

“Bridging the divide in the field of humanitarianism and development”

A project of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

**Report on a survey to identify problems and potential avenues for
collaboration and understanding among actors in the field of
humanitarianism and development**

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“Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.” *Albert Einstein*

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Background: The Platform's challenge and the survey

To foster cooperation on issues related to UNAOC's mandate, UNAOC works through thematic platforms whose members are drawn from the UNAOC Group of Friends. Two active thematic platforms currently encourage "dialogue in action". The Government of Switzerland has taken the lead on one of these that focuses on cooperation among actors in international humanitarian and development work, especially those inspired by their faith. *The core idea is that trust cannot be created simply through verbal exchange, and, if words are not followed by acts, dialogue can even be counter-productive. Experience shows that practical cooperation can bridge even gaps that seem irreconcilable.* Representatives from Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Finland, Russia, Jordan, Malaysia, Paraguay, Sweden, and Switzerland and the UNAOC Secretariat participated in a Bern meeting hosted by Switzerland in March, 2011. A working paper² was circulated and discussed in Doha in May, 2011 and during two working sessions at the UNAOC Forum in Doha on December 11-13, 2011. The process has involved a progressive deepening of reflection and sharpening of action ideas.

Excellent work and dedication of a wide range of non-governmental organizations garner respect and admiration, but coordination among them is a large and growing concern. Both international (secular or faith-inspired) organizations and the multiplying, often locally based humanitarian NGOs, are part of this coordination challenge. At worst, it exacerbates tensions and at best wastes energies and resources.

One reason for disparate and fragmented efforts and weak cooperation is that the organizations tend to be rooted (at least on the surface) in different ideologies or value systems. Religion is both a source of disconnect and tension and a potential area of common ground. Increasing attention and government funding is being directed to faith based or faith-inspired organizations, with several countries supporting research programs on their work, especially where it involves development and humanitarian action. There are promising examples of interfaith partnerships. However, cooperation between development and humanitarian organisations with distinctly different backgrounds is still rare and does not come easily.

The resulting divides detract from humanitarian and development cooperation, in "receiving countries" as well as in "donor" countries, at national and international levels. Suggested reasons include:

(a) insufficient information and knowledge about different organizations, their work, and their links to funding sources and volunteer support; (b) a pervasive dissatisfaction with the oft-touted "partnership" models in play; (c) common suspicions among communities and organizations linked to gaps - real or perceived - between differences in capacity or willingness to recognise different forms of capacity; and (d) a general tendency in humanitarian and development situations to accept inefficiencies (e.g. in use of funds and coverage of programs) and failure to take advantage of synergies (e.g. new funding sources, complementary skills, building sustainable communities).

In recent years efforts to avoid even the appearance of connection to organizations that support terrorist tactics have affected charitable giving as well as wide-ranging programs, especially in Muslim communities, and exacerbated suspicions and tensions within the activist community. *Yet wise leaders*

²<http://www.unaoc.org/2011/11/working-paper-and-policy-brief-on-collaboration-across-communities-on-humanitarianism-and-development/>.

suggest that the large areas of common ground between religions and cultures –especially their strong heritage of charitable and humanitarian work – should be a foundation to reinforce non-political links and to build more understanding and cooperation.

With so many actors involved and keen awareness of the diverse experience that emerged from the successive discussions, the platform leaders and representatives sought the views of a wider group through a questionnaire, sent to about 100 institutions (some explicitly secular, others religious) in October 2011. The response rate was poor but those who responded provided invaluable insights. Moreover, some follow up discussions with institutions that did not respond formally confirmed many preliminary findings and emerging issues. We are deeply grateful to those organizations that provided their unique perspectives.

This report summarizes conclusions of the survey and preliminary questions and ideas for future action.

The Survey

As a means to identify problems and potential avenues for collaboration and understanding among actors in the field of humanitarian and development action, UNAOC submitted a survey to 96 development organizations – both faith-inspired and secular – in an effort to better understand the interaction between organizations of different faiths, as well as between secular and faith-inspired organizations. To best represent the wide array of faiths present in the development community, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i, interfaith, “spiritual, but not religious,” as well as secular organizations were contacted. Of those who received surveys, eight returned responses. Despite this small sample size, the responses received represented a diverse cross-section of religious persuasions, and included the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), The European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion (EMESCO) (which claimed no explicit faith link), World Vision, the Swiss Foundation HEKS, and the Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Swedish UNAOC Focal Point, Jan Henningsson, offered important comments and perspectives. This report summarizes the responses received, grouped thematically. The survey questions, as well as Mr. Henningsson's insights, are included as Appendices.

Distinctive Assets and Liabilities of Faith-Linked and “Secular” Approaches

Faith-inspired respondents identified several distinct advantages and disadvantages linked to an explicit religious identification. Frequently cited assets included the ability to better connect with communities in developing regions through existing faith networks.

