

# RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT POST-2015

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**REPORT OF A CONSULTATION AMONG DONOR ORGANIZATIONS,  
UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES AND FAITH-BASED  
ORGANIZATIONS**

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## CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>X</b>
A. UN AND FBO DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS.....	XI
B. TRACK RECORD .....	XII
C. GLOBAL-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT .....	XIII
D. CALLS FOR A ‘SAFE SPACE’ FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE .....	XIV
E. ABOUT THE CONSULTATION .....	XV
F. STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT .....	XVI
<b>CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF RELIGION AND POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND POLICY GUIDANCE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. ICPD REVIEW SPEAKS TO INEQUALITY .....	1
A. THE SDGs .....	2
B. TO ‘DO RELIGION’ OR NOT TO ‘DO RELIGION’ .....	4
C. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS.....	6
1. <i>On the need for a transformational shift</i> .....	6
2. <i>On a human rights discourse</i> .....	7
3. <i>On further ambiguities</i> .....	8
<b>CHAPTER 2: GOVERNANCE AND EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
A. RELIGION AND GOVERNANCE .....	10
B. INTERGOVERNMENTAL NATURE OF THE UN SYSTEM .....	11
C. DONOR PERSPECTIVES.....	13
D. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS.....	14
<b>CHAPTER 3: STABLE AND PEACEFUL SOCIETIES .....</b>	<b>16</b>
A. RELIGIOUS LINKAGES WITH CONFLICT .....	16
B. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS.....	17
1. <i>On religion, peace and stability</i> .....	17
2. <i>On the selectivity of human rights</i> .....	19
3. <i>On culture shifts</i> .....	19
4. <i>On fear and silence</i> .....	20
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>22</b>
A. THE NEW NORMAL .....	22
B. EMERGING ISLAMIC DONOR DYNAMICS.....	23
C. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS.....	26
1. <i>On taxation, democracy and environment</i> .....	26
2. <i>On the evolving donor ecology</i> .....	26
3. <i>On unintended consequences</i> .....	27
4. <i>On how faith can strengthen social and economic capital formation</i> .....	27
5. <i>On inequalities between FBOs and gender equality concerns</i> .....	28
6. <i>On the diversity of FBOs in development, humanitarian and justice efforts</i> .....	29
D. CHAIR’S CONCLUSIONS.....	30
<b>CHAPTER 5: GENDER EQUALITY .....</b>	<b>32</b>
A. NORMS AND KEY ISSUES .....	32
B. INSTRUMENTALIZATION.....	33
C. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS.....	34
1. <i>On contested rights</i> .....	34
2. <i>On spirituality and rights</i> .....	34

<b>CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE .....</b>	<b>36</b>
A. NO SINGLE MODEL.....	36
B. THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES .....	37
C. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS.....	39
1. <i>On the need for a narrative</i> .....	39
2. <i>On remaining dichotomies</i> .....	40
<b>CHAPTER 7: HEALTH AND NUTRITION .....</b>	<b>41</b>
A. HEALTH IS ON THE AGENDA.....	41
B. FOOD SECURITY .....	43
C. RESOURCES TO SUPPORT SHARED CONCERNS.....	44
D. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS.....	45
1. <i>On the need for constructive engagement</i> .....	45
2. <i>On the Joint Learning Initiative</i> .....	45
3. <i>On the role of narrative again</i> .....	46
4. <i>On specifying 'the ask' of one another</i> .....	46
<b>CHAPTER 8: EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>48</b>
A. RELIGION AND SCHOOLS.....	48
B. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS.....	48
1. <i>On girls' education, and poverty</i> .....	48
2. <i>On diverse scenarios of engagement</i> .....	49
<b>CHAPTER 9: ATTRIBUTABLE NUGGETS, IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>50</b>
A. KEY TAKEAWAYS .....	50
B. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE CONSULTATION.....	52
C. CONCLUDING ACTION AGREED .....	53
<b>ANNEX 1: ILLUSTRATIVE GOALS AND TARGETS .....</b>	<b>55</b>

#### **BOXES**

BOX 1: WINDSOR CASTLE SUMMIT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

BOX 2: MARIE JUUL PETERSEN ON GULF-BASED NGOS

BOX 3: ONE PARTICIPANT'S VIEW

BOX 4: UN VISIT TO POPE FRANCIS

BOX 5: FISHING IN ZANZIBAR

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Any errors in this report are entirely my own. An important disclaimer here is that ***none of the opinions expressed in this document necessarily reflect those of any territory, institution, organization, office, government, Board or staff member.***

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## SUMMARY

The consultation titled “Religion and Development Post-2015: Challenges, Opportunities and Policy Guidance” was hosted by UNFPA in its capacity as Convenor of the UN-IATF-FBO and co-sponsored by George Mason University, City University London and Digni, a religious umbrella organization from Norway. The roundtable event took place on 12-13 May 2014 in New York. The nexus of religion and development concerns both faith-based organizations (FBOs)<sup>1</sup> as well as so-called secular ones. It is critical to recognize the diversity within religious organizations and actors and not seek to essentialise, over-simplify or categorize. This is especially the case because religion embodies layers of ambiguities, potentials and risks – whether as ritual, institution, non-governmental organization, leader or service provider.

Strategic thinking about religion and development requires a transformational shift in the attitudes of secular development actors — starting from simple stakeholder analysis undertaken from a presumed position of secular predominance, to considerations of a level playing field based on complementarity and parity between actors. The work of development has always been the domain of faith-based entities. The ‘intruders’ may well be so-called secular organizations.

Development actors, both faith-based and secular, must learn how to navigate the complex world of religion, rather than ignore or marginalize its significance. Secular development actors are cautioned against either ignoring the role of religion (in which case the development agenda loses a valuable interlocutor), or over-simplifying the complexities and ambiguities often found in such domains, particularly around contentious rights-related issues.

The dynamics of the diverse and complicated relationships between the United Nations and a range of religious development actors should be analysed with a view to the risk of mutual instrumentalization; i.e. the United Nations using religious actors and vice versa. A deliberate and careful stakeholder analysis of religious actors in any socio-political and legal context is key. Equally important is a critical reflection by secular and faith-based development actors about who is at the policy-making table and who is absent from it.

All development actors (secular and faith-based) stand to benefit from assessing even the unintended secondary and tertiary impact of engagement processes, and be wary of the risk of mutual instrumentalization, even if for the ‘right’ objectives.

What can often be ‘striking’ about the modus operandi of FBOs, including how they work with other faith communities in different parts of the world, is the invitation to

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<sup>1</sup> There is a great deal of discussion and debate around the definition of an FBO. It is used herein to reference faith-based or faith-inspired non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with legal standing, which are working to advocate for and/or deliver development and humanitarian services whether nationally, regionally or internationally (or indeed at all those levels). In this article, FBOs are distinguished from individual religious leaders (RL) or local faith communities, which operate in diverse contexts without being legally registered or established as a non-governmental entity.

question and be questioned, rather than appearing to know the answers to various developmental challenges.

Religious leaders and FBOs, are not necessarily equipped to play a prominent a role in national governance matters, nor would they want to. Some religious institutions (e.g. the Catholic Church) have learned from diverse experiences, not to engage openly in politics. Some “horrific outcomes” that have resulted from religious leaders’ and religious groups’ involvements in political space were pointed out. The concern was also raised that religious institutions themselves are not the most democratic of spaces and can be replete with political mismanagement. Some of the latter extends to the inability to deal with issues of abuse, and even domestic violence, which take place within the institutions themselves.

Many FBOs are ill-at-ease challenging political order, and therefore tend to shy away from such engagement. But at the same time, the civil space is shrinking in many countries, and attempting to stay ‘out of politics’ is increasingly unrealistic. Not only that, it was argued, but increasing political instability in some parts of the world has effectively encouraged a search for and a resurgence of more faith-inspired activism.

On the nexus between religion and peace and stability, several themes resonated, including:

- The instrumentalization of religious identity in conflict situations;
- An ambiguity about the role of religion during times of conflict and therefore its potential as a destabilizing force; and
- The potential of religious actors as peacemakers, thus the capacity for some religious elements to provide solutions to conflicts.

On the evolving ecology of financing, some FBOs as well as governments are acknowledged to be infusing significant resources. While not all FBOs are involved, they are, nevertheless, important brokers. These dynamics should have implications on ODA considerations and possibly also on the role of international financial institutions. The post-2015 agenda may require a conversation around the alignment of the strategies of emerging donors alongside those of Paris Club members from some of the world’s largest economies.

The strategic nature of the governmental deliberations on gender equality was discussed, including mention of the potential that sexual rights issues could “burden” the post-2015 gender equality goal. In fact, it was argued that gender equality considerations are not exclusively a matter of religion. Culture plays an important role, and cultural dynamics are part of post-2015 deliberations which the intergovernmental process is working with. Discussions addressed the nature of intergovernmental negotiations and the consistent opposition to certain issues elements of the sexual and reproductive rights’ agenda. Participants also noted that even some issues considered consolidated and advanced by governments themselves for decades (e.g. the Vienna Declaration on women’s rights being human rights), were also being contested in these intergovernmental fora. A concern apparently shared by all participants is that some of the basic tenets of gender



equality and women's empowerment already agreed upon currently appear to be 'jeopardized'. There was agreement on a need to preserve human rights mechanisms, which are themselves the driving force for all human rights – including those which “have yet to be consolidated”.

Discussants noted that in spite of pockets of resistance, the observation about a “post-secular world” resonates with the experiences of several donors. Indeed, a quote from a British politician was mentioned, in which he is alleged to have said, that governments “do God”. The various presentations and discussions underlined that religion is important in all areas of work – whether governance, gender equality or environmental accountability. An argument was also made that the increasing recognition of the role of religion and religious organizations appears to be consistent with a more general interest in spiritualism, and spirituality, especially in so far as there may appear to be an impact on behavioural change.

Environmental challenges are significant, as in spite of the efforts to date, “there is enough for our needs but not for our greed”. The engagement with faith actors heightens the awareness, and the capacity to appreciate that all developmental work takes place ultimately within specific and often distinct contexts. Thus, there can be no one size fits all solution or model of engagement. But the discussions also highlighted that conveying the environmental message exclusively through the provision of data – a feature many secular organizations are immersed in – is important but by no means sufficient to effect the radical changes needed not only in policy, but in terms of mindsets, behaviours and consumption patterns.

Numerous dynamics shared by the gathered faith-based organizations were highlighted during the roundtable consultation. Many of the FBOs:

- Share a sense of urgency as well as a real opportunity for FBOs to engage with the post-2015 development agenda. They are not only advocates to influence governmental delegations negotiating the sustainable development goals (SDGs); but also have roles to play in the eventual roll-out of the goals as community-based service providers, behaviour change-makers and social mobilizers, generating greater moral urgency behind the agenda. Also, faith leaders and faith-based communities have a non-tangible contribution to offer to broader spiritual aspects of developments;
- Are determined to carry out advocacy with diverse governments, and to stand in solidarity with like-minded secular and rights-based counterparts;
- Need to be organized, coordinated and cooperative (with each other as well as with secular counterparts);
- Are keen to move beyond technocratic language and to advance issues that may not be on the present agenda;
- Show determination to move beyond limitations imposed by overly technical approaches and jargon;
- Express concerned about ensuring that human rights are a basis of considerations throughout the post-2015 processes and the outcomes thereof;

- Give consideration as to how to ensure a level playing field among FBOs themselves, as well as among FBOs and their more secular developmental counterparts, bearing in mind the often wide differences in structure, as well as challenges of identification and representation;
- Acknowledge the need for ‘evidence’ and ‘results’ of faith-based engagement in development. Questions remain as to whom defines this ‘evidence’ and how much would be deemed ‘sufficient’ to consider systematic and learned outreach, as well as mutually agreed exit strategies?

Participants from the United Nations system identified a number of considerations regarding the nexus of religion and development as part of the post-2015 deliberations:

- Engagement with faith groups is key, including building deeper relationships where there is clarity about the value proposition, as well as other advantages. Such relationships, and the myriad actors, have to be contextualized not only through an appreciation of religion and its role in societies, but also by locating religious dynamics in an increasingly complex web of geo-politics.
- Clear and updated definitions of faith-based entities in development remain an ongoing requirement. This is not to argue semantics, but to ensure that the constantly evolving nexus of religious institutions, organizations, community-based entities, religious leaders, etc., is properly understood in shifting contexts. Partnering with one FBO should not be a model of partnership with the world of faith-based actors and entities.
- FBOs can enable the United Nations to look at new areas currently missing in discussions around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), e.g. issues of ethics, potential tipping points for creation of a culture of taxation, ability to mobilize in-kind local resources, and ability to raise significant financial resources from within faith communities themselves.
- Despite ample evidence showcasing the myriad work of FBOs in development praxis, much of this still work requires marshaling and analysis, given that most of the work is housed within respective agencies and not consolidated across the UN system.
- The UN and the wider donor community should identify the specific questions for which they are seeking answers or evidence. This should include evaluating and analyzing the capacities of FBOs to create positive change and/or rights-based and gender-sensitive transformational dynamics.
- FBOs have extensive experience in most of the Sustainable Development Goals under discussion by the Open Working Group to date, including partnerships with various operational UN agencies in joint advocacy or service delivery.
- The new aid architecture, and discussions around new development financing modalities, should consider the ‘new normal’ in today’s world, where not only BRICs are playing a key role, but Arab Gulf countries are also fast-developing a critical set of legacies in development assistance and humanitarian aid.
- FBOs have identified governance, financing development and peace and security as especially critical areas for their post- 2015 considerations, including the governance of FBOs and religious communities.

**Key follow-up activities:**

1. Networking: There was an agreement to form a loose, informal 'Network of Peers on Religion and Development Post-2015'.
2. Capacity building: The suggestion was made that donors, FBOs and UN agencies select two or three specific thematic areas and organize a follow-up colloquium on each. The use of specific frontline practitioner questions and experiences could build on shared knowledge, engagement and trust, resulting in a clear articulation of the compelling moral narrative around the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. Research: Research should be undertaken wherein a systematic surveying of governments and donor organizations would take place, with a view to identifying what policy makers want from FBOs.
4. Advocacy: FBOs determined to pursue stronger donor collaboration and support towards efforts to strengthen the evidence base on the impact of faith.

