Donor engagement with religion and faith-based organisations in development cooperation

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1. INTRODUCTION: FROM TABOO TO TREND

'A development taboo.' This is how the sociologist Kurt Alan ver Beek in 2000 described common attitudes to the role and relevance of religion in development. Analysing development policies and research, he demonstrated that neither development scholars nor practitioners paid much attention to religion in their work; instead they seemed to consciously avoid the topic, reflecting a strongly secularist conception of religion as at best irrelevant, at worst an obstacle to development (2000:31). In recent years, this has changed dramatically, and religion has arguably gone from being a taboo to a trend in development work. Among development practitioners and scholars, we have seen a veritable explosion in conferences, seminars, reports, projects and other initiatives dealing in different ways with the role and relevance of religion in development.

Donor organisations have played a particularly important role in driving this process from ‘estrangement to engagement’ (Clarke and Jennings 2008); in fact some of the very first initiatives on religion and development emerged from donor agencies such as the World Bank, the Dutch Foreign Ministry, DFID and others. However, so far there has been little systematic analysis, whether academic or otherwise, of donor organisations’ engagement.¹ The present report, published by the Danish Network on Religion and Development, seeks to contribute – albeit in a small way – to filling this gap, providing an initial overview of some of the initiatives that have been launched by some of the major donor organisations, including the World Bank, a number of UN agencies, and bilateral donor agencies in Britain, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the US. The report is based on desk studies of available reports, articles, and books as well as interviews with representatives from selected organisations.² Furthermore, one of the report's

¹ But see Clarke (2007, 2013) and Hegertun (2012) for exceptions. Apart from donors, many other development actors have played a role in driving this agenda, including not least the FBOs themselves. Apart from individual FBOs, worth mentioning here are also international networks of FBOs such as the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, CIDSE, the World Council of Churches, and the ACT Alliance.
² Authors have conducted interviews with representatives from the following organisations: Danida (Ulla Næsby Taiwah, Deputy Head, Department for Humanitarian Aid, Civil Society and Advisors, interviewed by telephone
authors was involved in a consultancy assignment commissioned by Swedish SIDA, mapping the involvement of faith-based organisations in the promotion of freedom of religion, and insights gained from that exercise have also informed the present study. Resulting from a one-month consultancy, the present study should not be seen as a comprehensive mapping of all donor initiatives on religion and development, but rather as a preliminary study, sketching out some overall tendencies of the field and presenting illustrative examples of some particularly interesting initiatives. In order to gain in-depth, systematic knowledge of donor involvement in religion and development, more long-term research would be needed, including interviews with more donor representatives, visits to different donor programmes and projects, as well as assessment of programming tools, training modules, guidelines and other material.

Recent years have seen a trend towards an increased focus on freedom of religion and religious minorities in foreign policy and development cooperation. Donor agencies in the US, the Netherlands, Norway, Britain and elsewhere have initiated activities, including guidelines, funds for civil society activities and research programmes on freedom of religion and religious minorities. However, since this topic was covered in the report Religion, Human Rights and Democratization: A Mapping of Faith-Based Organisations and Donor Initiatives (2015), the present report will not deal with it.

The report is divided into five parts: After an introduction to the Danish Network on Religion and Development, the report briefly sketches the history of donor involvement in religion and development, discussing some of the factors that
contributed to the increasing awareness of religion in development and presenting examples of early donor engagement in the topic. The report then presents an analysis of the four main types of donor engagement, namely cooperation with faith-based organisations, research and knowledge building, training and mainstreaming. The fourth part of the report identifies and discusses a number of potential problems and weaknesses in donor engagement with religion, relating these to broader discussions in the field of religion and development. Finally, the report sketches a few concrete ideas as to how the Danish Foreign Ministry can strengthen its engagement with religion and faith-based actors. The report also contains a comprehensive bibliography, presenting an overview of existing academic literature as well as ‘grey literature’ in the form of mappings, case studies, conference reports, policy papers, guidelines and handbooks. Finally, the appendix provides a brief, systematic overview of the donor organisations included in the study, including the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Norwegian (NORAD), the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DMFA), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the British Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), UNAIDS, and the World Bank. The appendix does not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of all religion-related activities of these donors, but merely presents a selection of their most relevant and prominent activities.⁴

⁴ The authors would like to thank members of the Danish Network on Religion and Development for insightful comments, corrections and suggestions to earlier drafts of the report and the appendix, including in particular Filip Buff Pedersen, Birgitte Steiper and Lars Udsholt (Danish Mission Council), Jørgen Thomsen (DanChurchAid), Karen Lauterbach (Center for Africa Studies, University of Copenhagen), Brenda Bartelink (Faculty of Religious Studies and Theology, University of Groeningen) and Jørn Lemvik (Digni, Norway).
2. THE DANISH NETWORK ON RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT

To understand the complex role of religion in development, including not only the considerable contributions that religion can bring to development but also its inherent risks and obstacles, requires faith literacy (James 2009). Seeking to contribute to building such literacy and awareness of the importance of religion in Danish development cooperation, in 2014 a group of Danish faith-based NGOs and experts with interest in the topic established a capacity building initiative on religion and development, funded by Danida through Globalt Fokus. The initiative was formalised as the Network on Religion and Development in June 2016, including a core group of member organizations consisting of the Danish Mission Council’s Development Department, ADRA, DanChurchAid, and Danmission, as well as a broader reference group, including the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Center for Africa Studies, Caritas and Danish Muslim Aid.

Since its establishment, the network has organised a series of seminars on topics related to religion and development, targeting Danish NGOs, the Foreign Ministry, academics, and other actors on the Danish development scene. With these seminars, the network has sought to encourage discussion and analysis of the role of religion in relation to e.g. climate change, humanitarian aid, gender equality, conflict, and politics. More recently, discussions have also centered on the Sustainable Development Goals and the potential role of religion in their implementation. The network has also organised a public course on religion, development and human rights, and is currently planning another course on how faith-based organisations can communicate topics related to religion and development to Danish constituencies. Finally, the Network has published a number of papers, including Religion som et aktiv i udviklingssamarbejdet (Danish Mission Council, 2015), Measuring Tools for Interreligious Dialogue on Peace (Danmission, 2015), and an Annotated bibliography on Religion and Development with an accompanying Guide.