For example, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, the Swiss HEKS Foundation, The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, The Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as the Swedish Embassy representative each identified specific instances where the ability to tap into faith networks improved their ability to work effectively in diverse, remote, and developing regions. Coordination with faith networks has the potential to increase significantly the reach of development initiatives.

Besides the importance of networks in improving access and coordination, faith-inspired organizations

observed that their religious character can be an asset in communicating with grassroots actors, faith communities, and other faith-inspired organizations, even when they are not of the same faith.

World Vision noted that communities do not always view economic progress as the primary indicator for development so integrating compassion and faith enhances programs; faith-inspired organizations can address both sides of that equation, trying to reach the spiritual dimension of development in communities.

Looking at the financial aspects of development cooperation, HEKS stressed that it can access funds from Churches, that secular or other faith-inspired organizations cannot. In the case of foundations, the religious roots of HEKS can be an asset and a disadvantage; issues such as proselytism are sensitive, and HEKS must make clear that it does not proselytize in the course of its work.

Use of religious language when accentuating goals and motivations is seen as an effective tool in broaching sensitive issues at the grassroots level with community members; at the same time, though, evoking religious language in development contexts is seen as a barrier for effective communication among and between faith-inspired organizations and secular development organizations. Even when working on common projects, simply using certain vocabulary can exclude faith-inspired actors from the table.

The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission was one of several organizations to note the importance of language in expressing the motivation behind their work to those they serve, as well as establishing effective relationships with organizations of different faiths. World Vision emphasized that as faith-inspired organizations are increasingly involved in coordinated development efforts, the language barrier is decreasing (in some instances), between faith-inspired and secular actors.

Language barriers can be most problematic within single faith traditions; different vocabulary and understanding on issues such as proselytizing among different Christian groups is a prominent example.

At the grassroots level, where development jargon is generally unfamiliar, articulating goals in terms of religious teachings can be an effective tool in ensuring mutual understanding even with secular development agencies and local actors. In regions where religious leaders occupy key positions of authority, religious language may be the most effective means of changing potentially harmful practices and attitudes.

For example, the Archbishop of Burundi's decision to take an HIV test publicly sent a particularly powerful message. Several responses highlighted the ability of faith-inspired organizations to approach development challenges from a holistic perspective that stresses physical, as well as emotional and spiritual well-being.

Responses tended to emphasize the positive assets of “faith-linked approaches”. The main liabilities they noted with an explicitly religious character revolved around misunderstandings and stereotypes surrounding specific faith communities. A special concern is that these can extend to faith-inspired organizations in general. Examples of confusion surrounding proselytization practices are seen as making

some mainstream development partners reluctant to work with organizations with an explicitly stated faith link – particularly evangelical groups, which have seen rapid growth in many world regions. More generally, representatives of both faith-inspired and secular development organizations reported a tendency in the development community to view faith leaders as potential “barriers to change” on many key development topics, including gender, education, and HIV/AIDS and homosexual rights issues.

Effective interfaith and faith/secular partnerships can be undermined by local and regional religious and political tensions.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), for example, reported initial resistance on the part of the Indonesian government to receiving “any assistance from Israel or Jewish organizations” following the 2004 tsunami. The disaster's devastation, however, soon overcame early political considerations, and “JDC was eventually honored by the Indonesian government for its post-tsunami relief and rebuilding efforts.”

Experience with Different Partnerships

Partnerships were cited overall as a positive way to work, deserving greater effort and attention. Responses focused on interfaith partnerships, but also highlighted aspects of intra-faith, and faith-inspired/secular partnerships. There was considerable overlap in attributes cited “that contribute to effective faith-secular or faith-faith partnerships”, including among those with little or no experience in direct interfaith cooperation (all organizations had experience working with secular partners). Key factors in establishing working partnerships include: focusing on shared values; taking the necessary time to build interpersonal relationships and understandings of different organizational structures; transparency (including on the limits of cooperation); and the importance of language choice for effective communication (for example: using the language of faith rather than human rights when dealing with faith-inspired versus secular partners).

Focusing on interfaith partnerships, some responses noted limited experience, while others have made working with partners of different faiths central to project execution, especially in areas where the majority population is of a different faith than their own.³ Among those who reported working with faith-inspired organizations of a different religion, success of the partnership varied. Factors explaining the variations include the length of time of engagement, and level of trust achieved between faiths. The responses stressed as success factors were taking the time to establish trusting relationships, better understand different organizational structures, and develop languages of mutual understanding.

The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) reported considerable interfaith collaboration through networks, as well as directly with secular organizations. In this instance, however, FELM maintains an explicit policy of preferring to partner with “churches” and “church based organizations or networks;” “it is probable that many of our supporters in the church would not wish their funds to go directly to organizations with a different faith-inspiration, although cooperation and working together

³Organizations that reported extensive interfaith collaboration included the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion, the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as the government of Sweden.

[in] such instances is not a problem at all.”