## INTRODUCTION

*"...the UN has retained a secularist jargon and ethos, so that even religious bodies have to use secularist language when they make arguments on the East River. They speak of "family values"—not of serving God. You might say that one of the purposes of secularism is to provide a language in which people of very different metaphysical views can communicate, and it served that purpose in the early years of the UN, even though some of its pioneering heroes, like the Swedish Lutheran Dag Hammarskjold, were deeply religious people. In the "post-secular" age where some forms of religion are on the rise again, nobody knows what the common language will be..."*

*The Economist (Erasmus, Religion and Public Policy, Religion and the UN: Visions of a New World)*

The United Nations is unparalleled as an international and intergovernmental body that has succeeded in extending its influence and infrastructure to encompass a huge range of mechanisms which serve almost 200 countries' governments. It convenes, develops, deploys, plans and coordinates critical international conventions and interventions responding to a multitude of human needs. But the realities around the UN have changed from a world in which nation-states made decisions to govern every aspect within their own boundaries and organized their own armies, to a world where non-state actors, various peoples and a plethora of other multi-state bodies, proliferate.

Geopolitical alliances, governance regimes and the direction of international development aid are all shifting. Plants and animals are facing drastic environmental changes in basic survival patterns. One of the many changes becoming increasingly difficult to ignore, especially for longstanding secular organizations, is the extent to which religion is surfacing as a critical broker of human and governmental existence.

Faith-based infrastructures include religious institutions, religious leaders (male and female), faith-affiliated and faith-inspired service delivery mechanisms, government-sponsored faith-based service partners, government-affiliated faith-based advocates, and international FBOs with local offices. They are tightly interlinked within the so-called 'communities'. In order to focus the lenses on communities, this kaleidoscope must be appreciated.

There is much to be learned about the role of FBOs in development, especially in service provision. A study (albeit contested) published by the World Health Organization was a 'reality check' for many development practitioners. According to the study, faith-based organizations provide an average of 30 to 40 per cent of basic health care in the world. This figure is expected to be much higher in contexts where conflicts and/or humanitarian emergencies are active (e.g. Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Syria) where organizations such as IMA World Health report that almost 75 per cent of basic health care can end up being provided by FBOs.

Religious institutions are capable of significant social mobilization, in addition to a distinct moral standing. Beyond the convening capacities inherent in raising and utilizing legions of volunteers (which no other institution can boast worldwide), they are owners of the longest standing and most enduring mechanisms for raising financial resources. In times when traditional ‘secular’ development is confronting its strongest set of resource challenges, these capabilities cannot be underestimated.

Characteristics of FBOs are varied: religion; size; location; areas of interest; positions on diverse development-related issues and priorities; geo-political positions; regional, national and local activities; and many more variations.. In 2012, the total revenue of World Vision International was \$2.67 billion; the total group source of Islamic Relief was \$67,211,825 plus a nearly equal amount in charity funds; and Lutheran World Relief’s total support and revenue was \$38,529,000. Far beyond these organizations are the Catholic Church’s diverse assets. At the same time, from a significantly more impoverished perspective, “USD 100 can go a very long way to provide basic needs,” says Nigerian Sister Ngozi, who oversees orphanages and women’s empowerment initiatives in rural Nigeria, FBOs vary widely: The biggest can stand very tall next to its secular developmental counterpart while the smallest may be involved in care for thousands of the world’s poorest people—and yet never feature in a mapping exercise conducted in capitals or in a Western-based NGO.

Given the realities of service provision, resource capacity, political presence as well as the potential of faith leaders and organizations to mitigate or aggravate a variety of conflict intra and inter-communities, being knowledgeable of the work of FBOs is necessary in order to benefit from the social capital available for sustainable human development, human rights, and peace and security. It is therefore essential to undertake informed and systematic outreach to key partners in the world of religion, where community service provision has been a reality for centuries.

#### **A. UN and FBO development partnerships**

It may be said that UN and FBO development partnerships represent multiple roads, not all well paved. How do FBOs engage with the United Nations system around development issues? There is no coordinated global faith-based engagement around development. Humanitarian relief, climate change, poverty and some health angles (e.g. malaria, tuberculosis, HIV and maternal health) bring many FBOs on board with legitimately impressive track records of care and organization. Other areas remain highly contentious, however, and see little coordination, activism or visibility. Such areas pertain to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health: the most contentious areas of rights in the entire development agenda. Faith-based organizations themselves are divided on positions towards specific issues of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Tensions between faith-based/faith-inspired women activists and more secular-leaning women activists on these issues remain unresolved; it can be heightened particularly at the global level where intergovernmental negotiations and outcomes take place.

The difference in positions, and many of the divisions between organizations and groups (including around contentious issues) is not dependent on the faith itself, i.e. lines are not drawn Muslim–Christian or Christian–Buddhist. Nor are these differences uniformly along national lines or west-east and north-south. Rather, they are within each faith **and** within countries. This is also important to realize for national advocacy purposes; in other words, within one country, the position that a government will adopt in inter-governmental negotiations is dependent on the strength of the advocacy by and for rights actors within that country.

## B. Track record

The United Nations system has a varied record of partnership and engagement with FBOs and religious leaders. Since the 1970s, UNFPA has had a history of research aimed at ensuring that the language of UN advocacy (in this case around health) is strengthened by the teachings of religion. Others have cultivated these partnerships more towards the late 1990s and early 2000s, largely around advocacy, care and service delivery, including the International Labour Organization, UNAIDS, UNEP, UNICEF and the World Bank.. Still others have started relatively recently to investigate the potential and/or publicly note the importance of outreach to and partnership with faith-based entities, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Department of Political Affairs.

An important nuance here is that the experience of engaging faith-based actors can differ even within the same UN agency. Consequently, approaches in the UN towards such partnerships vary widely. Most UN development agencies and humanitarian relief actors are relatively more cognizant of the potential and value of such partnerships. It could be argued, admittedly with some generalization, that the more openly ‘political’ the mandate of the UN body, or the more it enforces gender equality as a requirement of engagement, the more it will have concerns about partnerships with faith-based and faith-inspired actors. In general, engagement tends to err on the side of some suspicion at worst, and caution at best.

UNFPA has raised the visibility of this FBO ‘conversation’ within the UN system. UNFPA has been a driving force behind convening the UN system to call for a collective platform within the broader organization to reflect critically, and in a studied manner, on the purpose, objectives, methods, lessons learned and ‘pros and cons’ FBO engagement. At the outset, donor support was provided by Switzerland and continues at present with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad). UNFPA was the first member of the UN family to undertake a ‘mapping’ of its own engagement with FBOs, focusing on 2000 to 2007. This inspired other UN agencies to undertake similar (and with more detailed analysis) accounting of their outreach with FBOs and wider religious communities. Following the UNFPA Global Forum on Faith-based Organizations for Population and Development (Istanbul 2008), UNFPA launched the UN’s first Interfaith Network on population and development issues.

A task force was formalized in 2009 by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG)<sup>2</sup>, at the invitation of UNFPA, titled the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-based Organizations for Development. The IATF-FBO regularly convenes several UN agencies and hosts many consultations with FBOs, academia and think tanks around issues common to the development–religion–politics nexus. Many of these consultations are documented in print by UNFPA. In response to the IATF-FBO, in 2010 UN DESA) expanded its annual Report of the Secretary- General on interreligious and intercultural activities to include representation of the work carried out by this wider network of UN agencies.

In addition, UN staff meet with diverse partner FBOs in a yearly Strategic Learning Exchange, held under the auspices of the UN System Staff College (UNSSC). UNFPA together with UNAIDS convenes UNICEF, UNDP and UNHCR on a rotating basis. The Exchange provides an opportunity to share and critically assess concrete case studies of partnership and lessons learned. The objective is to enhance delivery towards common goals and seek to identify and overcome challenges.

### C. Global-level engagement

The outreach to faith actors around the post-2015 development agenda process can only be described as ‘very varied’ given the huge diversity of FBOs themselves, which are far from a homogenous block. On the global level, the engagement of FBOs tends to be informed by the following dynamics:

- 1. The size of the organization:** Larger FBOs tend to be more engaged with the UN than smaller ones. Some organizations have been long-time partners with UN agencies around specific issues, such World Vision on child rights and maternal health, and Islamic Relief on humanitarian relief and emergency support in countries.
- 2. Dominated by Christian NGOs:** Christian NGOs have a relatively longer history of centralized organization and presence at the international level (and, some would argue, a longer track record of providing social services in countries other than their own, preceding colonial presence). They are thus the most visible at the international ‘policy tables’, conferences and meetings, including at the United Nations.
- 3. Dependent on the responsiveness of the FBOs themselves:** Some FBOs consider(ed) the Millennium Development Goals to be part of their own agenda-setting and responsibilities. Some have been more willing to be engaged, and have articulated the MDGs or referenced the goals in their own strategic and policy frameworks. It is noteworthy, and possibly not a coincidence, that those FBOs are likely to be headquartered in the western hemisphere and also relatively more comfortable ‘taking on’ human rights language and issues. Many of these FBOs build and work through deep and longstanding partnerships with local NGOs. In many cases, the entire development

<sup>2</sup> The UN Development Group unites the 32 UN funds, programmes, agencies, departments and offices that play a role in development.



model is to build capacity and work through local churches or NGOs, as for Tearfund and Bread for the World-Germany. In contrast, many other FBOs and religious leaders have no interest in a presence in western headquarters; nor do they have the resources. They may rarely feel the need to accommodate MDG or related discourse in their own agendas or outreach. And yet they are critical development agents serving large segments of the local populations at the most micro community levels. In some ways, as is the case with many other NGOs, the ‘elite’ FBOs are the ones at the table at the global level.

**4. Dependent on the outreach done by the different UN agencies:** Some UN agencies have sought FBO input, deliberately organized outreach to their FBO partners, included them in programme roll-outs, and developed some sort of guidelines for such engagement. –Examples include some of the more operational agencies such as UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNEP and UNFPA. Other UN offices have, at different moments, selectively reached out to some religious leaders and engaged them in certain advocacy efforts and/or in certain mediation initiatives. Examples include UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).

The ways of outreach and engagement are myriad; nevertheless, they lead to similar concerns.

#### D. Calls for a ‘safe space’ for sustainable development discourse

The dynamics of donors, UN agencies and FBOs—influenced by size, agenda or variations in engagement style and other factors—have been on the minds of IATF-FBO members.<sup>3</sup> In 2012, a request was made by the UN Development Group to convene a consultation that would help identify the particularities of religious development organizations in relation to the UN’s post-2015 development agenda processes. This consultation would call for more deliberation around the nexus of religion and development, and would seek to engage multiple stakeholders, not simultaneously convened in the past. Others called for such a consultation, too.

Participants at Wilton Park meetings in 2011 and 2014 pointed out the potential value of a “dialogue with the UN” on issues of religion and sustainable human development, particularly as post-2015 deliberations appeared to require more attention by both foreign policy and traditional development desks. The meetings at Wilton Park, a forum for global change based in the United Kingdom, brought together policy makers, academics, and representatives of NGOs, donor governments and intergovernmental organizations to focus on the dynamics of religion, foreign policy and social development.

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<sup>3</sup> Members of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations for Development (IATF-FBO) include ILO, UNAIDS, UNAOC, UN DESA, UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UN-HABITAT, UNICEF, UN Women and the World Bank. The members have a record of engagement (and focal points assigned) with religious and/or cultural issues, and faith-based and/or civil society outreach.



This call was further reinforced when FBOs themselves, during training sessions sponsored by the UN Staff College<sup>4</sup> asked for a ‘safe space’ to engage in and around the post-2015 agenda. The reasons for the articulation of a ‘safe space’, as opposed to an ordinary consultation, rested on the realization that no conversation about any aspect of religion, especially when based on contemporary real-life situations in diverse contexts, could avoid political sensitivities. As the following report illustrates, religion, and religiously tinged issues, intersect with every facet of political, economic, legal and social dimensions.

The calls from diverse sources indicated a shared need for a ‘safe space’ wherein discussions among key development policy makers at the global level could unpack, identify and reconstruct an experience-based understanding of the nexus between religion and development. How could the post-2015 processes benefit from the interactions and the lessons learned?

### **E. About the consultation**

The result of these calls for a ‘safe space’ was an informal two-day meeting titled “Religion and Development Post 2015: Challenges, Opportunities and Policy Guidance”. The consultation was held in New York 12 and 13 May 2014. It was hosted by UNFPA and co-sponsored by George Mason University, City University London, and Digni. The consultation convened nearly 40 participants including members of the IATF-FBO; representatives of major donor organizations from Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States; several FBOs including Danish Mission Society, Digni, Islamic Relief Worldwide and World Vision; and international researchers on Gulf development, religion and governance, and religion and finance.

Objectives and purpose of the consultation:

1. To discuss the respective concerns, experiences and current milestones in the dynamics of religion and development;
2. To consider the impact and/or requirements of such partnerships given that the post- 2015 and SDG processes are progressing and moving towards shared development goals;
3. To consider opportunities to consolidate joint efforts towards calling for specific development priorities/goals (bearing in mind the systematic emphasis on and intersections with human rights and gender equality issues). Suggested thematic areas to look at include: poverty, climate change, health (including sexual and

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<sup>4</sup> These take place once yearly and are referred to as Strategic Learning Exchanges on Faith, Development and Humanitarian Relief. Various UN staff members are convened with FBO partners to exchange experiences and address partnerships which help to address and assess the nexus between religion-development and humanitarian aspects based on real in-country situations.

- reproductive health and reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS); women's empowerment, governance;<sup>5</sup>
4. To create an informal network of development peers as 'advisors' on religion and development dynamics (with a possibility of sub-networks focusing on specific thematic interventions/areas).