5 The paper is an adjusted translation of the Swedish Mission Council’s publication Religion som tilgång i utvecklingssamarbetet from 2013.
3. DONOR ORGANISATIONS’ SHIFTING VIEWS ON RELIGION: A HISTORICAL VIEW

For many years, narratives of modernisation and secularisation have shaped development theory and practice. Religion was understood as a conservative and traditional force, destined to withdraw and eventually disappear from public life as part of societal progress towards an increasingly modern society, and as such difficult to reconcile with or relate to development’s logic of economic progress and bureaucratic rationalisation. As ver Beek’s aforementioned study (2000) showed, development practitioners did not include religion in their policies and programmes, and development scholars did not write about religion in their books and articles. This all changed around the turn of the millennium, and today there is common agreement that development cooperation needs to take religion into account. An increasing number of researchers have taken up the topic, witnessed by a veritable mushrooming of books and articles on religion and development (Jones and Juul Petersen 2011:1292). Similarly, major donor agencies have issued policies, formulated guidelines and written reports. As a DFID representative notes in an interview for this report: "There has been a change across the whole of the UK government and probably across the UK society, on taking religion more seriously. Within DFID you can see a complete change." Together with the World Bank and the UNFPA, DFID was among the first donors to launch religion-related initiatives, but they have since been followed by many others, as discussed below in the analysis of donor initiatives.

A number of factors facilitated this ‘religious turn’ in the field of development

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\(^6\) Individual members of the network have also published several documents relevant to the field of religion and development. The Danish Mission Council, for instance, has published the anthology Religion og udvikling: Kan tro flytte bjerge? (2015); DanChurchAid contributed to a publication on Rights-based development from a faith-based perspective (2008); and Danmission has conducted evaluations of e.g. interreligious dialogue, to mention only a few examples.
cooperation. First, and most obviously, religion has not disappeared from the public sphere, withdrawing into the private sphere. Instead, public religion has become even more visible, partly prompted by the global rise of a new sort of identity politics. One of the clearest expressions of this was the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, leading to the fall of the secular, US-supported shah and the establishment of an Islamic Republic under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini. There has also been the strengthening of evangelical conservatives as a political force in the US in the 1980s, and more moderate expressions of the significance of religious institutions in democratic transitions in Eastern Europe, Latin America and southern Africa (Jones and Juul Petersen 2011:1292). More recently, movements such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State also testify to the fact that religion still has a significant political and social role in the world (Kastfelt 2015), serving as a strong source of identity, motivation and meaning to many people (Tadros 2010).

Second, parallel to the increasing visibility of political, and sometimes violent, religious movements and groups, the last decades have also seen an increase in the visibility and number of other kinds of religious actors – namely faith-based organisations (FBOs) involved in development and humanitarian aid. Some of the world’s largest international NGOs, including World Vision, Aga Khan Development Network and Catholic Relief Services (part of Caritas Internationalis), are faith-based, and at local and national levels, FBOs often make up a substantial part of civil society. In Africa, for instance, the World Bank estimates that FBOs provide approximately half of the continent’s health and education services (Deneulin and Bano 2009:1). Similarly, in many Middle Eastern countries, Muslim organisations are among the largest and most wide-reaching civil society organisations. Neoliberal initiatives towards decentralisation and privatization, leading to very weak state provisions of welfare in many countries in the south (and the north), have arguably contributed to this growth in faith based organisations, prompting them to fill the gaps that the reduced state spending on welfare and social service created (Clarke
Third, the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington and the ensuing so-called ‘war on terror’ have made religion, in particular Islam, integral to the formulation of foreign and security policy. As Jude Howell and Jeremy Lind observe: “the ‘global war on terror regime’ has contributed towards the increasing securitisation of aid policy and practice” (2009:1279). Several Muslim NGOs have been accused of financing or supporting terrorist networks, leading to the closure of at least a dozen organisations. At the same time Western donors have also intensified their cooperation with ‘moderate’ Muslim NGOs, seeing them as potential bridge-builders in their attempts to reach out to the Muslim world (Jones and Juul Petersen 2011:1293; Juul Petersen 2016).

Finally, shifts in conceptions of ‘development’ also contributed to facilitating a space for increased attention to religion in development cooperation. The past two decades have seen a shift away from classical political economy frameworks towards more heterodox approaches and concepts such as human development, social capital or participation, resulting in what McDuie-Ra and Rees (2010) term ‘an opening of the development space’. One consequence of these developments has been increased attention to religion and religious actors. Reflecting calls for broader conceptions of development, for instance, in the 1990s the World Bank commissioned a large research project called Voices of the Poor (Narayan et al. 2000), gathering information from over 40,000 men and women in 47 countries. One of the most surprising results of the research was that many poor people reported to have more trust in religious institutions than in government institutions. The

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7 Naturally, FBOs are not a new invention; almost all religions encourage their followers to take care of the poor. Catholic orders have been the important providers of health and education services in Latin America and Europe, and Islamic zakat systems have provided economic aid across the Middle East and North Africa, to mention only a few examples. See e.g. Kastfelt (2015) on the history of Christian missionaries in Africa, or Singer (2008) for a history of zakat in Islamic traditions.

8 This conclusion was repeated by, among others, a 2008 Gallup poll in which 82 percent of people in sub-Saharan Africa reported that they had more trust in religious organizations than in other social institutions (Jones and Juul Petersen 2011:1293).
significant value that people in the south put on religion and religious institutions prompted the author to call on FBOs to become “agents of transformation, using their influence to demand better governance and public accountability” (Narayan 2001:47).

All these – and other – factors have contributed to bringing religion on the development agenda. One of the first donor initiatives was the World Bank’s Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics, launched in 1998 by James Wolfensohn, then president of the Bank, together with George Carey, then Archbishop of Canterbury. Calling for ‘a wide-ranging international and national dialogue among faith and development institutions, with the effort to combat world poverty as the central focus,’ Wolfensohn and Carey first organized a series of conferences of donor representatives and faith leaders in London (1998), Washington DC (1999) and Canterbury (2002). In 1999, the World Faiths Development Dialogue was established to support these efforts, seeking to bridge the worlds of faith and secular development by supporting dialogue and conferences, fostering communities of practice, collecting case-studies on faith-based organisations, and promoting a better understanding of religion and development in general.

In the years that followed, other donors took up the call for increased awareness of religion in development. UN agencies such as the World Health Organisation, UNAIDS

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9 Precluding this focus on religion was a focus on culture and cultural sensitivity, spearheaded by, among others, UN agencies. In 1995, the World Commission on Culture and Development launched the report Our Creative Diversity, stating that “Development divorced from its human or cultural context is development without a soul”. Many of the arguments that were put forward in the debate on culture and development are echoed in today’s discussions on religion and its relevance to development: an emphasis on local relevance and contextualisation, the importance of local beliefs, understandings, values and world views and the need for broader conceptions of development than the purely economic.

