

‘RECLAIMING DEVELOPMENT: ASSESSING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF NON-  
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS TO DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES’

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ENHANCING THE DEVELOPMENT CAPABILITIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY  
ORGANISATIONS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO CHRISTIAN FAITH-  
BASED ORGANISATIONS (CFBOs)

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**1. Introduction**

Within the recent paradigm shift favouring the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as recipients and implementers of development assistance, the paper focuses on the capacities and performance of the diverse group of agencies which can be termed Christian Faith-based Organisations (CFBOs). This group consists primarily of (1) churches, which can be categorised as either denominational or independent, and (2) faith-based non-governmental organisations, amongst which it is useful to distinguish Christian international NGOs (CINGOs) from Christian national NGOs (CNGOs). Their relative strengths and weaknesses in pro-poor development activity are reviewed in the second section of the paper.

The paper goes on to suggest that there is a pressing need for funders and governments to be able to assess and, if judged worthwhile, assist CFBOs in three major knowledge domains if their present highly variable pattern of development performance is to be significantly improved. The three domains, which are reviewed in section 3 of the paper, are:

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Ability to Select and Use Relevant Conceptual and Analytical Frameworks: included here is comprehension of operational concepts such as sustainable development (in its multiple dimensions), pro-poor 'engines' and drivers of economic growth, sequential problem selection, evidence-based best practice and net impact assessment; and useful analytical constructs such as sustainable livelihoods, urban bias, social 'safety nets' and elite capture:

- (1) Familiarity with Participatory Development Processes: These procedures enable intended beneficiaries to contribute local knowledge to the selection and design of interventions in partnership with the CFBOs, and to participate in dialogue concerning strategy, programme and project priorities, resourcing and design features. 'Ownership' and socio-economic 'empowerment' objectives are pursued here, of course;
- (2) Awareness of Potentially Impact-enhancing Interventions and Key Components: 'Development content' knowledge from external sources may be obtained from the experience of both development agencies and communities working in similar contexts located in different areas or countries. Willingness to produce and share reliable information requires prior contacts and investment in communication channels with international coverage.

In the final section, the paper links the present need and opportunities to enhance these knowledge bases to (1) general and specialist professional training of CFBO leadership, and (2) the case for ongoing objective assessment of CFBOs' competence levels and achievements attained from both training programmes and their own evaluated development experience.

## **2. Appropriate Institutions for Pro-poor Development: NGOs, Churches and Networks**

An increased awareness by the main development agencies – international donors and aid-receiving governments – of the potentially enhanced roles of faith-based organisations in pro-poor development is quite recent. In particular, the three volume study by the World Bank – *The Voices of the Poor*<sup>1</sup> – and, follow-up

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<sup>1</sup> Narayan, Deepa (ed.) (2000-2002) *Voices of the Poor*. 3 volumes. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

studies of specific types of development activity carried out by FBOs<sup>2,3</sup>, are raising awareness both amongst very large numbers of FBOs themselves and amongst donors and governments of the possible advantages<sup>4</sup> Primarily, these include:

- (1) The long-term commitment to their members by FBOs; they are likely to remain in place through a variety of difficult circumstances;
- (2) The fact that in poor countries the majority of their membership is likely to consist of the poorest and marginalised;
- (3) The existence of separate intra-country and international links to sister-organisations possessing some funding and expertise-providing capability;
- (4) Christianity and most other world faiths stress a variant of the 'golden rule' (treat others as you yourself wish to be treated) as a guide to social relationships;
- (5) Spiritual and relational experiences can raise the self-regard and confidence of previously excluded poor people, helping them to benefit from new opportunities.

On the other hand, practical action by FBOs may fall well short of their ethical and spiritual ideals. For example,

- (1) 'The neighbour' may be defined in terms of kinship, clan, tribe, race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation and/or faith-based allegiance;
- (2) The religious organisation is ordered hierarchically, with policies and actions initiated in a 'top-down' manner;
- (3) The FBO may be integrated into the political structure of the state, supporting primarily the interests of the elites in society;
- (4) The training of religious leaders usually emphasises theological and ethical issues to the exclusion of applied social and environmental studies.
- (5) Evaluation of impact and identification of best practice by context is rarely achieved;

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<sup>2</sup> Belshaw, D. et al. (eds.) (2001) *Faith in Development: partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa*. Washington D.C.: World Bank/Oxford: Regnum Books International.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, K. and Keough, L. (2004) *Mind, Heart and Soul in the Fight against Poverty*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

<sup>4</sup> The importance of understanding belief systems, religious networks, etc. in African development has been stressed recently; Commission for Africa (2005) *Our Common Interest*; pp. 120-122.

