



Development and Religion

A Discussion Paper

Table of Contents

Box on Shared Principles

- I Introduction
- II Biblical and theological reflections, and faith-based perspectives on human rights
 - II.1 Historical context
 - II.2 Faith based organisations for development
 - II.3 Core values
 - II.4 Biblical perspectives
 - II.5 Faith based perspectives and human rights
- III What is our view on development?
 - III.1 Christian motivation for acting in development cooperation
 - III.2 Whose development?
 - III.3 Development to what end? The need for a contextual and a holistic approach
- IV Specificities of APRODEV agencies
- V Implications for our organisations
 - V.1 Internal life and internal policies
 - V.1.1 Faith literacy
 - V.1.2 The role of FBOs in facilitating learning processes about religion and development
 - V.1.3 The need for identity and self-reflection
 - V.1.4 Different strategies on how to deal with identity
 - V.2 Religion and external policies
 - V.2.1 Communications
 - V.2.2 Fundraising
 - V.2.3 Partnership
 - V.2.4 Interfaith working
- VI Development and religion: some case studies
 - VI.1 Diapraxis between FBOs from different religious backgrounds
 - VI.2 Churches, FBOs and State unite in peace building in South Mexico
 - VI.3 HIV/AIDS
 - VI.4 Prosperity Gospel teaching
 - VI.5 Conflict analysis

Shared principles

1. APRODEV agencies believe in the dignity, creativity and capability of each and every human being, as we are all created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This conviction permeates all the work we do. Therefore, we engage in development cooperation and humanitarian aid with people and organisations independent of their religion, class, caste, race, gender, sexual orientation or (dis)abilities. Standing with them in solidarity, we support their struggle for a dignified life.
2. The overall objective of our work is to be co-workers with God in the quest towards “life in all its fullness” (John 10:10), realising that this vision can, in the end, only be realised by the grace of God.
3. APRODEV agencies share the view that stewardship, justice and compassion are among the core values of the Christian faith. Our concept of justice is grounded in the righteousness of God who delivers the oppressed from bondage (Exodus 20:2). Justice, in this sense, is a relational concept which goes beyond the “rights” of individuals to include the obligations of communities. Compassion means that priority is given to those most oppressed, excluded, alienated and lacking opportunities. In this, we try to follow Jesus who was sent to bring good news to the poor (Luke 4:18-19). As stewards of God’s creation, we accept our responsibility to promote sustainability and maintain the integrity of the Earth for future generations.
4. We consider the Universal Declaration of Human Rights an inspiring ‘secular analogy’ of these core values and fully support both the classical and the newer generation of socio-economic and cultural human rights. In our daily work, we consider the Rights-Based Approach to development a useful framework in which to situate our policies and activities.
5. APRODEV agencies work for change of unjust structures on every level of societal life; from family relations to global economic structures. Rooted in the Christian belief of the transforming power of love, the unique value of every individual and a particular focus on the poorest of society’s members, we consider democracy and non-violence the most powerful tools for just change. The impulse for real and sustainable change emanates from the ‘grassroots’ of societies. When powerful unjust structures are challenged, we believe this to be the work of the Holy Spirit.
A strategy for change, carried out by many partner organisations of APRODEV agencies, can be formulated in four steps: knowledge and awareness raising, organisation, collective action and advocacy.
6. In acknowledging that religion can be a powerful force for good as well as ill, APRODEV agencies only work with partner organisations, whether religious or non-religious, which subscribe to or are open to dialogue about the political, social, economic and cultural rights; who respect religions besides their own, and accept representatives of other religions as viable partners in dialogue and joint action.
7. APRODEV agencies adhere to development as a comprehensive concept that does not separate physical from spiritual well-being but keeps together the material and spiritual realms of life as an inseparable whole.
8. The various APRODEV agencies relate in different ways to Christian churches as institutions in their national contexts. Yet, all APRODEV agencies consider themselves part of the Church in the broad sense of the word, all remaining open for dialogue and cooperation with people of other faiths and none.
9. APRODEV agencies stand in the Christian tradition as well as in the different unique historical contexts of Europe. Staff members are expected to respect the Christian faith and its ensuing values, and to be willing to learn about the Christian heritage and its relevance for development and humanitarian aid policies in today’s world.
10. APRODEV agencies believe in the power of cooperation to attain a full and dignified life for all. Working together with like-minded people and organisations, in Europe and globally, we can achieve more than we could do alone.

Introduction

The relation between development and religion has become a hot issue during the past ten years or so. For a long time, not much attention was given to the topic as some in the secularising 'West' predicted that the role of religion in society would fade away. At the same time, the topic was (and is) seen as a 'non issue' in many 'Southern' contexts where no separation is made between development and religion as the latter permeates all realms of life and cannot be 'separated out'.

For many in the 'West', the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC constituted a turning point as they started to realise that, for better or for worse, religion does play a role in society – and, for that matter, also with regard to development. This realisation has generated renewed interest in the issue among intellectuals as well as policymakers in the fields of development and humanitarian aid. It also underlines the necessity to include systematic attention to this topic in development studies, policy making and praxis.

At the same time it has become increasingly clear that excluding faith perspectives can significantly diminish the 'development effectiveness' of projects and programmes. The issue of HIV/AIDS is a case in point. The example given in chapter VI.3 shows that the issue of HIV/AIDS can be addressed in a more effective way when religious leaders are involved in the programmes.

Faith can be a very strong motivating force but it can be a force for ill as well as for good. An often cited quote comes from Father Sjef Donders who cautioned: "We should realise that there is good religion, bad religion and very bad religion".¹ Obvious examples of the latter are practices of slavery and of apartheid which were defended with one hand on the Bible. Furthermore, certain religious strands do not have very good track records in promoting gender equality or respecting the rights of people of different sexual orientations.

Civic associations loosely connected with faith groups and engaged in delivering a variety of services to the public, such as caring for the infirm and elderly, advocating justice for the oppressed, and playing a role in humanitarian aid and development cooperation have become known as Faith Based Organisations (FBOs). Initially, the term FBO was considered ideologically loaded as it was associated with specific US politics and policies. Moreover it may not correspond very well to the self-perception of quite a number of the actors. For example, Islamic development and relief organisations do not recognise themselves as "faith based". Concepts like "good living" which play an increasing role in Andean countries of South America do not refer to a religious faith, but rather to a world-view or philosophy deeply rooted in peoples' lives and spirituality. Even though the definition of what constitutes an FBO remains blurred and does not fit to every specific context, the use of the term has become more or less accepted throughout the world. It is for this reason as well as for lack of an adequate alternative that the term FBOs is used in this paper.

FBOs are very heterogeneous and sometimes complex, making generalisations rather problematic.² Therefore, the single term FBO may conceal more than it reveals as different FBOs can have profoundly different views on development and humanitarian aid. Some FBOs use their activities also in order to promote the spread of their religion and do not hesitate to proselytise. Others, including the APRODEV family of agencies, firmly oppose

¹ Quoted from Rick James, *Faith in development: Coping with paradox*, ONTRAC, No 46 September 2010.

² Various authors propose therefore a series of differentiations in elaborating a FBO typology. Cf. Rick James, *What is Distinctive About FBOs? How European FBOs define and operationalize their faith*, INTRAC Praxis Paper 22, 2009, p. 13.

proselytism, and make a distinction and a separation between mission and evangelism on the one hand, and development cooperation and humanitarian aid on the other hand.

Why this study paper?

In various contexts, APRODEV agencies encounter the issue of development and religion, both in their own organisations and in the daily praxis of their work with partner organisations. Questions relating to this topic touch on the very identity of our organisations. As a family of like-minded agencies, it is useful to *compare notes* with each other on how we address issues pertaining to our ecumenical identity. Engaging in such a process is part of APRODEV's goal to be a learning organisation.

Another reason for producing this discussion paper is that the *lessons learned* could equip us for engaging on the issues at stake with third parties, be these partner organisations, other FBOs or organisations based on ethical convictions, governments or institutions.