10 A fourth factor worth mentioning is the recent decades’ migration of refugees and economic migrants to Europe and North America, in many cases and in many ways contributing to increasing visibility of religion in society.

11 After the departure of President Wolfensohn in 2005, however, much of the World Bank’s high-profile interfaith engagement waned, shifting instead towards a more research-focused agenda aimed at measuring faith communities’ contribution to development work, particularly in the areas of health and education. Today, the WFDD is anchored at the Berkley Center for Peace, Religion, and World Affairs at Georgetown University in Washington DC. Check http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/wfdd/publications for further information.
and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) engaged with specific challenges around HIV/AIDS, gender and sexuality (Bartelink 2016:104). Similarly, a number of bilateral donors engaged with the topic in different ways. In 2002, for instance, the Swiss Agency for Development Co-operation (SDC) organised a conference with the title *Religion and Spirituality: A Development Taboo?*, resulting in several publications and followed by a series of workshops with NGOs. In 2005, the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) produced a policy brief recognising the ‘growing interest’ of religion in development and arguing ‘for a more systematic understanding of the role that faiths play in achieving the Millennium Development Goals’ (Jones and Juul Petersen 2011:1295). The year after, in 2006, DFID launched a £3.5 million five-year research programme, *Religions and Development*, hosted by the University of Birmingham, with the objective to produce policy-relevant research on the role of religion in development. In the Netherlands, the Knowledge Forum for Religion and Development Policy was established in 2005, with a view to enhance policy dialogue on religion and development between the Dutch Foreign Ministry and Dutch FBOs (Bartelink 2016:113). Later, the NGO-based Knowledge Centre on Religion and Development continued this cooperation, focusing on issues such as religion and sexuality and freedom of religion in the Dutch development cooperation.

Most recently in 2014 a consultation on religion and development, ‘Donor - UN – Faith (DUF I)’ was held initiated by UNFPA, Digni, University of London and George Washington University. In April 2015 World Bank director Jim Yong Kim gathered religious leaders and FBOs for a common commitment to ‘Ending Extreme Poverty – a Moral and Spiritual Imperative’ as part of the WB’s Faith Initiative and follow up (DUF II). Building on this momentum, in March 2016, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) launched the *International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development* (PaRD) – an intergovernmental knowledge and coordination hub with the aim to “strengthen and institutionalise cooperation between governments, multilateral organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academia, and religious actors working in the
fields of development, peace, interreligious dialogue and humanitarian assistance”.\textsuperscript{12}

In Danish development cooperation, however, there has historically been little explicit focus on religion; religion is not mentioned in strategies, policy papers or programmes and there are no guidelines for cooperation with religious actors. This does not mean, however, that Danida does not cooperate with FBOs.\textsuperscript{13} Many Danish FBOs, including DanChurchAid, Danmission, ADRA, the Danish Mission Council and others, receive financial support from Danida through long-term framework agreements and other kinds of financial partnerships. Furthermore, through Globalt Fokus, Danida indirectly supports the Danish Network on Religion and Development. In recent years, the Danish Arab Partnership Programme has also focused increasingly on religious actors and interreligious dialogue.\textsuperscript{14}
4. DONOR INITIATIVES: COOPERATION, KNOWLEDGE-BUILDING, TRAINING AND MAINSTREAMING

Today, the vast majority of major development donors engage in some sort of activity on religion and development. Somewhat simplified, activities can be divided into four distinct, albeit sometimes overlapping, categories, namely: 1) cooperation with FBOs; 2) knowledge-building, analysis and research; 3) mainstreaming and institutionalization; and 4) capacity-building and training of staff. The following chapter will describe each of these different categories, presenting illustrative examples and cases of each.

4.1 Cooperation with FBOs

The vast majority of donor activities in the area of religion and development fall within the category of FBO cooperation. With the term FBO or faith-based organisation, we refer to non-governmental organisations that constitute themselves with reference to religious discourses, i.e. organisations that define themselves as religious, either by simply referring to religion in their name, or by referring to religious principles, traditions, practices, authorities, figures or concepts in relation to their rationale, activities, staff, funding sources, or target groups.15 While the term can of course include all kinds of faith-based actors, it has primarily been used in relation to the field of development cooperation. The field of development includes a wide range of faith-based actors, from large international NGOs and alliances to local congregations, charities, schools and hospitals, all of

15 The term FBO is not unproblematic, and some – among scholars as well as organisations – are weary of using this term. In some contexts it is problematic to be classified as ‘religious’ or ‘faith-based’. In Egypt, for instance, many are afraid of being associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, something which could result in retaliations from government. Others reject this distinction between secular and religious organisations, considering it to be a Western construction with little relevance in other contexts; as noted by Bouta et al. (2005:6), in many Muslim societies, religion is inseparable from other aspects of life, making it impossible to distinguish between what is faith-based and what is not. And yet others maintain that the term is simply too broad to be meaningful or possible to operationalize (Hegertun 2012:126). Despite these – very relevant – criticisms, the term has gained wide acceptance among organisations and donors, and alternative terms (such as faith-inspired or faith-linked) do not seem to overcome the criticisms. See Tomalin (2012) for a brief history of the term and its use. For analyses of the role of FBOs in development more generally, see G. Clarke and Jennings (2008), G. Clarke (2006), or Bradley (2009).
them engaged either explicitly or implicitly in the provision of development aid to the world’s poor. See the table below for a typology of FBOs.\footnote{Apart from non-governmental organisations, other religious actors also play a potentially important role in development cooperation, including both governmental actors such as ministries for religious affairs, religious advisors and religious courts, and individual religious actors such as local leaders and spiritual guides.}