The Swiss HEKS Foundation cited an invitation from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to participate in a diapraxis with an Egyptian Muslim faith-based organization. The project allowed HEKS to engage with a Muslim partner in the Middle East, which was different from its more common relationships in the region with secular partners. Key differences and challenges in the partnership included: finding the right language (referencing a Christian faith identity versus a human rights mission to the Muslim partner); and understanding a different organization’s leadership, hierarchy, and structure. Trust building over time has helped to overcome challenges.

Among those with significant interfaith experience, positive aspects of the partnerships were emphasized.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), for example, reported having “long standing partnerships with many faith-based institutions and always turns to them when they can provide added value or access in different regions of the world.” The Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury reported engaging with Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, and Sikh leaders on an array of advocacy campaigns ranging from preventing violence against migrant workers in Hong Kong to promoting women’s literacy and development in rural Burundi.

Regarding intra-faith partnerships, World Vision noted that intra-faith partnerships with different Christian denominations can at times be more challenging than interfaith partnerships, which tend to focus on a common humanitarian mission.

Differing understandings of proselytizing, as one example, among different denominations of the same faith tradition can create rifts not present in interfaith settings. Looking at faith-secular partnerships, it is important for faith-inspired organizations to be transparent on the role of their faith in their work; concerns over evangelizing can impede or in many cases preclude partnerships from forming.

World Vision noted that partnerships with secular organizations are often centered on the individuals on the ground, rather than the institution as a whole, and individuals often carry their own faith perspectives and motivations, facilitating cooperation.

Overall benefits of partnerships include increased access to vulnerable populations, skills transfer and institutional knowledge sharing between organizations, and expansion of faith-inspired development networks. One response observed: “We engage in such partnerships because of their transparency, and effectiveness as well as a sense of connection with organizations whose humanitarianism is similarly inspired by tradition and faith.”

Coordination and Knowledge Issues

The responses noted that coordination issues are particularly pertinent in instances of humanitarian response, which demand the rapid and effective mobilization and delivery of funds, materials, and workers from organizations of various sizes and affiliations. The responses were somewhat mixed regarding the importance and/or lack of coordination on issues of development more generally.

For example, the Archbishop of Canterbury's office argued for the importance of global as well as local networks in coordinating efforts at all levels of the development spectrum. However, FELM did not share the same level of concern, noting that the current discussion of coordination issues is "perhaps overstated" given their focus on "the poorest of the poor," where "there is rarely, if ever, true incidence of overlapping with other organizations."

Survey responses cited several coordinating bodies that their organizations either belonged to or established. These included the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Action by Churches Together Alliance (ACT Alliance), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), and the Anglican Alliance for Advocacy, Relief and Development (AAARD). Several respondents also stressed the importance of coordinating with local governments and external financing partners, such as Oxfam and the Gates Foundation, needed to improve the engagement of faith-inspired actors as a whole. Besides providing global-level organizations with vital knowledge of local networks, customs and priorities, local/global coordination networks provide local actors with defined avenues to channel suggestions for policy improvement from the grassroots to the international level as well.

Echoing a common theme, several responses highlighted that coordinating with local actors, including governments, is essential.

In the case of the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, these partnerships are largely the products of the global structure of the Church itself, which allows for a mutually beneficial arrangement in which the Archbishop's office "can offer particular technical expertise in a range of development areas and global networking opportunities," while being guided by local priorities on individual projects. FELM's response noted: "coordination with local government is extremely important and sometimes bypassed in the current coordination discussions." As the body eventually taking ownership of any development project, coordination with local government is thus "far more important than coordination among NGOs."

Governments, however, can struggle to understand faith-inspired organizations, and their relevance to development and humanitarian issues; increased understanding, on both sides, is needed.

Donor Relations and Financing Issues

Responses reported mixed experiences in dealing with donors and grant making organizations. These variations tended to be based on whether or not development organizations had established trusting relationships with specific funders – itself no small task. Those organizations that reported strong relationships with funding agencies tended to be large actors with long records of working in the development field, established funding channels, and strong institutional capacities. Many acknowledged the difficulties often faced by smaller, locally-based faith-inspired organizations in securing funding from secular donors, often characterized by, as one respondent described, "issues of cultural insensitivity related to the stereotypes of faith groups" on the part of funders. These challenges are compounded by differences in terminology between the rights-based development paradigm favored by secular actors, and the "faith paradigm," or employing a faith motivation, frequently cited by religious organizations, which

can lead to gaps in communication and, ultimately, mutual suspicion.

The Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury described the funding challenges faced by many faith-inspired development organizations, to which they often offer guidance. The challenge is twofold –negative stereotypes and mistrust of religious actors by the secular development community, related to and often reinforced by differences in the terminology used by the two groups. The Office offers guidance to smaller churches and church agencies that “often involves helping to navigate the real or semantic differences between the faith paradigm for human flourishing and the rights-based development paradigm.”