To serve this dual purpose of the paper, it is composed of two main parts. The first part (chapters II-V) focuses mainly on our own identity and on the way in which we approach the issue of development. A number of 'specificities' of APRODEV agencies are mentioned and 10 shared principles are formulated (see above). The second part of the paper (Chapter VI) gives a few brief case studies on how the relation between development and religion has played out in concrete situations in which APRODEV agencies have been involved.

In the course of time, many documents have been written on the relation between development and religion.³ Most of these documents consider the topic from a 'functionalist' point of view. The APRODEV paper tries to go one step further and makes an effort to 'internalise' the issues at stake, as APRODEV, obviously, sees itself as a subject rather than an object.⁴

In addition to this discussion paper, which was accepted by the APRODEV General Assembly in 2012, a Reader will be produced on the topic. We hope that these two documents will enhance the awareness of the importance of the issue of development and religion within the APRODEV family of agencies, and will equip us better to discern how our faith convictions and our identities can contribute to a world which is more peaceful, more just and more sustainable.

II. Biblical and theological reflections and faith-based perspectives on human rights

II.1 Historical context

The 4th century marks the beginning of the 'Constantine era' in which Christianity became the state religion and shaped public life. Parallel with this development, ecumenical synods were organised to unify the doctrine and practice of Christianity as an attempt to establish common religious ground for the international Roman Empire. This came a cost to those who could not subscribe to this Imperial theology.

³ A recent example, which focuses on the praxis, is the study of the Knowledge Centre on Religion and Development: *Religion and Development. A Practitioners' Guide* (<http://www.religion-and-development.nl/publications/38/religion-and-development-practitioners-guide>)

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The 15th and 16th century can be described as the beginning of the end of this 'Constantine era'. Here we find the roots of humanism and of the Protestant Reformation, the birth of the nation states - and nationalisms - and also the start of European geo-political colonialism and the concept of Western superiority over 'heathen' and 'un-civilized' societies, ideologically reinforced through the expansion of Christianity.

The 17th century, the 'Age of Enlightenment', brought a new approach of human and natural sciences, emancipation from the patronage of the churches and later freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. Here we find the roots of European modernity and an almost utopian narrative in which progress was presented as an evolutionary process of development stimulated by scientific, technological, economic and financial innovation. The basic assumption was that modernity combined with democracy would lead Europe and the rest of the world to prosperity for all. In the 19th century liberalism, socialism and communism created their own concepts of this narrative as an alternative to traditional Christianity.

This 'utopian narrative of modernity' came into a serious crisis after two devastating world wars in the 20th century, the de-colonisation process, the fall of the Berlin Wall and end of the 'cold-war' (1989), the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001 in New York and Washington DC, and a number of food, energy and financial crises. The rise of new economic and political powers in the South and East and the shift of the gravity-centre of Christianity to the South further contributed to this development.⁵

II.2 Faith based organisations for development

In the 19th century Protestant (Western) missions were founded and missionary work was in most cases accompanied by social and agricultural work and building of hospitals and schools. In the missionary movement we find ambivalence towards the concept of Western and Christian superiority, an increasing awareness of the necessity of respect for native cultures and a sincere wish for mutual accountability of churches from the Global North and the Global South, conscious of the devastating power imbalances in politics, economy and cultural patterns. One of the consequences was a critical assessment of mission history and the call to distinguish between missionary work including evangelism on the one hand and diaconia, humanitarian aid and development work on the other. In this context, in the second half of the 20th century FBOs for humanitarian aid and development work were established. This separation also made substantial government funding possible for these specialized ministries.

For many observers, the start of this 21st century is marked by a shift from a secular to a post-secular culture. At the same time, we witness a shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity from Europe towards the former 'mission-countries'. Christianity now is the dominant religion in 2/3 of the countries in the world. The 'European' way of distinguishing missionary work from development work is different from the more holistic view in most of the organisations and churches in the South. In the South, the paradigm is that the church is 'sent to be, sent to say and sent to do' and that service, witness and community (diaconia, martyreia and koinonia) are closely connected, also in organisation and budget.

II.3 Core values

These differing paradigms in 'South' and 'North' generate new reflections on the role of religion and faith in development, beyond the simple matrices of religion as either a

⁵ Publications like 'The postmodern condition' (Lyotard, 1979), 'The end of history' (Fukuyama, 1989), 'The clash of civilizations' (Huntington, 1992), 'The end of modernity' (Sim, 2010) and 'Monsoon' (Kaplan, 2010) are examples that underline and analyse these changes.

source of or an obstacle to development. The organisations from which we come are grounded in the ethos and narratives of the Christian tradition. Faith nurtures, guides and sustains the work we do and informs our policies and practices. It supports our involvement in development in order to stand with the poor and gives it a holistic orientation that is open to spiritual dimensions and to the question of the meaning of life. It inspires and sustains us with a hope that goes beyond short-term successes or failures.

Dialogue with other stakeholders in development cooperation, partners in the global South and other faith traditions enriches and deepens this approach and also brings in new dimensions and tensions. It confronts us with different approaches and interpretations of faith and with a critique of our identification of Western and Christian values, relating to concepts of “development”. To find shared values as a basis for co-operation in our multi-religious and multi-cultural world is a challenge, but a necessary one.⁶

Core values of our organisations include **justice, stewardship and compassion**. In **justice** the focus is on a more righteous world and the implementation of human rights in the political, economic, financial and social structures of society, whereby in the biblical tradition justice towards the most vulnerable members of society again becomes a principle criterion for societal life.

In **stewardship** the focus is on creating a sustainable society and on protection and preservation of the entire creation, including non-human creatures, for future generations.

In **compassion** the focus is on solidarity and the eradication of poverty and on sharing of resources and ‘global common goods’ with the most vulnerable people.

The foundations for this orientation can be found in a variety of theological perspectives and in a pluriform and contextual understanding of the biblical tradition enriched by ecumenical, interfaith and interdisciplinary discourses. In the following sections we explore some of these perspectives.

II.4 Biblical perspectives

The biblical **creation** narratives tell us that men and women are created in the image of God.⁷ From this point of view they are equal, regardless of race, gender, belief, nationality, ethnic origin, political persuasion, sexual orientation, caste, class or (dis-)ability. This basic human equality and dignity must be respected and vigorously defended and upheld in the face of all those forces that would compromise, violate or deny who human beings are. This dignity is multifaceted: it has to do with the basic spiritual as well as physical and social needs and rights of everyone in personal as in corporate life. Thus, political, civil, economic, social, cultural and religious rights must all be upheld. In a personal perspective this motivates *solidarity and compassion*; in a more structural and systemic perspective this motivates the struggle for *social justice*.

The narratives speak about *stewardship* and define God as the sole owner of creation⁸. Therefore human dominion over the earth is not for unlimited exploitation and use of nature but careful, responsible and sustainable cultivation of God’s creation.⁹ Sharing natural and other resources and the global commons and caring for basic needs are the

⁶ For example recently Karen Armstrong tried to identify ‘compassion’ as the shared value that bridges all religious traditions. See: www.charterforcompassion.org
We think that the values of justice and stewardship also can bridge the different cultural and religious traditions, as we can see in the Earth Charter see: <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org> and the declaration for a global ethic of prof. Küng c.s. see: <http://www.global-ethic-now.de>

⁷ Genesis 1:26-28

⁸ Psalm 24

⁹ Genesis 2:15; Leviticus 25:4

answer to the belief that God gave them to all. Creation narratives reflect relationship and interdependency of human beings and generations and creation as a whole and therefore they are a call to *mutual responsibility and stewardship* as a core value.

The biblical narrative of creation also entails the story of a lost paradise, men who break their promises and brothers who kill each other in their own self-interest. It shows the uncertainty of human life, the brokenness and fragility of mankind, the gap between the powerful and powerless and the thin line between good and evil. There is no free ride in a world full of war and violence, hunger and thirst, cruelty and oppression where the dream of shalom and fullness of life is not yet realized. Those who really want to make a difference usually pay a price for this, unlike 'comfortable compassion', doing good without any cost. This is the cost of redemption and creating a new earth and requires a deeper understanding of repentance and human beings as sinners¹⁰, that is: understanding deeply how, because of the insecurity of human life, we all tend to act in our own self-interest.

