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The Role of Religion in Development Cooperation

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Religion and Development – a Challenging Opportunity

SEMINAR AT SIDA PARTNERSHIP FORUM, HÄRNÖSAND, SWEDEN, APRIL 26 TO 28, 2009, ARRANGED BY THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN, THE SWEDISH MISSION COUNCIL, DIAKONIA AND PMU INTERLIFE

Brief reflections by an outside observer Ingvar Rönnbäck

A seminar on the role of religion in development cooperation, arranged by four Swedish organisations from April 26 to April 28 2009, was held at the Sida Partnership Forum in Härnösand. This was an excellent opportunity for analysis and learning with its almost sixty participants from a variety of organisations, churches and religious communities in Sweden, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East who met to reflect together on religion and development.

The intensive dialogue during these two days made it clear to an outside observer that there was a considerable need for meetings of this kind, especially given the complexity of the subjects under discussion. Religion and development are two different phenomena, but nonetheless they are closely interlinked through history in dynamic interplay at global, regional and local levels. In the light of this, it is strange that the connection between the two is so rarely analysed and discussed.

The organisers (the Church of Sweden, the Swedish Mission Council, Diakonia and PMU InterLife), who are all active in international development cooperation, had drawn up a programme that was kept on course by Kenyan moderator *Dr Agnes Aboum* from TAABCO¹. It provided scope for discussion of a wide range of subjects, both general and thematic, as well as findings from case studies and research while future needs and opportunities were also addressed.

The programme presented the organisers and participants with a real challenge, and the seminar in all likelihood represents the beginnings of a long-term dialogue among development partners whose share common interests but operate in different roles, conditions, capacities and experiences.

A probing exploration of religion and development, where there is a desire to encourage actors and organisations to work together and take active measures to achieve development goals, represents a formidable challenge. This is associated with the complex relationship between religion and society but is also a consequence of globalisation and its manifold aspects.

1 Transforming, Analysing, Accompanying and Building Change Organisation

Part of reality

Many of these difficulties were clarified, stated and analysed at the seminar. This was evident from a number of the introductory analyses by *Jan Henningsson* of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Muhammed Muzzammil Cader*, National Coordinator of the Sri Lankan peace organisation Samadana, *Frank Urbach*, Policy Advisor at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and *Carole Rakodi*, Head of Religions and Development, a British research programme sponsored by DFID,² where religion and development were examined from a variety of perspectives relating to interfaith, Islam and government and research concerns.

However, they all subscribed to the analysis of religion as a phenomenon that it is impossible to ignore in any attempt to understand and influence development. Religion is a part of reality and is viewed by the majority of the world's population as fundamental to personal, social, cultural and economic aspects of life.

It also emerged that we are rapidly leaving the era when the relationship between religion and development was hardly a subject for discussion and study. Various historical reasons were cited for this, including the dominance of the economic and materialistic perspective, the growth of science and secularisation, the dominance of Western perspectives in global development, the privatisation of religious belief and the neglect of this subject by the academic world, to name but a few.

Religion as a social reality and political force became invisible in the world that was shaped by these historical phenomena. When religion was mentioned, it was viewed as something reactionary or doomed to imminent extinction.

However, religion is still visible as a force and an inspiration to a great majority of the world's population. It is also visible in politicians' rhetoric, societal organisation, conflicts and human loyalties, and it has survived its confrontation with science and a secular lifestyle. The question is what kind of religion are we talking about? According to Carole Rakodi, there is a great need for research into religion and development, and she emphasised that there is no proof that religious actors contribute more to development than other actors.

The other speakers also noted the problematic aspects of religion but at the same time they highlighted examples and perspectives that show that religion offers positive opportunities and roles.

Jan Henningsson stressed that religion can provide meaning, structure, community and liberation and called for a discussion of visions, methods and role models that would be of benefit to development. He also cited current and modern historical examples of situations where religion had played a positive role.

Muhammed Muzzammil Cader emphasised, among other things, the necessity of spiritual development as this is a fundamental human need and a dimension which, if neglected, may result in war and destruction.

Frank Ubachs did not defend religion as such but described the activities supported by the Dutch government that provide a variety of actors with opportunities for dialogue, learning and evaluating different alternatives. His message may be stated in the following terms: Religion can be a positive force, and governments can support activities that stimulate dialogue and learning. It is a challenge that possesses inherent problems for both faith-based organisations and official authorities, but it can be done. Perhaps it is even quite necessary to consider religion in politics since religion is a fundamental part of social reality and a phenomenon with global coverage.

Dialogue on four themes

After this introduction, the seminar then devoted itself to a dialogue on four themes that are all crucial to development and which represent a challenge to faith-based organisations and others. The themes discussed were as follows: *conflict and reconciliation, poverty and wealth, democracy and gender equality and climate and development*.

Brief statements on each theme that served as an introduction to group projects were made by *Isaiah Dau* from Sudan, *Ernesto Alayza* from Peru and *Nafisa Gouga D'Souza* and *Beena Sebastian* from India, after which the participants were free to choose the subject that interested them.

These group discussions are described elsewhere in this document but the general impression is that the delegates were deeply committed to discovering how to act from a religious perspective in an encounter with crucial development challenges.

The perspectives presented by the groups can be summarily interpreted as calling into question power, violence, welfare, patriarchy and unsustainable development. The means to realise a “changed world” involved spiritual development, building communities, lifestyle changes, gender-equality measures, networking and advocacy.

These perspectives are broadly in line with those advocated by secular organisations and intellectuals throughout the world, however the difference lies in the fact that the analysis to a certain extent is formulated on the basis of a religious conceptual apparatus and also, most essential in this context, that the religious perspective is also given its obvious place in the wider scheme of things. During the discussions this was expressed both as serious self-scrutiny and also hopeful descriptions of the development potential that the religious perspective is considered to be able to contribute.

In this discussion the attitude was one of cautious curiosity, reflection and mutual respect.

Research, analysis and learning

At the end of the seminar, Frank Ubachs and Carole Radoki were given an opportunity to describe their work and its findings in greater depth in their respective Dutch and British contexts. Once again, they stressed the importance of analysis, learning, research and dialogue within this field of study and described efforts to promote learning.

Both Ubachs and Rakodi clearly showed that the relationship between religion and development is a self-sustaining research area which all development actors must deal with, even if roles, mandates and perspectives are different.

It is easy to understand why they were invited to the seminar and, apart from the fact that they contributed their knowledge, research findings and thinking, they may also be regarded as pioneers in this area. The organisers need support for continued dialogue and for exploration of the relationship between religion and development and consequently need to gain the attention of the Swedish authorities. In this context, the work undertaken in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom sets a good example since the governments of both those countries have shown a great deal of interest in supporting measures to develop both the dialogue and the study of religion and development. It may well be that these two countries are considered more far-sighted and solution-oriented in this respect.

