.
 - **HIV/AIDS:** Olivier and Smith summarize the evidence on faith and HIV/AIDS to show that there has indeed been a concerted faith-based response to HIV/AIDS with a clear trend from “the late 1990s, when there was a major surge in the quantity and scope of response”⁶⁵ but concluding that the surge had since stopped. They summarize that faith actors are involved in several innovative mechanisms for HIV response across advocacy and campaigning, community-based service delivery, community-based research, and community financing.

57 Julia Berger, “Religious Nongovernmental Organizations: An Exploratory Analysis,” *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 15–39, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022988804887>; Clarke, *Faith Matters*; Carlo Benedetti, “Islamic and Christian Inspired NGOs: Between Tactical Collaboration and Strategic Diffidence?,” *Journal of International Development* 18 (2006): 849–59; Tamsin Bradley, “A Call for Clarification and Critical Analysis of the Work of Faith-Based Development Organizations (FBDO),” *Progress in Development Studies* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 101–14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146499340800900202>; Laura C. Thaut, “The Role of Faith in Christian Faith-Based Humanitarian Agencies: Constructing the Taxonomy,” *Voluntas* 20, no. 4 (2009): 319–50.

58 Matthew Clarke, *Development and Religion: Theology and Practice* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011).

59 Firoze Manji and Carl O’Coill, “The Missionary Position: NGOs and Development in Africa,” *International Affairs* 78, no. 3 (July 1, 2002): 567–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.00267>; Julie Hearn, “The ‘Invisible’ Ngo: US Evangelical Missions in Kenya,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 32–60, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700660260048465>; Jonathan D. Smith, “Positioning Missionaries in Development Studies, Policy, and Practice,” *World Development* 90 (February 1, 2017): 63–76, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.08.016>; Catherine Scheer, Philip Fountain, and R. Michael Feener, *The Mission of Development: Religion and Techno-Politics in Asia* (BRILL, 2018), <https://brill.com/view/title/35163>.

60 David P. King, *God’s Internationalists: World Vision and the Age of Evangelical Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

61 Dena Freeman, *Tearfund and the Quest for Faith-Based Development* (New York: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429343322>.

62 Jill Olivier et al., “Understanding the Roles of Faith-Based Health-Care Providers in Africa: Review of the Evidence with a Focus on Magnitude, Reach, Cost, and Satisfaction,” *The Lancet* 386, no. 10005 (October 31, 2015): 1765–75, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)60251-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60251-3).

63 Jill Olivier and Quentin Wodon, “Playing Broken Telephone: Assessing Faith-Inspired Health Care Provision in Africa,” *Development in Practice* 22, no. 5–6 (August 1, 2012): 819–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.685870>.

64 Featherstone, *Keeping the Faith*; Christo Greyling et al., “Lessons from the Faith-Driven Response to the West Africa Ebola Epidemic,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 118–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2016.1215829>; Katherine Marshall, “Roles of Religious Actors in the West African Ebola Response,” *Development in Practice* 27, no. 5 (July 4, 2017): 622–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2017.1327573>; Lyons et al., *Safe Burial Practices*.

65 Jill Olivier and Sally Smith, “Innovative Faith-Community Responses to HIV and AIDS: Summative Lessons from Over Two Decades of Work,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 5–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2016.1215839>.

- **Theological positions and human rights.** Some handbooks have offered chapters that summarize how theologies understood development, such as the *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*,⁶⁶ which covered Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Daoist, Confucian, and African Traditional Religions approaches to development. Indeed, theologians debate poverty and injustice at length, making this area a field of its own and only sometimes relevant for the religions and development evidence base when it leans towards practical, rather than abstract, discussion. *The Ecumenical Review*⁶⁷ or *HTS Theological Studies*⁶⁸ are examples of journals that publish on theology but often also with practical articles that are relevant for religions and development. Evidence on theological debates and divides in development programming have emerged too. For some secular development organizations, the fact or perception that theological positions can overrule and or/be in contrast with human rights is one of the main obstacles in engaging with faith actors.⁶⁹ This is especially common with respect to gender, where there have been fears that the “religious turn” in development might affect the struggle for gender equity that had been building up for decades.⁷⁰ Scholars of religion argue that human rights and religions are not mutually exclusive and can be supportive of one another (also see section below on FoRB).⁷¹ Likewise, there are well documented cases of faith actors being involved in social movements to advance issues of justice, such as the Jubilee campaign for debt cancellation.⁷² Some evidence has also begun to show how faith-based perspectives can effectively interpret rights-based approaches to humanitarian and development work.⁷³
- **Proselytism.** Faith actors have been perceived, and have at times acted, as proselytizing actors in humanitarian and development processes, offering conditional assistance in exchange for the chance to convert the recipient to their religion. This has hampered collaboration with other stakeholders, including donors,⁷⁴ who require assistance to be unconditional in line with principles of impartiality.⁷⁵ Yet, authors in this field have pointed out how complex the proselytization debate can be. For example, some argue that all aid is value laden and there can be secular forms of proselytization just as much as religious.⁷⁶ Likewise, within religions there are different approaches from pro- to anti-proselytizing stances and a spectrum of options that also allow for a middle ground of “voluntary witnessing” (e.g., speaking of one’s religion without tying assistance conditionally to recipients engaging in those religious beliefs or practices).⁷⁷ Finally, evidence has also shown how proselytism is just as much a contested area for local faith actors as it is for donors. For example, in Turkey, Muslim faith actors reportedly increased their engagement in education for displaced Syrian children to counter what they perceived as proselytism by Christian missions that would have led to “exploitation and assimilation by Western values.”⁷⁸
- **Faith and Finance.** Exploration of religious influence in economic history has recently seen a growing evidence base⁷⁹ and much of this intersects with development issues. Marshall identifies four major trends: “(a) new theoretical models that include spatial models of religious markets and evolutionary models of religious traits; (b) empirical work addressing causal influences on religious behavior; (c) examination of the economic history of religion taking religion as an independent, rather than a dependent, variable; and (d) studies of religion outside

66 Clarke, *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*.

67 For more information about *The Ecumenical Review*, see <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/17586623>.