The **relationships** between God and human beings and between people are central to the Christian faith and we believe that the major issues of development, such as HIV and AIDS, climate change, taxation and the food crisis, can be formulated in terms of broken relationships between rich and poor, women and men, people and the environment, and so on. In this framework, sin lies in this fracturing of relationships and the failure to mend them. The hope offered by relational theology is that the flawed structures that are indicative of broken relationships can be mended. Thus our work as Christian development agencies is based on exposing where that brokenness lies, and in demonstrating by all the means available how those relationships may be healed. This approach is relevant also to our organisational structures, providing a theological underpinning for accountability and transparency and for the relationships between each of our organisations, our partners and beneficiaries, and our supporters.

Liberation is reflected in the biblical stories of the calling of Abraham to leave traditional patterns of life¹¹, manifested in the calling of Moses and the liberation of Israel from the slavery in Egypt¹² and universalized in the liberating life and work of Jesus Christ. From this angle we speak of hope and liberation for the poor and oppressed and healing for those who are broken¹³. These perspectives are reflected in the values of compassion and social justice. In the biblical narrative, seeking justice and peace are grounded in the righteousness of God¹⁴ and imply looking out for the rights of all people and especially for the poorest of the poor. *Compassion* reflects God's love and the repeated biblical call is to protect and care for those who lack these rights, the 'strangers, widows and orphans' and to live the golden rule of compassion¹⁵. Righteousness and judgment are very often defined from the perspective of their impact on the vulnerable.¹⁶ Liberation theology defines *justice* as liberation from ideological, religious, cultural and political bonds and systems that are oppressing and exploiting people and nature and are supporting greed, economic and ecological injustice and violence. 'Eco-justice' explicitly connects the values of *justice and stewardship*. This necessarily involves a systems-approach and laws that seek to ensure the just treatment of both the vulnerable and the powerful and the earth. In the biblical tradition this is based not on the 'rights' of individuals but on the

¹⁰ Luke 3:3,8

¹¹ Genesis 12:1

¹² Exodus 3:7-9

¹³ Psalm 146:7-9; Luke 4: 18

¹⁴ Psalm 85

¹⁵ Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 7:12

¹⁶ Matthew 25:31-46

obligations and duties of the community. Since even laws can themselves become oppressive¹⁷, *justice* must continually be infused with the heart of *compassion*. Laws are for the sake of maintaining and restoring quality of life for all so that they may enjoy freedom, equality and participation. From the perspective of theological anthropology, poverty is far more than a one-dollar-a-day question or a condition of entitlement failure. A just and compassionate social order, in which human flourishing can occur, is constructed from the bottom up and implies empowerment of the powerless. As the prophetess Hannah proclaimed: 'God raises up the poor from the dust...the needy from the ash heap... to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour'.¹⁸

Covenanting and discipleship refer to the core paradigm in the Bible that men and women are called, notwithstanding the above mentioned human condition, "to do what is right, to love mercy and to walk attentively with God"¹⁹, that is to be God's agents in the world. This is the way of life and commitment as the Bible teaches us about Abraham and Moses, Ruth and Esther, David and the prophets and ultimately Jesus Christ and his disciples. These life-stories show us a 'theory of change' in which personal commitment and the interest of the community are connected and guided by the values of *compassion and justice*. Since the rich have more possibilities to realize their self-interest than the poor, "power" must be recognized and analysed in all our theory and practice. It is not simply a matter of shifting power structures; because the poor are not necessarily morally better than the rich. But we have to try to balance power and to institutionalize this balance and to narrow the gap between the powerful and powerless. It makes us aware of the limited power and credibility of human beings in the global process of liberation and cognizant of the biblical tenet, that perfection of life is finally God's gift. The fragility and vulnerability of life²⁰ can only be overcome through the revolutionary and anti systemic undercurrent of divine love and the faithfulness of Christians to the promise of God's Kingdom to come. And this does not exclusively pertain to Christianity but to all creation and the whole inhabited world or oikoumene.²¹ This leads not to resignation but rather to persevering discipleship and the freedom of doing everything in one's power to alleviate the plight of fellow human beings and of nature, in hope of the ultimate destiny of God's creation where righteousness is at home.²² In that spirit Christian FBOs also gain the freedom to self-critically review their concepts and impacts and to share privileges unselfishly and sustainably.

Incarnation is the deepest expression of how we believe God is involved in human life and in the world. God incarnate in Jesus Christ embodies self-giving, *compassionate love* and solidarity. It is God who in the middle of the brokenness and fragility of the world keeps his promises to humankind and redeems and re-creates at the cost of the life of Jesus Christ. Through the cross and resurrection, Christ decisively transforms the marginalization of those without rights, by fully identifying with them. Consequently, the Spirit of God and Jesus Christ is present throughout the whole of created order, bringing possibilities for creative and *transformative justice* wherever there is contempt for human life and denial of human rights. In the end, therefore, what the Christian faith can provide through rights-based development work is the empowering of underprivileged and marginalized people to imagine and live in the hope of a world different from the current realities of suffering,

¹⁷ Isaiah 10:1-2

¹⁸ I Samuel 2: 8a

¹⁹ Micah 6:8; Amos 5:24

²⁰ Romans 8:19-27

²¹ Isaiah 56 ff; Jeremiah 29; Romans 8; Revelations - to mention only some texts

²² 2 Peter 3:13

oppression and violence - i.e. "another world is possible!" - and to work tirelessly with others toward that goal.

II.5 Faith based perspectives and human rights

We consider the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of the United Nations (1948) and the different more specific declarations of rights in relation to the Universal Declaration to be the most comprehensive and widely supported principles and framework to guide international development and cooperation. Human rights have been developed through complex, interacting historical processes, informed by experiences of oppression and totalitarianism, injustice and violations of human rights.

Although human rights generally are consistent with biblical perspectives and priorities, they are not 'owned' by Christians. Paul for example, adapts the ancient Greek virtues of good citizenship in his message.²³

Admittedly, there has been an ambiguous historical record with regard to 'churches and human rights', such as choosing selected passages of Scripture in order to deny equal human rights to women or to justify the use of violence. In certain times and places, churches have been opposed to, rather than promoters of basic human rights.

We see these ambiguities also in other cultural contexts. Yet, religions play an important role in interpretation and acceptance of human rights. And they bring in new elements that complement a legal approach. Many people, especially in non-western countries, do not base their concept of rights on any human authority or source in the first instance and for many religious believers a moral-spiritual approach is more important and convincing than a moral-legal one.²⁴ Moreover, religions bring in an understanding of justice which goes clearly beyond law issues and includes a possibility of transformation and the dimension of forgiveness or reconciliation.

Dialogical openness to other religious and cultural traditions can bring new perspectives to rights-based development work.²⁵

III What is our view on development

Since the introduction of the concept of 'development', the ecumenical movement has tried to define its own understanding of what this would entail. One of the first who wrote extensively about this topic was the Indian economist Samuel Parmar. He defined an ecumenical understanding of development around a number of ingredients like social justice, people's participation, and self reliance. Without aiming at devising an integral ecumenical concept of development, some elements are particularly important in our view:

- the Biblical concept of 'fullness of life' is the motivating force;
- by implication, our understanding of 'development effectiveness' may differ from the purely secular Accra Agenda for Action;
- social transformation towards a more just, participatory and sustainable society constitutes an important objective for our activities;

²³ Phil. 4:8

²⁴ Cf. Gerrie ter Haar, Religion and Human Rights. Searching for common ground, in: G. ter Haar (ed.), Religion and Development. Ways of transforming the World, London 2011.

²⁵ For fuller discussion we suggest our Joint position paper: "**Rights based development from a faith-based perspective.**" APRODEV, Brussels, June 2008.