This semantic divide is exemplary of an additional level of cultural insensitivity in wealthier countries providing much of the development and humanitarian assistance. Many governments and private institutions commonly fail to consider the centrality of religion to the lives of many in poor communities, who experience religion “as a driver of change or as prohibitive, but ... not irrelevant, as the western European paradigm would generally perceive it.”

Others described generally favorable experiences with funding agencies.

FELM, for instance, reported that potentially contentious issues between it and its primary funding partner, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, including the proper use of government funds in the non-religious training of evangelists, or the renovation of church offices, had been resolved amicably through “transparent” discussions. The longstanding relationship between the two institutions, dating the 1970s, was likely a significant factor in the resolution of these issues. Swiss Interchurch Aid, which frequently partners with the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs, reported that its status as a faith-inspired organization can be an asset, allowing it to “access funds from churches that other NGOs can’t.” Still others, such as the European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion (EMISCO) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), reported funding channels to be self-contained within their organization or members of their faith community. World Vision stressed that the global anti-terrorism dialogue in international affairs creates challenges, with suspicions centered on questions about where faith-inspired organizations receive their funding.

The Swiss HEKS Foundation put forth some recommendations to the Swiss government following its diapraxis project. They noted that the extent of financial flows between organizations in partnerships influence the way both parties behave (adding an additional power dimension) and the kind of subjects they discuss. Governments should reflect on the role of financial aspects in relationships when examining collaboration and coordination between and with faith-inspired actors.

Looking to the Future

Organizations offered numerous suggestions for improving the coordination between development organizations of different faiths, as well as between secular and faith-inspired organizations. ***At the top of the list is the need to establish new and better development networks to facilitate coordination and limit project overlap. Potential network-building strategies include targeted grants for projects “implemented through a coalition of faith-based organizations;” the establishment of a common database to include all regional projects, contacts, and funding opportunities; increasing the inclusion***

of faith-inspired development organizations in policy talks at the international and national levels; and studying successful existing partnerships to determine potential methods of replication. This was held to be vital across all regions, although it was argued that there was a particular need for more work to be done on the issues of agriculture and water, while HIV, climate change, and Malaria were pointed to as successful examples of interfaith collaboration. ***Respondents saw a need to emphasize shared values when partner organizations may not share the same faith outlook, and to promote the benefits of organizational and sector wide codes of conduct. They argued in favor of increased training for secular and faith-inspired actors to improve coordination and decrease misunderstandings between the two networks.***

The Swiss HEKS Foundation emphasized the importance, looking forward, of distinguishing between misunderstandings amongst different religions and misunderstandings between a faith oriented approach and a value oriented approach more generally. HEKS, as an organization, is much more value driven than faith driven, referring to Christian values rather than to Christian faith. This can facilitate work with organizations that share similar values but have a different faith or in most cases with secular partners with a different mission reference (Human Rights).

As was repeatedly emphasized across all survey sections, effective partnerships between any two (or more) organizations relies heavily on establishing relationships built on trust – a process for which there is no substitute for exposure over time.

Related to the concept of trust, HEKS stressed that any cooperation between organizations, is overall, between people; understanding who you are working with is equally important as understanding the organization in many cases.

One response noted: “We cannot see any quick-fixes.” It thus can become the role for international bodies to establish networks in which mutual dialogue can take place over extended periods of time. Both faith-inspired and secular respondents stressed the importance of a “value-oriented,” as opposed to a “faith-oriented” dialogue. Emphasizing the values inherent in a faith over specific religious tenets can prevent semantic misunderstandings and potentially allow for a much greater range of suitable partners – both secular and religious – that may espouse the same (or similar) goals and values via differing theological paradigms. In further facilitating the process of trust-building, several pointed to the importance of establishing organizational codes of conduct, which can provide others with a means to better understand the standards an organization holds itself to, prevent misunderstandings, and dispel stereotypes. Several survey responses included the suggestion that a universal code of conduct for faith-inspired development organizations would be a suitable long-term goal.

Some difference in opinion on the importance of training and exchange emerged. Most concurred that these initiatives are useful, on the part of faith-inspired as well as secular actors, who seem to have mutual difficulty in deciphering the language of the other. Just as mainstream development organizations tend to misinterpret or misunderstand terms such as “mission,” there is a substantial lack of “development literacy” on the part of faith-inspired development organizations, particularly those that are locally-based and unfamiliar with international or even country-level funding mechanisms. Several pointed to a larger disconnect between the “developed” and “developing” world as well, in which mainstream development

actors (and perhaps wealthier societies as a whole) fail to consider the importance of religion in the lives of the people they serve. While increased training was seen generally as positive, exchange programs received mixed reviews.