68 For more information about *HTS Theological Studies*, see <https://hts.org.za/>.

69 Michael Jennings, “‘Do Not Turn Away a Poor Man’: Faith-Based Organizations and Development,” in *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*, ed. Matthew Clarke (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 365, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857933577.00029>.

70 Ruth Pearson and Emma Tomalin, “Intelligent Design?: A Gender-Sensitive Interrogation of Religion and Development,” in *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 46–71, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230371262_3.

71 For example, Elizabeth M. Bucar and Barbra Barnett, eds., *Does Human Rights Need God?*, The Eerdmans Religion, Ethics, and Public Life Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Linda Hogan, *Keeping Faith with Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015).

72 Marshall and Keough, *Mind, Heart, and Soul*.

73 Kaja Borchgrevink, “Negotiating Rights and Faith: A Study of Rights-Based Approaches to Humanitarian Action in Pakistan,” *Disasters* n/a, no. n/a (March 8, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12480>.

74 Rick James, “Handle with Care: Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations in Development,” *Development in Practice* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 109–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2011.530231>.

75 Philip Fountain, “Proselytizing Development,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development*, ed. Emma Tomalin (London: Routledge, 2015), 80–83.

76 Fountain, *Proselytizing Development*; Cecelia Lynch and Tanya B. Schwarz, “Humanitarianism’s Proselytism Problem,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2016): 636–46, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqw024>.

77 Emmanuel Awiah and Johan De Tavernier, “Dealing with Proselytism in Development Cooperation: A Rights-Based and Pluralistic Approach,” *Journal of Church and State* 62, no. 3 (2020): 525–43, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/csz058>.

78 Aslihan Tezel McCarthy, “Non-State Actors and Education as a Humanitarian Response: Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Education for Syrian Refugees in Turkey,” *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 2, no. 1 (November 13, 2017): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-017-0028-x>.

79 Sascha O. Becker, Jared Rubin, and Ludger Woessmann, “Religion in Economic History: A Survey,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester: Social Science Research Network, June 1, 2020), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3628217>; “Sascha O. Becker, Jared Rubin, and Ludger Woessmann, “Religion in Economic History: A Survey,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, June 1, 2020

the Western world (where the great majority of current work has been concentrated).⁸⁰ Some of the debate specific to religions and development has explored Islamic financing and there are increasingly articles making the case that Islamic social financing regularly assists in everything from “mitigating humanitarian crises”⁸¹ to women’s empowerment.⁸² However, there is some skepticism about the interest in financial resources from faith actors,⁸³ in line with the instrumentalization argument above.

Some current trends in religions and development evidence

Trend 1: Localization, decolonization, and local faith actors

Broad discussions on localization of aid and decolonization of development are occurring alongside a shift away from an interest in evidence from international FBOs to evidence about and with local faith actors in the religions and development evidence base. Evidence on local, less formal engagements by faith actors is still quite fragmented and limited,⁸⁴ although several studies have addressed these issues in the last years. Such studies demonstrate local faith actors’ crucial roles in peacebuilding in particular,⁸⁵ their ability to work with voluntary networks and access remote locations (as discussed above), the roles of social movements in volunteerism that respond to social issues,⁸⁶ and their connections to communities and role as first and last responders with an ability to fill social protection gaps.⁸⁷ Yet, studies also show local faith actors’ continued marginalization from donor engagement, with some difficulties similar to other local actors, while others point specifically to their faith-affiliation,⁸⁸ amid their own concerns about the NGO-ization of their activities.⁸⁹

In terms of decolonization, experiences, and perspectives of religious communities from the Global South can be key in re-framing notions of development, moving away from Western- and Northern-centric, towards more equitable approaches, and beyond functional, instrumental engagements of local faith actors.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, there remains a dominance of white, Western researchers in this field. Development Studies and Religious Studies in themselves are disciplines created by and for Western academic institutions. For example, the major “Development Studies” and “Humanitarian Studies” centers in universities are based in the Global North. The very concept of “religions and development” is not universally relevant. However, some academics from around the world are picking up on this field and re-interpreting it. Special issues on Asia focus on religious philanthropy⁹¹ and disasters,⁹² and other articles have argued for a reframing of how secular and religious notions of humanitarianism and development are employed in non-