- (6) In post-disaster situations especially, the moral economy inside FBOs as well as in wider society may be damaged to a significant extent;
- (7) The general ethos of the dominant religion may be 'conservative' and anti-reform.

The probability of wide variation in capability and experience in pro-poor development implies that the cooperation of and collaboration with CFBOs will best proceed in a cautious and highly empirical manner. The 'mapping' of what development activity is carried out by CFBOs and other FBOs on a country-by-country basis has hardly begun. Different emphases in the relationships between donors, governments, CFBOs and churches have prevailed at different periods and vary from country to country. In the early post-independence period in Africa and Asia secular governments tended to take over education and health services which had been started and run by CFBOs. But this was not universal, especially in Latin America, while varieties of mixed state/religion arrangements were often preferred elsewhere. By the 1990s in Africa several fiscally stressed governments were requesting churches to take back into their administrations hospitals and schools which had been nationalised earlier.

A common tendency after the early 1980s has been for Christian international NGOs (CINGOs) to expand development work from a basis of relief and reconstruction experience, later coopting national NGOs to execute projects on the ground. The rapid expansion of micro-enterprise development (MED) by Christian agencies from the 1990s onwards has been a case in point<sup>5</sup>.

CINGOs have been able to tap in to secular development agencies' funding, often on the condition that their religious activities are dropped. This enforced separation of CINGOs and CNNGOs from the local churches has been seen as a damaging handicap, causing tension and rivalry within the wider church as well as the suppression of non-material benefits reaching the poor. A few large CINGOs are putting more of their own funding to working directly through churches.

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<sup>5</sup> Lack of counter-factual evaluation of impact (with-without project comparisons), neglect of rural development and poor strategic design are major problems in understanding the real contributions made by MED to poverty reduction.

A relatively rare relationship at present is direct church-to-church aid, usually aid from northern churches proceeding via personal contacts in southern churches. The New Testament narrative – from intra-church relief to inter-church relief and livelihood support (Acts 2, 4, 6; II Corinthians 8 and 9) – suggests this alternative model, especially where the role of the state stressed by the Poverty Reduction Strategy process of the World Bank and the IMF is negated by corruption and/or inadequate capability. Systematic data and evaluative studies from the longer-running projects would be useful.

The ten development case-studies run by FBOs and donors (out of 25 in all, including dialogue and conflict management initiatives) described in the Marshall and Keough reference are summarised in Table 1 below. All ten are single sector based, indicating neglect of sustainable livelihood strategies. Only case-studies No.1 – HIV/AIDS prevention in Uganda – and No.7 in Latin America, by adopting a long-term plan for moving poor bright children into employment via a meritocratic secondary education system, seem likely to make a significant numerical impact on the poverty scene. Even so, more direct impacts via land reform and/or rural credit programmes are neglected.

The case-studies are restricted to collaboration across donor/FBO boundaries. Several are pilot projects which appear to need to achieve greater cost: effectiveness if they are to be successfully replicated. Also, all of them have been located in single sectors, whereas the measurement and reduction of poverty usually requires a more multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary strategy within which to assess options and trade-offs.

The choice of ‘the engine of growth’ is important both for solving poverty directly through increasing sustainable livelihoods and to strengthen the capacity of churches, other FBOs and NNGOs to maintain and even expand their local participatory and empowering roles in poor communities.