Some, such as FELM, reported positive experiences with exchange programs. Others, however, believed training to be a more effective mechanism, and that exchange programs could be counter-productive without an established level of familiarity, trust, and a shared language. World Vision, while not dismissing the utility of training in specific circumstances, emphasized the effectiveness of joint learning through partnerships and coordination as much more effective. “Face-to-face” learning, after establishing clear standards of transparency and accountability, can be more effective than training in promoting faith/faith and faith/secular cooperation.

Conclusion

Survey respondents – both faith-inspired and secular – offered several insights into the distinctive aspects of faith-inspired development organizations, the challenges and advantages of interfaith, intra-faith, and faith-inspired/secular partnerships, issues of coordination, as well as ways in which such partnerships (and the development field as a whole) can be strengthened and improved. There are significant gaps that hamper effective coordination and cooperation between and among faith-inspired and secular development institutions, though examples of cooperation are increasingly common.

Common themes on faith contributions to development included the ability of faith-inspired organizations to “speak the language” of grassroots networks in developing societies, the importance of emphasizing common values and reducing semantic divides between organizations of different faiths and faith-inspired and secular actors. Respondents also underlined the need for additional networks and opportunities to build trust, mutual understanding, and to improve coordination between organizations.

Survey participants emphasized the capacity of faith-inspired development actors to tap into and “speak the language” of existing grassroots networks in developing regions – frequently religious in nature themselves – to further development and humanitarian goals. Interestingly, they suggested that the ability of faith-inspired organizations to use a “values-based” language (as opposed to the “rights-based” language favored by the secular development community) was a vital asset in bridging the international/local divide, even in cases when grassroots actors may be of a different faith. Apart from language, faith-inspired development actors can touch those aspects of development that fall outside of mainstream industry, including the role of spirituality, compassion, and faith.

Frequently cited challenges to partnerships included common stereotypes and suspicions held by many in the secular development community toward faith-inspired actors. These included assumptions that religious organizations tend to oppose progress, specifically on issues pertaining to the rights of women, children, and sexual minorities, as well as fears of proselytization and suspicions of motive. Stereotypes and suspicions are exacerbated by semantic divides between the two communities. Despite these challenges, most responses highlighted positive experiences in partnering with actors of a different faith outlook, saying that such partnerships improved access to local networks and provided supplemental institutional knowledge and skills. The most commonly cited indicators of successful partnerships, both

within and across divisions of faith, included taking time to establish mutual trust through honest exchanges, and making language choices that emphasize shared values. Coordination was described as particularly vital in responses to humanitarian crises that demanded rapid and effective execution.

Looking to the future, creating coordinating networks across interfaith and faith-inspired/secular divides that provide opportunities and time necessary to establish the mutual trust and understanding necessary to build positive working relationships is essential. Publicized codes of conduct were described as useful in easing suspicion and dispelling stereotypes, and several participants expressed a potential long-term goal of a universal code of conduct for all faith-inspired development organizations. The importance of an inclusive, value-oriented dialogue was stressed, as well as a need for increased training (and experiential knowledge) of secular, as well as faith-inspired development actors to better address the gap between the two communities.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire and background

Questions:

1. Distinctive assets and liabilities of faith-linked and “secular” approaches, internationally and locally based organizations

(for organizations with explicit faith links)

Your organization describes itself as inspired by religious faith. Can you cite examples of situations you have experienced where this faith identification and your faith networks have brought advantages? Disadvantages? We would appreciate examples that are as specific as possible.

Are there particular sectors, places, or issues where your organizational policies or visions statements hold that religion plays, or should play, an especially important role? Can you cite examples?

Can you cite examples where secular development partners and governments should have made greater efforts to engage faith-based organizations/religious leaders and benefits that might have conferred?

Have you observed any stereotypes about faith-based organizations and their work? If so, please provide specific examples of stereotypes you have faced or observed.

What about practical barriers, for example cases where hiring practices or concerns about financing sources, were a source of concern that delayed or prevented action? Can you cite examples where regulations aimed at potential terrorist-linked organizations have distorted programs or contributed to social tensions?

(for those with no explicit faith link)

Are there situations and occasions in which the work of faith-linked organizations that you have witnessed has brought specific benefits? Examples? Specific disadvantages? Examples? Would you emphasize local, cultural dimensions or broader advantages and disadvantages that might link more broadly to the religious nature of organizations?

Are there particular sectors, places, or issues where you think religion plays, or should play, an especially important role? Can you cite examples?

2. Experience with different partnerships

Can you cite examples of deliberate efforts by your organization to work in partnership with organizations identified with a different faith or denomination? Why did your organization engage in such partnerships? Did you view it as a success? Why?

Have you participated in interfaith development or humanitarian activities? Can you cite examples? If so, what faiths were organizations involved identified with? What organizations did you partner with? What prompted the partnership? Around what issue(s) did you collaborate? What were the benefits and the drawbacks, if there are any you can identify?

Did you encounter specific challenges? If so, can you point to any specific characteristics that contributed to challenges (national regulations, faith ties, biases, local concerns, too little knowledge?)