Religion and development is a very relevant issue, not only for faith-based organisations but also for secular groups in society. This fact may motivate governments and public authorities to become involved with this field and support initiatives that aim at the achievement of important development goals. The fact that problems do exist should not be used as an excuse for keeping the relationship between religion and development out of the public arena. In a democratic society, religion and development must be discussed and analysed.

Reflections

When Bo Forsberg from Diakonia and Lena Ingelstam from Sida were given the task of reflecting on the seminar as a whole, these issues were also raised. Lena Ingelstam underlined the importance of faith-based organisations being rooted in democratic values and that they must be able to progress from aid to development.

Bo Forsberg stressed that the seminar represents the start of something that requires further opportunities for dialogue, and went on to speak about the inherent contradictions that the discussion of religion and development reveals. However, he also raised the common, positive values including the idea that all people are created equal and with the same dignity. This is expressed in the general religious rule about treating others as we ourselves would like to be treated. He also emphasised that the marginalised and the oppressed must be at the centre of this commitment.

The Religious Perspective is Always Present

THE MEANING OF RELIGION IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT – AN INTERFAITH PERSPECTIVE

Mr Jan Henningsson, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden.

In his address, Jan Henningsson highlighted three important phenomena that are characteristic of the contemporary world and that are pertinent to the subject of the seminar:

- The majority of the world's population appear to identify themselves by reference to a religious tradition or culture.
- In the construction of new national states in the post-colonial era (from 1919 on), many people regard religion as an authentic and indigenous form of nationalism.
- Within the UN family of organisations and other interstate arenas, politicians are increasingly listening to religious leaders and are thus creating a dialogue between the development of international law and religious thinking.



Jan Henningsson

When answering the question as to the functions that religion fulfils, Jan Henningsson refers to the World Values Survey (WVS), a global network of researchers who study values and their impact on social and political life.

The picture that the WVS presents is dominated by two dimensions that encapsulate the results of their analysis.

The first dimension reflects the relationship between *traditional values* and *secular/rational values* and also the contrast between societies where religion is very important and those where it is unimportant. Many other orientations relate to this scale, for example family relationships, deference to authority, rejection of abortion and many other social phenomena.

The second dimension reflects the relationship between *survival* and *self-expression values*. In places where wealth has accumulated over past generations, survival is taken for granted. Priorities have thus shifted from issues of economic and physical security to subjective well-being, self-expression and the quality of life.

Nearly all industrialised societies have experienced a shift from traditional to secular/rational values while, at the same time, the continuing trend towards a knowledge society has caused a movement away from survival values and towards self-expression values.

Jan Henningsson's view is that this development is related to the polarisation of materialist and post-materialist values.

Those who experience survival as guaranteed and are guided by self-expression values give priority to issues of the environment, tolerance and participation in decision-making.

The situation that arises when these values apply favours societies characterised by interpersonal trust and tolerance.

The Inglehart-Welzel “Cultural Map of the World” shows that a majority of the world’s population belong to the group that is guided by traditional and survival values while a minority e.g. Scandinavians, are secularists/self-expressionists.

Visions, methods and role models

According to Jan Henningsson, religion offers meaning, order, community and liberation, while in a development context it can also contribute *visions, methods* and *role models*.

Visions of a better world, as presented in religious traditions can be, and have been, utilised as a source for striving to achieve better conditions for individuals and societies. Jan Henningsson mentions Latin America, South Africa and Palestine as examples of areas characterised by this orientation. Liberation theology is one example of this. A common feature of many of the thinkers who have shaped these trends is a theology that is community-based rather than person-centred and is driven by a passion for justice.

Jan Henningsson posed the following provocative question:

“If we were to revisit these regions today, how would we evaluate the role played by religious or political leaders evoking motifs from the Bible 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 properly waged?”

Jan Henningsson also cites important examples from other religions and cultural spheres that demonstrate the connection between the religious ideals and their effect on the theory and practice of constructing a society and on development.

When it comes to religion’s provision of *models and method*, Jan Henningsson highlights in particular the problems associated with legislation that flows from religious ethics. Such legislation does tend to become an unfortunate tool for religious majorities to impose their value system on minority groups.

The ability of religion to shape individuals who function as positive role models is regarded by Jan Henningsson as an asset.

“Regardless of the authenticity of their saintliness and the historicity of their hagiographies, personalities like St Francis, Mother Teresa and others continue to inspire.”

Jan Henningsson also makes this provocative point: “We need to give nuances to the concept of the secular so that it encompasses the religious,” and he concludes with the following statement:

“Some of us have lived, or are still living, close to the truly poor. We know that for many of them, it is all about daily bread, about physical and mental survival. Here, the concept of development can seem abstract. Religion is hope and comfort – risky, but sometimes the only dignified alternative.”



New Approaches to the Concept of Development

DEVELOPMENT, RELIGION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION IN DEVELOPMENT

Mr Muhammed Muzzammil Cader

– Moderator and National Coordinator of SAMADANA, Sri Lanka



Muhammed
Muzzammil Cader

Muhammed Muzzammil Cader from Sri Lanka depicts a historical process where both development and religion are dynamic components.

“The concern of colonial rulers with respect to ‘development’ was essentially a process directed at the use of material resources for their own benefit,” he said. “It was only after the Second World War that ‘development’ emerged as a major issue for individual countries and the world as a whole.”

Mr Cader stressed that the concept of “development” has a wide range of meanings within numerous contexts: biology, psychology, construction etc. When development is used for a human society, a country or a people, all these senses are relevant. Development is always about growth, transformation and betterment. It involves both quality and quantity and relates to human and material development.

Mr Cader referred to the UN development strategy and stated that it originally employed an approach that focused on economic growth and then came to focus on social development, equitable income distribution and social justice, although the focus has now shifted to structural adjustment and national policies.

“All these highlight the ingredients and properties of development which are all the ‘good things’ of life that constitute the state of human well-being and take the form of income, health, education, environmental concern, freedom, security and enjoyment of human rights. In short, they include the political, social and economic aspects of life.”

He also stated that the properties that are continuously present in development are:

- *Growth* – primarily a process of increase and expansion
- *Change* – all types of change
- *Improvement* – a qualitative property of development that must be judged in terms of human value systems
- *Indivisibility* – all elements of development are linked to each other. Any one factor that lags behind may disturb the entire process of development.

Religion's image of reality

On the basis of this description of the concept of development, Mr Cader turned his attention to the concept of religion.