- development is not a linear progressive process but rather a process characterised by frequent ruptures and even set-backs and regression;
- relations with partners should, as much as possible, be based on an equal footing;
- such relations should be long term, based on mutual commitment and trust, and should recognise that social transformation is a continuous process that cannot easily be captured in a series of individual projects (partnership as *koinonia*).

III.1 Christian motivation for acting in development cooperation

Work for justice and development as implemented by churches and church-related agencies is regarded as part of their social ministry and stemming from a holistic understanding of Christian mission carried out by a fellowship of people who are inspired by God's word. Faith inspires us to love one another in the hope and the anticipation of God's kingdom. The church is therefore sent out by God to give witness of its faith and to serve in love. Religious faith can play a central role in the development process: for us, our Christian faith, guided in particular by the biblical perspectives mentioned earlier, is a source of energy and orientation which inspires people and enables them to act.

Historically, Christian organisations, like most other FBOs, have been at the forefront of providing basic services for poor people, especially in the fields of primary health care and education. Often, providing basic services was part of a holistic understanding of mission according to which it is not possible to separate physical and spiritual needs of people. In many circumstances, such services were and still are of vital importance for poor people.²⁶

From the late 1950s until the late 1960s, the World Council of Churches (WCC) considered development as economic progress, but also as a process of liberation from dependency and immaturity. The WCC observed that the "world society" was becoming increasingly interconnected. At the same time, fundamental imbalances of power were growing. On the basis of these developments, the WCC concluded that churches should take responsibility in development policy. After the charitable needs-based approach of the early years, questions of social justice and development came into focus in the course of the 1960s. At the Assembly of the WCC in 1968, in Uppsala, development cooperation was defined as an important task of the churches. The Memorandum on "The Development Service of the Church – A Contribution towards Peace and Justice in the World", issued in 1973 by the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), for example, gives a clear definition of the churches' mission in this field of work: "The development service must concern itself with the people who are being pushed to the edges of their societies and whom no one helps. Christian churches and other religious communities, too, bear great responsibility for ensuring that religious faith brings people closer to each other so that it does not become a source of conflict and war. Besides, they are setting an example and bringing their political influence to bear." The 1975 Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi radically questioned the future viability of the Western model of progress and contrasted it with a guiding notion of a "just, participatory and sustainable society".

In the 1970s, Christian organisations turned to ecological issues in their programme work. Important strategic trends towards sustainable agriculture and making use of alternative energy started at that time. In the 1980s the empowerment approach became increasingly important: strengthening people's self-help efforts by developing awareness, supporting networks which advocated the rights of their members and promoting measures to create income for disadvantaged groups took centre stage. The core notions of the

²⁶ According to the World Bank, 50% of health and education services in Sub-Saharan Africa are provided by FBOs: *The World Bank's Commitment to HIV/AIDS. Our Agenda for Action, 2007-2011*, Washington DC, 2008

conciliar process on “justice, peace, and integrity of creation” stipulated that industrial societies bear a share of the responsibility for world-wide injustice.

Whether “development” is still the correct term for the ecumenical endeavour of achieving social justice, enforcing human rights and empowering individuals is currently a highly contentious discussion. The notion of “ecumenical diaconia”²⁷, as expressed for example by the international WCC conferences in Larnaca (1986) about “Diaconia 2000” and in El Escorial (1987) about “Koinonia”²⁸, might be terminologically better suited for expressing the particularities of churches’ and church-based agencies’ understanding of development than the highly watered-down term of “sustainable development”. However, there is reason for doubt whether the notions of ecumenical diaconia and koinonia can be used or will make sense in a secularized development policy context. Therefore, we might be forced to continue to use the term “development” in external discussions, but to specify more clearly what we mean by our use of this term.

III.2 Whose development?

APRODEV agencies believe that all human beings are children of God, irrespective of achievements and abilities, ethnicity, religion, gender and social reputation. The belief that all human beings are created in the image of God supersedes all differences that may exist (Galatians 3: 26-28).

Trying to be faithful disciples of Christ, and in our desire to be co-workers with God, we assume responsibility for this One World and we try to respond whenever and wherever people are in need. Justice for the poor, preserving and restoring peace, and the integrity of the creation are building blocks of a common world. Christian organisations challenge policies and practices at the household, community, national, regional and global level that threaten God’s creation. Poor people are subjects and not objects of processes of change. The central focus of the churches’ solidarity with the poor is not on “developing” whole countries, but on the people, men and women and their communities. It is their development that is at the centre of our work, and the preferential option for the poor is one of the cornerstones of our development work. Therefore, we support the empowerment of communities most affected by oppressive structures to claim their rights.

Strengthening the self help potential of the poor and the disadvantaged in their local situation and promoting their ability to play an active role in improving their living conditions in a fair world economic system is an important goal for Christian organisations. With this comes the promotion of civil society involvement and the participation of the poor and disadvantaged in political life.

All development policies have a gender impact and affect women and men differently. Christian organisations require the participation of both men and women in the decision making and implementation of development activities to ensure that the activities enhance the situation of women, enable men to participate appropriately and promote gender justice.

The human rights aspect has become an increasingly prominent feature of the project and advocacy activities of our organisations (see footnote 25). Human rights are a powerful instrument for the poor: development is not a matter of asking for alms any more,

²⁷ Diaconia is a Christian term from Greek that encompasses the call to serve the poor, oppressed and the weak.

²⁸ The essential meaning of koinonia embraces concepts conveyed in the English terms community, communion, joint participation, sharing and intimacy. The word is used frequently in the New Testament to describe the relationship within the early Christian church as the act of breaking bread in the manner which Christ prescribed during the Passover meal (John 6:48-69, Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:24).

but for legitimate rights – the right to water, food, health care, etc. Enforcing civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights constitute, therefore, important goals for our joint work.

III.3 Development to what end? The need for a contextual and holistic approach.

What is the goal of development? Does it equal poverty reduction? Does the model of development as continuous progress, put forward by the tradition of enlightenment, match the Christian vision of human beings?

In our view, 'development' has been, and still is, too often equated with economic growth alone - rather than as unfolding like a blossom from the bud - and has been considered as a linear process. This one-dimensional view of development combined with rapidly changing geo-political realities, has rendered the classical concept of 'development' increasingly obsolete. Intensifying globalisation, the growing multi-polarity in the world order, and the interconnectedness of the different crises we are facing simultaneously in today's world, make it abundantly clear that the classical North-South agenda has to be replaced by a truly global agenda. An interconnected world requires an interconnected and integrated multidimensional agenda. Simply revising existing agendas is not enough anymore; what our world needs is nothing less than a fundamental transformation of prevailing mind-sets and policies on a global scale.

In this context, there is an urgent need to re-think both the concept and the policies of 'development', and to replace these with concepts which reflect the universal quest for human well-being and koinonia, a healthy equilibrium between the fulfilment of both the material and the spiritual needs of people, and a better and sustainable balance between human beings and creation as a whole.

There are no universally valid recipes for well-being and koinonia. Such concepts and policies can only be relevant if due regard is given to the different contexts in which these concepts and policies take shape. In some contexts, for example, more emphasis on material progress is absolutely necessary for enhanced well-being, in other contexts people are yearning for more spiritual growth.

The quest for well-being and koinonia is named differently in different contexts. Well known expressions are Ubuntu (Southern Africa), San Seng (Buddhism), Yin Yang (Taoist philosophy) and buen vivir (Latin America). The Bible refers to 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10) and 'shalom' in the First ("Old") Testament. While this human quest is universal, it can only become concrete in the different contexts in which people live. Keeping this in mind is essential for any meaningful reflection on the relation between development and religion.

The shift away from the classical development paradigm requires a fundamental transformation in 'the North' as well as in 'the South'. It has profound implications for the agendas of those who are involved in international cooperation as well as for the methodology and the way in which these agendas are implemented.

This also has implications for life styles of people everywhere and certainly for those who are relatively well off. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is no future for creation as a whole unless relatively wealthy people live more simply, so that others may simply live. Concepts of 'sufficiency' and 'enough' have to be further elaborated. We firmly believe that there are liberating alternatives to wasteful and environmentally harmful consumer behaviour, that ecological, social and fair economic activity is feasible, and that another world is possible.