Did a faith/secular partnership lead to changes in program design, strategy, or operational approach? Did you conclude that there were improvements in outcomes, or more costs than benefits?

Has the faith/secular identification of your organization made it more or less difficult to cooperate with secular/faith-linked organizations? How does that apply in practice?

Can you point to features that contribute to an effective faith-secular or faith-faith partnership?

3. Coordination and knowledge issues

Are coordination issues a major concern for your organization? Always, sometimes? Does inadequate knowledge of what others are doing in your areas of activity contribute to problems? OR do you view the discussion of aid coordination as possibly overblown?

Have you been part of deliberate efforts by governments and external financing partners to engage faith-inspired actors in policy planning or practical coordination? How successful or unsuccessful have they been? What are the main missing links and priorities for action?

How, in your experience, does your organization coordinate with others on the ground? Do you belong to specific sector technical groups or steering committees in each country where you work, or in a few countries? Who leads these groups?

4. Donor relations and financing issues

Can you cite positive and less positive aspects of your work with different financing agencies? Has the faith dimension played any identifiable role in the process?

Can you provide illustrations of cultural sensitivity among financing agencies? Of cultural insensitivity?

5. Looking to the Future

What ideas can you suggest for translating the ideals of (jointly) working towards common goals into practice?

Is training needed and if so what kind and for whom? Would exchange programs among organizations be useful?

Are there particular countries where concerted efforts to encourage partnerships among groups with different backgrounds could yield results?

Specific sectors or issues? (for example, water, tuberculosis)

Do you see merit in efforts to define clearer codes of conduct that address religious or cultural dimensions of humanitarian or development work?

How useful and important do you see deliberate efforts to encourage or foster interfaith initiatives in operational situations? Examples?

Are there knowledge gaps that present problems? What are the priority areas where better mapping of organizations could yield benefits?

Where faith-inspired organizations are engaged in advocacy work with governments, donors, and partners, what steps have you witnessed that can ensure that their principles are not biased or do not include any kind of proselytism or preferences and how the positive interfaith action principles are concretely applied.

Appendix 2: Religion and Development – an Interfaith Perspective

Jan Henningsson

Introduction

In addressing the role of religion – specifically interfaith cooperation - in the development context, at least three aspects of the contemporary world should be highlighted by way of introduction:

a) First: as the World Values Survey shows us, a majority of the world’s population seems to identify themselves with a religious tradition or culture – if not as active believers, then at the very least as loyal adherents; details below.

b) Second: for many people building new nation-states in the post-colonial era, religion has come to be regarded as the authentic, indigenous alternative form of nationalism. Faith traditions gradually displaced socialism and other secular ideologies as the basis of common values, both political and socio-cultural.

The independent India that Gandhi envisaged – and successfully fought for – is still a nation torn between the forces of Hindutva (loosely translated as “Hindu Nationalism”), Islam, and secularism. Ayatollah Khomeini may not have anticipated the “Westernized” style among contemporary Iranian youth, nor might Nelson Mandela look happily at his South Africa today. Nevertheless, during their historic struggles, these leaders derived much of their inspiration and authority from the shared values and common pervasive mood of their co-religionists.

There is hardly a better illustration of the link between religion and nation-building than the ongoing (2011-2012) uprisings by Arab peoples. When confessional base organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood establish political parties, the concept of development plays a central role, sometimes in the name, often in the program. Thus, in Egypt, one of the members of the Islamic bloc (an election coalition headed by the Salafi party al-Nour), is the *Construction and Development* Party. Founded as the political wing of the militant organization al-Jamaah al-Islamiyyah, it signals the new attitude, recently adopted by some ultra-conservative Islamic groups, toward democracy and social change.

Another example, in a non-revolutionary context, is the PJD - the Party for *Justice and Development*, the ruling party after the latest (2011) parliamentary elections in Morocco, Justice is another term highlighted by the emerging political movements - both secular and Islamic; indeed a concept closely linked to socio-economic development.

Meditating on the results of the recent - free and fair - parliamentary elections in Arab countries, one may conclude that the victories won by Islamist parties, implies the launching of narrow, confessionalist policies. However, this is not borne out by the party programs, quite the contrary. Witness the UNDP Arab Human Development Reports (2002 -) which initially received a lukewarm response, at best. Now, it appears, these thorough, indigenous analyses of education,

gender equality, and citizenship, serve as a source of information and inspiration for the burgeoning Arab democracies.

c) Third: in the UN family of organizations – and some other interstate fora, such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE – the secular discourse of international law increasingly enters into dialogue with religious actors. Politicians now talk and listen to religious leaders, and the language of urgency and problem-solving meets the language of continuity and values. Committed persons on each side are discovering that there need not be irreconcilable disagreements on issues of human rights and human dignity, nor are the ideals of social cohesion and value-based communities necessarily in contradiction to the ideals of individual emancipation and socio-economic progress.