Table 1: Typology of faith-based organisations\footnote{This is in part inspired by G. Clarke and Jennings’ (2008) typology. However, whereas Clarke and Jennings include the category ‘radical, illegal or terrorist organisations’, we exclude this category, insofar as is not based on organisational characteristics but on ideological characteristics, which do potentially cut across all the above categories. It is, in other words, at least theoretically possible to find radical, illegal and terrorist organisations among all the above-mentioned types of organisations, just like it is possible to find progressive, liberal, moderate or conservative organisations among all the above.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of organisation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congregations</td>
<td>Organised groups of people whose primary purpose is to worship together, including churches, mosques, temples, synagogues etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local associations, charities and networks</td>
<td>Organisations whose main purpose is to collect and distribute religious alms in the local community and carry out charitable work for the poor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political organisations</td>
<td>Organisations whose primary purpose it is to gain - or influence - formal political power.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural organisations</td>
<td>Organisations whose primary purpose is to promote socio-cultural activities such as sports, education, art etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development and humanitarian NGOs</td>
<td>Organisations whose primary purpose is to provide development and humanitarian aid, often international.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missionary organisations</td>
<td>Organisations whose main purpose it is to spread and strengthen their religion by seeking converts and educating members of their religious community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representative councils, organisations, networks and alliances</td>
<td>Organisations whose main purpose is to represent and coordinate between organisations and people belonging to the same religious community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities, schools and research institutes</td>
<td>Institutions whose main purpose is to spread knowledge and research based on religious principles, traditions and texts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Donor cooperation with FBOs takes many different forms. Most common are \textbf{bilateral partnerships and funding}. All donors included in the present overview have established partnerships with FBOs, international as well as local. This kind of cooperation is not new to donors; many have funded FBOs for decades – Norwegian Church Aid, for instance, is one of NORAD’s main NGO partners and has been so for many years. However, what is new is the expectation that such partnerships can
bring something different than e.g. partnerships with secular NGOs and that they should somehow be promoted. Among donors, a number of positive characteristics are associated with FBOs, and there seems to be general consensus on the 'added value' of these organisations, regardless of their internal differences: FBOs are considered to have widespread and long-term presence in even the most remote villages; a high degree of recognition, support and legitimacy in the population; extensive networks and relations; and – not least – an ability to mobilise funds and resources.¹⁸

Several donors have formulated specific guidelines for their partnerships with FBOs, including DFID, UNHCR, UNAIDS and UNDP. Some donors actively encourage FBOs to get involved and apply for funding. A couple of years ago, DFID held a series of workshops directed specifically at Muslim FBOs, offering assistance in their grant application processes. On a larger scale, USAID supports “existing and prospective faith-based and community partners” through its Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI), which is part of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. The organisation is very explicit in its calls to FBOs and their website contains a lot of information on partnerships with FBOs and religious communities. CFBCI aims to provide “a bridge for faith-based and community groups seeking to connect with USAID’s mission, directing them to appropriate points-of-contact within the Agency, offering resources to help guide them through the partnership process, and providing information about new grant opportunities.”¹⁹ As part of its consultations with civil society on the formulation of a new Charter for the Future, BMZ engaged in dialogue with FBOs, summarizing its

¹⁸ There is, however, no systematic research to support these claims. While a number of case studies of individual organisations demonstrate the distinctive and comparative advantage of FBOs in certain contexts and at certain times (e.g. Marshall and van Saanen 2007, Marshall and Keough 2004, Tyndale 2006), there are very few larger, comparative or quantitative assessments of the work of these organisations, allowing for broader generalisations and definitive evaluations of their work. Some FBOs are trying to develop indicators for measuring the role and relevance of religion and religious actors in development, including e.g. World Vision.

¹⁹ See www.usaid.gov/partnership-opportunities/fbci. For more information on the White House Office, see https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp. This approach within USAID can be traced back to the nexus between the Bush administration and the US Christian right that become an important feature of US policy on international development (Clarke 2007). Under President Bush US foreign aid dollars going to faith based groups almost doubled from 10.5 percent of aid in 2001 to 19.9 percent in 2005.
experiences in the text *Respect and protect cultural and religious diversity* which provides "an important basis for the BMZ's further dialogue with religious communities."20

Other donors are not as explicit in their approach and have not initiated any activities aimed specifically at strengthening FBO cooperation. This does not mean that they do not cooperate with FBOs, but rather that they do not want to apply specific criteria to certain organisations. As a representative from SDC notes, emphasising common criteria of professionalism and neutrality: "Faith-based organisation should not be treated as a separate category, they have to fulfil the same quality criteria as any actor in development. It would be wrong to have some separate criteria for faith-based organisations." A Danida representative explains the agency's position: "We recognize that the faith-based organisations can be something quite unique due to their religious support base. But we also remind them that they should remember the neutrality values and the humanitarian principles."

Noting that all Danida's FBO partners are highly professional, she emphasises that Danida cooperates with the FBOs first and foremost because of their professionalism and not because they are religious.

Donors often emphasise **cooperation with local religious leaders** as an important element in their partnerships with FBOs. As noted by the Danida representative, religious leaders "have a special platform to talk about change, to deliver information and to work very locally." Cooperation with religious leaders often takes the form of awareness-raising, capacity-building and training, often with international FBOs as intermediaries. USAID, for instance, has been collaborating with religious leaders for many years. In 2008, the agency partnered with Afghan imams and mullahs to improve the health of women and children, providing training to 288 religious leaders on health care, family planning, and hygiene. During religious services, the imams and mullahs incorporated health messages into their sermons, teaching about child and maternal health in accordance with religious

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While much donor cooperation with religious leaders has traditionally focused on issues such as health and education, more recently donors have started supporting interreligious dialogue and conflict resolution, tackling more controversial issues such as citizenship, religious freedom and pluralism. In particular USAID, NORAD, the Dutch and the Finish development cooperation have focused on these aspects in their cooperation with religious leaders. In the Netherlands, for instance, the DMFA funds the FBO network *Religions for Peace* in its organisation of interfaith councils aimed at de-escalating religious tensions and countering extremism. The Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently funded the development of a global network of religious leaders for peace and conflict resolution, the *Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers*.

In a Danish context, an example is Danmission’s project *Interreligious citizenship education*, supported by Danida under the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP). Through this project, Danish and Lebanese experts and religious leaders have collaborated to produce a handbook on citizenship and religion for use in Lebanese schools. Another successful project is *Leaders for inter-religious understanding (LIU)*, a training programme for managers and opinion leaders from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Denmark, seeking to facilitate dialogue, cultural and religious understanding. The project was highlighted in the recent evaluation report of DAPP as a good example of how projects can establish regional networks promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the region (MFAD 2015). As noted by the Danida representative interviewed for this report: “With DAPP we have a unique possibility. We know that religious leaders respect other religious leaders. A dialogue taking place in a religious room is sometimes worth more than a dialogue in other contexts.”