Table 1: Case-studies of Selected Development Collaboration between Faith-based Organisations and Development Funders

No.	Country	Sector/Issue	Agencies	Plan/Project	Evaluation	Remarks
1.	Uganda	Health: HIV/AIDS Prevention	Government; Christian and Muslim FBOs	FBO programmes, integrated with Poverty Plan	Multiple measurement	Unique reduction in infection rates in Africa; three policy gaps cited.
2.	Mozambique (Ghana, Burkina Faso)	Health: HIV/AIDS Prevention	Government, WB, USAID, UN/FBO (R.C.)	38 volunteer groups; HIV/AIDS Care	Effects measured	High cost pilot project
3.	13 African Countries	AIDS Orphans	6 INGOs (2 FBOs)	NGOs coordinated by INGOs	None reported	'Nascent initiative'
4.	World Conference: Church Delegates	Health: HIV/AIDS Prevention	CFBO funded 82 countries	Information Exchange	No records, follow-up	Prevention and care focuses
5.	Ghana	Health: Teenage sex	UNFPA/CFBOs, etc.	Pilot for local organ. participation	FPA report M & E training	To be replicated plus income generation
6.	Senegal, Uganda	Health: FGM	UNFPA/women's groups/elders	Local campaigns for change	Effects measured	Bottom-up attitude change
7.	14 Latin American Countries	Education: Slum Children	RCFBO plus secular foundation	Technical plus leadership education in Jesuit schools	Sector and poverty strategies to be integrated	c \$10m p.a. grant from Swiss secular foundation
8.	Kenya, Zanzibar, Uganda	Education: Primary Schools	Muslim FBO	Primary education of Muslims, esp. girls	Teaching monitored but finance insecure	Impact unclear
9.	Mongolia	Natural Environment: Protection	Buddhist FBOs WB/ WWF etc.	Part of 'Religions in Biodiversity' project in 4 countries	Local knowledge collapse problem; missing data	Impact unclear
10.	Uganda	Health: Community Health Clinics	Government and 72 Clinics	Ongoing clinic programme; donor analysts	Statistical test, of 'faith element' in health care	Methodology innovation

Note: Data abstracted from Marshall and Keough (2004) *op. cit.*, pp. 95-201

Finally, assessment of financial sustainability is particularly necessary if the persistent problem of aid dependency is to be mitigated (Streeten cited in Goulet, D. (1996) *Development Ethics*, p.126).

### **3. Knowledge Improvements for CFBOs**

This paper suggests that there is a pressing need for funders and governments to be able to assess and, if judged worthwhile, assist partner CFBOs in three major knowledge domains if their variable pattern of development performance is to be significantly improved. The three identified domains are:

3.1 Ability to Select and Use Relevant Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks: Included here is comprehension of operational concepts such as sustainable development (in its multiple dimensions), pro-poor 'engines' and drivers of economic growth, sequential problem selection, evidence-based best practice and net impact assessment; and useful analytical constructs such as sustainable livelihoods, urban bias, social 'safety nets' and elite capture. Also, the linkages from faith-based ethical principles to practical approaches to poverty reduction and justice enhancement need to be examined, applied where appropriate and carefully assessed in the identification of best practice<sup>6</sup>.

3.2 Familiarity with Participatory Development Processes: These procedures enable intended beneficiaries to contribute local knowledge to the selection and design of interventions in partnership with the CFBOs, and to participate in dialogue concerning strategy, programme and project priorities, resourcing and design features. 'Ownership' and socio-political 'empowerment' objectives are pursued here as important ends in themselves. But local knowledge may be unable to resolve emerging problems which are new to the experience of local people e.g. much of the range of environmental degradation problems associated with population pressure and inflexible technology and enterprise choices. Also, new external opportunities and solutions may be superior to local knowledge options even when the latter are not (yet) problematic. The role of the faith-based community within the larger poor group may be to provide an entrée to external ideas and resources in an otherwise closed situation, to take the lead in

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<sup>6</sup> Belshaw, D. (1997) Socio-economic Theology and Ethical Choice in Contemporary Development Policy: an outline of biblical approaches to social justice and poverty alleviation, *Transformation*, 14, 1, 5-9.

innovating more harmonious relationships and productive activities and/or critique unjust systems.

3.3 Awareness of Potentially Impact-enhancing Interventions and Key Components: This 'development content' knowledge<sup>7</sup> may come from internal and external sources. The latter may be obtained from the experience of both development agencies and other CFBOs working in similar contexts located in different areas or countries. Willingness to produce and share reliable information requires prior contacts and investment in communication channels with national and even international coverage. To bring external knowledge efficiently into the purview of local communities usually requires an initial period of testing, demonstration and sometimes technical training. In rural development situations, especially if post-disaster recovery is involved, timeliness is of the essence. Action research methods can be superior substituting the operator's experience in large part for formal research design or a full-scale project.