## F. The structure of this report

To describe the presentations and discussions as rich, engaging and in-depth would be an understatement. Attempting to capture the scope, depth, nuances and variety of knowledge and perspectives is simply not realistic. This is rendered all the more challenging given the context of non-attribution promised by the organizers, and on which basis all participants invested their time and resources to participate in this meeting.

This report captures the gist of the interventions and the subsequent discussions engendered. In many instances, more questions than answers were raised, in keeping with the purpose of an open and frank sharing of reflections and experiences between diverse stakeholders, about fundamentally contentious issues. The presentations were undertaken on the basis of diverse themes identified in the report of the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 'A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development'. In this report, twelve 'illustrative goals' are advocated to realize the transformative shifts for the sustainable development agenda (see Annex 1). The two-day meeting, and this report therefore, addressed the following themes in the order noted:

- Governance and institution building (Chapter 2);
- Stable and peaceful societies (Chapter 3);
- Financing sustainable development (Chapter 4);
- Gender equality (Chapter 5);
- Environment and climate change (Chapter 6);
- Health and nutrition (Chapter 7);
- Education (Chapter 8).<sup>6</sup>

On each of these themes, speakers were identified from the three main constituencies represented (UN, Donor, FBO) to 'kick off' and indeed provoke the discussions, which were then commented on by participants.

The roundtable discussions now begin.

<sup>5</sup> See Annex 1 for a framework for 12 development goals proposed by the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda as illustrative examples for the post-2015 development agenda. Website: <http://www.post2015hlp.org/the-report/>

<sup>6</sup> Employment was on the agenda but largely due to the absence of the relevant UN entity dealing with these issues, it was not addressed.

## Chapter 1: AN OVERVIEW OF RELIGION AND POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND POLICY GUIDANCE

### A. ICPD review speaks to inequality

This year the United Nations conducted a review of progress towards the goals set out 20 years ago in the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), where 179 governments committed to a Programme of Action to deliver human rights-based development. The review, *ICPD Beyond 2014*, was undertaken by UNFPA with Member States and provided rich knowledge covering several key developmental features. Notably, while great progress has been achieved, there are large portions of the population left behind. A trend towards greater levels of income inequality is now a reality not only in developing countries, but also in developed ones. Most noteworthy for UN agencies and actors is the extent to which women and girls are at the receiving end of these inequalities, and increasingly challenged as a result of them. No single country in the world has achieved full gender equality by any measure. The results of this inequality are particularly dire among marginalized, vulnerable and key populations.

Unfolding events in Nigeria (with the abduction by the *Boko Haram* group of over 200 girls) as well as in Syria and Iraq (with sectarian tensions leading to killing fields) provide high profile examples of what happens on a daily basis in terms of discrimination. In many ways, they represent the challenges in the years to come.

We stand today at a very complex set of crossroads:

1. Politically speaking, religion is either part of or stands in direct opposition to ruling regimes in many parts of the world. It is probably safe to say that the forms of religious regimes and religious opposition are as diverse and numerous as in the 19th century.
2. The social landscape today is populated with religious actors, discourses and dynamics, not all of which are easy to grasp and some of which are hard to ignore—whether in daily life or as overarching cultural dynamics that have an impact on thoughts, behaviours, attitudes and provision of social services.
3. The world of religion invariably intersects in many domains. This occurs whether we speak of strengthening health systems, embracing cutting edge knowledge in educational developments, exploring issues of political legitimacy and the sanctity of human rights, or calling upon leaders to rally around greener policies to help safeguard the planet for generations to come.

The Sixth International Parliamentarians' Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action was convened 23-25 April 2014 in Stockholm, Sweden. The participants acted with honesty and courage to take progressive declarations and stands,

as they are much closer to the people they represent. This is noteworthy and inspiring. It serves as yet another reminder why global meetings of various branches of governments, together with numerous counterparts in civil society and the private sector, are critical to our shared lives and to informed decision-making.

## A. The SDGs

*“To truly listen is to risk being changed forever.”— Northrup Frye*

The concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was born at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, in 2012. The objective was to produce a set of universally applicable goals that balances the three dimensions of sustainable development: the environmental, social and economic. At this particular moment, the post-2015 and SDG processes are moving towards their conclusion, with issues important and relevant for all development actors. Our consultation in May 2014 was particularly timely, as each of the post-2015 agenda items critically intersect with religious traditions, with values, and with what humanity as a whole has been grappling with for millennia. The MDGs were a social agenda, but this is being greatly expanded into a radically different universal agenda that is not just about ‘poor people’, and is not just decided on in capitals. In fact, all are expected to take action, everywhere.

The Rio+20 conference emphasized that governments themselves want to be in the drivers’ seat, instead of the development agenda being fashioned at the level of technocrats. This heightens the importance of an intergovernmental process complemented by an active series of dialogues and engagements with civil society organizations. A global conversation is evolving, involving 2.4 million people so far, through the ‘World We Want’ initiative ([www.worldwewant2015.org](http://www.worldwewant2015.org)). The conversations underline, clearly and unequivocally, that people around the world know precisely what kind of world they want to live in.

The post-2015 engagements to date, particularly with the results of the global conversations, simultaneously validate and yet are very different from the Millennium Development Goals. The top issues identified correspond to MDG articulations, with education appearing as the number one need, followed by access to education and quality health care for all. But in addition, there is a significant percentage of those who identified ‘honest and responsive government’ at a par with those who noted ‘access to decent jobs’; both areas were absent from the MDGs. These priorities were closely followed by food security, gender quality and freedom from fear and violence; also not included in the MDGs. It is important to note that while many identified needs are missing from the MDGs themselves, they nevertheless resonate strongly with the Millennium Declaration.

All of these needs are precisely what religions and other faith traditions grapple with. Faith is arguably the terrain where justice, peace and the struggle against inequality interface. This meeting is therefore an opportunity to consider how religious actors may be shaping or impacting upon the emerging agendas of the sustainable development goals

(SDGs). Appreciation of these issues is growing within the UN, as evidenced for example in the May 2014 meeting between the UN leadership and representatives of the Vatican and His Holiness the Pope on the SDG agenda. This meeting was followed by an audience between the UN Secretary-General and His Holiness, who committed the Catholic Church to support the SDG efforts. This entire meeting was remarkable.

Another key area of difference from the MDG process resides in an appreciation, in some circles, of the role of faith actors as ‘tipping points’. Faith actors are capable of social mobilization that can shift attitudes and behaviours towards those more conducive to sustainable development. This potential for social mobilization is particularly relevant in times reminiscent of those preceding the First World War. Humanity is confronted now with a similar series of critical choices as it was then. One path is to continue the status quo, which aggressively exploits finite resources, which is characterized by finger pointing and warmongering, and which sustains a world of divisions between rich and poor within and between nations. Another choice is the post-2015 development agenda, which offers opportunities to traverse a path of equity, equality, justice and the full realization of all human rights.

While it hard to believe in change, we know that parameters can change. What if we reconsidered our environment through the prism of faith? What if we re-thought social order with inputs of religions that strive for social justice—and with religious organizations that have established and innovated social services, conservation, patterns of consumption, and means of reaching and healing, even the most marginalized? What if we looked at the world through the prisms of those who know their **contexts** best because they are born of them and work with them and fashion their discourses? These perspectives, these dimensions — imbedded in values, faith, religion —lack the technocratic approach that has dominated discussions to date.

Taking peoples’ contexts into account enables us to be more efficient and effective. Necessary pressure to take these contexts into account needs to be leveraged on decision-makers. These contexts are important to consider in the transition to sustainable development. Taking contexts into account requires far more effort and resources.

The fundamental teachings of religion include concern for peace, endeavours for social justice, and caring for the poor and the marginalized. These fundamental values are often taken for granted, however, at best articulated in human rights language, which does not appeal or inspire in the same way. After all, more than 100 million people go on religious pilgrimages every year; that bespeaks commitment, this is about what moves people. These sources of energy should be mobilized.

At the same time, all religions have troubling dimensions. This is why it is imperative that we measure our religious beliefs against agreed human rights principles, and against our human challenges. A great deal of time is spent on disputes pertaining to human rights, especially the rights of women and girls. There is no question that we need to dare to challenge, and that principles of human rights must be given the right of way over

male-dominated traditions. Precisely because of these contested domains, the bedrock of our conversations on sustainable development must be religion, faith, culture and values.

**Box 1: Windsor Castle summit on climate change**

*Faith-based and secular groups met at Windsor Castle for a three-day summit on climate change in 2009. This experience of engaging with and gathering religious representatives around environmental concerns, prior to the Copenhagen Summit, is worthy of note. Attendance at this meeting was contingent upon the successful development by religious communities of multi-year action plans designed to conserve energy and change patterns of behaviour and consumption which are harmful to the environment. Most of those plans are still being enacted, but one of them is thriving: the creation of a ‘Green Pilgrimage Network’. The religious actors committed themselves to working collaboratively to realize the ‘greening’ of pilgrimage experiences. Cities such as Jerusalem and Mecca are involved. These successful endeavours are all the more noteworthy when contrasted with the relative paucity of results emerging from the Copenhagen Summit.*

**B. To ‘do religion’ or not to ‘do religion’**

*“[There is] too much focus on the impact of religion on man, and not enough on the impact of man on religion.” — Amin Maalouf*

To ‘do religion’ or not to ‘do religion’ – is that the question? Culture was rarely mentioned in the discourse around the MDGs. What is actually at stake here is not just a matter of including FBOs in development planning and roll-out efforts. At stake is a recognition of the fundamental role of religion, religious convictions and religious values as part of the cultural fabric of humanity—as a powerful force in shaping development. The issue is not about ‘secular’ organizations seeking to engage religious ones; rather, religion should be a matter of concern for **all** developmental actors.

A dichotomy between secular and faith-based organizations should not be made. Religion as an element of society concerns everybody — a fact that cannot be emphasized enough. Secular organizations are erroneously considered as ‘neutral’ but they are themselves guided by values and ideologies, not always made transparent.. The imperative for self-reflexivity by all development actors is to reflect critically on their own positions, guiding values and beliefs. FBOs should not be treated as a special or separate category but must respond to the same quality criteria as any other actor.

By calling for consideration of the role faith holds in shaping development, and by engaging faith-based actors, there is a risk that religious actors would instrumentalize development processes. Should religion and FBOs be used to instrumentalize the five



transformative shifts that have been put forth as drivers of the SDG agenda?<sup>7</sup> No. We must endeavour not to do that.

Herein lies the ambiguity of religion. It is important to recognize the potential in the relationship of religion to society, as well as the risks inherent. These possibilities and dangers are part and parcel of entertaining religious actors in social and political processes; indeed, in development as a whole. This ambiguity informs all discussions. Religion pronounces on all aspects of life: dealing with money, material wealth, sexuality, power, and so on. As such, it has the potential to provide guidance to daily life, social coherence, solidarity, justice, peace and non-violent resistance. At the same time, some religious organizations have their own internal power dynamics, may engage in questionable external outreach, claim absolute truth, and go so far as to instrumentalize religion to justify acts of war and outright atrocities.

To engage with religion requires discarding any notion of homogeneity. Religions are diverse, within each and between them. Moreover, religions are largely interpreted by men, and are riven with internal contradictions. There is a rush to ‘mobilize religious actors’ but their complex and contradictory realities have to be factored into any and all such engagements. Neglecting these aspects of religion in development processes and world affairs is costly. There is no alternative to a detailed case-by-case study of the role of religion, including all its ambiguities, in every development dynamic.

To engage with religion requires a certain level of ‘religious literacy’ on the part of development actors—an understanding of the complex roles that religions play in contemporary global, national and local contexts. Some faith-based actors can contribute to shaping and facilitating the post-2015 agenda, but not all are well placed nor able to do so. There is no evidence to justify asserting that FBOs are better placed to understand local contexts, occupy the moral high ground, or enjoy the trust of civil servants—though this is often said. To successfully collaborate with an FBO, a careful analysis of its profile is required, including self-critical reflections. Once again, religious literacy, and religious competency, are a developmental requirement.

Another critical dimension of the religion and development equation pertains to the identity and representativity of faith-based actors. This is particularly relevant given the difference between religious institutions (largely male-dominated and rife with internal power dynamics) and non-formal religious actors serving at the heart of their communities. When we are speaking with representatives of FBOs, who are we actually talking to? Who is excluded from the dialogue and consultation tables? Is outreach to FBOs taking into consideration issues of asymmetries of power among religious groups and communities, or even contributing to them?

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<sup>7</sup> The High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda identified “five big, transformative shifts” required to drive the post-2015 agenda: leave no one behind; put sustainable development at the core; transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all; and forge a new global partnership. Accessible at: <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>

## C. Discussion highlights

### 1. On the need for a transformational shift

Strategic thinking about religion and development requires a transformational shift in the attitudes of secular development actors — starting from simple stakeholder analysis undertaken from a presumed position of secular predominance, to considerations of a level playing field based on complementarity and parity between actors. The work of development has always been the domain of faith-based entities. The ‘intruders’ are the so-called secular organizations.

“We have no permanent friends and no permanent enemies. There are common concerns but there will always be objectionable elements.”

This transformational shift entails recognizing and contending with contradictory dynamics. On one hand, religion should not have a special place at the table, since it is part of the fabric of faith, culture and values. On the other hand, to arrive at that awareness requires a certain level of religious literacy among developmental actors. But if religious actors cannot make a claim to exceptionalism (i.e. to be distinguished from ‘civil society’ and ‘cultural dynamics’) then on what basis should they be sought out by developmental actors? How can we justify processes of inclusion of religious actors who would shape the development agenda? What would strengthen the ‘moral imperative’ for sustainable development? How would this, in turn, inform a more robust strategy for identifying the comparative advantages of FBOs, and the best means by which these may be leveraged?