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- 80 Katherine Marshall, “Religion and International Development,” in *Handbook on Religion and International Relations*, ed. Jeffrey Haynes (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021): 207, <https://www.elgaronline.com/view/edcoll/9781839100239/9781839100239.00021.xml>.reflecting recognition that religion plays both positive and less positive roles. Religious engagement touches every facet of development work, from economic policies to health, education, and water, to protection of vulnerable communities. Evidence produced by various disciplines (economics, anthropology, political science, and psychology)
- 81 Mustafa Mahmoud Hamed, “The Role of Islamic Social Finance in Mitigating Humanitarian Crises: A Multi-Range Strategy to Mitigate COVID-19 Impacts,” *European Journal of Islamic Finance*, no. 16 (December 31, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.13135/2421-2172/4937>.
- 82 Ninik Sri Rahayu, “The Intersection of Islamic Microfinance and Women’s Empowerment: A Case Study of Baitul Maal Wat Tamwil in Indonesia,” *International Journal of Financial Studies* 8, no. 2 (2020): 1–13.women are the main beneficiaries of Baitul Maal Wat Tamwil (BMT)
- 83 Alliance of Religions and Conservation, “Faith in Finance: Faith-Consistent Investing and the Sustainable Development Goals” (Bath: ARC; UNDP; OECD, 2016), <https://jiflc.com/resources/faith-and-finance/>.
- 84 Marshall et al., *What Impact Does It Have*.
- 85 For example, Susan Hayward and Katherine Marshall, *Women, Religion, and Peacebuilding: Illuminating the Unseen* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2015); David Boan et al., “A Qualitative Study of an Indigenous Faith-Based Distributive Justice Program in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya,” *Christian Journal for Global Health* 5, no. 2 (September 1, 2018): 3–20, <https://doi.org/10.15566/cjgh.v5i2.215>; Nell Bolton, “Interreligious Action for Peace: Studies in Muslim-Christian Cooperation,” (Lexington: Catholic Relief Services, March 28, 2017), <http://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/research-publications/interreligious-action-peace>; Susanna Trotta and Olivia Wilkinson, “Partnering with Local Faith Actors to Support Peaceful and Inclusive Societies” (Washington, DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities; Berlin: International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), 2019), <https://jiflc.com/resources/peace-sdg-16-pard/>; Olivia Wilkinson, Florine de Wolf, and Moses Alier, “The Triple Nexus and Local Faith Actors in South Sudan: Findings from Primary Research” (Copenhagen: DanChurchAid; Washington, DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, 2019), <https://jiflc.com/resources/triple-nexus-lfas-south-sudan-primary-research-dca/>.
- 86 Arnold Lindros Lau and Jayeel Serrano Cornelio, “Tzu Chi and the Philanthropy of Filipino Volunteers,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 43, no. 4 (January 1, 2015): 376–99, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685314-04304004>.
- 87 Heather Wurtz and Olivia Wilkinson, “Local Faith Actors and the Global Compact on Refugees,” *Migration and Society* 3, no. 1 (June 1, 2020): 145–61, <https://doi.org/10.3167/arms.2020.030112>.
- 88 Shatha El Nakib and Alastair Ager, “Local Faith Community and Related Civil Society Engagement in Humanitarian Response with Syrian Refugees in Irbid, Jordan: Report to the Henry Luce Foundation” (New York: Columbia University, 2015), <http://jiflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/El-Nakib-Ager-Local-faith-communities-and-humanitarian-response-in-Irbid.pdf>; Olivia Wilkinson et al., “Bridge Builders: Strengthening the Role of Local Faith Actors in Humanitarian Response in South Sudan” (Islamic Relief; Washington, DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, RedR UK, Tearfund, Tearfund Belgium, University of Leeds, 2020), <https://jiflc.com/resources/bridge-builders-south-sudan/>.
- 89 Wilkinson et al., *Faith in Localisation?*
- 90 Philipp Öhlmann, Wilhelm Gräb, and Marie-Luise Frost, *African Initiated Christianity, and the Decolonisation of Development: Sustainable Development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches* (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367823825>.
- 91 Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce and Jayeel Serrano Cornelio, “Introduction: Religious Philanthropy in Asia,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 43, no. 4 (2015): 349–55.
- 92 Philip Fountain and Levi McLaughlin, “Salvage and Salvation: Guest Editors’ Introduction,” *Asian Ethnology* 75, no. 1 (2016): 1–28.

Western contexts, such as Sri Lanka.⁹³ Recent handbooks from Africa⁹⁴ and Southern Africa⁹⁵ offer a range of critical interpretations of religions and development through theological, historical, economic, missiological, educational, feminist, and health perspectives. They deal with potentially contentious issues from xenophobia to LGBTIQ+ rights and broaden perspectives of what should be the evidence “story” of religions and development, demonstrating that many of the major themes examined above (e.g., defining FBOs, instrumentalization, proselytization) come from a particularly Western and donor-oriented lens of concern.

Trend 2: Faith-sensitive psychosocial support

Emerging as a distinct interest in the last five years or so, faith-sensitive psychosocial support has seen a growth in guidance documents,⁹⁶ online learning, systematic and literature reviews,⁹⁷ and original research.⁹⁸ Some other terms used include “trauma healing/awareness,”⁹⁹ “spiritual care,”¹⁰⁰ and “spiritual first aid.”¹⁰¹ The evidence points towards the need for greater consideration of how people’s spiritual lives and religious coping mechanisms are part of their experiences of crisis and healing from trauma. In existing psychosocial support, spirituality is rarely included as a potentially sensitive topic and rarely within typical mental health training from a Western perspective. The pastoral and spiritual support from faith actors and communities therefore runs in parallel without integration. While care is needed to broach questions of spirituality, research documents that people widely use positive and negative religious coping mechanisms during and recovering from crises¹⁰² and so this area cannot be ignored in any work that aims to help people overcome trauma. A sub-area arising on this topic is the use of religious coping among aid workers themselves to deal with the stressors of the work (secondary trauma). Studies so far show that religious coping can help aid workers,¹⁰³ including international, national,¹⁰⁴ and local, to destress, but that these same actors can also use religious coping strategies negatively, which can harm their mental health as a result.¹⁰⁵

Trend 3: Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB), recognizing intersectionality, and the effects of multiple vulnerabilities on religious minorities

As an international human right enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) is relevant to development work as a right to be upheld to assure internationally understood definitions of human dignity. FoRB is not a new trend – there has been a “Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief” at the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights since 1986, for example. Yet it has gained in significance in recent years, with much cited figures from Pew Research Center seeming to indicate that 83% of the world’s population experiences “religious restrictions,” with their 2019 figures

93 Nalika Gajaweera, “Buddhist Cosmopolitan Ethics and Transnational Secular Humanitarianism in Sri Lanka,” in *Religion and the Politics of Development*, ed Philip Fountain et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 105–28, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137438577_6.