Some donors have also encouraged broader networks and working groups with

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FBOs. In 2011, DFID formed a *Faith Working Group*, responding to claims by British FBOs that they were being overheard in development discussions. More than 40 representatives of British faith groups, civil society organisations and academics attended a workshop to identify key principles for good partnership between DFID and FBOs. The consultation resulted in a *Faith Partnership Principles Paper*, published in 2012, emphasising transparency, mutual respect and understanding as key to good partnership. The Faith Working Group also established the *Joint Learning Initiative* (JLI),\(^{22}\) involving religious and secular civil society organisations to map the work of FBOs, document their added value and effectiveness, and produce guidance on evaluation of their impact. According to a DFID representative, the Faith Group has been “the driving force for us actually starting to take religion much more seriously within development, and to look at how we can strengthen our relationship with faith based organisations.”

On an international level, recent years have seen the emergence of several broad **coalitions and networks for cooperation**, primarily with international FBOs and high-level religious leaders. Back in 2008, UNFPA launched the *Global Interfaith Network for Population and Development*. In what came to be known as the Istanbul Consensus, UNFPA and its faith-based partners outline their commitment to partnership.\(^ {23}\) In 2009, UNFPA also spearheaded the establishment of the *UN Inter-Agency Task Force*, aimed at mobilising FBOs around the Millennium Development Goals and more broadly encouraging cooperation between donors and FBOs. The members of the Task Force include UN agencies, other donors and FBO representatives. The launch of the Sustainable Development Goals has prompted new international initiatives on cooperation. In April 2015, more than 30 religious leaders and heads of international FBOs, together with the World Bank Group, launched a call to action to end extreme poverty by 2030. Their joint statement *Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative* was released April 9.\(^ {24}\)

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\(^{22}\) For more information on the Joint Learning Initiative see www.jliflc.com

\(^{23}\) See the full report from the Global Forum, including the Istanbul Consensus, at www.unfpa.org/public/op/edit/publications/pid/4501

\(^{24}\) The moral statement can be found here: www.rebelmouse.com/faith2endpoverty/
few months later, BMZ, USAID and DFID in partnership with the JLI organised an international conference on *Religion and Sustainable Development: Building Partnerships to End Extreme Poverty* in Washington, DC. At a donor meeting in September 2015 in Kronenberg, Germany, it was decided to establish an international coordination mechanism on religion and development with the title *International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development* (PaRD). A follow-up conference was held in Berlin in March 2016 at the invitation of BMZ, when the partnership was formalised.

In the wake of the so-called 'war on terror', a number of initiatives aimed specifically at building bridges to Muslim FBOs were initiated. In 2005, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs was initiator to the project *Towards cooperation with Islamic charities in removing unjustified obstacles*, also known as the Montreaux Initiative. The *Humanitarian Forum* is another example. The Forum was established by Islamic Relief’s founder, Hani al-Banna in cooperation with Oxfam and British Red Cross and including a range of Muslim NGOs, Western NGOs and governmental aid agencies. The Forum has organised several workshops and conferences with the aim of "creat[ing] dialogue and understanding between Muslim organisations and their Western and multilateral counterparts.”

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25 For more information on the conference see: http://www.rsdconference2015.org/.
26 In recent years BMZ has become a more active player in the field of religion and development. See more at: http://www.bmz.de/de/themen/religion-und-entwicklung/index.html
27 Since 2005, the initiative has been hosted as part of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva. See Benthall (2014) for further information on this initiative.
28 Members are British Red Cross, DFID, IICO, Islamic Relief, Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, MercyCorps, Muhammadiyah Foundation, National Rural Support Programme, Near East Foundation, Qatar Charity, Qatar Red Crescent Society, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth.
29 For more information on the Humanitarian Forum, see www.humanitarianforum.org. In 2006, for instance, a conference was held in Kuwait, organised by the International Islamic Charitable Organisation and gathering Kuwaiti and Gulf-based NGOs with the purpose of discussing the problems faced by Muslim NGOs after 9.11. In 2009, a workshop brought together Kuwaiti NGOs, representatives of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the British Charity Commission and Islamic Relief in order to discuss capacity-building of local NGOs. Following this workshop, the Forum established a national office in Kuwait, serving as an umbrella organisation for 35 Kuwaiti NGOs. Similar activities have taken place in other countries.
4.2 Research, analysis, and knowledge-building

Many donor initiatives on religion have started with some sort of research or analysis, seeking to build knowledge and raise awareness of the topic. For most donors, the purpose of such initiatives has been to improve their understanding of the contexts in which they work, in recognition of their lack of knowledge of local religious actors, practices and discourses. In some cases, knowledge-building initiatives have also included an inward-looking process of reflection, focusing on donors’ own norms and values (Juul Petersen et al. 2015:42).

Many knowledge-building initiatives have taken the form of conferences, workshops and seminar series. In Switzerland, for instance, cooperation between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Catholic Lenten Fund led to a year-long process of reflection and dialogue on the role of religion in development. As part of this process, a number of reports were published, including the discussion paper, *Role and Significance of Religion and Spirituality in Development Co-operation* (2005), as well as a series of case studies, looking at the role of FBOs and of religion in development work.\(^{30}\) Summing up on the findings from the case studies, *Folgerungen für die Praxis. Methoden und Instrumente*, presents a series of questions to be asked by development staff when working with religious communities and FBOs. In Sweden, SIDA funded a seminar on the role of religion in development cooperation in 2009. The seminar included almost sixty participants from organisations, churches and religious communities in Sweden, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East and resulted in the publication *The Role of Religion in Development Cooperation*, summing up points from the keynote presentations and the discussions from the participants.\(^{31}\) In 2012, Sida co-funded an academic conference on civil society, religion and development, resulting in the

\(^{30}\) At the moment the documents are only available in German (the latest also in French) at www.eda.admin.ch/deza/de/home.html

\(^{31}\) More recently, SIDA took up the topic of religion in one of its Development Talks, a forum for knowledge and debate on global development cooperation. For more information on the seminar see: www.sida.se/Svenska/aktuellt-och-press/development-talks/dt-inbjuningar/religions-role-in-development-cooperation/

A few donors have supported more **long-term academic research and analysis**. Back in the late 1990s, the DMFA initiated the *Muslim Women and Development Action Research Project*, with the aim to gain a better understanding of how Muslim women draw on religious and cultural resources to claim rights to reproductive health and education (Bartelink and Buitelaar 2006). More recently, UNFPA funded a major research project on the relationship between women’s rights, religion and politics from 2007-2009, carried out by the UN Research Institute for Social Development.\(^{32}\) The largest research programme on religion and development to date was the DFID-funded five-year research programme *Religions and Development Research Programme*, anchored at the University of Birmingham, and carried out in cooperation with research institutions in Tanzania, Nigeria, India and Pakistan. Running from 2006 to 2011, the programme resulted in a vast amount of reports, academic articles and policy documents, exploring the relationships between major world religions, development and poverty reduction, with a particular focus on Tanzania, Nigeria, India and Pakistan.