When Andreas D’Souza, an interfaith theologian⁴, talks about reconciliation, when behavioral scientists talk about social harmony (restoring inter-personal trust), and the researchers at SIPRI⁵ about conflict resolution – are they not all referring to the same human conditions on the ground? Is it not, then, the duty of our international fora to facilitate cross-fertilization and synergies?

Functions filled by religion – descriptive list

Religion is an elusive concept, extremely difficult to define from an outside perspective. In order to understand the global phenomenon of religion, one must listen to voices from the inside. One example is Reverend Carl-Erik Sahlberg, vicar in a down-town Stockholm church, who worked for many years with the outcasts of Swedish society: the alcoholics, drug addicts and prostitutes. However, despite the common goals of religious and secular society in addressing such problems, he was frequently told: “You do a great job. If only you were not so religious!”

How important is religion to people today? One type of answer can be gleaned from the World Values Survey. The WVS is a global network of scientists studying values and their impact on social and political life. To date five waves of surveys, from 1981 to 2007, have been carried out in 97 societies, representing almost 90 percent of the world’s population. A famous summary of the surveys is the Inglehart-Welzel “Cultural Map of the World”, which shows that for peoples in the populous regions of Africa, South Asia, Catholic Europe, Latin America religion is important, whereas for minorities in the world’s population – like the Scandinavian peoples – it is of marginal interest.⁶

Pillars of religion

Religion is a holistic ideology which – in order to remain viable – must provide the faithful with meaning, order, community and liberation. This conceptual way of describing religious phenomena is found in a

⁴ Dr Andreas D’Souza was the Director of the Henry Martyn Institute for Interfaith Reconciliation, Hyderabad, AP, India from 1995 to 2007. I worked with him 1999-2002.

⁵ The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, founded 1966, famous for its yearbook.

⁶ However, if the definition of religion were to focus less on the public sphere and more on private spirituality, statistics might look different.

wealth of scientific literature. Given our particular focus, I propose a slightly different approach, namely that – in the context of development – religion offers visions, methods, and role models.

The third pillar deserves a paper of its own, for despite the all-too-worldly trappings of religious hierarchies and institutions, the world of faith has always brought forth inspiring personalities. Regardless of the authenticity of their saintliness and the historical accuracy of their hagiographies, personalities like St Francis, Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Sulak Sivaraksa, and others continue to inspire people around the globe.

Visions of a better world (like those of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah) are offered by religious narratives. It is important to note, as well, that these narratives are not necessarily transmitted in written form, but just as often through oral traditions. Is there such a thing as “paradise” implemented on earth - a just, sustainable, participatory society? What happens when eschatology becomes incarnate in history, as perceived by many Iranians when Ayatullah Khomeini returned?

Here I shall concentrate on the first pillar, the energizing visions, as expressed by some Christian faith communities.

Christian utopia?

The Christian visions are both immanent and transcendent. What do Christians really mean in praying “Your kingdom come...”? Examples of dynamic interpretations include the revival of social ethics in the Vatican II (1962-65), as well as in the World Council of Churches programs inspired by the UNCTAD 1974 (New International Economic Order), and the “re-discovery of the poor”⁷. Many development-focused Christian movements and programs derived their world view as much from Marxist analyses of oppressive structures as from the Bible. (However, the influence of these theological trends receded after "die Wende" in 1989.)

Liberation theologies, e.g. in Latin America (Gustavo Gutierrez, Oscar Romero), South Africa (Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane), and Palestine (Geris Khoury, Michel Sabbah) offer examples of how faith-based visions can help mobilize popular resistance to oppression. A legacy from these movements is that their theology was community-based rather than person-centered, and that their commitment to liberation is matched only by their passion for justice. “Justice, and only justice” (1988), was the title of Naim Ateek’s famous book in the wake of the first Palestinian Intifada.

Many 20th century Christian intellectuals resuscitated models from the Hebrew Scriptures related to the equal distribution of wealth and the provisions for redistribution, such as the 7th year of grace and the 50th year of jubilee. Some, but not all, also derived inspiration from the New Testament passages about the first Christian congregation and the way they shared everything with one another.⁸

⁷ E.g. in the Bible studies by Julio de Santa Ana.

⁸ It was only later, perhaps in the mid 1980’s, that feminist perspectives were given due weight in this discourse. A trailblazing study was Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, 1982.

After World War I, Mohandas Gandhi said: “I do not judge the Gospel by European’s actions, but I judge Europe according to the Gospel”...

Hard questions

In hindsight: what, at the end of the day, was the role played by religious or political leaders invoking biblical motifs in their struggle for freedom and against poverty? Would it be fair to say that – at least in South Africa and parts of Latin America – the struggle for freedom was successful, whereas the battle for justice is still to be waged properly?