A disconnect continues between rhetoric and collaboration. How can we effect a move beyond rhetoric to realize a different means of working together, as international development actors including faith-based ones? This question appeared to resonate with many. The impact of religion on actual development *in situ*, and particularly at the community level, is clear. And yet there is an ongoing disconnect between these realities and international policy makers’ own ‘religion blind-spot’. Thus, FBOs, or wider faith actors, are often not ‘represented’ at the policy-making tables. Moreover, what some of them are interested in (e.g. behavioural change, community-level social support systems, strengthened holistic care mechanisms) remains off the international planning agendas. Also, such work is difficult to capture using traditional indicators for measuring impact and progress.

Acquiring the ‘right’ indicators is a challenge. They should avoid being simplistic and capture, for example, the complexities of impact of some faith leaders who may lack education but still carry authority in communities. Reference was made in this context to



the work of Indian economist Amartya Sen and the Legatum Institute's Prosperity Index measuring income as well as well-being.<sup>8</sup>

Engaging with faith issues and with FBOs is about ownership and empowerment. It should be based on the realization that religions have fueled many transformative and inclusive social movements. The example of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and Dr. Martin Luther King was evoked, in terms of his appeal to human rights from within the discursive frameworks of faith. This approach successfully galvanized both the faith-based and the non-faith-based simultaneously.

Some FBOs engage successfully with sacred religious texts around development interventions, which faith leaders themselves will take seriously. The potential to change harmful discourse (speech and action), justified in religious terms, is realized when religious protagonists themselves can be made to see alternative expressions of faith that support human rights, rather than decry or abuse them. Through this process of engagement with religious texts, some FBOs report an ability to shift community attitudes such as on HIV/AIDS stigmatization, and to argue against harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).

A call was made to consider the dichotomy inherent in some development dynamics between 'guest' and 'host'. In some cases 'guests' (international development actors) may seek to have the 'hosts' (communities) speak their own language. But greater change is achieved, it was maintained, when guests speak the hosts' own language. An example was shared concerning faith-based engagement in Uganda around criminalization of homosexuality. A dialogue was generated with faith communities around the Biblical narrative of Jesus and the Ten Commandments, e.g. "Did Jesus say to hate your neighbor if s/he was a homosexual?". This was an alternative to focusing on human rights implications. While national legislation has yet to change, some of the religious communities supporting punitive anti-rights legislation are now questioning their approach from within.

These dynamics were juxtaposed to UN reports, which, it was maintained, "will only ever be just a UN report". The extent to which these reports can be transformative, was gauged by some to be doubtful and limited.

## 2. On a human rights discourse

A question was raised about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: To what extent is it viewed as a 'sacred text', at least in some quarters of the UN and secular development contexts? There is a strong **alignment** between the global conversation and what religious traditions have carried, one participant said. Many concurred that

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<sup>8</sup> The 2013 Legatum Prosperity Index™ is described as "distinctive in that it is the only global measurement of prosperity based on both income and wellbeing". Website: <http://prosperity.com/#!/methodology>

International Conventions and frameworks are reflections of universal values and traditions, accumulated by humanity over time, and enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Centering the post-2015 process on human rights is a means of countering the technocracy noted above. Human rights are at the core of what several UN development agencies are committed to. Through this focus on the Declaration, the unifying confluence of religion and values is being respected.

The starting point, some maintained, must be secular development discourse. This requires, simultaneously, an acknowledgement that all actors speak from clear normative positions. Thus, secular development actors are themselves speaking from an ideological paradigm, which is a human rights discourse.

### 3. On further ambiguities

The ambiguities around religion were emphasized as some voices pointed out the differences between ‘rank and file’ of religious communities as compared to religious leaders. Lack of clarity as to whom the leaders are actually speaking for — themselves or their membership — complicates attempts to bridge secular and faith-based development actors.

Some cautioned that all major religions have “a tradition of justifying war through [religious] text”. At the same time, any value systems can be given to validate “just war” at diverse moments in history, as “any value system is itself ambiguous”. Calls were made to distinguish between values that contribute to framing a discourse, and those which contribute to a particular group identity. While the two are connected, they are also distinct endeavours and require different normative frameworks with diverse programming and outreach implications.

Questioning the certainty that normative human rights framework are necessarily better, some also urged the UN to reflect critically on its “own hierarchical organization... and [question] exactly whom it serves?” Why appear concerned about instrumentalization, it was argued, when the intent of the entire discussion may be how to instrumentalize religion, but to do so with a more evidence-based awareness of its potential, and *in spite of* the ambiguities?

FBO members asked if precise mechanisms are available in the post-2015 process to which their input can be provided. It was noted that a number of national consultations have already taken place, to which many FBOs have contributed. Some FBOs have taken part in the ‘My World’<sup>9</sup> survey and discussions. Participants voiced concern about the likely disconnect anticipated in the near future between the processes which enabled faith and values to be voiced and the processes that will facilitate more narrow technocratic discussion. Thus far, broader engagements have been made possible by the Open Working Group and High Level Panel formats. Once the conversation moves into intergovernmental negotiations, however, it will be a challenge to create opportunities to

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<sup>9</sup> <http://vote.myworld2015.org>

bring faith voices in. Mention was made of the UNDP-UNESCO-UNFPA co-lead post-2015 Thematic Dialogue on Culture and Development, which is envisioned to include a multiplicity of cultural voices, stakeholders and issues. Also, a concern was noted as to the extent to which faith-based contributions can, or should be, mainstreamed in the core work of the United Nations system.

## Chapter 2: Governance and effective institutions

### A. Religion and governance

Governance is the most contested area in the discussions of the Open Working Group (OWG)<sup>10</sup> discussions. Within that discussion, perhaps one of the most glaring silences concerns the question of values and religion. This may suggest the background to a UN initiative that seeks to build alliances across cultures, identity lines and religions. Recognizing the inherent challenges, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) aims to be innovative, and to be prepared to accept that any failures along these forms of endeavours can be instructive and transformative in and of themselves.

“If and when secular organizations shun FBO engagement, then the opportunity that FBOs offer towards legitimizing the post-2015 goals and related initiatives, and enabling them to be more locally-owned, is compromised.”  
— An FBO perspective

The strength of the UN system as a whole may lie in the ability to recognize and come to terms with its own institutional trajectory (*raison d'être* and dominant secularism of ideology, mandate and praxis), it was noted. The strength and sustainability of the institution also requires critical consideration of the contexts within which the UN works, particularly its headquartered presence in “post-Christian societies”.

FBOs possess both advantages limitations when engaging the governance agenda. Historically, religions have played strong political roles. After the severance of the link between Church and State, and with the independence of former colonies, however, some FBOs found themselves marginalized and displaced by new elites. This led to one of the lessons learned: Once religion engages with governance, it is bound, at some point, to grow weaker and eventually to lose its foothold. Thus, it is best to distance the faith-based institution and organization from governmental institutions and the praxis of governance, and to maintain a relatively silent position.

<sup>10</sup> One of the main outcomes of the June 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) was the agreement by governments to launch a process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), which should be limited in number, aspirational and easy to communicate. A 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) of the General Assembly was tasked with preparing a proposal on the SDGs. The OWG was established on 22nd of January 2013 by a decision of the General Assembly. The governments decided to use an innovative, constituency-based system of representation that is new to limited membership bodies of the General Assembly, thus most of the seats in the OWG are shared by several countries.

Another lesson learned was that engaging on governance and with governmental institutions requires being active in and more accountable to myriad public domains. This sometimes entails self-serving scrutiny and critique. Most FBOs have, over the years, learned to be wary of opening themselves up to random criticism. However, when it comes to the creation and management of effective institutions (rooted in communities, able to mobilize resources from within and to manage social service delivery relatively well), FBOs successfully constitute local, national, regional and international networks. Many of these engage with myriad stakeholders at the same time. Many FBOs offer themselves as effective institutional partners. When it comes to modalities of implementation, many FBOs can boast strong capabilities and long-standing partnerships, and many have well-developed skills and systems of monitoring and accountability.

FBOs hold legitimizing potential, yet this can put them in jeopardy when it comes to embracing a governance agenda. All civil society organizations are subject to the same danger. At the same time, if and when secular civil society organizations shun FBO engagement (as has happened in some countries) then the opportunity that FBOs offer towards legitimizing post-2015 initiatives and enabling them to be successfully locally-owned, is compromised.

An example of the Central African Republic was shared as to the ‘double-edged sword’ of religious involvement in conflict resolution. FBOs are often the first recourse for victims of the conflict. When religious conflict escalates, the very identity of an FBO becomes its liability. On the other hand, as experience in Tanzania illustrates, FBOs are critical deliverers of services to the poor. Because they are deeply rooted and well managed, some FBOs work in tandem with government, and successfully engage in public-private partnerships. Their experience also translates into an unparalleled database and knowledge capacities: they can identify what people need, how best to serve some of the most marginalized, and how to leverage governmental interface to serve the most vulnerable.

## **B. Intergovernmental nature of the UN system**

The intergovernmental nature of the UN system underlines the importance of taking into account the nexus of religion and civic participation, i.e. religious actors as part of the broader civil society spectrum, including as social service providers. This includes the priority given to governments in all aspects of UN decision-making and engagements. But how should the UN place itself vis-à-vis religious activism that is anti-state? There is no one single clear role for the UN when it comes to engaging religious non-state actors in situations where there is conflict with governments, as these vary per context, and success is often difficult to trace. For instance, mediating between religious actors themselves, or between religious anti-state actors and governments, is subject to considerations of sovereignty, among other factors. The track record of the UN in attempting to engage with religious actors in situations of tension colored by religious dynamics is, at best, checkered. Also, there are challenges inherent in talking of religion and good governance in contexts where the legitimacy of the governing entities themselves is questionable – yet these very entities are Member States of the United Nations.

The UN and other intergovernmental bodies will often be challenged by contexts where religious discourses play a prominent role in questions of the legitimacy of governance mechanisms. The example was given of the election of Hamas in the mid-1990s, as well as developments in some Arab countries since 2011. UN offices concerned with political, developmental and even humanitarian outreach are grappling with contexts where political Islam, or Islamism, in particular, features prominently in debates and altercations around governance. As an example, Egypt was cited as a context where a supposedly ‘moderate’ and elected Islamist party was ousted by the military (albeit with significant populist support), and where a crackdown on the Islamists in question, is being undertaken. These developments, as well as others raised by the role of the Russian Orthodox Church vis-à-vis developments in the Ukraine, and the election of Hindu nationalist party leader to power in India, raise many questions about the nexus of religion and governance.

A number of questions were posed about the UN, religion and governance:

1. **Image and role of the UN:** Should the UN appear to side with the governing regimes regardless of the means to state power, particularly in the Arab context?
2. **Diversity of religious protagonists:** If moderate Islamist voices are thus silenced, what other voices of political Islam does that leave and how should those be anticipated – if at all?
3. **Definitions and outreach:** Some religious actors make a ‘claim to exceptionalism’ saying they are not part of civil society. In such cases, by which criteria, and in which ‘rubric’, should intergovernmental bodies place and deal with them?
4. **Historical baggage:** The majority of the faith actors with a voice in many UN-related endeavours at UN headquarters, particularly New York and Geneva, are Christian-based. The perception that the dominant secular western development discourse is more easily accommodated by Christian faith actors is hard to ignore; both have roots in missionary and colonial history. This consideration should feature in the ‘faith outreach’ claimed by the post-2015 consultation processes.
5. **Fear:** Strong skepticism was voiced that “lack of evidence as to the impact of faith-based actors on/in development” poses a drawback for engagement between secular and faith-based dominions. Evidence is available in abundance, other participants maintained; further, questions about evidence are not asked when engaging well-resourced faith-based actors, nor when it comes to humanitarian relief. Secular intergovernmental spaces may be intentionally avoiding acknowledging the complexity of religions’ roles. It is a real possibility that this acknowledgement may entail an evidence-based critique of secular praxis.

The discussions began with an observation that governance is often (mistakenly) thought of as a discrete ‘sector’ within the context of development, whereas there is constant fluidity and interdependence between them. Rather, governance is the operating system for all development applications.

Historically, there are many instances of countries where FBOs have played a key role in political contexts, e.g. in Indonesia when some religious organizations were behind the creation of broad based movements for political mobilization. Thus there is a complex relationship between states and religion, and situations where states seek to co-opt religion and/or religious groups to justify legitimacy and guarantee community outreach.

But what of the governance of the post-2015 process itself? A few voices self-identified as “shameless advocates of instrumentalization” of faith actors. There are many instances when faith actors are best placed to champion certain critical social, political and economic issues. They may be a moral voice, the embodiment of centuries of critically reviewed social and political experience, or collators of data such as birth records. Faith-based actors should, it was argued, be strategically leveraged.

### C. Donor perspectives

The discussions underlined the complexities from certain donor perspectives. Some Arab donors, it was noted, were heavily vested in the first round of post-2015 consultations, while being simultaneously involved, in varying degrees, in developments in their region. Naturally, these involvements impacted on their level of comfort, so to speak, when it came to discussions around the role of religion in governance, let alone when it came to engaging religious non-state actors in any aspect of the post-2015 consultations.

Some elaborated that Arab governmental support (or resistance to) groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood underlined the cultural and political schisms in the Arab region, as well as the implicit sectarian tensions at play. These issues raised an important rhetorical question: What happens when some donors also have a political stake in the religious dynamics of governance in countries other than their own?

This question prompted an assertion by some donors who maintained that their government had “less and less interest in being involved in the governance of other countries”. Instead, they were “more concerned” with attempting to support the creation of meaningful spaces for people to have a voice in their own broad governance process, thereby supporting inclusion of marginalized voices in the political mainstream.

The experience of an International Financial Institution (IFI) was shared. It was noted that the role of faith in the good governance agenda was indispensable for the success of the post-2015 process, and yet had the greatest chance of derailing it. In the 1990s, framing the ‘good governance’ debates in technical terms, such as reference to corruption, was a strategy used by some IFIs. Currently, a global agenda on social accountability is providing the mobilizing opportunity, syntax and structural framework for outreach with governments as well as non-governmental actors. An example is the



World Bank's Global Partnership on Social Accountability (GPSA). Involved are issues such as transparent budgeting and citizen scorecards. To date, 37 UN Member States ("client governments") have opted into the GPSA. The World Bank is seeking to scale up social accountability measures and assessing various entry points to improve this agenda, including tentatively assessing whether FBOs may be helpful in such efforts, but without being blind as to potential pitfalls.