IV Specificities of APRODEV agencies

Within the APRODEV family of agencies, differences can be observed regarding the way in which the members are related to churches as institutions. Some agencies have close organisational and institutional links to churches in their home countries while others have relations with churches but operate at arm's length from them. Differences can also be found in partner policies. Some APRODEV agencies have a 'preferential option' for working with church-related partner organisations whereas others do not specifically focus on such partners. What most APRODEV agencies have in common, though, is that, in the end, the most important basis for partner relations is not whether or not a partner is 'faith-based' but whether there is a joint commitment to good performance in the struggle against poverty and exclusion, and for justice, peace and the protection of God's creation.

IV.1 Characteristics

FBOs like the APRODEV member organisations have a number of 'characteristics'. Although these specificities are not necessarily unique to FBOs, they are characteristic for most of them. Many of these characteristics are positive but some of those can also take on negative features. Some specificities of APRODEV and its member organisations are:

1. Global reach and local presence

APRODEV and its member organisations are part of a worldwide ecumenical family. Through our contacts and working relations with Action by Churches Together (ACT), the World Council of Churches, and the Lutheran World Federation, APRODEV is in touch with actors in all corners of the *oikumene* – the whole inhabited earth. Most of these actors are close to local realities. This provides those who are part of this ecumenical movement with the possibility to have their ears close to the ground and to engage, together with partners all over the globe, in activities which are embedded in, and tailor-made for each particular context. Therefore, these activities have the potential of being more relevant, more effective and more efficient. In addition, working through local partners increases the possibility to reach (communities of) poor people, and to enhance ownership.

For the lobby and advocacy work of APRODEV this means that 'partner-based advocacy' vis-à-vis European Union institutions can become more than a slogan and can turn into reality.

2. Faith based

A second important feature of APRODEV and its member organisations, besides their worldwide reach, is their identity as faith-based organisations. This means, among other things, that in addition to a human rights and rights-based approach discourse, reference can be made to religious identities. This is important when they work with partner organisations which operate in thoroughly religious contexts.

The importance of the interactions between development and religion, and politics and religion is increasingly recognised. Sometimes religion can be part of the problem, sometimes it can be part of the solution, but almost always religion plays a role in societal developments – especially in areas other than the secularised parts of Europe. As faith-based organisations, APRODEV and its members are, in principle, well placed to discern the role of religion and to engage in policies and activities which aim at enhancing the positive role religion can play in improving the livelihoods of people. Partner organisations which operate in profoundly religious contexts may recognise in the APRODEV agencies 'soul

brothers and sisters' who, like them, do not see a watertight separation between the spiritual and the material realms of life.

3. Holistic view on development

The Christian faith – as most religions - does not make a separation between the material and the spiritual realm of life, and supports a holistic view on development which is a welcome antidote to one-dimensional views which see development purely and solely as material progress and economic growth.

4. Broad agenda

It follows from this holistic approach that FBOs like APRODEV and its members are not “single issue organisations” but address a broad range of issues. In addition, the far flung ecumenical movement has its roots in many different local situations, all struggling with common but differentiated agendas. This broad approach can also prevent quickly changing agendas and stimulates follow-through and continuity of policies.

5. Long term presence

Although APRODEV member organisations are relatively young (most were established in the 1960s), the religious communities with which they work often have (had) a long term presence in society. This staying power can mean that projects and programmes are planned and carried out over longer periods of time rather than on *ad hoc* bases. This can, for example, provide for the sustainable provision of basic services.

6. Religion as a motivating force

With regard to development, religion is often a powerful motivating force through emphases on concepts such as justice, reconciliation, compassion and service. Religion can inspire hope and may help to overcome feelings of powerlessness and distress. Working with an FBO can for some be more a “calling” than part of a “career”. History has shown, however, that when motivation mutates into fanaticism, religion can become a very dangerous force.

7. Professional

FBOs like APRODEV and its members are ‘professional’ in the original sense of the word: they profess their faith and beliefs through the ecumenical identity of their organisations. They are, however, also professional in that the members can build on decades of expertise and commitment to high standards in working closely together with local partner organisations in the areas of development and humanitarian aid.

8. Legitimacy

Also, but not solely because of the above mentioned characteristics, FBOs are often considered legitimate and are valued by poor people. A World Bank study concluded that “religious leaders and institutions were often the most trusted institutions in developing countries”.²⁹

9. Transformation

While supporting vulnerable groups to meet immediate needs and build long-term security, APRODEV agencies believe that they are called to challenge and change the systems that favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised, so working for

²⁹ Deepa Narayan, *Voices of the Poor. Can Anyone Hear Us?* Washington OUP, World Bank (2000). Quoted from: Rick James, *What is Distinctive About FBOs. How European FBOs define and operationalise their faith*, INTRAC, February 2009

fundamental change. APRODEV members aim for a transformation in the way power is shared among the 7 billion inhabitants of our planet, seeing their role as being a catalyst to bring people together in relationships that help to change an unjust world.

10. Constituency

Another characteristic of APRODEV members and similar organisations is the strong ties they have with the constituencies in their home countries. These constituencies, which are largely but not exclusively church-related groups and parishes, are composed of committed people who are eager to translate their faith and convictions into concrete actions in day-to-day life, in politics, and in giving generously of their time and resources. Being linked to well rooted and relatively stable constituencies distinguishes APRODEV member organisations from donor organisations that work with less structured groups of supporters.

V. Implications for our organisations

V.1 Internal life and internal policies

V.1.1 Faith literacy

The importance of religion as an aspect of international development has been stressed in this document. As a consequence of this, we realize that the lack of knowledge about religion, religious practices and beliefs is a hindrance to making the development work, carried out by FBO's as well as by secular agents, as efficient as possible. If there was a greater understanding about the role of religion in the context of development, better results would be achieved. The most striking examples of this are in the arenas where religion is a strong stakeholder and promoter of specific opinions, like reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, but also in cases of armed conflict or reconciliation processes.

This has been acknowledged by numerous research programs, think-tanks, conferences and other initiatives in the field of religion and development in recent years. There is an understanding within the APRODEV family that FBOs have a special role to play alongside academics and others when it comes to lifting up the issues of religion and development. Long-term experience of working within the faith communities and with dialogue between various faiths has contributed to a thorough understanding of these complex issues.

At the same time it is important to avoid 'instrumentalising' FBOs as mere bridges into the religious communities or as producers of desired developmental results. FBOs cannot be reduced to conveyors of western development messages into otherwise closed arenas in the Global South.

So, when it comes to knowledge about the role of religion in development or "religious literacy", FBOs have a twofold task;

- to facilitate the process of learning about and understanding the role of religion in development in wider society and among secular agents; and
- to keep on-going processes to reflect on the practices and self-understanding of FBOs.

V.1.2 The role of FBOs in facilitating learning processes about religion and development within a wider context

There are several examples of organisations within the APRODEV family which play a very important role in highlighting the issues at stake in the public arena. In Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom various initiatives were taken concerning the nexus of FBOs, the academic world and government. Furthermore, research-programmes, national hearings and commissions, etc. were undertaken. One can foresee that there will be a growing interest in this type of initiative in the future. APRODEV can play an important role in spreading the results of these various processes.

V.1.3 The need for identity and self-reflection within FBOs.

Within all types of organisations there is a continuous need to understand one's own identity and historical background, but also to learn more about the actual faith that is the ideological and spiritual foundation of the work. There is a need for faith literacy, particularly so in the very secularized European countries where religion is no longer a part of the public arena or common knowledge. It is important to state that faith literacy is needed in organisations with a strong Church identity as well as within organisations with a more secular identity.

The organisations within the APRODEV family share the situation of working in a more or less secular context in European countries but also carry out work in a much more religious –often multi-religious- context in the various countries in the Global South. Knowledge about religions is an important factor when it comes to the end results of the work.