94 Ezra Chitando, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, and Lovemore Togarasei, *Religion and Development in Africa* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2020).

95 James N. Amanze et al., *Religion and Development in Southern and Central Africa: Vol. 1* (Mzuni Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx0785f>; James N. Amanze et al., *Religion and Development in Southern and Central Africa: Vol. 2* (Mzuni Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx0783g>.

96 Michael French et al., “A Faith-Sensitive Approach in Humanitarian Response” (Islamic Relief Worldwide; Lutheran World Federation, June 2018), <https://refugee.jlflc.com/resources/a-faith-sensitive-approach-in-humanitarian-response/>.

97 Wendy Ager et al., “The Case for—and Challenges of—Faith-Sensitive Psychosocial Programming,” *Intervention* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 69, https://doi.org/10.4103/INTV.INTV_20_18; Jamie D. Aten et al., “The Psychological Study of Religion and Spirituality in a Disaster Context: A Systematic Review,” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy* 11 no. 6 (February 2019): 597–613, doi: 10.1037/tra0000431; Leonie Harsch, Corrie van der Ven, and Olivia Wilkinson, “Faith-Sensitive MHPSS for Humanitarian Practitioners,” *Forced Migration Review* 66 (March 2021), <https://www.fmreview.org/issue66/harsch-vandervan-wilkinson>.

98 Kathleen Rutledge et al., “Faith and MHPSS among Displaced Muslim Women,” *Forced Migration Review* 66 (March 2021), <https://www.fmreview.org/issue66/rutledge-pertek-abohilal-fitzgibbon>.

99 Carolyn Yoder, *The Little Book of Trauma Healing: Revised & Updated*, 2nd ed. (New York: Good Books, 2020), <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Little-Book-of-Trauma-Healing-Revised-Updated/Carolyn-Yoder/Justice-and-Peacebuilding/9781680996036> and <https://ministry.americanbible.org/trauma-healing>.

100 Ricko Damberg Nissen et al., “The Catalogue of Spiritual Care Instruments: A Scoping Review,” *Religions* 11, no. 5 (May 2020): 252, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11050252>.

101 See Spiritual First Aid Hub, <https://www.spiritualfirstaidhub.com/>.

102 For example, Anne Eyre, “Creating Spiritual and Psychological Resilience: Integrating Care in Disaster Relief Work,” *Journal of Public Mental Health* 9, no. 2 (July 29, 2010): 37–38, <https://doi.org/10.5042/jpmh.2010.0329>; Joey Ager, Alastair Ager, and Behailu Abebe, “Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Emergencies in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for Engaging with the Faith Sector,” *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2014): 72–83; Chandí Fernando and Michel Ferrari, “Spirituality and Resilience in Children of War in Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 13, no. 1 (2011), http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19349637.2011.547138#Vq_HbTYrLX8.

103 Ozgul Ozcan, Mark Hoelterhoff, and Eleanor Wylie, “Faith and Spirituality as Psychological Coping Mechanism among Female Aid Workers: A Qualitative Study,” *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 6, no. 1 (June 21, 2021): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00100-z>.

104 Alastair Ager et al., “Stress, Mental Health, and Burnout in National Humanitarian Aid Workers in Gulu, Northern Uganda,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 25, no. 6 (December 2012): 713–20, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.21764>.

105 Laura E. Captari et al., “Negative Religious Coping and Burnout among National Humanitarian Aid Workers Following Typhoon Haiyan,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 37, no. 1 (April 1, 2018): 28.

still indicating the highest levels of government restrictions on religions worldwide.¹⁰⁶ However, as Birdsall and Beaman have noted,¹⁰⁷ the figures are misleading, not least because the definition of “religious restrictions” is not the same as the legal definitions for violations of FoRB. Likewise, the measurement of FoRB violations worldwide is a complex area with many different measurement approaches taken, which can be influenced by politicized agendas and show “differing understandings of the nature and relative significance of violations and their comparability.”¹⁰⁸ “International religious freedom” has risen in prominence as a somewhat synonymous but contested term driven by religio-political agendas from the US.¹⁰⁹ This has led to what Hurd calls “religious freedom promotion,”¹¹⁰ which politicians use to focus attention on certain religious populations and justify foreign policy goals.

Petersen and Marshall¹¹¹ summarize the four major positions that those linked to FoRB often take:

1. “Religious discrimination is really about something else,” which is associated with secular human rights organizations who are skeptical about FoRB and its potential to act as a barrier to other human rights promotion, such as women’s rights.
2. “Persecution of Christians is the most pressing concern,” associated primarily with conservative Christian organizations and focused on persecuted Christians often in the Middle East.
3. “The real victims of discrimination today are the Muslims,” with Islamophobia in Europe and North America as one of the most pressing topics of concern.
4. A human rights approach to FoRB, which underlines that “FoRB is about the protection of all individuals’ right to believe and practice their religion (or not),” and is mostly taken up by progressive organizations with rights-based agendas, from FBOs to human rights groups.

