

Assessing the Contribution of Faith-Based Organisations in Development: Mythical or Real?

**Nida Kirmani and Comfort Davis,
Religions and Development Research
Programme, August 22, 2010**

This session will explore:

- What is a faith based organisation?
- How do FBOs contribute to (or hinder) processes of development?
- What is distinctive about FBOs?
- What are the advantages of FBOs versus (secular) NGOs?
- What are the possible challenges of relying on FBOs as development partners?
- What challenges do FBOs face?

What is a Faith-Based Organisation and Why Should We Care about Them?

- Growing interest in FBOs amongst donors because of a general sense that religion has been neglected by development theory and that religion is becoming more important (rise of the Christian Right in the US during the Bush era and post 9/11 interest in/suspicion of religion)
- ‘Refers to religious and religious-based congregations, specialised religious institutions, and registered and unregistered non-profit institutions that have a religious character or mission.’ (Global Health Council, 2005)

Typologies of Faith-Based Organisations

- *Faith-based representative organisations or apex bodies*: rule on doctrinal matters, govern the faithful and represent them vis-à-vis the state or other actors
- *Faith-based charitable or development organisations*: mobilise the faithful in support of the poor and work on issues related to poverty and social exclusion
- *Faith-based socio-political organisations*: organise and mobilise groups on the basis of faith in pursuit of political objectives
- *Faith-based missionary organisations*: attempt to spread the faith by seeking converts
- *Faith-based illegal or terrorist organisations*: engage in illegal practices or in armed struggle or violence justified by faith

○

Clarke (2006)

Opportunities and Risks

Pros

- Closer to the poor
- Address people's spiritual needs
- More sensitive to local needs/cultures
- Include more members of the community
- Less motivated by profit? More sincere
- Are able to appeal to a higher sense of morality/authority

Cons

- Pressure people to convert
- Create or exacerbate divisions amongst groups
- Discourage people from standing up for their rights - Encourage fatalism
- Discriminate against women - Promote a socially conservative view
- Are less accountable
- Remove responsibility from the state

Research on FBOs in Karachi, Pakistan

- Al Khidmat Foundation – welfare wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami
- Alamgir and Saylani Welfare Trusts – urban welfare organisations
- Edhi Trust – largest Pakistani humanitarian organisation
- Behbud Association (Karachi) – women-led charity and development organisation
- Caritas (Karachi and Hyderabad) – Pakistani branch of the international Catholic organisation

Comparison of Organisations

- Spectrum from welfare to development
 - Edhi, Alamgir/Saylani, Al Khidmat focus largely on welfare and relief
 - Behbud and Caritas provide relief and welfare but also include longer-term development projects
- Depend largely on individual, religious donations
 - Behbud receives a limited amount of institutional support
 - Caritas receives funds from other Caritas country offices
- Spectrum of religiosity (Berger 2003)
 - Al Khidmat, Alamgir/Saylani, and Caritas are all explicitly religious
 - Religion is intertwined with Behbud and Edhi's work mostly as a motivating factor for donors

Comparison with 'NGOs'

- Orangi Pilot Project, Indus Resource Network, Thardeep Rural Support Programme, and Sindh Agricultural and Forestry Workers Association
- All are funded through institutional donors
- All four work on long term development rather than welfare although some grew out of emergency situations
- All present themselves as 'secular' or 'non-religious' and are critical of religious-based organisations and charities in general

Conclusions from the Karachi Research

- The term 'FBO' is problematic in the Pakistani context
- The main distinction is between local charities, for which religion is often intertwined with their work, and professional development organisations, which have no apparent relationship with religion
- The more important variable in determining an organisation's orientation and priorities seems to be funding structure rather than religion
- Religion is intertwined with charity but not with 'development'

Questions for discussion:

- **What types of FBOs exist in your country? What kinds of partnerships exist between FBOs/NGOs?**
- **What is distinctive about FBOs as compared with secular NGOs?**
- **What are the potential advantages of working with FBOs as development partners?**
- **What are the potential challenges/risks of partnering with FBOs (or for FBOs themselves) in particular contexts?**