V.1.4 Different strategies on how to deal with identity

Some organisations within the APRODEV family call themselves “Christian”; others refer to themselves as based on the Christian tradition. There are organisations composed of a community of believers, in contrast to organisations made up of a group of people embracing some common values. There are at least three different strategies to deal with the religious identity in organisations: 1) policy formulation, 2) staffing policies, and 3) continuous education and dialogue

1) Policy formulation

Every self respecting organisation carefully calibrates its policy formulation with its values and the ethos of the work. Such texts play an important role in the work as they reflect the identity and self-understanding of the organisation. Basic policies constitute a reminder and a source that can be referred to as an organisation develops and meets new challenges.

Problems can arise when a policy expresses a certain faith or set of values that is not shared by all the staff of the organisation. Therefore, it is important to make clear for whom organisational policies are written and to whom they apply. Is it a starting point for a process of common learning through exchange of ideas or is it to be left outside the everyday reflection of the organisation? The formulation and re-formulation of policies is in itself an important part of establishing the identity of an organisation.

2) Staffing policies

Staffing policies constitute another way of defining identity. The APRODEV family represents a variety of organisations with different relations to the church structures

supporting them and thus different policies when it comes to faith issues and employment policies. Some organisations require active membership in a Protestant church from their staff members, senior management and board members, while on the other end of the spectrum; some organisations ask staff members to embrace the general values of the organisation. Some organisations carry out international diaconal work, as an integrated part of global mission. Others are more freestanding development or aid organisations based on Christian values.

Even if there are differences in employment policies, it does not take away the need for training and reflection on the organisational identity.

3) Continuous education and dialogue

The third possibility is that formulating the ideological identity of the organisation is carried out through an on-going process and exchange of ideas among the staff and other stakeholders. Such an on-going discussion is possibly the most dynamic way to relate to a given religious basis. This is especially true for organisations that have a Christian identity but are made up of people with varied religious backgrounds. In this process, it is important to acknowledge that Scripture or religious narratives can be viewed in very different but still fruitful ways.

There are at least three different ways in which an individual can approach something like a “religious tradition” in general, or the Christian narrative in particular. If we could borrow words from the field of literature, the first option would be that of a “classic”. A classic is worth reading, has some deep insights and adds knowledge and maybe understanding to a person’s life. It is interesting but it is only one resource among many others.

The second option could be called “ethically formative”. The Christian narrative could very well be of ethical significance for the reader as the narratives have ethical implications and raise questions of right and wrong. It is also possible that the interaction with Scripture could be formative as the stories deal with complicated issues and processes, and often unexpected outcomes. The fact that the Gospel stories and the prophets are often addressing the issue of poverty and justice can appeal to the reader. The Bible also contains narratives about processes where someone goes through hardships but eventually emerges as a transformed human being. These constant themes in Scripture could have an ethically formative function.

The third possibility to look at the Christian narrative is maybe the most obvious; through the eyes of a believer. For the believer the text or narrative acquires a deeper meaning: a spiritual guidance and an experience of the innermost beliefs of that person. But it is important to see that religious narrative could be fruitfully dealt with in other ways than through the believers.

If these three ways to approach both a religious tradition and Scripture can be accepted within the same group of people, a very interesting and dynamic but also challenging process could be started, where the religious foundation of an organisation could be a continuous inspiration rather than a ‘dead letter’ that is left on a bookshelf.

V.2 Religion and external policies

Introduction

Because of our widely shared values, it is likely that the external policies of faith-based development agencies will be very little different from those of secular organisations.

The most probable significant, and contentious, points of difference will therefore be in areas where some Christians hold specific ethical convictions (e.g. funding from public lotteries) and where some have specific religious or theological concerns (e.g. the nature and extent of inter-faith working). The points below relate to (i) communications; (ii) fundraising; (iii) partnership; and (iv) inter-faith working.

V.2.1 Communications

(a) Regardless of the nature of the audience, APRODEV agencies do not use images that portray helplessness, passivity or dependency. On the contrary, they will seek out images that challenge stereotypes and that affirm that each person is uniquely made in the image of God.

(b) Some agencies are accountable to churches and ecumenical groups as well as seeking support from the wider public and from governments, and some use a certain bilingualism in their communications. In that case, messages intended for a church audience are explicitly Christian in tone (e.g. using Bible texts) while those that are aimed at the general public (like in national newspapers) do not use “religious” language. Others, however, use a common language for both church audiences and the general public.

More specialist communications, such as those directed at secular policymakers, will be phrased in suitably professional terms, but will not shy away from references to theology and Christian ethics where appropriate. In general, it is considered important for agencies to be explicit as to their Christian roots in their communications.

V.2.2 Fundraising

APRODEV agencies recognise that they operate in an increasingly challenging funding context and that, therefore, they need to explore the widest possible range of potential funding sources. There are four other broad sources of funding in relation to which caution and sound due diligence procedures are needed: a) governments, b) private companies, c) foundations, and d) lotteries.

(a) Agencies welcome money from governments where the funding is in line with their own objectives and where it cannot be taken to imply agreement with specific government policies. However, it is important not to be dependent on government funding. Agencies vary as to the degree to which they are willing to receive government funding. The acceptable proportion of income from governments currently ranges from no more than 30 per cent to up to 90 per cent.

(b) Unsolicited donations from all individuals, organisations and companies are welcome unless there is reason to believe that the money has been obtained illegally.

(c) On the other hand, donations are only solicited from foundations (and companies) whose behaviour and ethical standards are compatible with those of the agencies. This means that the agencies’ faith-based standards are made explicit whenever necessary.

(d) Agencies differ considerably in their policies with regard to lottery funding. While some receive/accept nothing, others have guidelines as to what is acceptable. It is recognised that in some countries lotteries have a more positive image among Christians than in others.

V.2.3 Partnership

(a) Partnership, particularly ecumenical partnership, is a concept that is central to the work of the APRODEV agencies which consider working with local partners of paramount

importance. Several agencies have set out their Christian understanding of working in partnership. While church-related organisations, ecumenical bodies etc. may appear to be natural partners for an FBO, it has to be made clear that the aim of such partnerships is development and humanitarian relief, not evangelisation nor helping to establish an institutional Christian presence. It is important to recognise too that agencies may hold very different views about development from those with whom they share a common faith, so ongoing dialogue is essential.

While there may be a general desire to prioritise church-based or ecumenical partnerships, these partners must meet the same standards of accountability as secular partners. However, there may be an increased willingness to help potential faith-based partners achieve such standards. With regard to the split between faith partners and secular partners, this varies from 75% -25% to 25%-75%, depending on the agency.

(b) Priority is not necessarily given to partners who promote inter-faith dialogue. Rather, importance is placed on the project benefiting people of all faiths and none, without regard to gender, ethnicity, etc. (but see further V.2.4), while also prioritising marginalised groups in society.

(c) An interesting development in one agency is that “partnership” is also a term used increasingly to describe its relationship with its supporters. The nature of this partnership is still being developed. At present it is evidenced in initiatives such as linking churches at home and overseas, although it is perfectly conceivable that non-church links might be forged as well.

(d) This development is echoed in twinning programmes in some contexts, again involving congregations in different countries.

V.2.4 Interfaith working

Respect for other cultures and religions is part of the ethos of all the APRODEV agencies. At home, they recognise the importance of working with other agencies and faith groups, and this is particularly significant in campaigning and advocacy work. The united voices of different faiths can be much more effective than those of a single group. This type of co-operation also helps to address perceptions of ethnic tensions in the home countries.

Internationally, different faith agencies typically work together on a range of projects in various countries. Pragmatically, this is especially important where religion is perceived to contribute to conflict or tensions, and where religious leaders can have a positive role in overcoming them. Otherwise, the criteria remain the same as for partnerships with secular groups: working with people independent of religion, race and ethnicity, and gender, while focussing on those who are most in need.

VI Development and religion: some case studies

As stipulated in chapter III, there are no universally valid recipes for well-being and koinonia, or for development for that matter, that are applicable in all parts of the world. Each context is different and, therefore, each set of policies needs to be tailor-made to fit a particular situation.