The fourth approach that “anchor[s FoRB] in a broader human rights framework”¹¹² is ultimately encouraged, with the authors clarifying that “there is no conflict between FoRB and women’s rights. The right to FoRB is about the protection of all individuals and their right to interpret and practice their religion... Furthermore, FoRB can never be used to justify discrimination, inequality, or violation of other people’s rights – including women’s rights.”¹¹³

Recent reviews have found very little evidence that FoRB or analysis on religious inequalities and religious minorities are integrated into development approaches.¹¹⁴ The Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) project has brought religious inequality and FoRB debates into closer conversation with religion and development debates. The project critiques previous religions and development work by examining how and why religious inequalities are ignored. If religions and development efforts only seek to understand and work with majority religious traditions and their representative faith actors, then they purposefully blind themselves to the experience of religious minorities and the inequalities they face. This highlights the need to properly understand power dynamics between majority and minority religions in any context and how the faith actors engaging in humanitarian and development work mirror these dynamics.

In connection to international cooperation, the 2017 Beirut Declaration launched the “Faith for Rights” framework used by the UN and its faith-based partners to discuss and find common ground on religious and human rights. FoRB is also relevant throughout the SDGs framework, as a recent series from the Danish Institute of Human Rights highlights with briefing papers on FoRB and the SDGs, covering women’s rights, education, health, freedom of expression, and climate change.¹¹⁵

106 Pew Research Center, “Globally, Social Hostilities Related to Religion Decline in 2019, While Government Restrictions Remain at Highest Levels” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, September 30, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/09/30/globally-social-hostilities-related-to-religion-decline-in-2019-while-government-restrictions-remain-at-highest-levels/>.

107 Judd Birdsall and Lori Beaman, “Faith in Numbers: Can We Trust Quantitative Data on Religious Affiliation and Religious Freedom?,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 60–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2020.1795401>.

108 Katherine Marshall, “Towards Enriching Understandings and Assessments of Freedom of Religion or Belief: Politics, Debates, Methodologies, and Practices,” CREID Working Paper 6, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2021), 2, <https://doi.org/10.19088/CREID.2021.001>.

109 Jeffrey Haynes, “Trump and the Politics of International Religious Freedom,” *Religions* 11, no. 8 (August 2020): 385, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11080385>.

110 Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, “The Paradox of Free Religion,” Berkley Forum (blog), January 12, 2021, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-paradox-of-free-religion>.

111 Marie Juul Petersen and Katherine Marshall, “The International Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief: Sketching the Contours of a Common Framework” (Copenhagen: The Danish Institute for Human Rights, April 5, 2019): 19, <https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/international-promotion-freedom-religion-belief>.

112 Petersen and Marshall, *Sketching the Contours*, 6.

113 Petersen and Marshall, *Sketching the Contours*, 17.

114 Mariz Tadros and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler, *Inclusive Development: Beyond Need, Not Creed*, CREID Working Paper 1, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (Brighton: Institute for Development Studies, 2020), <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/15120>; Marshall, *Enriching Understandings*.

115 See The International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, <https://www.ippforb.com/resources>.

Trend 4: COVID-19, religion, and development

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on how researchers and practitioners think about religion and development. In many regions, religious institutions and facilities play significant roles in health-related service delivery and policymaking. Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, there has been a growing focus on different aspects of the intersections between faith actors, religion, and COVID-19 in academic research. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, many studies have surveyed the role of religious coping mechanisms and spiritual support as part of broader responses to mental health exacerbated by COVID-19.¹¹⁶ As part of their gender-related development engagements, FBOs have issued advocacy and guidance documents on the rise of domestic violence, for example, during the pandemic.¹¹⁷ More generally, there is increasing evidence that faith actors have mobilized resources to assist vulnerable groups in their communities who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.¹¹⁸ The influence of faith actors, in general, and of religious leaders in particular, has been at the center of debate, especially as regards the helpful dissemination of public health information, on one hand, or the spread of false information and conspiracy theories about the virus, on the other hand.¹¹⁹ In terms of vaccines, the debate, especially in the US, has often focused on religious liberty debates as a possible ground for exemption from requirements geared to public health.¹²⁰ The JLI, the World Faiths Development Dialogue, and the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University have set up a repository of resources covering religion and COVID-19 that can be accessed online and searched by development-related thematic areas and geographical region.¹²¹

Who are the faith actors?

We use the term “faith actors” to allow for a broad understanding of a diverse group of actors who are commonly referred to in different ways, including local, national, and international faith-based organizations (FBOs), religious communities, and religious leaders. In this section, we summarize the key trends and debates that have formed among academics and in grey literature on the definition of faith actors over the last two decades. We then explain our own understanding of who faith actors are (see diagram below).

Most reflections on the definition of faith actors in development, particularly until the mid-2010s,¹²² have used the term “Faith-Based Organizations.” This reflects in part the fact that Christian traditions, especially Catholicism and mainline Protestantism, had the longest history of partnering with other development actors. It also reflects the rapid expansion of civil society organizations and especially organized non-government organizations, many with an explicitly development and humanitarian vocation. The structure of Christian communities is conducive to establishing formally registered organizations that are like those of other NGOs and acceptable to other NGOs in

116 For example, Victor Counted et al., “Hope and Well-Being in Vulnerable Contexts during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Does Religious Coping Matter?,” *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 17, no. 1 (December 3, 2020): 70–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1832247>; Muhammad Saud et al., “Social Support through Religion and Psychological Well-Being: COVID-19 and Coping Strategies in Indonesia,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 5 (October 1, 2021): 3309–3325, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01327-1>; Francesco Molteni et al., “Searching for Comfort in Religion: Insecurity and Religious Behaviour during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy,” *European Societies* 23, no. sup1 (February 19, 2021): S704–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1836383>.