From the United States governmental perspective, there is a keen awareness as to the concerns around instrumentalization. Decades of experience in development, humanitarian assistance as well as human rights support prompted the founding of a new office of faith-based partnerships in the State Department. Already, there have been some accusations of instrumentalization, resulting in a frank conversation with faith-based partners about the mutual benefits of outreach, as well as the fact that the pursuing of certain goals and partnerships can be mutually beneficial. Thus, "it is a two-way street". The perspective of the specialized office is that their goal should be "working to eventually not be needed", as opposed to working to keep themselves in business. This perspective informs the agenda, the issues, as well as the outreach undertaken with various embassies in the Washington, D.C. to ensure synergy and mutual consultation.

#### **D. Discussion highlights**

Religious leaders and FBOs, are not necessarily equipped to play a prominent a role in national governance matters, nor would they want to. Some religious institutions (e.g. the Catholic Church) have learned from diverse experiences, not to engage openly in politics. Some "horrific outcomes" that have resulted from religious leaders' and religious groups' involvements in political space were pointed out. The concern was also raised that religious institutions themselves are not the most democratic of spaces and can be replete with political mismanagement. Some of the latter extends to the inability to deal with issues of abuse, and even domestic violence, which take place within the institutions themselves.

Many FBOs are ill-at-ease challenging political order, and therefore tend to shy away from such engagement. But at the same time, the civil space is shrinking in many countries, and attempting to stay 'out of politics' is increasingly unrealistic. Not only that, it was argued, but increasing political instability in some parts of the world has effectively encouraged a search for and a resurgence of more faith-inspired activism.

Other voices argued for some critical distinctions to be made in the discussions. While governance is a technocratic matter, it is also a question of values – something faith actors embody. This prompted another call for an important distinction between FBOs and the social and economic development work they do, and between religious leaders, some of whom do play political roles.

Examples were given of interfaith fora in Ethiopia and in the Solomon Islands, where Imams and Pastors successfully work together and with youth on issues of community interest. As a result of their impact at the local level, some have become key negotiators with the duty bearers, i.e. the governments. Similarly, the track record of FBOs in several



Latin American countries in service delivery to meet basic needs at the community level has prompted some governments to engage with them to complement their own services and outreach.

While the nexus of religion and politics is complicated and replete with challenges, there is no question that the role of some FBOs in development requires further nuance and appreciation, if only in terms of the positive track record some of them do have. Faith-based and faith-inspired movements are far from receding into the background. This discussion inspired a call to the UN actors to seek to influence the Open Working Group , sharing some nuanced appreciation as to the role of religion in the broader domains of governance and institution building.

## Chapter 3: Stable and peaceful societies

### A. Religious linkages with conflict

The theme of ‘stable and peaceful societies’ was identified by the Chair as “one of the most challenging areas for the discussions of the OWG”. The complexities of non-state religious actors in conflict situations were noted, as were obvious intersections of religion with conflict (e.g. the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria). Other challenges in this area include the linkages between stability and peace with sustainable consumption patterns and environmental implications, and related power dynamics and geo-political considerations between the northern and southern hemispheres.

Speakers then proceeded to assess the religious linkages with conflict and with considerations of peace and security. They shared examples of initiatives undertaken to work with these issues.

Some conflicts illustrate a clear link with issues of religious identity and are tied in to the state’s inability to honour their roles as duty bearers in general, and especially when it comes to issues of political and economic justice and social service provision. The context of Myanmar was cited and it was argued that rather than ethnic and religious hatred between communities being a cause of violence, it was, rather, the consequence. Often diverse religious communities coexist peacefully. The shortcomings of governments to provide basic services to some communities, to be egalitarian in service provision, and to be held accountable for their deficiencies, stokes the violence which erupts—leading to religious hatred and strife.

Conflicts may take on religious garb yet not necessarily be about the religions themselves. Instead, “they have profane causes, related to resources and other dynamics”. Here the instance of Nigeria’s Boko Haram sect was cited. In contexts such as these, how can religion and religious communities contribute to state-building?

Religion is oftentimes noted as a cause of conflict, in a manner that has increased ‘ambiguities’ and disabled the necessary clarity required about ‘root causes’ of the dissent into violence. How can we promote inclusiveness rather than polarizing tendencies in society? Examples of engagement by FBOs in situations of conflict differ, but a comparative analysis of such engagement is hard to access by secular development actors. Numerous studies exist on these issues yet UN actors are, by and large, still seeking to assess, based on evidence, under what circumstances, how and with what impact do religious actors contribute to stability and peace in general and in post-conflict situations; and, on the other hand, to violence and conflict?

Within the United Nations Department of Political Affairs is an office which is tackling some of these questions, and seeking to provide a workable mechanism of systematic engagement and deployment of religious leaders. The Office of the Special Adviser on

the Prevention of Genocide is mandated to provide early warnings to the Secretary-General on situations that could lead to genocide and other mass atrocities, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, noting the surge in religious tensions worldwide (from the Middle East to East Asia and parts of Africa), said that although religion could be embroiled as a cause of some conflicts, it could also be a source of the resolution of some of them. From there emerged an idea for a project to work with select religious leaders and create a network of religious peacebuilders, who could be called upon to mediate various tensions within and among communities. This idea was presented to some UN Member States, and discussed also with several faith-based organizations.

“The UN has to be plugged into religious topics much more,” concluded the team working on this project. Within the UN Secretariat and among certain Member States there is some political support for and welcome of the idea of a religious peacebuilders’ network. However, this form of support has yet to translate into practical resourcing for the initiative. In the meantime, there is ongoing work between Mr. Dieng’s office and the UN Alliance of Civilizations, to secure an inclusive dialogue on some of these issues at various jointly sponsored fora.

“How can we not assess the comparative advantages of faith-based organizations, and also realize that we have to go through religious leaders? Otherwise, all parties, but especially secular entities, are engaging in developmental quietism. Someone has to speak and do the obvious... I would hope I could see the UN do that.”

## B. Discussion highlights

### 1. On religion, peace and stability

The first discussant listed the three themes of the presentations around the nexus between religion and peace and stability:

- Instrumentalization of religious identity in conflict situations;
- Ambiguity of the role of religion during times of conflict and therefore its potential as a destabilizing force; and
- Potential of religious actors as peacemakers, thus the capacity for some religious elements to provide solutions to conflicts.

The approach of building networks of religious leaders was commended by some of the gathered faith-based representatives, in principle only, as a means of building on and deploying the social capital of religious leaders. A broader understanding is required of the necessity for social, economic and political *justice* as a key element of ‘peaceful societies’. Engagement with religious actors was viewed as valuable and productive to the extent that religious actor’s social capital can be harnessed — beyond mediation of

certain conflicts, and towards active engagement in all aspects of recovery, reintegration and human development.

This multi-layered engagement would, per definition, extend beyond religious leaders and interreligious dialogue, and require outreach and involvement with myriad faith-based organizations delivering services in communities. Such engagements could provide a means of securing interreligious cooperation and collaboration around service provision to meet critical basic needs, and thus enable better outreach to marginalized and vulnerable populations.

The Chair noted the possibility that the sustainable development goals discussion may well include some targets on peaceful societies. Issues may include violence against women, international organized crime, and civic participation. The question posed to the discussants was: What can be advocated or mobilized for to implement the SDG and post-2015 agenda? One faith-based actor noted that recognition of these issues strongly underlines the importance of the roles of religious leaders and local/community-level faith actors. Another emphasized the importance of identifying the best tools that already exist, as a critical entry point. A consortium of African independent churches are developing a social accountability curriculum of their own, for example.

Sustained engagement around addressing critical needs (e.g. poverty, housing, health, education, sanitation, etc.) between secular and faith-based actors in certain communities can preempt the eruption of violence. Collaboration towards provision of basic needs in any given context allows for the operationalization of a faith-based discourse, and this helps to counter extremist narratives. In other words, as secular and faith-based development efforts are harnessed collaboratively, the outreach and quality of the services can be wider and better. In turn, this strengthens the visibility of a narrative of faith which is service oriented, rather than the ones designed to capture political power. This observation was based on the experience of several participants.

What is required from more secular development organizations therefore, is a harnessing of political will towards the creations of frameworks, strategies and tools which integrate religious actors (not just individual leaders) more deliberately, as agents of sustainable peace. This would be an alternative to the current modalities of either ignoring religious agency altogether; viewing FBOs exclusively or partly as the cause of conflict and strife ; or undertaking *ad hoc* initiatives of engagement of religious leaders.

Engagement with religious leaders could entail mutual misperceptions and missed opportunities. An experience was shared where the head of a major religious order said, “We are fed up with UN and others telling us what to do. We do not work for the UN or any other international organization.” Some religious leaders perceive UN outreach as a distraction that draws them closer towards the fire of politics and away from their main tasks. For some religious leaders, engagement could be dangerous and damage their reputation. This concern was reiterated by several speakers, including a comment that some secular development organizations are not only unaware of these concerns but tend to complain about FBOs not being ‘committed enough’ to engagement.

## 2. On the selectivity of human rights

Another complexity in the nexus of peace and security with religious engagement was noted as “the selectivity of human rights”. A UN speaker noted that some UN agencies are both positioning and highlighting religious leaders as agents of peace and champions of the green environment agenda, for instance, and yet these very same leaders may hold relatively antagonistic and publicly articulated positions on women’s rights. Does this form of secular–religious engagement, ostensibly for the sake of “stability and peace especially in times of conflict”, inadvertently also communicate that some rights are deemed more pertinent than others, at different times? This generated further discussion and diverse opinions, with many arguing that flexibility and discernment need to be simultaneously used when designing outreach and partnerships between faith-based and secular actors. Various points were made: “balance the harm versus the benefits”; “each context creates its own determinants so we cannot speak unilaterally”; and “more secular–faith-based engagement will provide solutions in the long-term to some of these dilemmas”.

“In our search for inclusiveness – we should not compromise on universal human rights.”

Many instances of actual engagement were shared, which illustrated how the peaceful religious counter-narrative was effectively realized. Some reflected on engaging with a Muslim Brotherhood charity in 2010 that agreed to cooperate on a clearly articulated women’s rights agenda, including ensuring skills and monitoring for access to higher education and political office. Yet others recalled less peaceful examples, as in Mali, when northern rebels ruined cultural heritage sites in Timbuktu, and suppressed dancing and musical traditions. These acts were justified by religious arguments and subsumed within a religious veneer, yet they barely concealed agendas of political power. The lesson learned from these interactions was that the attempt to be inclusive of all actors (including the religious ones), should not come at the expense of human rights, nor should diversity or difference justify a breach of any one human right. We should certainly engage with FBOs, it was maintained, but always within broader framework of human rights.

## 3. On culture shifts

*“But what happens if we cannot put the genie back in the bottle?”*

Regardless of what some policy makers may maintain while they are in Brussels, New York, Geneva, Vienna or Washington, D.C., missions from country offices and field missions are increasingly requesting guidance on how to engage with religious actors, including in conflict zones. This observation engendered discussions around “culture

shifts” and ensuing tensions. In headquarters of western secular institutions, awareness is increasing of the importance of the role of religion and faith-based service provision, both during and after situations of armed conflict. This heightened awareness is leading to more requests for targeted support, e.g. training of foreign service officers and of UN staff on faith, international relations and development.

Faith-based representatives also spoke to a similar “culture shift” taking place within many of their own organizations: “There is a major shift where the posture is becoming less about condemnation, and more about compassion.” There has been “an advance” in finding common ground between secular human rights ethos and religious dynamics, in organizational cultures, more generally. An example was shared wherein less than a decade ago, the prevalence of HIV was a taboo topic. Gradually however, dealing with HIV and related aspects of sexuality, stigma, prevention and care, became the tipping point towards openness to engagement from both the secular and faith-based side. Facets of gender equality, including the role of women in the Church, are equally contentious areas now witnessing change in discourse within religious spheres and institutions. It is the responsibility of faith communities to continue to “equip” their members to deal with these sensitive dynamics, speakers said.

*“For an FBO, the priority is to listen, to engage in dialogue, to have a conversation, to agree to and deliver on shared priorities...rather than negotiating for /about what was internationally agreed.”*

An FBO shared an experience navigating the intersection between religion and peaceful societies while working with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. They were told: “To create change you have to knock on our door, live with us, show that you love us, then you can start asking questions. And it will take time, we can reflect. But we don’t want your answers. If we don’t talk, if we don’t listen to

each other, then we will have conflict.” The lesson learned, about dealing with each other as faith-based entities, underscored the importance of conversation and listening.

#### 4. On fear and silence

When it comes to peace and security, fear plays an important role. Fear tends to silence, and silence can often serve to consolidate injustices. An example was shared from Uganda where the dominant culture tends to be against homosexuality. “It is not religious opposition to homosexuality that determined the legal condemnation,” one participant noted, “rather it is a situation where even the religious communities are fearful of going against the current... and this leads to silence about the injustice of condemnation of homosexuality... It is not religion. It is politics.”

The issue of fear was picked up during the remainder of the discussion. Fear plays a role on all sides of this trilateral dynamic: donors are generally wary about the extent to which they are perceived to be supporting ‘religious engagement in/on/with development’; UN

development agencies tend to be similarly cautious; and, on certain aspects of the development agenda – particularly sexuality-related dynamics and reproductive rights – many FBOs themselves keep their distance. Reasons for this fearfulness vary, but the result is a polarization within the international development community, broadly defined. The reluctance of several Catholic faith-based partners of the UN to attend this particular meeting, was noted as being connected to the fact that UNFPA (which has sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as part of its ICPD mandate) was the consultation’s host. One participant asked, “If women’s reproductive health and rights are legitimately part of the creation of peaceful societies, then how can the fear of all parties from tackling these issues be conducive?”

One development researcher expressed disappointment with “the limits of liberalism”, rhetorically asking “how can [we] not assess the comparative advantages of FBOs and realize that we have to go through religious leaders”. The researcher said that otherwise “so-called secular entities...would be engaged in developmental quietism” and that “someone has to lay down the law and I would hope I could see the UN do that”.