\(^{32}\) For more information on the research project see: www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/projects.nsf/%28httpProjectsForProgrammeArea-en%29/3F3D45E0F8567920C12572B9004180CS?OpenDocument
Finally, a few donors have supported the establishment of more permanent institutions or programmes for knowledge-building on religion and development. One example of such an institution is the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development (KCRD), which was indirectly supported by the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs through its funding to the NGOs ICCO and Cordaid.\(^{33}\) KCRD has produced a number of publications, including academic as well as more practical and policy-oriented ones, and regularly organises conferences, seminars and courses to build knowledge and capacities on religion in development cooperation. Another example is the World Faiths Development Dialogue, now part of Berkeley Center’s Programme on Religion and Global Development. Under the leadership of Katherine Marshall, the programme has hosted numerous global workshops, produced almost 30 reports, mappings and case studies and conducted more than 400 interviews with representatives from FBOs around the world.

4.3 Mainstreaming and institutionalisation

Often, initiatives on religion are spearheaded and driven by dedicated individuals with a personal interest in the topic, as was seen e.g. in the case of the World Bank’s World Faiths Development Dialogue, driven primarily by then president Wolfensohn, or with the Dutch Knowledge Forum for Religion and Development, promoted by the then Minister of Development Van Ardenne (Bartelink 2016:113). Such individual enthusiasm and entrepreneurship is often necessary to kick-start initiatives, but the risk is of course that once the particular individual is no longer in office to ensure continued attention to initiatives, they die out – as has been the case with e.g. the Knowledge Forum. In order for religion to become an integrated, institutionalised part of development cooperation rather than a fragile one-man’s project, it is pertinent to ensure broader organisational ownership and institutionalisation of

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\(^{33}\) In recent years, however, support to Dutch NGOs has been downsized, meaning that the Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development had to close down. The KCRD, which was established around the same time as the Knowledge Forum eventually proved to be more sustainable because it was independent. The KCRD gradually took over the work that the Knowledge Forum had started, engaging in dialogue with policymakers on issues of concern to the Dutch MFA and building up capacities, e.g. through a course on religion and sexuality.
initiatives. The German BMZ, for instance, has set up a task force on values, religion and development with the purpose “to combine the expertise from various units in the German Development Ministry more closely, to better harmonise interventions that are related to this set of issues and combine them into a new overall approach, and to develop new strategies.”

Most tools for mainstreaming and institutionalisation take the form of guidelines for cooperation with FBOs, reflecting an understanding of FBO cooperation as the main component in religion and development work. To mention a few examples: USAID has formulated a U.S. strategy on religious leader and faith community engagement, outlining a set of guidelines for how to cooperate with FBOs. These are further specified in the Rule for Participation by Religious Organizations ensuring that faith-based and community organizations are able to compete fairly for USAID funding, and that USAID programming decisions are based on the program eligibility criteria, without regard to the religious character or affiliation of applicant. DFID’s 2012 Faith Partnership Principles, mentioned above, is another example. More recently, the Swiss SDC published its Folgerungen für die Praxis. Methoden und Instrumente, listing a series of questions to be asked when working with religious communities and FBOs. Several UN agencies have also formulated guidelines for their partnerships with FBOs. Back in 2009, UNFPA published its Guidelines for Engaging Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) as Agents of Change. The same year, UNAIDS presented its Partnership with Faith-based Organizations UNAIDS Strategic Framework, listing the goals, objectives and guiding principles underlying the agency’s partnerships with FBOs. A more recent guide Partnering with Religious Communities for Children was issued in 2012, intended to strengthen partnerships with religious communities and making them more effective.

But the integration of religion into development cooperation is not only about

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35 For more information on the strategy see www.usaid.gov/faith-based-and-community-initiatives/us-strategy
cooperation with FBOs; it is also about more systematically including broader concerns regarding religion in programming tools throughout the whole development cycle – from partnership agreements and project design to evaluation. The need for such mainstreaming has been consistently raised in research, reports and discussions on religion and development; however, so far few donors have systematically engaged in the development of such tools. UNFPA is one of the few donors that has done so. Since 2002, UNFPA has emphasised the integration of what the agency has termed culturally sensitive approaches into its programming efforts. As noted by a high-level UNFPA representative in a 2010 public speech: “We have learned through country experiences that culture matters. And, therefore, we are committed to deliberately, systematically and strategically institutionalize a culturally sensitive approach to development.” The agency has formulated eight principles for its culturally sensitive approach (see text box) and has developed the Culture Lens - a programming tool that “helps policymakers and development practitioners analyse, understand and employ cultural values, assets and structures

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37 www.unfpa.org/press/promoting-international-development-through-cultural-lens
in their planning and programming processes.”

4.4. Capacity-building and training of staff

Finally, a fourth important component in donor initiatives on religion and development is capacity-building and training of staff. As James (2009:1) and others have noted, religion and FBOs are highly complex, and it requires in-depth knowledge and understanding to navigate this field, taking advantage of the considerable contributions that FBOs and religion can bring, but at the same time mitigating the inherent risks in such endeavours. In other words, sound involvement with religion and FBOs requires what some have termed ‘faith literacy’. In the words of a SDC representative (quoted in Dietschy 2008:6):

It is no exaggeration to talk about a kind of religious illiteracy. It is expressed in the fact that many staff members simply have

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A culturally sensitive approach: UNFPA’s 8 principles

**Principle 1** is that cultures are the realities in which development takes place and that people seek religious leaders and institutions for guidance, comfort and support.

**Principle 2** is that people are the products of their culture and also its creators. As such, they are not simply passive receivers but active agents who can reshape cultural values, norms and expressions.

**Principle 3** is that cultures are neither static nor monolithic. Every culture is characterized by diversity, contestability and private and public space for mediation and negotiation and diverse interpretations. This also includes interpretations of religious texts that are made by "men" and I mean "men" and that can be changed by the engagement of both men and women of faith.

**Principle 4** is that cultures have a strong impact on the social sectors and on social relations, but especially on gender power relations.

**Principle 5** is that it is through change from within societies/communities that cultural norms, traditions and expressions are changed.

**Principle 6** is respect for cultural independence and cultural diversity with the acknowledgement that change can be mediated in favour of human rights and gender equality.

**Principle 7** is that cultures and religions share common denominators with universal standards, such as human equality, compassion and tolerance and that their manifestation and/or interpretations can be a force to promote or obstruct human rights.