"Any discussion of spirituality or religion is incomplete without the presence of God", he states, and he pondered the creation with its superb organisation and immeasurable meaningfulness as evidence of God's existence.

For many years, this picture of reality as shown by religion was, he stated, called into question by science and considered to have been proved to be a hoax.

"However, today scientific opinion has come full circle and we now witness science ready to vindicate God's word," he claimed. "The growth of knowledge has served to clarify and consolidate the truth."

This change has cast new light on the connection between spirituality and development. The mindset that stated that religion was cruel and evil resulted in the development experts quite simply rejecting the idea that it could play any role at all in the development process. The change in this point of view has led to a reappraisal of the role of religion as it has now been realised that all the aspects of development mentioned above are linked to spirituality.

"Without spirituality, the process of widening people's choices in order for them to live a long and healthy life cannot be achieved," says Cader. "It is now felt that the lack of spiritual education means that education leads humanity towards misery and sorrow rather than to a happy life."

According to Mr Cader, this has happened because human beings have not maintained contact with the guidance that religion provides for the stewardship and distribution of the world's resources.

"The basis of human rights is to be found in all spiritual writings and teachings. This has been disregarded, and this is the reason why those who speak about human rights are the same people who infringe them."

"If I may put this in another way: the partial knowledge that we have has to be enhanced by spirituality in order to provide a broader, more extensive and far-reaching outlook in the development process, so that its qualities and properties can be achieved."

Mr Cader claimed that the rebirth of spiritual thinking in development is due in part to the fact that the previous view failed in its effort to combat poverty, inequality and injustice and that religion is now regarded as potentially crucial to the achievement of developmental aims.

"Development starts with people understanding one another, and effective development can take place only if its starting point is the way people perceive the world and their place in it,

and it is striking that the vast majority of the poor are religious.”

Cader stresses that the point of the approach that takes religion into account is not whether faith is seen as “true” or “untrue” but that no matter what form it takes, it constitutes a social and political reality.

“The challenge, then, is to create a new phase of development, this time not based on the experts’ plans, but on social realities; on life as it is actually lived.”



The Resurgence of the Relevance of Religion

THE INTERFACE BETWEEN RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr Frank Ubachs, Policy Advisor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands

The Dutch government is involved in research into, and reflection on, the role of religion in development. Frank Ubachs, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, states that the relevance of religion to people seems to have undergone a revival both in developing countries and in Europe.

“The road to modernisation does not seem to lead to secularism as a matter of course,” he stated.

In his opinion, this changes the view that religion is something that counteracts development, and an image now emerges that is at least supplemented by aspects that enable religion to persist as a part of modernity. This leads Ubachs to ask the following question:

“If religion is not merely part of the past but also part of the future, what is its role in the formation of that future?”

As a historical background to this process, Frank Ubachs stated that the position of power enjoyed by religion in Europe has changed throughout history so that neither churches nor faith-based organisations (FBOs) have any obvious access to power and influence over the political agenda. They must negotiate with governments in order to attempt to influence them.

In the wider world this dualism has become clearer, which means that believers feel that their institutions face competition from the state, or that they are dominated by it.

“This fundamental opposition becomes visible especially in the states that fail to deliver on their promise of services for their citizens, and in all these countries it is religious institutions that step in and provide basic services so that people may survive”, says Frank Ubachs. This occurs regardless of the prevailing religious culture.

“It is this tension, or even competition, that characterizes many endeavours to help people cope with disasters, overcome diseases and build a better life, and it is here that new ways of thinking and working have to be found as to maintain or exacerbate such competition that does not benefit the citizens!”

A knowledge of the contexts

Ubachs is of the opinion that a government, as for example in his own country, must therefore deal with three important questions in this context properly:



Frank Ubachs

- What is the nature of the religious, historical and social contexts?
- What is the nature of the current political actors and their agendas?
- What options are there?

In order to achieve this, it is essential to maintain a dialogue with local people on the ground who possess inside information and/or experience of local circumstances. In this dialogue, the faith-based organisations and the government representatives have different partners and networks, and thus different information. According to Frank Ubachs, both sides would ideally find ways to share these insights with each other and thus increase their common knowledge and consequently be better placed to assess opportunities and risks.

Some years ago, the Dutch government entered into a dialogue with the faith-based organisations, institutionalised in the Knowledge Forum for Religion and Development policy, which explores the importance of religion for the orientation of development policy.

What have been the results of the work of the Forum so far?

The experience and results of the work of the Forum so far have been compiled in a document entitled “Handout – Religion and Development Policy” (www.religie-en-ontwikkeling.nl/publications). This gives an overview of the subject with detailed sections on

- Education
- HIV and Aids
- Religion and conflict
- Ecological sustainability

Last year the Forum decided to address issues at a more political level and requested a meeting with the Minister of Development. This has resulted in annual talks on a specific theme between the Minister and the directors of the organisations involved. In order to ensure that these talks are relevant, the Forum has chosen to select subjects that are close to the Minister’s strategic planning. This year’s theme is “Religion in Fragile States”.

“The most important aspect of this dialogue is that it is not merely an exchange of views but a sincere search for practical approaches that can benefit both parties.”

Reflection is essential

Frank Ubachs considers that when analysing the scope of co-operation between religious organisation and secular donor governments, it is important to determine how the funds relate to purely religious activities. This definition is, however, not entirely simple as supporting the construction of a mosque

or a church may result in people receiving education or gaining access to food.

Another interesting issue is the claim by the FBOs that they are better placed to gain legitimacy and confidence in traditional religious societies than a secular body. When these measures are undertaken with the support of a secular state, it is not unusual for the organisation to stress its non-involvement with purely religious matters, which means that it is thus unable to enjoy this advantage.

“Or,” wondered Ubachs “is there a difference in tone between their discourse with donors and their discourse with recipients?”

He also questions to what extent religious orientation really is an advantage when it represents a tradition that is viewed with suspicion by the target group.

“These remarks are not meant to discredit the work of FBOs,” stresses Frank Ubachs “but are a warning not to be uncritical of the role of religion in development work. It is all a question of context. To be able to act responsibly and successfully, we need information most of all. Both partners – government and NGOs – have access to detailed information from different angles. There is a lot to be gained by working together and sharing this information.”

The next stage in the work of the Forum is to introduce more practical approaches, which will be achieved through two important measures:

- Collaboration between the government analysis system and the organisations’ equivalent operations in studying states affected by conflict or exhibiting stability.
- Study of synergy effects in a given practical context. This involves, in simple terms, inviting all the relevant actors to talks, with the intention of identifying common interests.