Some UN voices noted a growing appreciation in the UN system that, faith communities, as gatekeepers, also have the ability to influence access to service provision. Therefore, it is important to engage them. However there is “a real concern, in fact, a sensitivity, about preaching to the preachers”. The question was posed: “What happens if [we] cannot put the genie back in the bottle?”

Regarding the universality of human rights, the UN is bound by the need to prioritize the universality of agreements reached at intergovernmental tables, but FBOs “do not have to abide by this”. Rather, for FBOs, the priority is to “listen and to engage in dialogue so as to deliver on a common platform”. This means that the more intractable the issues at the table, the more FBOs will see time as a necessary element “for a conversation, rather than a negotiation” to take place.

If “the conversation” becomes a matter of arguing about women’s rights, some donors would not see the value of engaging in the dialogue. Some researchers pointed to the need for a gradual approach whereby even when opposing positions are held, some of the dots can nevertheless be connected. An example of an engagement with a Catholic NGO around migration was cited whereby at the outset, there was no discussion on, nor ability to appreciate, the specificity of women migrants. But through a sustained and evidence-based dialogue, awareness was built and the NGO formulated relevant policies.



## Chapter 4: FINANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Chair asked participants not to limit the conversation on financing to overseas development assistance (ODA), but rather to “usher in a new paradigm of bringing in financing capital to help us achieve the transition towards sustainability, towards low carbon, ending inequality, organizing the global economy and capital markets in a new way”. While acknowledging that public finance mechanisms remain critical, the Chair said presentations and discussions could reflect more broadly on financing, address the need to reorient capital markets, and specifically consider how civil society actors (particularly faith-based) are already “pioneering resource management for sustainable outcomes that safeguard human dignity”.

### A. The new normal

Presenters described “a new normal” wherein data shows that private investment officially exceeds ODA. The discussion was about private investment, ODA and faith-inspired resource flows. Presentations acknowledged that in this new context, global poverty was reduced more in the last 10 years than in the last 100, and that nations once viewed through the prism of poverty, are able today to provide features of development assistance for others, thanks to private investments by, for example, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Examples were shared of Nigeria’s satellites launch, and Haiti’s production of a tablet for export. These developments are fueling considerations among some that by 2035 there will be “no poor countries left in the world”.

International financial institutions, such as the World Bank, are endorsing two new goals: (1) end extreme poverty by 2030 by reducing to no more than 3 per cent the fraction of the world’s population living on less than \$1.25/day; and (2) promote income growth among the bottom 40 per cent of people. But at the current rate, it is anticipated that IFIs will fall short of these goals by 2030. Discussions are ongoing as to the critical need to further mobilize national resources (e.g. means of improving taxation, including contexts relevant to the operations of multinational corporations), as well as natural resource management. In that regard, it was pointed out that many national governments are moving in the right direction.

Presentations also highlighted the role of civil society mobilization which, among other resource enablers, has resulted in critical investment and financing tools over the years, such as endowments. The Jubilee Debt Campaign, for example, has helped many countries partially overcome developmental challenges exacerbated by heavy debt burdens.

There is an enormous way to go to reach and serve the needs of many, particularly in contexts of increasing inequalities, which are exacerbating the conditions of the already vulnerable and marginalized in communities all over the world. These concerns are also



prompting inquiries into the science of delivery, i.e. how to make a transformational impact with better and smarter aid. This is an entry point for an assessment of the role of faith-based communities and organizations.

Large-scale FBOs base their social investment considerations precisely on the issues of ‘smarter aid’ and on a unique narrative which would “invite religious leaders into co-creation for a sustainable, just and equitable world”. As international development organizations, they are able to appreciate the intrinsic value of deliberately engaging with faith communities, which are “respected and influential in their local contexts, are already doing vital work, and will be around long after all international organizations leave”.

Discussions referred to the 2013 report of Charity Aid Foundation’s World Giving Index, which tracks charitable activity globally. The report noted that all the indices of private faith-based investment are growing, particularly in developing nations. Muslim FBOs are relatively newer entrants into the scene of international development, and they remain very much of a minority in a field still largely dominated by Christian aid organizations, many of which come from a tradition established during the colonial era.

## B. Emerging Islamic donor dynamics

Muslim, or Islamic, FBOs have pioneered and realized myriad capacities to raise resources, by working with local faith communities on poverty reduction initiatives, as well as activating one of the Five Pillars of Islam. “Zakat” is an obligatory payment on any Muslim of a certain percentage of wealth accumulated and retained for over a year. Many Muslim development FBOs have benefitted from aggregated, longitudinal studies on zakat, which has become a principal means of raising funds for development and humanitarian programmes. Several instances of Islamic microfinance initiatives which ‘harvest’ zakat were shared. One such example was cited in Mali, where systematic collection of the zakat has enabled a strong sense of community ownership over developmental programmes, including the successful ability to fulfill their religious obligation to undertake the pilgrimages (to Mecca), among many other initiatives.

### 3: Marie Juul Petersen on Gulf-based NGOs

“Gulf-based NGOs involved in aid provision are often overlooked – or altogether avoided – by Western donor agencies.” This, in spite of the fact that their budgets can range from one million to hundreds of millions of dollars. Precisely how does religion influence Gulf NGOs? Research based on Saudi and Kuwaiti NGOs points to five main ways religion influences:

1. **Funding sources.** Many of these organisations rely primarily on religious alms, or zakat, from individuals donors, some as much as 80 percent.<sup>1</sup> This means that they have a strong donor base, capable of raising private funds – for instance, the Kuwaiti International Islamic Charitable Organisation has recently raised almost 40 million USD for Syrian refugees. But it also means that they are restricted by their donors’ expectations that aid is given according to conservative Islamic practices – which in turn means a focus on traditional charity such as hand-outs, orphan care, celebration of religious holidays and similar activities.

2. **The ways in which money is handled.** Because Islamic aid principles put limitations on administrative costs, operations are presumably cheaper than those of other organisations. But that also means that the organisations often lack proper administrative and financial systems. Religious traditions of anonymous giving arguably contribute further to this lack of accountability and transparency.

3. **Staff constellations.** Few staff members in these organisations have a professional development background. As one staff member in a Gulf-based organisation said, people work here because they want to work in a Muslim organisation, not because they want to work in a development organisation. This lack of professional aid expertise influences the kind and quality of the aid provided – there is little knowledge of e.g. human rights based approaches, gender mainstreaming, participatory development, project management tools etc.

4. **The choice of target groups and areas of intervention.** Driven by ideas of pan-Islamic solidarity, many organisations focus exclusively on Muslim countries and populations, e.g. Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Palestine and Syria. But their religious identity arguably also gives them greater access to areas that are difficult for secular organisations to enter. An example of this is Somalia, where a coalition of Muslim NGOs was able to deliver aid to Al Shabab-controlled areas where other, secular, organisations could not go.

5. **The concrete aid activities.** For many of these organisations, aid is both material and spiritual, and they spend a substantial amount of their budgets on explicitly religious activities such as mosque-construction, funding Qur'an schools and teachers, distributing religious material, celebrating religious holidays and so on. Likewise, religious principles and practices also shape most other activities, whether it is education, health or microfinance projects. "It is all about Islam," as people constantly say.

From a secular, Western perspective that kind of aid is highly problematic – it is missionary and indoctrinating, violating principles of neutrality and non-discrimination. But from the point of view of many Gulf-based organisations, they simply meet the spiritual needs of recipients when secular organisations will not. For instance, one person told me about this small village in Bangladesh where the mosque had been destroyed after a flooding. People there had asked several international, secular NGOs for assistance in rebuilding the mosque – but no one would help, except for his organization. "They see us as family," he said.

*Based on Marie Juul Petersen. "Sacralised or Secularised Aid? Positioning Gulf-based Muslim NGOs", in Jonathan Benthall and Robert Lacey (Eds.) Gulf Charities and Islamic Philanthropy in the 'Age of Terror' - and Beyond, (Berlin and London: Gerlach Press, 2014).*

While the role of Muslim FBOs in financing development is certainly noteworthy, researchers provided some of the ongoing challenges or the "other side of the coin". While harvesting accumulated zakat may lead to (relatively) minimal administrative costs, there remains a need to improve financial accountability mechanisms. The 'religious' character of such FBOs often translates into a strongly motivated staff, but this also may mean a relative lack of knowledge of developmental approaches, not to mention issues pertinent to gender sensitivity and gender mainstreaming. The material aid provided has a spiritual depth, which many secular organizations lack. For instance, microfinancing educational initiatives focused on enhancing literacy and reading skills,

building mosques and celebrating religious holidays may strengthen religious knowledge and enhance identity and a sense of solidarity.

Some of these dynamics are deemed problematic by many secular development actors. There is concern that this form of faith-based development cooperation may be instrumentalized and conditional. Some presenters cautioned against a general notion that Gulf-based development actors are “more in tune with desires/needs of the poor”, and urged a more critical consideration in line with a general need to inquire as to whether and how “faith-based aid matters”.

Another presentation provided a further overview of Gulf funding mechanisms, based on several years of experience setting up aid coordination mechanisms, in particular examining aid flows to fragile states from the Arab Gulf. The presentation noted there were no aid coordination mechanisms or systems in place in the Gulf until less than a decade ago. Now, however, a dramatic change is in effect, with countries such as Kuwait housing significant technical expertise, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with a well-funded aid office. This Gulf block is arguably the largest in terms of donor spending globally. For example, Saudi Arabia’s giving to Egypt, which is not even considered a fragile state, has amounted to \$20 billion. This aid goes beyond oil and covers technical and infrastructure support. This points to the strong likelihood of even greater aid flows to fragile states. The enhanced development aid capabilities of Gulf countries is complimented by increased documentation as well as critical assessment of development and impact effectiveness, including retrospective reviews of financial flows since 1975.

Among emerging trends are attempts to ensure transparency and coordination of Gulf aid, with increasing assertiveness and politicization, e.g. in the post Arab Spring context where aid commitments have increased dramatically. At the same time, a clear battleground has emerged between Islamist-leaning groups (including faith-based NGOs and governments) and secular groups. Competition for the same political, social and economic space is underway between these various actors, each struggling over a legitimacy framed in religious, political and cultural Islamic terms.

Certain Gulf donors (e.g. the UAE) refuse to fund anything with any religious overtones or subject to certain “security checks”. This move was first illustrated after the September 11, 2001 events, when many donor governments and institutions around the world prioritized two sets of concerns in screening and assessing proposals and programmes. One was the relationship between religion and governance regimes, and the other was national as well as international security concerns. “But who defines security?” was posed as a rhetorical question. This often means that some Gulf funding favours supporting more traditional western entities such as Oxfam. This was pointed out as an irony, because it implies that western-based secular development actors are determinant – directly or indirectly – of some Gulf funding. This indication of a lack of donor neutrality has direct implications on faith-based and faith-inspired resourcing dynamics.

Overall, the presenters said the post-2015 process must engage critically with Gulf actors, particularly the governments as they are “the biggest determinants of resources”. They

noted that the UN “does not appear to be seizing the opportunities presented by these emerging donors”.

### C. Discussion highlights

#### 1. On taxation, democracy and environment

Diverse cultures encourage tax payment in different ways. Attempts framed within secular discourse include the Mayor of Toronto’s campaign to sell a culture of tax paying. Discussants also pointed to the links in some societies between taxation and democracy. Given that some governments appear unable to mobilize sufficient structural or human resource capacity to ensure tax collection, participants discussed the role of some faith-based actors in using religious discourse to encourage behaviours, and in turn, cultures, more conducive to paying taxes (whether by individuals or corporations). However, a concern was expressed that this may render the role of FBOs “too strong... and shrink the space for democracy...which would destroy the UN as we know it.”

“The post-2015 process must take into account Gulf donors [who are among] the biggest sources of influence on development agendas as they hold significant resources.”

A respondent noted the challenges faced by established democracies of taxing assets of multinational corporations, and seeking due taxes from some corners of the private sector. The effort to secure the economic viability and sustainability of some of these actors through tax breaks, however, may also result in turning a blind eye to considerable environmental risks. Even where the private sector may be paying their tax dues, it was asked, “What does the environmental balance sheet look like?”

#### 2. On the evolving donor ecology

Some FBOs as well as governments are acknowledged to be infusing significant resources. While not all FBOs are involved, they are, nevertheless, important brokers. An example of the World Congress of Muslim Philanthropists was cited as one of many contexts where alignment with Muslim values is not limiting the reach and coverage of initiatives to Muslim populations. This also relates to zakat which, it was pointed out, is not intended to benefit Muslims only.

These dynamics should have implications on ODA considerations and possibly also on the role of international financial institutions. The post-2015 agenda may require a conversation around the alignment of the strategies of emerging donors alongside those of Paris Club members from some of the world’s largest economies.

**Box 3: One participant's view**

*Some FBOs can:*

- *Create a culture more conducive to paying taxes;*
- *Broker an alignment of emerging donors (including themselves) with Paris Club members;*

*Some FBOs do:*

- *Ensure that zakat funds are channeled into development;*
- *Release asset-based capacities already residing within communities;*
- *Have more resources than some UN development agencies.*

**3. On unintended consequences**

*“There is something wrong when do-gooders with money become so powerful that they take over the roles of governments and democracy.”*

Proselytization was identified as a concern, as the other side of the coin of some faith-inspired development initiatives. Far from being limited only to Muslim contexts however, western donors recognize that this concern relates to Christian faith-based entities as well. As one donor noted, “We see that dilemma but we are not clear how to solve it.”

FBOs noted their longstanding hesitancy to identify and leverage themselves as faith-based. Some said they have felt the need to be apologetic for their faith-based identity. There was a strong request to put an end to “the theoretical assumption” that there is a consistently strong link between evangelism and development. Many noted the expectation that the post-2015 goals would incentivize all development actors – but especially faith-based ones.