The pattern of impact achieved on poverty of various kinds has to become an integral part of the innovation or reform package as it is presented via demonstrations, training and operator-to-operator extension systems. The summary of field experience of this type in evaluation reporting should become a more useful source of learning for communities and their supporting agencies as they work to achieve their development goals.

#### **4. Training and Experience-based Learning for CFBO Leadership**

In this final section, the paper links the present need and opportunities to enhance the three identified knowledge bases to (1) general and specialist professional training of CFBO leadership, and (2) ongoing objective assessment CFBOs' competence levels and achievements attained from both training programmes and their own evaluated development experience.

Historically, the training of CFBO leadership has been split between theological college/seminary courses for church leaders and a mix of professional courses for development workers (education, medicine, engineering, agriculture, etc.) plus

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<sup>7</sup> Belshaw, D. (2005) Sustainable Poverty Reduction: taking income generation seriously in transformational development, *Transformation*, 22, 2.



field experience and, increasingly, a mid-career masters degree in development, with a general or more specialised content (economics, environment, gender, rural development, etc.).

The first attempt to bridge the gulf between 'Theology' and 'Development' was made, I believe, by Professor Duncan Forrester in the form of a graduate master's degree at Edinburgh University. This was launched in the early 1990s. The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies has been running twelve-month taught diploma/masters programmes since 1998, initially in 'Theology and Development' validated by the University of Leeds, followed by 'Mission and Development Practice' validated by the University of Wales. Also, between 1999 and 2003 three cohorts of development managers working for World Vision International were trained via the Leeds programme. These were mounted simultaneously at three centres in Africa – in Ethiopia, Kenya with Uganda, and Tanzania<sup>8</sup>.

These programmes have been assessed by the usual academic arrangements of an external examiner and a validating centre's mentor. Feedback would be considerably strengthened if evaluation follow-through of graduates were applied to their workplaces with communities in the field as well as with churches and NGOs which employ them.

The issue of the widely variable performance of CFBOs (to name but one group) in development work was raised at the beginning of this paper. The competence of a CFBO to carry out its tasks can be inferred from the formal training received by its staff, assuming that this is subject to periodic evaluation, and from the identified impact on poverty and injustice and achieved on the ground. Competence to produce reliable measures of competence is generally lacking in the CFBO community, reflecting in large part weaknesses in identifying sustainable development strategies. Accepting the continuing dependence of a minority of communities on external aid, with no resources left to be rolled onto untouched communities, is depressingly common behaviour. The development competence problem suggests the possible value of professional standards and

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<sup>8</sup> A rival discipline in the market is 'western' business management. This seems less able to grapple with environments which are hostile to that sort of business.

testing. More agency transparency in evaluation and strategic choice, backed up by applied research studies and in country short courses are also needed.

Table 2: Taught courses and coursework options offered at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies for the Diploma and MA degree of the University of Wales, 2001 – 2006.

	<b>Applied Theology/Mission Courses</b>	<b>Joint Courses or Coursework only</b>	<b>Development Studies Courses</b>
Module 1	Mission as Transformation	Integrative Strand 1(CO)	Development Theories and Strategies
Module 2	Bible, Culture and Context	Integrative Strand 2(CO) Religion, State and Society	Development Management and Leadership (E)
Module 3		Independent Studies Integrative Strand 3(CO)	Contextual Analysis
Module 4		Ethics in Development Integrative Strand 4(CO)	Micro-enterprise Development (E) Local Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development (E)
<b>Notes:</b> E: elective course CO: coursework only 1. A 20 000 word dissertation is submitted after the completion of coursework.			Vulnerability: People at Risk (E)

While the Marshall and Keough book usefully opens up a hidden area of development knowledge, the goals of more up-to-date and efficient information exchange suggests more tailor-made internet arrangements. A bulletin or e-journal could be one means of laying bare where the state-of-the-art and the content of the relevant debate are at. Interactive internet exchange is another. Arrangements for inter-CFBO transfer of sensitive information of this type would themselves need to be identified, tested and evaluated. The Institute for Development Research at Oxford is exploring these possibilities. A large and

representative group of corresponding members is another way of helping to professionalise this growing area of activity<sup>9</sup>.

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