Would it be begging the question to ask whether there was too much focus on the group - the community? Did this mentality risk, first, the emancipation of women (the pretext being not to split the in-group solidarity) and, second, did it confessionalize the group identity, so that individual freedoms of thought and religion were jeopardized? Ambedkar’s India is a case in point. Commenting on these very issues, Gilles Kepel discusses “*citadelles identitaires*”, the danger that people – e.g. in migrant groups or other minorities - are regarded solely in terms of their religious affiliation, and thus denied multiple identities.

The Arab Call for Rationality

Amplified by the ongoing political awakening, some of the strongest and most articulate calls for rationality come from Arabs. Perhaps this is because during the past 40 years, Arab and other Muslim societies have suffered more than others from the onslaught of religious obscurantism. There are, of course, many names for this phenomenon: “fundamentalism” is commonplace, Gilles Kepel talks about *intégrisme*, Radwan al-Sayyed prefers “revivalism”.

When it comes to the attitude towards modern science, the term “obscurantism” is often used to describe the position – and impact – of religious reactionaries. The sorry state of affairs when it comes to production, dissemination, and acquisition of scientific knowledge in most Arab countries has been thoroughly analyzed in the UNDP *Arab Human Development Report 2003*: “Building a Knowledge Society”. Freedom of expression may be a more urgent issue for human and social scientists than those in natural science because of the very nature of the study rather than the nature of the intellectual.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the new Bibliotheca Alexandrina, *Ismail Serageldin* explained to a journalist why “centers of excellence are imperative”, and continued:

What’s more, development requires a culture of science, which has to be promoted. You can’t practice science without certain values: truth, honor, and respect for creativity whatever its source. The culture of science must be open to new ideas and tolerant of diversity; divergent views must be arbitrated according to the system, on the basis of evidence.⁹

⁹ Fatemah Farag “Pushing back the frontiers – interview with Ismail Serageldin”, in *Museion*, Al-Ahram Publications, Cairo, 2002:13.

Breaking taboos and the wall of fear

In Nawal al-Saadawi's book *Breaking the Taboos*, she recounts interaction with a colleague at Duke University, whose anti-capitalist, anti-globalist theory falls short, she argues, when it comes to understanding the malaise of Third World countries such as Egypt¹⁰. Al-Saadawi's argument demonstrates that the battle for rationality in the Muslim world is waged against forces other than capitalist consumerism, ethical nihilism, cultural postmodernism, or hermeneutical deconstructionism. It is, first and foremost, a grass-root struggle for literacy, especially for girls, and basic education to equip people to live and work in today's world.¹¹

Needless to say, these problems have not yet been overcome by the democratic forces now reshaping the Arab world, although new tools such as social media infuse optimism in the revolutionary generation. However powerful the impact of new technologies, one should not underestimate the role of the "old" ether media, especially in regions where literacy is low, and where the spoken word is of paramount importance. In the near-prophetic words of the *Arab Human Development Report 2003*:

Some Arab news satellite channels, notably Al-Arabia, Al-Jazeera, and Al Manar have brought new content and form to the screen by airing free debates. They have thus spurred many Arab ground and satellite channels to provide more space for a diversity of voices and viewpoints and to allow more freedom of expression on political, social and cultural issues usually hidden behind a curtain of silence. These new talk shows [--] have nevertheless raised audience awareness, and could effect a radical change in the Arab public scene in the long run, opening it up to a culture of pluralism and dialogue.¹²

Even during the worst, bloodiest days of the Arab Spring, a revolutionary poem from 1930 by Abulqasim al-Shabiy was often recited by youth on the barricades:

*Idh al-sha'bu yawman arad al-hayat,
fa la budd an yastajib al-qadar
wa la budda lil-layli an yanjali
wa la budda lil-qayd an yankasir*

If, one day, the people want their life
Then destiny must respond
The darkness of night must be dispelled
And the fettering chains must be broken.

Abulqasim al-Shabiy, 1909-1934

¹⁰ Saadawi 2004:35f.

¹¹ For an in-depth discussion of the feminist movement in the Arab world, see e.g. Karam, *A Z Women, Islamisms, and the State: contemporary feminisms in Egypt*, MacMillan, London 1998.

¹² AHDR 2003:76

Asian values

Some, like Lee Kwan Yew, the strong man of Singapore, argue that Asian values – rooted in culture and community - differ radically from Western values, based on the absolute freedom of the individual. But he is challenged in his view by Kim Dae Jung:

“The Confucian [--] teaching is a political philosophy that emphasizes the role of government and stresses the ruling elite's moral obligation to strive to bring about peace under heaven. Public safety, national security, and water and forest management are deemed critical. [--] For the past several hundred years, the world has been dominated by Greek and Judeo-Christian ideas and traditions. Now it is time for the world to turn to China, India, and the rest of Asia for another revolution in ideas. We need to strive for a new democracy that guarantees the right of personal development for all human beings and the wholesome existence of all living things”.¹³

¹³ Kim Dae Jung debating “Asian Values” with Lee Kwan Yew in *Foreign Affairs* 1996.

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