“Our role as moderator of dialogue and reconciliation does not clash with our notion of the separation of church and state,” notes Ubachs. “What we do is to acknowledge the influence and legitimacy of the religious actors and the role they play in the struggle for people’s needs.”

“Sometimes there is a very fine line between development and religion, and we constantly have to ask ourselves whether or not we are crossing it. Reflection is therefore essential. We must clarify our objectives and those of our partners. Together we have to discern where cooperation is beneficial and where the limits are. This is the reason for our dialogue with the FBOs.”

A Highly Complex and Exciting Research Topic

THE INTERFACE BETWEEN RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT

Prof. Carole Rakodi, Director of the DFID-sponsored program “Religions and Development (RaD)”, United Kingdom



Carole Rakodi

Professor Carole Rakodi began by giving the historical background to the study of the relationship between religion and development.

“Europe in particular has experienced centuries of struggle for dominance between religions and within them. This convinced people that only secular models for inter-state relations could ensure the benefits of the material welfare created by science and technology.”

This image was reinforced by the obvious backwardness that was seen as characterising countries dominated by other religious traditions and most noticeably Islam. It was in the framework created by this image that the economic perspectives achieved such a pre-eminent position.

“I believe that the present economic dominance that prevails in development work can be traced back to these experiences,” says Carole Rakodi.

This is, according to Prof Rakodi, linked to modernisation theory, the theory that most clearly influenced development during the 1950s and 1960s and even later. It is akin to the colonial view of colonised societies and assumes that social and cultural institutions organised along Western lines would facilitate economic growth and contribute towards an advanced, “modern” society.

Within this development thinking, there was a link to the desire for secularisation that was part of that era and which involved banishing religion to the private sphere and removing it from political power.

In many countries, this placed religion in a sensitive position as, despite everything, it is an alternative source of authority to that of the state and an alternative organisational form. It is thus a potential challenge to the state and the fragile states that grew out of colonisation were rather sensitive to this.

“Thus the role of religion and the religious units in the ‘development industry’ was formulated and developed by Western governments and institutions, whose political systems were all based on some form of secularism and who all had an ambivalent attitude to the question whether religion was a force for good or evil,” claims Rakodi.

Significant actors

Faith-based organisations continue, however, to be very significant development actors although they are not always explicitly recognised as such. Prof Rakodi claims that they themselves fail to make their own religious basis clear.

“And I believe that this applies in particular to organisations in the European context, who maintain relationships with a government and must be cautious about designating themselves as religious.”

However it is, according to Professor Rakodi, very clear that religion has a key role in the lives of millions, and in many societies religious organisations are among the most important social organisations. However, they are frequently hierarchical, patriarchal and against many aspects of social change that are important to those with an interest in development.

“It is also clear that the dominant faith traditions have a global reach, and that the present face of globalisation leads to their reinforcement, their reconstitution, whether we speak about economic globalisation and the spread of consumerism or political globalisation. Either way, they have major implications for the faith traditions. At the same time, the role of religion in public life is being re-assessed. Religion and politics are linked in all sorts of ways, many of them very controversial.”

“What we do not know is exactly *how* these things are important. What this means on the ground and what the implications are. Although for all of you who are practitioners in this field, this is part of your practical experience; this knowledge is not systematic and has not been synthesised so that it can be brought into the development debate.”

Research programme with two main themes

“And this was, in fact, the starting point for our research program, our premise being that both religion and development are very broad concepts with enormous variations and facets.”

The research project collects existing knowledge, develops new knowledge and defines concepts, all to use as a basis for an improved dialogue. The project works in four countries, in three of which, India, Tanzania and Nigeria, at least two of the major faith traditions are found, and where in some respects there have been conflicts between them. The fourth country, Pakistan, has a dominant religion but the western aid donors consider that it is difficult to work there as they do not understand how the country functions.

The research programme has been oriented towards two main themes, of which one involves the relationships between religious values and beliefs, and the other the attitudes, habits and practices of individuals in social groups; in other words “lived religion”.

“This field is especially interesting when one examining the gap between the teachings of religion and how people act in their everyday lives.”

The other theme deals with the societal level and studies the relationships between religious organisations, states and social organisations.

Patterns emerge

What insights has this research produced so far?

One basic precondition is, according to Carole Rakodi, that we are not speaking about two separate spheres when it comes to religion and development. The secular development actors’ assumptions are informed by their, more or less, implicit understanding of what religion is. On the other hand there are religious organisations that engage with some of the secular principles and ideas. In addition, there is a diversity of value systems within both the secular and the religious organisations. It is in this complex context that research reveals the emergence of certain patterns.

Professor Rakodi states that the role of religion in society is much contested both within the faith traditions and by non-believers. In all the main faith traditions we see this conflict between “the moderates”, the established denominations/congregations and schools of thought, and “the radicals” who in many of the faith traditions express themselves through some form of revivalist movement. However, within these radical forces there are also different directions e.g. within Islam, which has both a current that stresses personal religious development in order to become “a better Muslim” and a politically-oriented radical current that wishes to achieve political power.

A second trend is the overall growth, apparently, of the major world religions, even if certain regions go against that trend, Europe being the most obvious. At the same time, traditional beliefs show a decline, which benefits the major religions.

A third trend is one of religious conversion.

“This is not only in response to what you might call a spiritual awakening but also to escape social exclusion and to foster a sense of identity and dignity,” says Carole Rakodi, who gives the example of India where lower caste groups are converting to Christianity and Buddhism.

A fourth trend demonstrated in research results is that religion appears to have become more important when people define and express their identity, and it has also become more prominent in the public sphere. Professor Rakodi is of the opinion that religion is first of all a source of identity and that this trend means that the feeling of national identity that post-colonial regimes have tried very hard to construct has been

ruptured in certain cases by the emergence or resurgence of religious identities, which seems to be happening in both India and Nigeria.

Religion and politics

“This brings me to the link between religion and politics,” says Prof Rakodi, “because religion has always been used instrumentally in politics.” She states that a current trend is that the frequency of the instrumental use of religion in politics seems to have increased in recent years.

“And if that continues this can potentially add to the strengthening of religious identity and undermine other kinds of cross-cutting ties between people i.e. nationality or class. And there is some concern that, as these trends unfold, it will make it more difficult for poor people to seek a common cause as their religious identity will be more strongly mobilised than their identity as a deprived group.

A clear example of the greater role of religion in politics is the Muslim view that governance should be in the form of Sharia law. This leads to a general Islamisation as the parties with a different orientation make efforts in the political debate to show that their policy has qualities that are compatible with these religious requirements.

“So what seems to happen is that Islamisation reinforces the role of religion in the public sphere, even when this is not supported by many Muslims.”