For this, a checklist of issues and questions that need to be addressed can be applied. A first list of issues relates to a mapping of the religious context in which the work is carried out. Questions to be asked include: which actors are deemed important by the partner organisation? What relationships do they have with other actors (support, rejection, conflict)? Do these play out differently with regard to women and men? Is there a kind of “market of religions” with competing religious actors? What are the implications of this for

the partner organisation? How does the partner organisation position itself in the context in which the project is carried out? Is religion a criterion that is used by the partner organisation in selecting with whom to work? Questions like these can help understand the role of partner organisations in their specific contexts and may help identify any 'blind spots' they, as well as the 'donor' may have.

A second building block for a situation analysis consists of an assessment of the partner organisation with regard to issues related to development and religion through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) assessment. For example, research confirms that religion can play a decisive role in 'sustainable development'. Which aspects of the churches and/or faith communities are crucial in this respect? Which elements of religion give a particularly significant contribution to the success of a programme? Are there certain religiously inspired values that could play a negative role? (AIDS prevention programmes, for example, can be hampered by certain moral values and taboos which impede the necessary educational work). What influence do religious values have on the division of roles between women and men?

Religion can promote but can also hinder 'development'. Is the partner organisation aware of this ambivalence? Do they know whether/how religious aspects support or undermine their work? Are these issues discussed?

A third tool in the box is to engage in a personal assessment of the role which religion plays in the way in which individual persons carry out their work. Are individual persons willing to engage in a self critical assessment? How do they deal with situations in which they are contradicted? Do the person's religious convictions hinder communication with people of other persuasions or do they allow for an open attitude?³⁰

This discussion document concludes with a number of case studies which illustrate how development and religion can interact in the praxis of day-to-day work.

VI.1 Diapaxis between FBOs from different religious backgrounds

The SEND (Swiss Egyptian NGO Dialogue) project brought together HEKS/EPER as a Swiss Christian Organisation (and member of APRODEV) and an Egyptian Islamic Faith Based Organisation (FBO) to test feasibility of cooperation between them. The project was initiated by the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs and lasted from 2007 till 2011.

In a first step, the project allowed both FBOs to get to know each other better and gain confidence in one another and at the same time left room for disagreement and differences, especially in terms of the relation between faith, charity and solidarity. In a second step the two organisations engaged in a diapaxis – a dialogue through action- with the development of a joint activity. The joint activity resulted in an international camp to train young women in peace-building with a curriculum developed by both organisations.

One of the main challenges was to find shared values for collaboration. HEKS presented at first its activities and working principles in the secular language it commonly uses with most of its partner organisations. The reference to the Human Rights framework proved however not to be decisive for the Egyptian partner who put more emphasis on faith as a common ground – irrespective of religious tradition. Being able at a later stage of the project to

³⁰ For a more extensive overview of these methodologies see: *Entwicklung und Religion. Folgerungen für die Praxis Methoden und Instrumente. Schlussdokument*, Direktion für Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit DEZA, Bern, Switzerland, March 2009.

present its programme using Christian references was a major achievement for HEKS. This shift of reference allowed both organisations to quickly identify shared values guiding their respective work and to set up a joint action.

FBOs referring both to the Human Rights framework and to a religious tradition might therefore play an essential bridging role between secular NGOs and FBOs as they are able to articulate their work with different frameworks. This might facilitate the identification of shared values as a cornerstone for collaboration between FBOs and NGOs. Secular organisations and FBOs might thus recognize values that they share, with the former drawing them from the Human Rights framework, while the latter derive them from their religious tradition.

Main Lessons learnt

- HEKS became more aware of its ability to articulate its values and working approaches by making reference to Human Rights as well as by making reference to its Christian Faith. This allows HEKS to reach organisations which put religious values above Human Rights.
- Building trust and relationships are essential to reach such organisations. Time required to build up this trust should not be underestimated.
- Identifying shared values expressed with different words builds the ground for practical collaboration between organisations with different religious backgrounds.
- Trust building is an ongoing process: when new actors are involved in the joint dialogue or project, difficulties and misunderstandings previously overcome may come up again.

VI.2 Churches, FBOs and State unite in peace building in South Mexico

After the rise of the Zapatista revolution in 1994 in Mexico and the occupation of the Chiapas by the Mexican army, a coalition of Swiss Catholic and Protestant FBOs answered the international call of Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of the San Cristobal diocese, to support his mediation endeavours. HEKS/EPER and Brot für Alle/Pain pour le Prochain, both members of APRODEV, were involved in this initiative.

A first delegation of Swiss voluntary observers was sent to the Chiapas villages in 1995. Building on this initiative, the FBO coalition succeeded in securing the support of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to develop a full-fledged observation program. Six further delegations composed of Swiss Church representatives, Members of Parliament and NGO workers visited the Chiapas between 1999 and 2002. In early 2000, a permanent local presence was set up for the PROPAZ program in order to support the peace building process in South Mexico, to strengthen the local actors and to facilitate relevant networking to reach key stakeholders. Thus, local partners were supported in building the capacity of peace promoters and in organizing fora and exchange meetings between parties involved in the conflict. At a later stage, observers' delegations were replaced with advocacy activities on the spot. After the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs withdrew from the program in 2007, the coalition of Swiss FBOs remained engaged in PROPAZ and will continue up to the end of the year 2012.

Main lessons learnt:

- The collaboration between the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Swiss FBOs and Churches allowed addressing the conflict situation with a multi-track diplomacy -which is the only effective and sustainable approach. Each actor was able to reach out to stakeholders at different levels of the conflict. Parliament, Church

and NGO members have entry points with different institutions and actors in Mexico.

- The collaboration between Swiss FBOs, State and Churches established a win-win situation. On the one hand, international observation and peace programs are not effective without the involvement of the State and the access to official canals. On the other hand, the State does not have the same access to civil society as Churches and NGO do. People in Mexico tend to be more trusting of Churches and civil society organisations than of the State. The Swiss delegations however showed in their set-up that bridges were possible between these different stakeholders.
- The mix in the delegations' set-up proved to be an asset as the Swiss delegations did not fit into only one simple political, religious or human rights category and therefore could not be too easily discarded by the people they met in Mexico. The delegations thus gained in legitimacy and managed to influence the agenda of the various stakeholders they could meet at different levels.
- The main missing point during the whole period from 1994 was the weak coordination with other initiatives at European/international level. On the basis of a stronger and more concrete common agenda with other actors (e.g. APRODEV, CIFCA, WCC, CIDSE, etc.), a stronger impact would have been possible.

VI.3 HIV/AIDS

Koinonia ("fellowship") is a national organisation in Brazil that aims to strengthen joint work among ecumenical agencies, encouraging collaboration rather than competition. Since 2003 Christian Aid has funded Koinonia's HIV awareness work with faith leaders and in the first seven years of that partnership Koinonia trained more than 200 religious leaders from various Christian and Afro-Brazilian religious traditions. Assuming that each leader can reach and influence about 100 worshippers, this training will have taken vital HIV prevention and care messages to around 20,000 people during that time.

Faith leaders have highlighted the importance of their social role and the influence that they have when they talk about HIV and AIDS. Two examples:

Pai Alessandro is a Candomblé priest who welcomes around 120 people to his house of worship every fortnight. Since his training he regularly speaks publicly about HIV and keeps condoms in his storeroom for ease of distribution. He also ensures that in ceremonies involving skin-cutting each participant has a separate razor.

"In Candomblé the priest has a very broad social role. People turn to us for advice and guidance about everything. A Candomblé priest acts as a complete guide for someone's life. We can speak about anything – health, career, marriage, sex – and when we speak our voices carry a lot of weight and people listen. So we have a big responsibility to get our facts right."

The Revd Artúr Cavalcante is the vicar of Holy Trinity church, São Paulo.