An interesting irony was also shared by the FBOs during this discussion. In some communities, rebuilding mosques and acquiring prayer mats had been enabled through development assistance, and these communities were able “to get back on their feet quicker than those where those activities did not take place”. Yet, none of the FBOs involved in this work would dare give out a bible to the Christians among those communities, because of the likelihood that the FBOs would be accused of proselytization.

**4. On how faith can strengthen social and economic capital formation**

There is need to recognize the “role of faith in releasing asset based capacities that already reside in communities,” some participants said. The UK-based faith-based organization Tearfund focus its mobilization around releasing 90 per cent of the capacity

that are already within communities where it works, with ‘capacity’ understood in terms of social capital, human resources and financial resources. An example was shared of Tearfund’s interventions in Ethiopia, which taught select community leaders how to save money, and thereby unleash entrepreneurialism. A simple formula used by Tearfund to release such capabilities? Patience. Tearfund learned this lesson through earlier interventions with faith communities in Uganda, where, when they asked local community representatives how best to support their own local fund-raising efforts, they were advised to “keep money out of the process for two years... which should be sufficient to discovering that we can do much ourselves.” If Tearfund inserted its own financial resources prior to the time frame agreed, there would be a need to refine work methods in such a way “that does not crowd out that process of formation of local capacities”. Over time, Tearfund has learned that “every time we spend a dollar, we expect 10 dollars in capacity built, in return”.

Secular development counterparts shared some cynicism about international development modalities which are “all too often set up to distribute funds to solve problems...yet end up detrimental to the process itself... of letting people in their communities be the agents of their own development”. Speaking more generally, some voiced concerns that much of the disbursement of funds to date could still risk being characterized as “unsustainable... focused on disparate projects”.

*“If religion is not instrumentalized for aligning development with more universal values, this creates a vacuum for religion to be instrumentalized for more parochial values which push for exclusion and intolerance.”*

At the same time, some strategies, such as those of the World Bank, were acknowledged as better geared towards transforming systems of cash disbursement and creating incentives for private capital. Still, many concerns remain including, notably, corruption. FBOs “can play a role in pushback against crony capitalism”. A call was made to discuss these dynamics further, with a view to connecting the dots between faith-based mobilization of social and economic capital and the current policy and practice of resource allocation with secular donors and international (UN) entities. An example was noted in this regard of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which established a consultative council of FBOs (which met in April 2014) and appears to have some decision-making capacity.

## 5. On inequalities between FBOs and gender equality concerns

Questions were asked around the emerging Gulf donors and the space they are occupying in developmental decision-making and influence, whether directly or indirectly. In spite of the fact that gender equality issues today are more recognized and relatively more prioritized in both international development and foreign policy-making, the changing donor landscape can be a cause for concern, especially given that the emerging Gulf donor positions on gender equality appear to vary.



The answers provided differing scenarios and readings around gender equality considerations. On the positive side, it was pointed out that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, for instance, successfully established an Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission in 2012. One of the endeavours of this entity is to review the legislation of all 57 member states with an eye to making a case for some OIC member states to consider removing current reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Moreover, major international FBOs such as Islamic Relief Worldwide for instance, reported focusing most of their microfinance work (80-90 per cent) for women's rights and economic empowerment projects. They mentioned programmes aimed at eliminating violence against women, with some of these tailored to contexts of armed conflict, and ending female genital mutilation/cutting. In the last two years in particular, IRI has increased its efforts to undertake specialized research on gender equality, enhance faith literacy (jurisprudence) and broaden theological learning among women in communities and within IRI itself. IRI has started to recruit gender advisers in its various offices.

The view of some Gulf-based dynamics appeared less positive, albeit relatively less studied. When the goals and objectives of some of these funding mechanisms were reviewed, women's rights initiatives appeared, on balance, to be geared more towards encouraging women to undertake traditional roles (e.g. sewing) rather than increasing levels of higher education and enhancing participation in political and economic spheres. A similar viewpoint was expressed in references to Gulf nations' Constitutions.

## **6. On the diversity of FBOs in development, humanitarian and justice efforts**

In reference to financing portfolios, there is a need to distinguish between FBOs. In the United States, for example, the top FBOs have a total revenue of around \$ 6 billion, of which approximately \$5 billion is privately raised, according to participants. In other words, these are by no means significantly publicly funded, and some of them are themselves donors.

Not all FBOs are large, well-resourced and internationally-based. Some are decidedly less well-off, and many operate on 'shoestring budgets', especially those working in urban slum areas, and rural and remote communities. There is a need to keep those distinctions in mind when it comes to describing activities and impact, as well as when arguing for inclusion in post-2015 deliberations.

While secular development actors raise questions and articulate concerns about the role of FBOs in development, there are hardly any concerns raised by the same actors when it comes to their role in crisis management and humanitarian relief. Why? Because, it was argued, some of the FBOs bring in more resources (including financial ones) into the humanitarian sphere, more than even the UN.



Many major FBOs deliberate on the consequences of their engagement on distributive economic and social justice, more so than private sector counterparts, and perhaps even some international secular development actors. An FBO participant threw the gauntlet to some of the participants, asking the question: “In projects around trade, finance, agriculture and even economic governance, how much of the economic growth considerations are related to justice... and how much of the programming efforts are really based on human rights principles?” Some donors were quick to respond that there are a number of FBOs in the United States that are very unlikely to divest themselves of investments in fossil fuels (a call that was made of many global organizations in an attempt to ‘walk the environmental talk’). Therefore, FBOs should not be idealized nor have their ethics generalized. Rather, it is important to bear in mind that faith groups, like all civil society organizations, have beliefs and values. Even secular donors, it was pointed out, “sometimes have to explain our groups’ values and beliefs”. So in principle, while the motivations behind development institutions’ should not “really be an issue”, they in fact, are an issue. Thus, just as many faith groups feel they have to “leave their faith at the door” before they come into developmental spaces, some secular development organizations also prefer not to emphasize their secular agendas.

#### D. Chair’s conclusions

*“I urge you to work together in promoting a true, worldwide ethical mobilization which, beyond all differences of religious or political convictions, will spread and put into practice a shared ideal of fraternity and solidarity, especially with regard to the poorest and those most excluded” — Address of His Holiness the Pope to the UN Chief Executives Board -May 9, 2014*

In his conclusion of the session, the Chair said that while progress has been made, by and large, in navigating the landscape of financing development work and generating resource flows, discussion has highlighted the need to be aware of new emerging donors, including FBOs and Gulf governments. More research and analysis will be needed in order to accurately assess what religion, broadly defined, adds and/or takes away from the financing agenda more generally. Moral positions that revolve around climate change in particular and environmental issues in general, are beginning to influence some of the financing priorities.

Referring specifically to the ongoing Open Working Group discussions, the Chair noted that the narrative of the future development agenda is still being shaped. This will continue to evolve in the latter half of 2014, as the post-2015 process is housed firmly within governmental negotiations in the General Assembly. This is anticipated to result in both an inspirational narrative along the lines of the Millennium Declaration, as well as the framing of clear goals and targets. In answer to the question of how could civil society, including religious voices, shape the narrative, the World We Want was cited as an important forum, as well as the post-2015 consultative processes – two of which are

particularly pertinent to this group: the one on the role of civil society, and the one pertaining to culture and development (<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sitemap>).

In response to a query as to whether the UN Secretary-General may be able to meet with top religious leaders of the world and leverage his political capital thereafter, based on shared wisdom, the answer emphasized that the post-2015 goals are, ultimately, the responsibility of governments. Yet, a signal event had already taken place on 9 May 2014 when leading executive officers of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes were received at the Vatican Apostolic Palace, by His Holiness the Pope. The UN Executives, led by UN Secretary- General Ban Ki-moon, were in Rome for the biannual meeting for strategic coordination of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB).

**Box 4: UN audience with Pope Francis**

While acknowledging the efforts of the UN in implementing the Millennium Development Goals in education and decreasing poverty, the Holy Father said that the “world’s peoples deserve and expect even greater results.”

The Pope noted that “an essential principle of management is the refusal to be satisfied with current results and to press forward, in the conviction that those gains are only consolidated by working to achieve even more,” he said. “In the case of global political and economic organization, much more needs to be achieved, since an important part of humanity does not share in the benefits of progress and is in fact relegated to the status of second-class citizens.”

The Holy Father went on to say that any future goals in sustainable development must have a “real impact” on fighting the causes of poverty and hunger. The Pope said all forms of injustice must be challenged, which include “resisting the ‘economy of exclusion’, the ‘throwaway culture’ and the ‘culture of death’ which nowadays sadly risk becoming passively accepted.”

Source: <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/un-secretary-general-ban-ki-moon-visits-pope-francis>

## Chapter 5: GENDER EQUALITY

### A. Norms and key issues

Referencing the unique meeting between the Pope and UN leaders, one of the UN speakers noted that the advocacy of the Pontiff was an important articulation to frame the nature of the shared objectives between faith-based and secular development actors, and that, in a way, the discussions taking place in this consultation already echoed the spirit and the words.

Within the UN conscience and discourse, the formulation of the post-2015 development framework on gender equality is derived from normative charters, including international conventions, treaties, resolutions and decisions. Through these normative frameworks, a set of values governing collective and individual life are provided. These embody and express universal values drawn from the human experience, including the religious traditions. The UN's operative belief, therefore, is that these instruments ought to serve as the conduit, or the link, between religious values and the formulation of the post-2015 agenda.

“Leaving ... selective interpretations [of sharia laws which deny women's human rights] uncontested, is bad for gender equality, for development, and for sharia itself.”

The presenter noted that especially for the UN, “there is no alternative but to abide by universally established value systems which have been accepted by governments.” These are the human rights instruments, and the entirety of the discourse which includes all the Covenants (on social, political, cultural, etc.) rights, as well as the ICPD, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and others. Abiding by this discourse was posited as “arguably more pressing in areas such as gender inequality and women's empowerment.”

The issues under the gender equality rubric cover violence against women and girls, unpaid work (including care), the gender wage gap, inequity in access to and control over all kinds of resources, and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. In spite of the fact that many governments had spoken to the importance of these issues already before the MDGs were agreed to, the MDGs themselves fell far short of noting and addressing these issues.

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During the 58<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women in 2014, as well as during the Open Working Group's varied discussions, it became clear that issues relevant to sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as issues of sexual orientation and gender identity were contested by several governments. Discussions are uncertain around the means of implementation and funding for all the future developmental goals, including those relevant to gender equality considerations. The question for many secular gender equality

actors within and outside of the UN system, is how (and if) the new normative framework of post-2015 can be used to break new ground.

Current discussions around the gender equality goal are limited to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, with little to no mention of sexual rights. This concerns many developmental actors, though there are some within the international development community who feel that “to extend the gender equality agenda beyond the current issues...would overload it”. These voices articulate a call for “a comprehensive approach to address the structural barriers of gender equality” given that a gendered assessment of the MDGs reveals that “progress has been unacceptably slow for women and girls...and of course religion and cultural traditions have contributed greatly [to this slow progress]”.

## B. Instrumentalization

The presenter then referenced the discussions around ‘instrumentalization’ in terms of its risks and opportunities, and affirmed the perception that instrumentalization was a two-way street, wherein religious actors and institutions make use of secular development ones, and vice versa. If religion is not instrumentalized for aligning development with more universal values, this actually creates a vacuum for religion to be instrumentalized for more parochial values which push for exclusion and intolerance, it was argued.

Religion (or interpretations thereof) and cultural traditions are often used to justify harmful practices that directly contravene basic human rights. Specific mention was made of female genital mutilation/cutting, honour killings, denial of education to girls, and discriminatory legislation. Speaking to the implementation and roll out of gender equality-related post-2015 considerations, the presenter noted that there is a dire need to accelerate and to enforce gender equality by countering often historic discrimination, particularly in ever-increasing contexts of humanitarian emergencies and armed conflict. UN Women therefore, as the agency tasked with coordination and primary accountability for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment, deems it essential to continue to foster partnerships with community and traditional leaders.

Acknowledging the importance of interfaith collaboration also requires deliberate attempts to enhance the opportunities and mitigate the risks of such engagement. Not only is this strategic intent important for human development, but for the future of religion and religious actors in public life. An example was shared of a UN-hosted Arab consultation earlier in the year, in preparation for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), where a range of issues related to gender equality were raised. A young Egyptian activist pointed out the elephant in the room: the rise of Islamism (political Islam) and the challenges it poses for gender equality considerations. The activist insisted that all development and human rights actors should clearly denounce the selective advocacy and application of sharia which deny women’s human rights, saying: “Leaving such interpretations [of sharia] uncontested is bad for gender equality, for development, and for sharia itself.”

## C. Discussion highlights

### 1. On contested rights

FBOs emphasized the strategic nature of the governmental deliberations on gender equality, and noted the potential that sexual rights issues could “burden” the post-2015 gender equality goal. “If we are serious about countering all forms of gender discrimination, we cannot just exclude [sexual rights] from the post-2015 without having a strategy of engagement nevertheless in place. Maybe not in Africa, but in Europe, Latin America, and the United States there is engagement around these issues,” the FBO speaker said. Moreover, these gender equality considerations are not exclusively a matter of religion. Culture plays an important role, and cultural dynamics are part of post-2015 deliberations which the intergovernmental process is working with”.

“If the secular development actors do not act in synergy with their like-minded faith-based development counterparts, other forces of religious radicalism, which espouse violence and undermine women’s rights – indeed undermine the centrality of human rights – may prevail”

The discussions addressed the nature of intergovernmental negotiations and the consistent opposition to the agenda of sexual rights. But participants noted that even some issues considered consolidated and advanced by governments themselves for decades (e.g. the Vienna Declaration on women’s rights being human rights), were also being contested in these intergovernmental fora. A concern apparently shared by all participants is that some of the basic tenets of gender equality and women’s empowerment already agreed upon currently appear to be ‘jeopardized’. Thus, it was argued by some that putting the focus on sexual rights per se, “may be wise from a tactical perspective to integrate evolving rights...but generates a painful blowback even against other rights in a context of continued violations”. There is therefore a need to preserve human rights mechanisms, which are themselves the driving force for all human rights – including those which “have yet to be consolidated”.