Contrary trends

However, Carole Rakodi stresses that contrary trends can be also be observed where religion is mobilised to bridge social gaps and, for example, in conflict resolution.

She also states that the use of religion for political purposes sometimes backfires, when people see that the religious regimes cannot deliver good governance and improved well-being.

A further area where the trends relate to development issues is the relationship between religion and economic development, where Professor Rakodi relates that it appears that a reward for hard work is generally viewed in religion as justified provided that it is used well. Prosperity and wealth are seen as a gift from God and as a reward for religious observance. This seems, in several religious traditions, to de-emphasise the *means* of acquiring wealth which in certain cases can favour the use of dubious means e.g. corruption.

Carole Rakodi also reflects on the services that religious organisations provide in collaboration with states and how these religious values can affect services in supposedly secular states.

“This also leads to a mirror image of this effect, where we can ask about the influence of states on religious providers and

particularly when they receive funds from the government's coffers."

A final subject that Professor Rakodi touches briefly on is gender issues including an example from Nigeria where religious leaders opposed a proposal at national level from the women's movement, while religious organisations in one of the states were working for very progressive legislation in the same field.

This brought her back to one of the fundamental features of both the real meeting between development and religion and the study of this topic, which is that it is a highly complex area with many aspects and contradictions.



Discussing poverty

INTRODUCTION

Ernesto Alayza, Bartolomé de las Casas Institute, Peru

In his brief introduction to the group discussions, Ernesto Alayza paints a sombre picture of the iron grip of global poverty.

“We have witnessed four decades of development and plentiful resources, wonderful technology and economic advancement, but despite the efforts of the international community, we now see an increasing number of people living in poverty.”

Ernesto Alayza defines poverty as a situation where people have no access to the goods and resources required for them to realise their dreams and achieve their goals. In his opinion, these limitations erode the living conditions of both individuals and groups in a manner that results in dehumanisation in both a subjective and an objective sense.

Poverty deprives people of the ability to avail themselves of their legal rights, since reality shows that resources are necessary in the form of professional standing or contacts with powerful people for these rights to be enjoyed. Poor and marginalised people must be very well organised to gain their rights, according to Alayza, which is rarely the case under the prevailing circumstances. In this situation they may fall victim to a charismatic leader who exploits their situation and uses his/her political power to create a populist relationship and turn them into clients.

Alayza states that the situation is rooted in a systematic problem that is self-sustaining and which becomes increasingly distant from its solution for every day that passes. This is a problem for the world as a whole, but it defies the international institutions as, despite all the programmes and campaigns, it has still to be resolved.

This systematic problem was formerly defined as an economic problem with social effects.

“However, today we can consider it a cultural problem with psychosocial consequences. It has very firm foundations that relate to attitudes, mentalities and beliefs.”

Ernesto Alayza advocates the concept of “Option for the Poor”, which is one of the principles of Catholic social teaching. It shapes a way of relating to poverty that is based on individuals assuming responsibility for one another.

“If we believe that everyone should have a life of plenty and that the Earth’s resources are for all, then we must acknowledge poverty as unjust and inhumane.”

GROUP DISCUSSION

In the light of this, one of the groups gathered for discussions based on a number of defined issues.

Initially, discussions revolved around the particular resources that religion can bring to development work and religion's role as a *unifying force* was advocated, as well as its *holistic view of existence*, with a *transcendental perspective* that contributes to a *cross-boundary approach*, *counteracts self-centeredness* and contributes to *explaining things that are difficult to express*. The *eschatological perspective* with its element of *hope* is linked to this. Religious perspectives contribute to people's experience of meaning and provide them with a *frame of reference* that, unlike many other things in today's world, is permanent and provides a firm foundation both forwards and backwards in time.

These spiritually-based resources are supplemented by religion's qualities as a *unifying force with grass-roots contacts* and access to a potential for mass mobilisation which may be able to handle *differences of opinion*, channel financial *donations* and also offer channels for extensive *communication*.

When the issue of the problematic aspects of religion was raised, the answer was brief: The same elements, except their disadvantages. Particular mention was made of the risk that religion claims a *monopoly of the truth* and the path to salvation, and also promotes *exclusionary* arguments. Furthermore, it was also stated that there was often a discrepancy between what religion teaches and how it is actually practised.

The question now arises, in the light of this, as to how religion can exert an influence over poverty reduction and wealth distribution.

This question triggered a lively debate, which went in a new direction when one of the participants expressed the viewpoint that it is not actually poverty that is the problem, attention ought to be switched to problems relating to material wealth. The question is not why certain people are poor but why only certain people have access to wealth.

This viewpoint was supported by the other group members, and the discussions gradually began to focus on changing the lifestyle of the majority of people. Examples were also cited of how religion is sometimes too close to the power base so that does not act on behalf of the poor and how religious organisations contribute to preserving corrupt structures. The question of how Christianity and corruption are linked was posed but no direct answer was given.

A number of group members were keen to return to the question of the focus on wealth rather than poverty and the subject of lifestyle amendment. The statement that there are people who actively choose to whole-heartedly organise their lives according to what they believe is right, while others are unable to break free of their complacency or other ties in the

prevailing situation, prompted one of the participants to repeatedly ask the question “Where is the tipping point where certain people make this courageous choice?” One of the examples was taken from the former Yugoslavia where people refused to accept that their neighbours should now be viewed as enemies.

The group also discussed the challenges that accompany the encounter between religious and secular actors in development work. In a self-critical and provocative manner, it stressed the importance of the religious organisations coming to grips with the meaning and role of religion in their operations, especially when they were financed by secular funding.

At the same time, the caution surrounding religious identity was challenged by the question: “What is wrong with a church organisation growing stronger and thus contributing to societal development?”

Another question came as a riposte to the first: “Is this a challenge for the religious organisation, or the government, or Sida?”

The discussion then finally switched to the purpose of the seminar, where a representative of one of the organisers stated:

“We want Sida to be involved in reflecting on these issues. We do not want to focus primarily on what is right and wrong. Good development is always contextual, and we need openings into the discussion about our role and mission, instead of always starting off with the question of whether or not we are engaging in evangelisation. The interesting starting point should instead be ‘Have we contributed towards people gaining their dignity?’ ”

Discussing democracy and gender equality

INTRODUCTION

Beena Sebastian, Chair of the Cultural Academy for Peace, India

Beena Sebastian uses her native country India as a platform for her presentation in which she states that the principle of gender equality is written into the country's constitution, which even empowers the state to adopt positive discrimination measures in favour of women.

She states that this development was inspired by the women's movement together with a wide network of NGOs, including congregational religious groups, with a strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women's concerns.