117 For example, ACT Alliance, “Gender and Faith perspectives on COVID-19,” Briefing Paper (Geneva: ACT Alliance, 2020), <https://www.genderandcovid-19.org/resources/gender-and-faith-perspectives-on-covid-19/>; Mandy Marshall, “Domestic Abuse and COVID-19: How Churches Can Respond,” London: Anglican Consultative Council and the Anglican Alliance, 2020), <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/gender-justice/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19.aspx>; World Council of Churches (WCC), “COVID-19 Responses” (Le Grand-Saconnex: WCC, 2021), <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/covid-19-resources>.

118 For example, Dario Paulo Barrera Rivera, “Religión y COVID 19 en el Perú del Bicentenario. Laicidad de colaboración y reacciones evangélicas a la pandemia,” *Estudios de Religión* 34, no. 2 (September 16, 2020): 431–62, <https://doi.org/10.15603/2176-1078/erv34n2p431-462>; Thelma Miryam de Souza Mathiazem, Evany Bettine de Almeida, and Thais Bento Lima da Silva, “Espiritualidade e religiosidade como estratégias de enfrentamento do idoso no distanciamento social devido à pandemia de COVID-19,” *Revista Kairós-Gerontologia* 24, no. 29 (2021): 237–58.

119 For example, Sima Barmania and Michael J. Reiss, “Health Promotion Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Importance of Religion,” *Global Health Promotion* 28, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 15–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757975920972992>. See also: Fortune Sibanda et al, eds., *Religion and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Southern Africa* (London: Routledge, 2022) and Chammah J. Kaunda et al, eds., *Christianity and COVID-19: Pathways for Faith* (London: Routledge, 2022).

120 Council on Foreign Relations, “COVID-19 Vaccines and Religious Exemptions,” Webinar, November 30, 2021, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/event/covid-19-vaccines-and-religious-exemptions>.

121 See Faith and COVID-19: Resource Repository, <https://covidfaithrepository.georgetown.domains/>.

122 Julia Berger, “Religious Nongovernmental Organizations: An Exploratory Analysis,” *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 15–39, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022988804887>; Gerard Clarke, “Faith Matters: Faith-Based Organizations, Civil Society and International Development,” *Journal of International Development* 18, no. 6 (2006): 835–848, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1317>; Gerard Clarke, “Faith-Based Organizations and International Development: An Overview,” in *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 17–45, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230371262_2; Tara Hefferan, Julie Adkins, and Laurie A. Occhipinti, *Bridging the Gaps: Faith-Based Organizations, Neoliberalism, and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9780739132876/Bridging-the-Gaps-Faith-based-Organizations-Neoliberalism-and-Development-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean>; Laurie A. Occhipinti, “Faith-Based Organizations in Development,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development*, ed. Emma Tomalin (London: Routledge, 2015); Emma Tomalin, “Thinking about Faith-Based Organizations in Development: Where Have We Got to and What Next?,” *Development in Practice* 22, no. 5–6 (2012): 689–703, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.686600>.

their separation from, while remaining affiliated to, religious institutions. Using the term “FBO” to refer to all types of faith actors from many different religious traditions, however, has shortcomings. For example, in some Muslim contexts,¹²³ the role that religion plays in an organization’s ethos and formal institutional ties may be more implicit than overt, acknowledged in the identity of most charitable organizations, and need not be designated as a separate “faith-based” identity (further, some reject the label in part because of perceived political disadvantages).

The boundaries of the terms “Faith-Based Organizations” have been widely discussed. Many have argued, for instance, for or against the inclusion of informal actors such as congregations, Sunday schools, and varieties of groupings arising from religious communities.¹²⁴ In addition, local faith actors might have very different characteristics from formal FBOs, such as whom they chose to partner with. Some scholars¹²⁵ have observed that local faith actors in the Global South might be reluctant to engage with international donor governments due to compliance measures that would require them to distance themselves from their religious identity. Likewise, the evidence points towards the reality that international development actors are more likely to want to engage with formalized faith actors that operate in the same ways as NGOs.¹²⁶

Much of the debate on the definition of faith actors has focused on comparisons between FBOs and other NGOs,¹²⁷ and between FBOs from different religious traditions and within traditions.¹²⁸ In Tanzania, for example, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches were perceived to be more engaged in evangelization activities, while Lutheran churches appeared to be more focused on development work.¹²⁹ In the same context, study participants perceived Muslim organizations as more fragmented, less hierarchical, and less supported by international donors, and Catholic FBOs as more active and influential in advocacy. Context and tradition-related factors can greatly influence the positions and roles that different FBOs take up, especially in relation to other actors.

Aside from single groups and denominations, there are also many interreligious bodies that form useful networks with which international actors engage. Religions for Peace (RfP)¹³⁰ is an international coalition of nationally and regionally based interreligious bodies around the world and regularly engages with major UN and other development initiatives. Many scholars have documented the potential for interreligious cooperation in humanitarian, development, and peace work¹³¹ and there are also many guides and programs on interfaith engagement, such as Learning to Live Together¹³² from Arigatou International.

More recent contributions have increasingly moved away from an exclusive use of the term “FBOs.” For example, some have suggested “faith-inspired organizations,”¹³³ or others have suggested the use of a range of terms to reflect the diversity of actors at local levels and across traditions (e.g., “national/local faith-influenced organization,”

123 Nida Kirmani and Sarah Zahidi, “The Role of Religious Values and Beliefs in Charitable and Development Organizations in Karachi and Sindh, Pakistan,” Working Paper (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2010), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08abb40f0b64974000736/summary_paper_50.pdf.

124 Thomas H. Jeavons, “Religious and Faith-Based Organizations: Do We Know One When We See One?,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 140–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764003257499>; Clarke, “Faith Matters”; Tomalin, *Faith-Based Organizations in Development*.