"As part of the Anglican Church I hold a position of trust in relation to my congregation. I have the opportunity to get close to and influence people because of my role. The authority I hold is not because of me as an individual, but because of my position as a vicar. I use this authority to help get rid of myths about sexuality, illness and other taboos. My role is a pastoral one. It's not about imposing my view but about talking."

"There are a lot of preconceptions around HIV. It's a subject loaded with stigma. Using religious language and my own source of faith – the Bible – we deconstruct those passages that people use to justify stigma and show people a new way of reading them. And we

highlight other texts which point to our duty to welcome and support those who are excluded.”

In addition to the training, Koinonia supports priests like Pai and Artúr with materials on the theme of AIDS and religion, and with pastoral advice in specific situations. Its work underlines the significance of FBOs in working directly with influential faith leaders and through those leaders conveying important development messages to groups which non-religious NGOs are either unable to reach or lack the authority to influence so effectively.

Main lessons learnt

- Christian Aid has long been aware of the importance of religious leaders in speaking about HIV prevention and stigma. Through Koinonia we have seen how leaders are very conscious of their responsibility in this area and are willing to speak out despite the possibility of being stigmatised themselves.
- In Latin America, unlike some African countries, faith networks are a more significant point of contact than individual Christian church denominations. Koinonia demonstrates the effectiveness of communicating crucial messages to a wide range of people through ecumenical networks.
- There is a tendency to understand interfaith working in terms of collaboration between the Abrahamic religions. Partnership with Koinonia demonstrates the importance of working with other religions (in this case Afro-Brazilian religions) and deepening our understanding on the basis of our shared values.

VI.4 Prosperity Gospel teaching

“Prosperity” gospel teaching, also known as the “health and wealth” gospel, holds that believers have a right to material prosperity. This teaching could be seen as stemming from the Wisdom literature of Ancient Near East, which is reflected in the ancient Jewish belief that riches are a sign of God’s favour. In this context, Jesus’ comment that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10.25) is revolutionary, overturning centuries of accepted teaching. However, adherents of the prosperity gospel have developed the Old Testament ideas by isolating a few verses from the New Testament, such as John 10.10 (“I came that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness”) and 3 John 2 (“I pray ... that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul”), thus linking the good health and good fortune of individual Christians with God’s blessing.

Today, much of the objection to this teaching, which has been promoted particularly by some North American Pentecostals, is focused on how it has led to financial excesses on the part of some church leaders and the corresponding exploitation of their congregations. In some developing countries in African and Latin America which have imported this thinking, there is the risk that people see their poverty or disease as a sign of God’s displeasure and will be unwilling to engage with efforts to improve their situation.

This selective use of Scripture is more than just academically unfounded. In the context of development it can be life-threatening. People, who see their immoderate exploitation of the earth’s resources as conforming to God’s will, refuse to accept that it is necessary to combat climate change in order to enable poor communities to survive. And those who take Jesus’ comment that “the poor are always with you” out of context will use it to justify a view that poverty eradication is impossible because it is somehow contrary to biblical teaching.

Prosperity gospel teaching is, therefore, more of a heresy than a gospel. It denies salvation to the rich and life to the poor.

VI.5 Conflict analysis

In several countries which are experiencing or have gone through situations of conflict, ICCO and Kerk in Actie are, in their approach to peace building, focussing on the theme of conflict transformation. This approach emphasises the need to address root causes of violent conflict and unequal power relations.

To ensure that conflict transformation can be applied in practice, ICCO and Kerk in Actie have developed a guide that translates policy choices for conflict transformation into user-friendly guidelines for formulating context-specific programmes. The core characteristics of working programmatically are:

- The need for cooperation and complementarities, which includes dividing the roles between different actors according to strength, capacity and focus.
- Working towards a common goal which is specific and attainable.
- Conducting the process in an inclusive and participatory way.
- Dividing programmatic work into phases, while recognising that it is an ongoing process.

In this, ICCO and Kerk in Actie prefer to work with a mix of different kinds of organisations like NGOs, FBOs, Community Based Organisations, Research institutes, etc. Some of these organisations have strong constituencies, and therefore legitimacy, whereas others can rely on considerable knowledge and experience.

The process of programme development on conflict transformation consists of three different phases. The first phase concerns a thorough analysis of the conflict. A document was published as a guide for such a joint analysis. The second phase concentrates on developing a joint vision, whereas the third phase focuses on applying the vision in a realistic programme with a clear goal.

Analysing the religious landscape is an important part of the first phase. In that context, it is important to assess how various religious leaders and religious organisations reduce or fuel a conflict. What is the influence of religious beliefs on people's attitudes, behaviour and their relationships? What place does religion have in the underlying structures of the conflict? Ultimately, the aim is to reduce the actual or potential negative effects of religion, and to enhance the positive effects in the areas of justice, equality, human rights and lasting peace.

VI.6 Witchcraft and HIV/Aids

AIDS constitutes the biggest epidemic in the history of humankind. The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa is catastrophic. The region hosts only one-tenth of the world population but more than two-thirds of those infected by AIDS live in that part of the world. The hardest hit are women and girls; three-quarters of all women infected by HIV/AIDS live in Africa south of the Sahara.

Witchcraft is part and parcel of many societies in Africa. This can lead to situations in which an infection with a disease like HIV/AIDS can be blamed on an external force rather than on irresponsible behaviour by the person who contracted the infection. There are even cases in which witchcraft of (former) Western colonial powers was blamed for the outbreak and spread of infectious diseases in Africa. On the African continent, health and disease are

closely connected with a broad field of relations between persons and ghosts. Unless health care practitioners take account of the widespread connection that is made in Africa between witchcraft and disease, health care programmes will be less effective than they could be. Mission 21, a Swiss mission agency, organised a three-year programme on this issue focussing on the stigmatisation and exclusion of victims of HIV/AIDS in Africa.³¹ An important goal of the programme was to reduce the social, religious and cultural discrimination of people suffering from HIV/AIDS. In addition, Mission 21 aimed at working with its partner churches and partner organisations in establishing communities of solidarity with HIV/AIDS victims which would give these people new perspectives in life. A basic premise for this work was that HIV and AIDS cannot be seen and treated in isolation but have to be connected with all aspects of social and personal life. On the basis of the results of that programme, Mission 21 formulated a number of guidelines for its work on HIV/AIDS.

Effective responses to HIV/AIDS require action at three levels: consciousness raising and prevention, nursing and treatment, and reducing the negative social, political and economic effects of the pandemic. In all these areas it is of paramount importance to take account of religious and cultural factors. For example, consciousness building has to take traditional and religious world views (e.g. on sexuality) seriously. Traditional healers and opinion makers have to be included in order to enhance chances for success.

In general, it is important to note the warning against painting a too simple and simplistic contrast between traditional (African) practices and modern (Western, Christian) ways of healing. Thinking in terms of witchcraft has to do with a felt need to seek for an explanation. Why did this happen? What can I do about it? In traditional healing systems, the question "Why" is, in the end, more important than "What" (diagnosis). The question "Why" can easily lead to guilt or the identification of irresponsible behaviour. Therefore, such questions are often seen as a taboo. Looking for explanations together with the help of fortune tellers and traditional healers may lead to positive results in the social and spiritual realms. The potential of this should not be underestimated. Traditional healing systems can often provide more adequate responses to (individual and collective) social and religious tensions than scientifically based reasoning. Charismatic churches can play a similar role albeit in 'modern clothes'.

Knowledge is not sufficient; it has to be complemented by experiences. Painting a contrast between an 'encoded' African discourse and a 'decoded' European way of thinking is too easy. It is more important to look at how to understand each other without falling prey to cultural relativism.

³¹ The results of that programme are analysed in an article by Guy Thomas and Benedict Schubert *Witchcraft und HIV/Aids. Im Dilemma zwischen traditionellen Praktiken und Konzepten der Moderne*, published in *Entwicklung und Religion. Erfahrungen aus kirchlicher Zusammenarbeit un endogenen Kulturen. Fünf Fallbeispiele zum Umgang mit Potentialen und Risiken*, Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, Direktion für Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit, Bern, March 2009