"However, there is still a wide gap between the goal as stated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand, and the situational reality of the status of women in India on the other hand."

Beena Sebastian claims that prevailing inequality is built on underlying causes that relate to *social and economic structures, a patriarchal system and religious traditions, practices and norms*.

Consequently, the access of women, particularly those belonging to weak and vulnerable groups, to education, health and resources, is inadequate.

"Therefore, they remain largely marginalised, poor and socially excluded."

According to Beena Sebastian, in most socio-cultural communities in India, women's human rights are limited by religious, cultural and traditional practices that are based on patriarchal norms. The rising religious fundamentalism that underpins women's subordination has also meant that issues of culture, religion, ethnic and other forms of identity have become highly politicised.

"When religious texts are interpreted by extremist thinkers and leaders, religious traditions are not always in accordance with human rights, especially those of women."

However, Beena Sebastian has also seen that in India, religious and other social movements have had a positive impact on the development of democracy and equality. In her opinion, very early historical traditions contain expressions of striving for equality, which has been highlighted in the oral folk narrative and in literary and religious scriptural tradition. In later times, this was followed by Christian missionaries who pioneered secular educational institutions that contributed to

the spread of the ideas of equality and liberty. The women's movement, the Constitution, and civil society organisations are other phenomena that have made a positive contribution.

Due to these processes, among others, Beena Sebastian can state that despite everything there are a number of positive changes to report with regard to the situation of women in India. These include:

- An increased number of women in education, including higher and professional education
 - Very good educational performance by women at all levels
 - Women are visible in all spheres of society, even those fields that were male bastions in the past (police, defence, etc)
- “Women are on the move!”

GROUP DISCUSSION

The participants drew the conclusion in the discussion that democracy and traditional religious values are compatible and were of the opinion that democracy and religion must go hand in hand, as religion is a way of life and of thinking and this is an integral part of life as a whole. However, the discussions stress that the scriptures cannot be used as an instruction manual for democracy, as they predate it. For example, the Bible must always be interpreted in the current context if it is to be a positive influence on democracy and equality.

It is clear, however, that not all manifestations of religion lead to democracy, and it is therefore essential to distinguish those elements of religion that support democratisation.

The group discussions also highlighted the fact that, unfortunately, power is also a motive for religious leaders and that in many religious communities there is a hierarchy and a way of behaving that suppresses a questioning attitude and exploits human weakness and ignorance.

Hence, it is a major challenge to distinguish between the lust for power and the drive to help people, which can prove complicated when such behaviour is based on religious conviction, for which reason it is important to address issues of hierarchy and power in religious contexts.

The group considered that equality guidelines must be implemented within the religious communities but this must be done with sensitivity to the actual situation and be supported at grass-roots level. It cannot be taken for granted, for example, that a woman leader can be appointed to a church in a Muslim area, since this may have negative consequences for the local church and the individuals associated with it. The church, however, can advocate equality and serve as a good example so that supporters of religion also strive to emulate these values.

The group also discussed the fact that in many cases religious organisations avoid collaborating with others despite the fact that they have many common intentions. Greater collaboration, it was felt, could contribute to limiting the development of extreme elements while also giving greater force to their common intentions to change.

The access of religions to the attention of large numbers of people, as well as channels and structures for communication and learning, was highlighted as a valuable asset in efforts to develop democracy and equality.

The group also discussed the fact that many religions incorporate elements that are in direct opposition to equality.

“We have to talk about these problems,” was the general view “not hide them. We must unlearn learned behaviour.”

The question of how this was to be achieved was left unresolved for the moment, as an open challenge.

With regard to encounters between religious and secular actors in development work, the following perspectives were highlighted.

- We encounter suspicion from other actors who believe that we are only interested in saving souls and are not as professional as they are.
- We have different frames of reference, so we need to learn each other’s language. A technical aid terminology does not work in a mosque or a church, where it is better to speak about righteousness or justice. If, on the other hand, we use of our own language excessively and in the wrong context, we risk scaring each other away.
- The faith-based organisations tend to believe that their passion will “get the job done” and make the world a better place. We have a lot to learn from secular organisations, for example, Sida, while at the same time we must keep our identity so as to ensure access to our religious resources.
- We are affected by organisations such as Sida in ways that are sometimes beneficial and sometimes detrimental.
- Sida is not grass-roots based, so we are better placed for spreading the message among the people.
- We must also try to develop our own ideas on development and poverty, and not just be dependent on Sida’s definitions.

Discussing conflict and reconciliation

INTRODUCTION

Dr Isaiah M Dau, Sudan Pentecostal Church, Kenya

Starting with three general questions, the Sudanese pastor and doctor, Isaiah M Dau, gives his reflections under the heading *The role of religion in development*.

He gave the following perspective.

Religion and faith affect human life and human/societal development. This is a fact that cannot be ignored; consequently religious influence can be either positive or negative. Dr Dau is of the opinion that religion can be misused or misinterpreted in such a way as to impel conflicts in a negative direction and impede reconciliation and development. According to him, there is nothing in religion that legitimises behaviour, actions and modes of thought that push conflicts in the direction of violence. In one passage, Dr Dau stated the following:

“If religion is abused or misinterpreted, it can create conflict. But if it is used and interpreted correctly, it can effect reconciliation and enhance peace.”

Taking a biblical perspective as our starting point there is, according to Dr Dau, a conflict within man that is expressed in our relationships. It is a conflict with God, with our own selves and therefore with fellow human beings. Peace and reconciliation should be sought on all three levels. Inherent in true reconciliation are justice, truth, confession/repentance, dialogue, forgiveness, reparation, opportunity/second chance, respect, equality, transparency and unity.

The added value of religion is therefore overwhelmingly discernible in the reconciliation package.

All religions work to alleviate human suffering and poverty, a value that Dr Mau claims is shared by secular actors in the field of international development, and it is important to be aware of this similarity.

On the other hand, it is seemingly difficult for western humanitarian organisations to recognise religion as an essential aspect of human life as they desperately try to do the impossible, to separate the secular and the spiritual, while the majority of world religions make no such distinction.

Dr Dau also points out a risk that religious actors can become too focused on the eternal that lies beyond the temporal and the mundane, and hence they too are guilty of making a distinction that is not possible. Consequently, religion becomes irrelevant to the practical efforts for development here and now.

The common challenge to both religious and secular actors is to recognise all human needs without polarising the human being. The early Christian missionaries understood this balance, states Dr Dau, as they established churches, schools and clinics to meet the needs of the heart, the mind and the body.