125 Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh, “Typology of Religious Characteristics of Social Service and Educational Organizations and Programs,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 109–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764003257494>; Tomalin, *Faith-Based Organizations in Development*.

126 Emma Tomalin, “Religions, Poverty Reduction and Global Development Institutions,” *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 132 (November 6, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0167-8>; Olivia Wilkinson et al., *Faith in Localisation?*

127 Robert Leurs, “Are Faith-Based Organizations Distinctive? Comparing Religious and Secular NGOs in Nigeria,” *Development in Practice* 22, no. 5–6 (2012): 704–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.685868>; Matthew Clarke and Vicki-Anne Ware, “Understanding Faith-Based Organizations: How FBOs Are Contrasted with NGOs in International Development Literature,” *Progress in Development Studies* 15, no. 1 (2015): 37–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993414546979>.

128 Riham Ahmed Khafagy, “Faith-Based Organizations: Humanitarian Mission or Religious Missionary,” *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 5, no. 1 (October 9, 2020): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-020-00080-6>.

129 Leurs, Robert, Peter Tumaini-Mungu, and Abu Mvungi, “Mapping the Development Activities of Faith-Based Organizations in Tanzania,” Working Paper 58 (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2011), <http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/1659/>.

130 See Religions for Peace, <https://www.rfp.org/>.

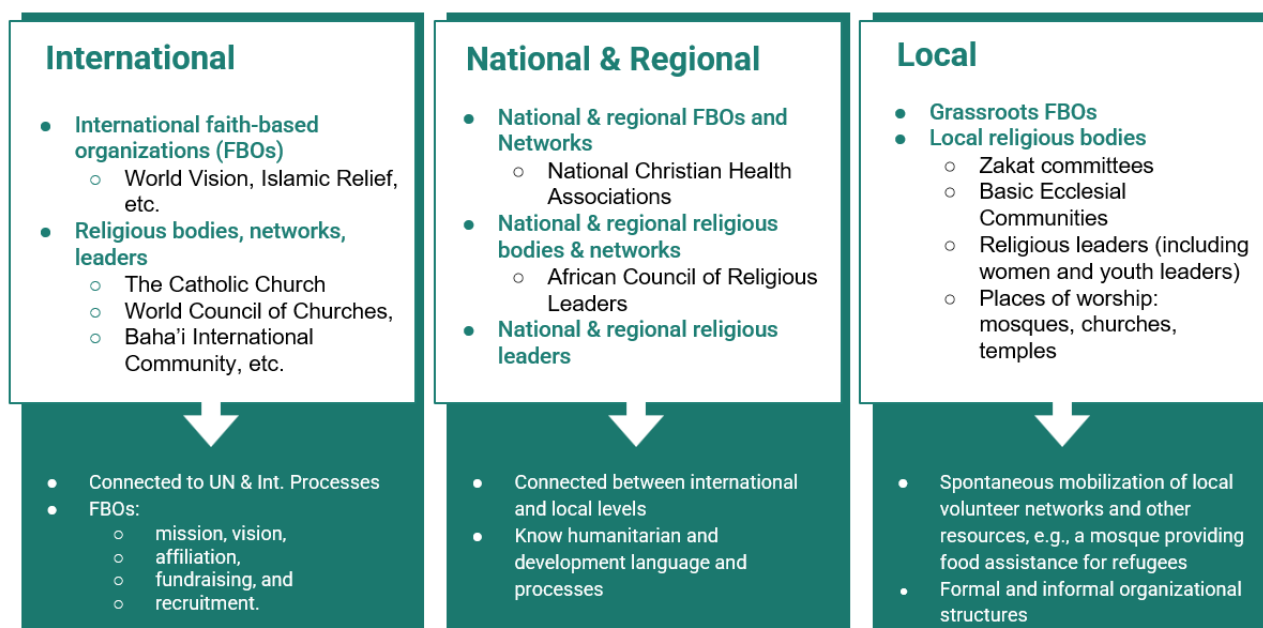
131 Peter Bender, “Religions for Peace (RfP) and Global and European Interfaith Politics: Different Faiths, Common Actions – in Foreign Policy?,” in *Rethinking the Religious Factor in Foreign Policy*, ed. Maria Toropova (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2021): 129–49, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-33776-6_7; Ezra Chitando and Ishanesu Sextus Gusha, eds., *Interfaith Networks and Development: Case Studies from Africa*, 1st ed. (Cham: Springer Nature, 2022); Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016); Philip Fountain, “Mennonite Disaster Relief and the Interfaith Encounter in Aceh, Indonesia,” *Asian Ethnology* 75, no. 1 (2016): 163–90; Stacey Gutkowski and Craig Larkin, “Spiritual Ambiguity in Interfaith Humanitarianism: Local Faith Communities, Syrian Refugees and Muslim-Christian Encounters in Lebanon and Jordan,” *Migration Studies* 9, no. 3 (2021): 1054–1074, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnab024>; Martin Munyao, “Migration, Interfaith Engagement, and Mission among Somali Refugees in Kenya: Assessing the Cape Town Commitment from a Global South Perspective One Decade On,” *Religions* 12, no. 2 (February 2021): 129, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020129>.

132 Angeliki Aroni, “Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education,” Good Practices Series (Geneva: Arigatou International, 2014), <https://ethicseducationforchildren.org/images/zdocs/Arigatou-GPS-No2-Learning-to-Play-Together-EN.pdf>.

133 Katherine Marshall, *Global Institutions of Religion: Ancient Movers, Modern Shakers* (London: Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203581940>.