**Principle 8** is that human rights can be recognized and internalized through a culturally sensitive approach that gives social basis and support to the legal approach and that builds on positive cultural values and religious interpretations that strengthen human rights principles.

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38 See www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Culture_Matter_I.pdf
problems with questions connected in any way to religious theory or practice. They generally prefer to give such subjects a wide berth. This is not necessarily a sign of militant atheism, but rather of awkwardness. They do not have a language in which they can describe and reflect on their own spirituality or that of others.39

Several donors have initiated regular courses on religion to encourage such faith literacy. DFID, for instance, offers staff regular training courses on religion and development with the goal to ensure more focused guidance and talks on religion and development within the organisation. UNFPA has developed an annual training seminar for UN and FBO staff on religion, development and humanitarian relief, based on concrete cases from the field.40 Others offer one-off course on particular topics; the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for instance recently organised a course on religion and sexuality for the Ministry’s policy advisors, aimed at increasing knowledge on religious views on sexuality, and exploring the potential for dialogue between the DMFA and religious actors on this topic.41

39 Recent studies indicate that this lack of knowledge and literacy with regard to religion is widespread in many donor agencies and foreign ministries. The Swedish Mission Council recently published a study of how Swedish embassies integrate freedom of religion and belief in their work, concluding that there was a need for stronger awareness and knowledge of freedom of religion and belief among staff in embassies. The report, How is Freedom of Religion or Belief observed in practice? (2016), can be found here: http://www.missioncouncil.se/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Swedish_embassies_and_FoRB.pdf. An unpublished study conducted by Norwegian Digne among staff in Norway’s Foreign Ministry reached similar conclusions.

40 The European Union’s External Action Service (EEAS) also offers regular courses for staff on the role of religion in foreign policy and development cooperation.

41 The Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recently requested the Finnish Ecumenical Council to provide training for their staff. The Swedish Mission Council is also in the process of developing training material.
5. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Taking into consideration the vast range of initiatives, best practices and experiences presented by donor agencies in the field of religion and development, some general reflections and recommendations for engagement can be formulated.

**Avoid narrowly instrumentalist approaches**

A common criticism of recent donor initiatives on religion and development, often voiced by FBOs, is that many of these initiatives end up instrumentalising religion and FBOs as tools in the enhancement of development cooperation. According to many FBOs, the interest of development donors in their work is purely instrumental, aimed at enhancing existing development approaches and activities rather than radically rethinking them. This is what the Knowledge Center Religion and Development calls an *additive approach*, seeing religion first and foremost as an additive or an 'added value' to sustainable development (Van Wensveen 2011:82). It is about the ways in which religion can be instrumentalised for providing good development, often through FBOs; not more fundamentally about the ways in which religion shapes or can shape the ways in which development is conceptualised.

Donors are criticised for not integrating religion in a more holistic manner and for not paying attention to the meaning and significance of religion beyond its direct relevance for development purposes, but merely focusing on the aspects of religion that can be of use in the implementation of an already well-established conception of development. FBOs are, in this view, included as partners in development cooperation because their organisational and institutional qualities – such as access to local communities, broad networks and capacity to ‘speak the language’ of the poor – make them effective tools in the implementation of development activities, rather than because their religious identity and values bring new perspectives on development.\(^{42}\) Naturally, there is nothing wrong in cooperating with FBOs because

\(^{42}\)Even spiritual activities such as prayer are instrumentalised: One example is the *World Day of Prayer and Action for Children*, organised by UNICEF in cooperation with its faith-based partners, and based on the understanding
of their assumed advantages and ‘added values’. Even FBOs themselves instrumentalise their religion at times – and some of them arguably also instrumentalise development, insofar as they engage in development activities as a way to promote their religion. But it is important to be open to other approaches and understandings than the purely instrumentalist ones, even if this involves a risk of fundamentally challenging well-established truths of the development orthodoxy.

**Introduce a broad understanding of religion**

Closely related to the instrumentalist approach is the fact that development donors often apply a very narrow understanding of religion, equating a focus on religion with religious organisations and institutions, i.e. with FBO cooperation. There is little consideration of religious expressions that exist outside the formal or the organised FBOs – on rituals, traditions, theology, values or beliefs, on that which is not tangible, measurable or rational. As noted by James (2009:9): “Most governments still view development as a secular enterprise. They want to engage with the institutional forms of faith (the religious institution), but remain concerned about the spiritual dimensions of faith (belief in God).” One common reason given for this is the fear of proselytization, which is of course a very real concern among donors, potentially threatening principles of neutrality and impartiality. But another, albeit less explicitly formulated, concern might be the fear that the spiritual element of religion can fundamentally challenge conceptions of development. Contributing to these fears and concerns is also the lack of a common language between secular donors and faith actors on the role of religion in development.

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that “religious leaders and faith-based groups have the moral standing and influence to instill a sense of global solidarity, which can help bring about positive change for children” (www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index_51802.html).

43 Kjell Nordstokke has sought to address this through the concept of ‘religious assets in development’, categorising the assets of FBOs into ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ assets, with the former including e.g. long-term experience, institutions and structures, motivated staff, and economic resources, and the latter including collective memory and faith praxis, traditions and rituals, value systems, relations and sustainability. See Nordstokke (2013) for further information.
Opening up for a broader understanding of religion as something other and more than religious organisations and institutions means opening up for an understanding of religion as potentially relevant to all aspects of life. As noted by Tomalin (2015:218), “the very act of distinguishing between ‘faith-based’ and secular organizations in contexts where religion may permeate almost all aspects of life is arguably an imposition of Christianized or Western understandings of the relationship between the religious and the secular that do not have the same meaning elsewhere”. It also means paying attention to the role of religion within seemingly secular environments. For instance, what does religion mean for staff in secular NGOs, ministries, consultancy firms? And more broadly, what are the underlying values in such environments, if not religious? Secular organisations and institutions are not necessarily more objective or neutral than religious actors; they are also based on very particular sets of norms and values. And it is often in the encounter with religious actors that they are forced to relate more explicitly to these values, engaging in reflections on what they mean to their work.