In order to achieve a positive relationship between religion and development, religious convictions should be acknowledged as an integral aspect of human development. In other words, development is not merely a secular enterprise or project but also a religious one. It thus follows that religious communities and associations should be involved in development projects so that ownership of development is strengthened and ensured.

In acknowledging the significance of religion for development, in the view of Dr Dau, the tension between religion and development should not be overlooked. Religion and development are related but are not the same thing. We must aspire to help them to complement each other so that fundamental human needs are satisfied.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Discussion commenced with the question about what it is in religion that constitutes the motivation for involvement in conflict resolution and reconciliation, and after a short deliberation the answer was summarised as follows:

- Every religion contains a message of peace.
- All religions contain ideas of reconciliation.
- Conflict is part of life and may represent an opportunity.
- What matters is how conflicts are handled and how they can be transformed.
- It is important to accept differences and other people.
- It is important to avoid generalisation and instead employ an enquiring attitude as concerns what applies in each case and in different contexts.

The subsequent discussion indicated that the group participants broadly shared the initial premises presented by Dr Dau in his introductory reflections, and in principle all of them expressed views that defended the core message of religion as one of peace.

Perhaps it was Riad Jarjour, President of the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCD), who expressed the clearest critique of religion as an opponent of development and stated that the secular state could protect people. Religion, in his view, must be reformed.

It was also mentioned that religious leaders had committed the most terrible crimes against other people, having played a

part in genocide and other acts of violence. The fact that such leaders have done what they did diminishes the legitimacy of religion and its ability to play a constructive role in reconciliation and peace. In order to present religion as a positive force, when the instigators of violence, its defenders and sympathisers are so visible, was described as a difficult challenge of major dimensions.

Mention was made of the ability of members of different religions and groups to jointly undertake practical projects, and there is a mode of behaviour that involves listening to and respecting each other without trying to change the other party. Being interested in your own religion and employing a meditative and enquiring approach also provides a great opportunity for learning about somebody else's religion.

The following debate stressed that the struggle for peace and reconciliation must be waged on two fronts: as the internal struggle between good and evil within each person, and as an open social and political struggle against unjust systems that demand change.

The following points summarise the discussion; first a number of positive statements that point out the opportunities:

- Every religion has a commitment to, and a call for, peace.
- All religions have a view of others as their brothers and sisters.
- Every religion has tools and strategies for reconciliation.
- Every religion has tools for learning to know yourself.
- It is important to find peace within yourself.
- Religion is also collective and relational.
- There is a language of reconciliation.

Now some problems that emerged from the discussion:

- The generalisation trap that involves a failure to examine situations and see them in a context.
- Religion may be used as a tool for those who have real power.

Finally, some points that were made as guidance on how religion affects conflict resolution and reconciliation:

- Recognise the struggle that is waged within each person.
- Do not demonise others.
- Religious narratives can provide guidance.
- Religious leaders need to take action for reconciliation and peace.
- Religious organisations and communities can act before violent conflicts break out.
- Examine the context, i.e., the relationship between religion and traditional values.

Discussing climate justice and development

INTRODUCTION

Nafisa Goga D'Soutza, Laya, India

Nafisa Goga D'Souza represents the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change which provides a voice for marginalised groups in the climate change debate.

“We believe in listening to their voices and we recognise that they are not merely victims but also potential agents of change.”

Nafisa Goga D'Souza is of the opinion that the climate issue and the poverty crisis are linked since the imbalance between poor and rich has made it possible for 20% of the world population living in the developed nations to consume 86% of the world's resources, which results in the emissions that contribute to climate change that affects the poor.

“The ecological debt owed by the North to the South is greater than the sums owed by the South to the North,” she states.

The result of the prevailing situation is that the people who are not responsible for the problems are those who are most affected by them. On the basis of this description of reality, Nafisa Goga D'Souza states that the climate crises is a global problem in an unequal world, but one that is being dealt with in a painfully slow process, where only lip service is paid to justice and equity and negotiations are characterised by the various nations blaming each other.

As to the question of the role of the religious institutions, Nafisa Goga D'Souza claims that they can conserve the public conscience in a context of negotiations driven by self-interest and highlight ethics and justice when new solutions are proposed. She also considers that the faith-based organisations and development actors must collaborate extensively since these actors seek to protect the marginalised majority. In her opinion the situation demands a paradigm shift with regard to the current view of development which today is exploitative in character and is based on the assumption that happiness comes from material possessions.

Hence, the challenge for faith-based organisations in the climate debate is to;

- address the real issues of the long-term meaningful survival of the global community
- stick to the big picture and refrain from becoming lost in minor details

- have the courage to address uncomfortable lifestyle issues
- contribute to issues of equity and long-term solutions for a better world staying at the heart of efforts to address climate change.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The entire group accepted Nafisa Goga D'Souza's presentation of climate change as a true description of the factors currently affecting the global eco-system.

When the participants came to give their view on what it is in religion that provides the motivation for involvement in the climate issue, clear differences emerged with regard to approach and priorities. The representatives of the North initially highlighted the possibility of linking the financial crisis to the climate crisis so as to find a way towards a viable green economy. Both Agnes Aboum and Nafisa underlined how marginalised people in the South had already experienced the climate crisis and been affected by it. In their world it is much more tangible, but the rhetoric and language of the negotiations relating to the climate issue is not their language, nor is the financial crisis their first concern. If anything, they are outside the global economy and are viewed as being of no interest due to the "poverty" that is their lot.

However, it soon became clear that the climate crisis does not cause any conflict in the context of religion, where the least common denominator among all the parties is that the climate crisis is global and the hardest hit are the poor. Religions have a common ethical platform in the form of the respect for creation as sacred. They also have resources to proclaim their fundamental values in their meetings with many people in their respective context, as well as an ability to hear people's true stories.

A pattern emerged during the discussion, which was that different continents and countries required different strategies. For example, many African countries need conflict prevention measures with regard to such issues as water; India needs improved wood burning and solar-powered stoves as well as other small-scale solutions, but to a large enough extent to ensure adaptation to the climate crisis and through development find a way out of poverty.

Views and expectations of the nature of faith-based organisations and what they can achieve vary from one country or region to another. For example, the African churches are relatively separate from other civil society organisations and have hierarchical traditions with roots in Western missions. They thus differ from the traditional African religions among the native populations, which are the most marginalised of religious organisations.

In India, by contrast, with its plethora of religions and relatively few Christians, it is difficult to clearly distinguish religious movements from social and grass-roots organisations as they all operate as civil society organisations and are oriented towards participatory democratic influence at local level.