“informal local faith and worship communities,” “faith networks,” and “local faith figures.”)¹³⁴ Others have defined faith actors according to their main purpose. According to this view, for example, groups that share worship practices are labeled as “congregations,” while those who are engaged in providing aid and support are defined as “local associations, charities and faith networks.”¹³⁵

As key trends and debates on the terminology used to describe faith actors show, there is no single typology that applies to each context of analysis. We suggest the use of “faith actors” as a broad category and offer guidance on how to use more specific terms through this diagram. This diagram is organized according to the actors’ context – i.e., international, national, and regional, and local – due to the common organizing levels of humanitarian and development activity. The use of more specific terms should consider context- and religion-specific types of faith actor.



- **Religious leaders** are present at every level. It is important not to generalize or to use the term “religious leaders” to refer to all “faith actors.” In fact, there are many different types and roles of leadership, considering internal hierarchies and levels of formality and informality. For example, research has shown that the role of pastors’ wives, i.e., informal leaders, on child protection, is particularly important.¹³⁶ Some religious leaders can be very influential in the international humanitarian and development realm, while others, who are active at national or local level are key to engage with to advocate for better legislation or to achieve change at community level.
- **International FBOs** often present high degrees of formality (i.e., recruitment processes, fundraising, internal structure, etc.), are affiliated with a religious tradition that influences their mission and vision to various degrees,¹³⁷ and engage with other international actors, both religious and secular, as well as with smaller organizations at national and/or local level. They take part in international development and humanitarian programs together with other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), donors, and UN agencies.

134 El Nakib and Ager, Local Faith Community; Merel van Meerkerk and Brenda Bartelink, “Religious Actors in Development: Time to Fix Our Blind Spot,” *The Broker - Connecting worlds of knowledge*, January 28, 2015, <https://www.thebrokeronline.eu/religious-actors-in-development-time-to-fix-our-blind-spot/>.

135 Katherine Marshall et al., “Implementing Strategic Religious Engagement in International Development,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 19, no. sup1 (November 1, 2021): 63–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1983350>.

136 Carola Eyber et al., “The Role and Experience of Local Faith Leaders in Promoting Child Protection: A Case Study from Malawi,” *Intervention* 16 no. 1 (2018): 31–37, <https://doi.org/10.1097/WTF.0000000000000156>; Carola Eyber and Kanykey Jailobaeva, “When a Child Has Not Made 18 Years and You Marry Her off ... Don’t Bother to Invite Me! I Will Not Come”: The Role and Involvement of Faith Leaders’ Wives in Child Protection Issues,” in *International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters*, ed. Kathryn Kraft and Olivia J. Wilkinson (New York: Routledge, 2020).

137 Thaut, *Christian Faith-Based Humanitarian Agencies*.

- **National and regional faith actors** often engage with other country-wide organizations, including governmental actors. Through their connections, e.g., with wider networks within their religious affiliation and/or interreligious organizations and councils, they may also participate in international humanitarian and development processes involving other INGOs, donors, and UN agencies. They can also function as mediators between such international processes and local faith actors.
- **Local faith actors** include grassroots FBOs and more informal actors, which are often linked to a place of worship, such as Zakat committees and congregations. While these are often involved in humanitarian responses and development processes, they are less likely to have direct links to international humanitarian and development actors. In the last decade, local faith actors have been increasingly looked at as potential and actual partners in development and humanitarian interventions. For example, the Global Compact on Refugees¹³⁸ refers to the importance of both “local actors” and “faith-based actors” as part of its multi-stakeholder approach¹³⁹ and, indeed, local faith actors are critical in responding to refugees.¹⁴⁰ The focus on localization emerges from the aim to be “as local as possible, as international as necessary”¹⁴¹ in humanitarian response. Research has shown that partnering with local faith actors can increase the effectiveness and suitability of context-specific interventions.¹⁴² However, there is still a long way to go to achieve effective, fair, and equal collaboration between international actors and local faith actors in humanitarian and development work.

Explaining the structure of the report

The rest of this report is divided into six thematic areas covering health, the environment, violence against children, gender, peace and conflict, and forced migration. Each thematic area is co-authored by two experts and includes an overview of the main debates within the scholarship over the last 20 years. It is not necessary to read this report from start to finish. We encourage readers to look at the thematic chapters that are most relevant to their work. These chapters are not intended as an exhaustive illustration of all discussions taking place in religions and development scholarship, but rather as a guide to understand the main areas of focus and to point to relevant resources for more detailed information. They are also understood as a resource for researchers, secular development practitioners, and faith actors, including religious leaders, to appreciate the main changes in religions and development debated over the past two decades and quickly get up-to-speed on new subject areas.

138 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “The Global Compact on Refugees” (New York: United Nations, 2018), <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>.

139 Wurtz and Wilkinson, *Local Faith Actors*.

140 Susanna Trotta and Olivia Wilkinson, “Local Faith Communities and Responses to Displacement,” in *The Handbook of Displacement*, ed. Peter Adey et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020): 771–84, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47178-1_53.

141 United Nations, *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility*, Report of the UN Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2016 (UN Doc. A/70/709), <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/one-humanity-shared-responsibility-report-of-the-un-secretary-general-for-the-world>.

142 For example, Joey Ager, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Alastair Ager, “Local Faith Communities and the Promotion of Resilience in Contexts of Humanitarian Crisis,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 202–21, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fev001>; Kanykey Jailobaeva et al., “Child Protection Practices and Attitudes of Faith Leaders Across Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 95–110, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1874131>; Olivia Wilkinson et al., “Faith in Localisation? The Experiences of Local Faith Actors Engaging with the International Humanitarian System in South Sudan,” *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 7, no. 1 (January 11, 2022): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00113-8>.

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