Understand the complexity of religion

The instrumentalisation of religion and the focus on FBOs as an ‘added value’ in development cooperation inevitably leads to a rather one-sided focus on the positive contributions of religion, reversing earlier times’ one-sided focus on religion as a negative force in development, but sharing the same preconceived, essentialised and static notions of ‘religion’. But religion is both positive and negative, sometimes even at the same time – and it is crucial to make room for this complexity and ambiguity in initiatives on religion and development. As noted by a SDC representative, it is not possible to separate between the potentials and the risks associated with religion in society. Religion has to be understood as a complex social phenomenon, closely intertwined with culture, politics, and economy. There is a need for an approach that not only deals with the positive contributions that

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44 There are a few examples of critical research initiated by donor organisations. Norad has funded some research on discrimination and stigmatisation within religious communities and on the potential conflict between freedom of religion and other rights. The UNFPA has funded a research project on the relationship between women’s rights, religion and politics.
religion can bring to development, but also seeks more broadly to explore and understand what religion actually means in the social contexts where development work is carried out (Lauterbach 2015).

Without careful consideration as to this complexity, the new-found enthusiasm of development organisations to engage with FBOs could, as noted by Clarke and Jennings (2008:65), jeopardise hard-won commitments to e.g. gender equality. For instance, while cooperation with religious leaders certainly brings potential in terms of reaching large audiences, it also entails a risk of endorsing or even strengthening conservative and patriarchal positions on women’s rights (Tomalin 2007; Tadros 2010; Bradley 2011). Similarly, religious leaders may very well have good relations to political leaders, facilitating their ability to influence political agendas, but such political relations may also be highly problematic, raising questions of partiality, representativity and power. Some donor agencies are aware of these dilemmas. As a representative from DFID explained in an interview conducted for this report:

There is a group of people saying that we end up giving strong voices to unrepresentative groups in that a lot of faith leaders don't represent their faith communities. We should be making sure that we reach out to the voices emitted in faith groups that aren't represented by the faith leaders. Different ways of doing this are to identify women's groups within communities or to find alternative faith leaders or youth leaders within communities, but it is very hard.

**Do not overestimate the importance of religion**

As necessary as it is, the increased focus on religion and FBOs also involves certain risks. First and foremost, there is a risk of overlooking other relevant aspects and factors, including ethnicity, nationality, politics, gender or economy. As the scholar Emil de Kadt has noted: "One thing is taking religion seriously, but it becomes problematic when religion is promoted as the only identity of significance, and other aspects are overlooked" (2009:784). Take religious conflicts, for instance. Even
those conflicts that seem to be clearly religious – such as that between the Buddhist majority and the Muslim minority in Burma/Myanmar – are rarely only religious. Conflicts are complex and multifaceted, and religion is most often one among many different components. Focusing solely on religion in such instances risks contributing to polarization rather than solving the conflict.

Second, a focus on religion risks overemphasizing the unifying, or representational, potential of religion. Religious groups and communities are not internally homogeneous. Different groups and individuals within a religion can have very different social, political and religious agendas, and there are always many different, and often competing, fractions within a religious group. Minorities within a religion may feel discriminated against, or even persecuted, just like there are people who do not feel represented at all by the religious authorities. The fact that donors seem to prefer a particular kind of FBOs as cooperation partners further problematises this. The kinds of FBOs that donors work with are often socially moderate, non-evangelising and practicing a kind of religion that emphasises the ethical and moral rather than the political and legal – what the scholar of religion Bruce Lincoln has termed a 'minimalist religiosity' (2002). But it is not necessarily this type of FBOs that enjoy the greatest popular support and legitimacy. In fact, many FBOs report that they are accused of being too 'Western' and 'elitist', turning their backs on more conservative religious traditions and values to promote a 'secular' agenda. This is particularly evident in discussions on e.g. homosexuality and abortion.

Finally, a strong focus on religion also risks locking debates into a religious terminology. Using religious arguments to argue for women’s rights, for instance, is of course better than using religious arguments to argue against women’s rights – but it is nonetheless a kind of argumentation that legitimates religion’s ultimate authority over women's bodies and identity, potentially stigmatizing women who do not consider themselves to be religious or to be religious in different ways.
6. RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT IN DANISH DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: IDEAS FOR THE WAY FORWARD

The Danish Foreign Ministry could benefit from a more systematic approach to religion and religious actors in development cooperation, facilitating the provision of context-sensitive, participatory and locally relevant aid. Naturally, the design of a sustainable and coherent approach would include a much more thorough analysis and evaluation of existing initiatives than the present report has provided; however, based on the above, we may sketch some provisional ideas as to the first steps to be taken.

**Strengthening religious literacy and awareness among staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:** While several staff members in the Ministry as well as abroad have years of experience working with FBOs, others know very little about the role of religion in development, and there is a lack of systematic awareness-raising and knowledge-building on religion in development. To enhance religious literacy among staff in the Foreign Ministry more generally, we suggest the introduction of courses on religion and development for staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including Danish embassies and missions abroad. Such courses could include modules on the role of religion in relation to e.g. gender equality and women's rights, health, conflict resolution, the Sustainable Development Goals, and other topics of particular relevance to Danish development cooperation.

**Mainstreaming of religion in programming tools:** To make sure that knowledge on religion influences programming and partnerships, it is important to ensure systematic integration and mainstreaming into all relevant aspects of Danish development cooperation. This could include e.g. development of tools and guidelines ensuring attention to religion in initial risk and context analysis, programme design, management and monitoring, partner reporting, and evaluations. Another relevant initiative could be the systematic gathering of existing knowledge, experiences and best practices in Danida's prior engagement with
religion and FBOs.

**Enhanced cooperation with FBOs:** While Danida has cooperated with Danish FBOs for decades, there has been little focus on religion in these partnerships. A more active engagement in discussions with FBOs on the role and relevance of religion in development cooperation may facilitate new perspectives and approaches. For instance, the 2016 development strategy presents an obvious opportunity to engage with FBOs, e.g. through the Danish Network for Religion and Development, exploring the ways in which religion might play a role in the implementation of the strategy. Danida might also want to consider more actively engaging with non-Christian FBOs. Currently, Danida’s main FBO partners are Christian, reflecting the religious landscape in Denmark. While many of these engage in partnerships with a very diverse group of organisations, we suggest that Danida also makes a conscious effort to engage more directly with FBOs of other faiths, not only in order to ensure a pluralist and diverse partner group, but also because such partnerships may direct attention to other aspects of the relationship between religion and development than those noted by Christian FBOs.

**Participation in international networks:** Finally, Danida should encourage and support participation in international networks focusing on religion and development, facilitating knowledge-building and exchange of experiences, and contributing to greater synergy and cooperation among donors. Relevant initiatives include first and foremost the newly established PaRD, UNFPA’s Interagency Task Force for Cooperation with Faith-Based Organizations and, not least, the World Bank’s Faith Initiative.
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