The majority of religious organisations in the South, particularly in the countryside, lack the climate expertise of the West and carry out no lobbying activity. The language in which the climate issue is discussed belongs to the field of the natural sciences and negotiating techniques and is remote from the formulations employed by African or Indian villagers, although their experience of the climate crisis is a common one. The religious organisations, however, have on the whole relatively good resources for making the experiences and language of the poor comprehensible to the politicians responsible for the national climate policy of each country.

Everyone agreed that religion has spiritual power and values as its contribution to the solution of the climate issue. These values are an excellent basis for stimulating an alternative lifestyle and a different view of growth than the one that prevailed during the expansion of the twentieth century. Religious actors can therefore take part in a debate on ethics and climate justice, allow the voices of the poor to be heard and reach those in power. All their voices are needed – Muslims, Hindus, Christians and adherents of traditional religions.

One major problem, according to those representing the perspective of the South in the group, is, however, that people in the North or the West are unwilling to alter their production methods and lifestyle, although poor people in the South have already been touched by the reality of the climate crisis. In this respect, religion has a major role to play by contributing to the dialogue between South and North within the required paradigm shift. A serious problem of credibility is, however, that the Christians are not particularly fitted to speak about climate, in view of the fact that the West has so far controlled major segments of economic growth from within societies characterised by Christian values.

One final conclusion in the discussion was that the clearest challenge to the religious organisations is to re-assert their role as a social movement among people who live simple, everyday lives and to keep their feet on the ground.

With regard to the North, this means in the short term continuing efforts to influence transport and CO₂ emissions and in the long term to sow, in order to reap, a new alternative attitude to how we are to care for Creation i.e. the planet and its fragile eco-system and justly allocate its resources among everyone.

For the South, the climate crisis is primarily an expression of inequality and poverty; developments in India and China

require a green alternative economy that links the financial and climate crises together and provides environmentally friendly alternatives.

The participants in the group discussion view the strength of religion as its ability to give hope. If this is used for the right purpose so that people participate to a greater extent in the existing world here on Earth, then this is a fundamental value to be derived from the role of religion in development cooperation.



Summarising the seminar

At the conclusion, the seminar Moderator Agnes Aboum invited two of the participants to contribute their personal reflections on what the seminar had achieved. These individuals were Lena Ingelstam, Head of Sida's Team *Civil Society* within the *Development Partnerships* Department, and Bo Forsberg from Diakonia.

Lena Ingelstam reflected on the current trend where the concept of aid is being replaced by that of development. In her opinion, this is part of a necessary holistic approach, which takes a very serious view of understanding every single context. In secularised Sweden in particular, it is essential to reflect on the fact that the people that we meet in development cooperation live in a far more religious context than we ourselves do.

"There is a little gap here," she stated, thereby touching on an important issue as to the ethical criteria that are so important to cooperation.

Lena Ingelstam also stressed the importance of the religious organisations in conveying national policy to people at the grass-roots level. Finally, she ventured to challenge the religious organisations that were present.

"When the faith-based organisations take their place in the development arena, they must also make sure that they are based on democratic values! Unfortunately, I know of several such organisations that do not live up to this ideal."

As seminar Moderator Agnes Aboum went on to the next speaker, she took the opportunity to issue two challenges relating to what had been said. First she stressed the importance of taking action prior to the climate meeting in Copenhagen.

"How can we incorporate the experiences and true stories of living individuals into the policy discussions?"

She then challenged the guests from the South to take back to their organisations what had been said and its relevance to their situation. She also passed on the challenges from Lena Ingelstam and Carole Rakodi, among others, relating to the difference between what the religious organisations teach and how they actually behave.

Bo Forsberg praised the seminar which, in his view, had produced quite a few concrete proposals, although the ambition of the organisers was primarily to initiate a discussion on development and religion, as a first step in an important process.

“And this will be followed up. We will contact you with our proposals,” said Bo Forsberg, whose remarks were clearly aimed at the Sida representatives present.

Bo Forsberg highlighted the significance of the discussions to development, as attempts to understand despite all setbacks.

“There is a common understanding,” he stressed. We believe in a God who has the world in his hands. We believe in life, dignity and justice, words that recur irrespective of which religion they are taken from.”



Where do we go from here?

The seminar was planned by a group representing the following organisations: the Church of Sweden, the Swedish Mission Council, Diakonia and PMU InterLife. After the seminar, the group discussed possible steps for follow-up of the findings. Some of the points are presented here:

The importance of religion seems to be increasing in the world. Faith-based organisations have played, and are playing, an important role in development both in Sweden and in an international context. However, the relationship between religion and development needs to be further explored and the findings implemented.

The following are a number of issues concerning religion and development where we would like to see

- a more comprehensive view of development and aid as development is much more than modernisation
- an increased understanding and appreciation of religion as provider of meaning and hope
- a more open and nuanced view of the role of religion in development, even if we are aware that religion is not always part of the solution but may also be part of the problem
- new openings in the discussion about the role and contribution of religion in development
- that religion is not just seen as a private matter; but has a given place in the public sphere
- that we avoid generalisation about religion and development and that we rather seek an understanding in the light of the local context
- that we work harder to identify common interests between religious and secular actors
- that Sida and civil society organizations as a matter of course also invite faith-based organisations and actors to dialogue and participation in development
- that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sida and civil society organisations pay attention to the fact that religion is an important factor in analysing the socio-political context.
- that the neutrality of the secular state is not regarded as an obstacle to creative interaction between the state on the one hand and the religions/civil society on the other

Possible steps to take us there might be

- to distribute the seminar report to people and institutions that we think may be interested in these issues
- to reflect on our role as Christian mission and development organisations in order to explore what we should do to change in the direction indicated above
- to invite and participate in seminars and workshops where the relationship between religion and development can be further discussed, e.g. by means of national one-day seminars together with other frame organisations and Sida officials
- to continue to monitor what is taking place in the field of research and cultivate contacts with RaD, DFID, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development Policy and others
- to engage in dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sida to learn how they understand religion in relation to development and security and what steps they want to take to draw more on the resources of religion

List of participants

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Beena Sebastian, Chairperson, Cultural Academy for Peace, India

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Bo Forsberg, Secretary-General, Diakonia, Sweden

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Sida works according to directives of the Swedish Parliament and Government to reduce poverty in the world, a task that requires cooperation and persistence. Through development cooperation, Sweden assists countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Each country is responsible for its own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge, skills and expertise. This increases the world's prosperity.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

GLOBAL

The importance of religion seems to be increasing in the world. Faith based organizations have played and are playing an important role in development both in Sweden and in international context. In order to explore the relationship between religion and development the Church of Sweden, the Swedish Mission Council, Diakonia and PMU InterLife organized an international seminar on the role of religion in development cooperation together with Sida Partnership Forum. Some of the findings are described in this report.



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