### 2. On spirituality and rights

One discussant pointed out that so far, the conversations appeared to reference religion in terms of institutions, leaders, traditional religious practices, laws and interpretations. But what of spirituality? Spiritual expressions are questioning religion and traditional structures. There is a role played by these spiritual expressions that is not linked to religions and may be contesting religions in future, it was maintained. These developments are bound to have an increasingly defining role in terms of how people engage in spiritual matters. At some point, therefore, it is important to shed light on and engage with these emerging spiritual expressions, which come from diverse traditions but

remain amenable to working under a spiritual umbrella. These dynamics, it was argued, ought to be equally critical when dealing with post-2015 agenda.

For some communities, a human rights discourse “can invite suspicion”. Far from shying away from either traditional religion, or human rights or spirituality, this should necessitate a reflection and an articulation around “the deep commitment to human dignity...that we are made in the image of God”. The need is to translate the latter understanding, and the commitment it calls for, in a way that strengthens the human rights discourse, and in line with concerns about human spirituality.

The discussion highlighted the importance of the value systems underlining the post-2015 deliberations and eventual outcomes. Some noted that bringing back the discussion around addressing “inequalities” as a sustainable goal in and of itself is essential in order to remove the full burden resting solely under the gender equality goal.

There is a pressing need to ensure synergy between human rights concepts and post-2015 programmatic engagement, including partnerships with like-minded faith actors. “If the secular development actors do not have this synergy with their faith-based development counterparts, other forces of religious radicalism, which espouse violence and undermine women’s rights – indeed undermine the centrality of human rights – may well prevail”. Given earlier discussions as to emerging donors and political agendas that involve religious dynamics, engaging with like-minded religious actors is not a luxury, but a moral and political imperative to safeguard human rights. “If we step away from engagement [with rights-based and human rights inclined faith actors] now, then we disempower ourselves including by denying ourselves the opportunity to even be constructively critical of the religious radicalization taking place,” one participant said. In response came a caution that it is important to bear in mind “the post-2015 framework is about development, not about religion.”

This is no time for complacency about gender equality nor about human rights. The whole post-2015 discussion could be framed through the lens of women’s empowerment and gender equality. At the same time, there are serious challenges which are both ideological as well as technical. The ideological challenge is the continued perception of human rights as a Western framework, thus resisting them as a universal framework. The technical challenge is the continued lack of data on human rights endeavours, most especially in reference to girls’ and women’s specificities. The above challenges underline the need for coherence and consistency in the post-2015 narratives around gender equality.

## Chapter 6: Environment and climate change

The moderator began the session by highlighting the centrality of inequality to the post-2015 discussions, noting that the gap between rich and poor has become a feature of so-called developed countries who are providers of ODA. Reminding participants of the words of the Pope to the UN executives to tend to all the world's peoples, the moderator rhetorically asked the question: "How can we tackle consumption when the poor do not have the opportunity to even think about how to choose their consumption?"

### A. No single model

One speaker related a key event in 2009 that brought together religious leaders from all faith traditions of the world, specifically around the environment and climate change agenda (see Box 1). The meeting at Windsor Castle, attended by the UN Secretary-General, addressed religious leaders from around the world, each of whom had committed to engaging their faith communities towards realizing environmentally-conscious religious spaces. The meeting was noteworthy in many respects, but especially, the presenter noted, when compared to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen a few weeks later. Whereas the faith leaders and organizations adopted a collaborative attitude of open negotiation with each other around the common objective of environmental stewardship, the speaker noted that the Copenhagen meeting fared far less well, partly due to an attitude where some participants appeared to barter with "who will do [something] first".

A secular organization with long experience in engaging faith entities around environment spoke to some of the lessons learned over the years. The organization works with over 400 major religious traditions in the world, and has brokered 27 long-term plans in various countries in the South, six of these involve major Muslim organizations. Rather than being interested in interfaith work which seeks commonly held concerns, this organization's modus operandi was to "work one by one with each different tradition, and work with the distinctions". The presenter referred to the earlier discussion around spirituality, arguing that the conversation about whether to work with religions is in fact "rooted in 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism... which is no longer relevant in today's dynamics". A recent UK survey was quoted, wherein people 65 years and above spoke in terms of religion; those 35 years and older were "not interested in religion"; and the younger generation "is deeply engaged with religion". Youth, however, are not interested nor active within institutional religion, nor even necessarily within nation states. In fact, this generation is not "even interested in bodies like the UN".

The speaker maintained that "we are moving into a post-secular world", and those partaking of the conversation around this particular policy roundtable, are, it was argued, among those "who have broken through the development and religion binary [because] there is much more". In other words, the context of human development is much more complex than an apparently simplified secular-religious divide.



Maintaining the thesis that this is a post-secular world, it was posited that this also means being ‘post’ a single-model approach to human development. This also implies being beyond the global dominance of any one religious tradition or any one nation. “The future is pluralistic, so the role of faiths has to be as well”.

Referring to the earlier point regarding data, the speaker disagreed with the notion that once development practitioners have the relevant data, changing attitudes, behaviours and harmful practices would be possible. The misperception that change depends on data, however, is consonant with the fact that most developmental approaches, organizational reviews and reports, rarely mention culture, religion, ethics or values. Unless these dimensions are understood and integrated into development programmes, data alone will not enable the changes needed to eventually realize radically different patterns of consumption necessary for the survival of the planet.

## B. The importance of stories

Since we are a “narrative species”, it follows that we should not focus on data, and ignore the story. The story of our cultures, which many faiths narrate, and which many are moved by, is that human beings are part of culture and both are part of nature. An event hosted by the World Council of Churches in 1992 enabled representatives of the Pacific Islands to present their particularly powerful narrative about the environmental fate awaiting their islands. It is more than entire households and livelihoods and cultures being submerged in a few years’ time, they said; it is about our ancestors’ bones being washed away.

The post-2015 sustainable development goals need to tell the stories of the good efforts that are taking place and rooted in a generosity of spirit, which itself is harnessed by values and beliefs. By focusing on narrating the stories and not limiting ourselves to data, it was urged, we can go beyond the religious institution or leader, and expand the consciousness of our appeal to include spirituality. These are the narratives that will encourage all — government, religious institution, NGO — to “go the extra mile in dedication to a cause”.

Another speaker noted the critical role of faith in creating a public consciousness based not on the individual “I”, but the collective “we”. Faith actors, through their capacity to advocate and mobilize, demand accountability within governance structures. “Many governments understand that we the public does not care enough about environment yet, because the key battles take place inside each of us through values, mindsets, story”. Only a crisis (actual or perceived) affects change. While there appears to be some resistance in certain quarters about climate change, there is a growing realization that things are changing. Given the convening capacity of faith traditions, and the need for “coming together to care for our environment”, it follows that FBOs can be important agents to inspire necessary transformations in attitudes, behaviours and life-styles.

The key role of FBOs in the area of climate change and environmental debate was affirmed through subsequent presentations. Faith-based ecumenical platforms, notably the World Council of Churches, have hosted consultations since the 1970s linking climate change to global justice. “Advocacy is a generic function of faith communities, and part of the mission of religious actors; religious advocacy is a value added,” participants maintained. Regarding climate change, there are many commonalities among religions and between religious and secular civil society actors. What could be strengthened further, it was noted, is a concerted global civic advocacy to bring the various actors together (religious and non-religious) and develop a long-term vision.

The UN presentation focused on the link between climate change and population growth. Research points to some interesting correlations. High fertility countries actually have low consumption patterns, whereas low fertility countries are the ones with high consumption patterns. As the poorest countries develop and become relatively more affluent, fertility rates tend to decline while consumption patterns increase. This is not a permanent state of affairs, but it is a trend. Demographic trends also play a role. It is difficult to know what the consumption trajectory will be, and this affects economic growth, distribution and inequalities. Being aware of these dynamics should alert people to the importance of not directing blame for climate change to high fertility countries that are low on consumption.

To date, the work in many UN agencies in this area has largely focused on gathering and analyzing data, and providing a narrative on the interplay of science and real-life impact. This is done with a view to equipping governments and civil society with the means of engaging with their communities, to create deliberative spaces of communication, and increase public awareness of and participation in the agenda. Population data can inform and support grassroots communities to “decide about their own adaptation and resilience”.

Another presentation focused on a faith-related narrative of working on climate change, dating back a decade and involving a “journey to Kathmandu” with 3,000 people from various faiths. Participation in the trek entailed providing a sacred gift, such as a donation of land, and making a pledge to sustainable management. More contemporary efforts from Islamic faith-based organizations, such as Islamic Relief, include creating the informational and training tools necessary for advocating with Imams and local faith groups for environmentally-friendly practices. A successful experience resulting from one of these trainings, in Zanzibar, was shared.

#### **Box 5: Fishing in Zanzibar**

In Zanzibar, local fishing communities were used to blowing up dynamite in the ocean to secure capture of bigger quantities of fish. Despite attempts by the government to ban the practice, including legislating against it and jailing fisherman who violated the laws, the practice continued. Organizations attempted to work with communities to advocate against the practice, but it apparently did not stop. Islamic Relief’s training, however, appeared to yield results after one year, as several fisherman ceased to use dynamite, and

resorted to alternative means. When Islamic Relief evaluation officers inquired as to why they had stopped, they were informed that the training provided by the group was the reason they were inspired to stop. The training had included sharing over 250 verses of the Quran speaking to the need to protect and steward nature-related blessings of God. The presenter related the words of a fisherman who said, “I can break governmental laws but I cannot go against the laws of Allah.”

### C. Discussion highlights

Discussants noted that in spite of pockets of resistance, the observation about a “post-secular world” resonates with the experiences of several donors. Indeed, a quote from a British politician was mentioned, in which he is alleged to have said, that governments “do God”. The various presentations underlined that religion is important in all areas of work – whether governance, gender equality or environmental accountability. An argument was also made that the increasing recognition of the role of religion and religious organizations appears to be consistent with a more general interest in spiritualism, and spirituality, especially in so far as there may appear to be an impact on behaviours.

#### 1. On the need for a narrative

Environmental challenges are significant, as in spite of the efforts to date, “there is enough for our needs but not for our greed”. The engagement with faith actors heightens the awareness, and the capacity to appreciate that all developmental work takes place ultimately within specific and often distinct contexts. Thus, there can be no one size fits all solution or model of engagement. But the discussions also highlighted that conveying the environmental message exclusively through the provision of data – a feature many secular organizations are immersed in – is important but by no means sufficient to effect the radical changes needed not only in policy, but in terms of mindsets, behaviours and consumption patterns.

The need for a coherent narrative, therefore, requires the following:

- An ability to be well-versed on local narratives – many of which can incorporate not one, but many religious voices. Thus, to be conversant on local narratives may well demand some degree of religious literacy or knowledge of religious dynamics;
- Appreciation of the fact that story telling is one of the strengths of faith-based modalities of work, and through these stories, individual experience is linked to community and commonality;
- Realization that this environmental crisis is also an opportunity to spur further and more nuanced engagement with faith-based organizations, not only those advocating for environmental awareness but also those “effectively ‘delivering green’ on the ground”;

- Understanding of the fact that creating a coherent narrative requires an “ethical investment” on the part of the UN and donor organizations, including in religious media, which is “bigger than European media combined”.

## 2. On remaining dichotomies

Several questions were raised about apparent dichotomies presented by the discussion to date. How can we reconcile the skepticism about interfaith platforms with the subsequent discourse about commonality? How is it possible to reconcile any good that can come out of religious texts with, as one participant put it, the “absurdity that one can find guidance for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in religious texts”?

The questions received some ‘push back’. Diversity, argued faith protagonists, is essential for the continuation of life. If interfaith attempts are in search of a mono-cultural intellectual world, then they are clearly failing and should fail because that is too close to arguing for one model of thinking, or one type of intervention. Moreover, much of the interfaith engagement around environmental issues appears to be intent on a “commonality of crisis”, while relatively low on “celebration and the commonality of joy”. All religions value creation, yet not all governments have been able to translate this into policies to protect the most basic of creative dynamics – the environment we live in. Instead, the investments many governments make are focused on “economic growth at all costs and if that means more coal to burn, then so be it”.

Some expressed “a need for faith representatives to help donors and the UN wrestle with tough choices”. An example was given of the hydropower dam project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which has become controversial due to the resulting number of displaced persons. At the same time, the dam is needed to power the nation out of poverty and so overcome the impact of conflict. This example further supports the importance of compiling stories rooted in faith; stories that can speak powerfully to complicated scenarios encountered when attempting to achieve environmental sustainability.

## Chapter 7: HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Health and nutrition are the areas of development with the longest and best-documented tradition of faith-based engagement. Yet some of the most problematic dynamics and tensions with human rights are active around this theme. Among the constituencies immediately affected by tensions between faith and health are adolescents and youth. The moderator noted that youth-related issues should have featured more prominently as a cross-cutting theme throughout the consultation, given the specific vulnerabilities and the ethical and moral issues engendered.

“Polio vaccination and HIV/AIDS treatment are areas where working with faith-based partners yielded quantifiable results in terms of increased community acceptance and uptake of the vaccines as well as anti-retrovirals. So much so that WHO is looking into leveraging such partnerships around Hepatitis.”

### A. Health is on the agenda

The fact that health is part of the post-2015 development agenda is a major breakthrough, one presenter noted. The language of Rio+20 affirmed that a healthy child contributes to a healthy society. In effect, health both contributes to and benefits from sustainable development, i.e. it can also serve as an indicator.

At present, health is a focus area with targets that include the unfinished MDG agenda (specifically MDGs 4, 5 and 6<sup>11</sup>), non-communicable diseases (NCDs), universal health coverage and financial protection. Member States (governments) are continuing to discuss means of implementation. This is where FBOs and other civil society organizations have a major role to play, given that they are major contributors to the health sector.

Several examples were shared where the engagement of faith actors proved to be a tipping point. In three contexts where polio was endemic, major breakthroughs have occurred, partly as a result of the interventions of faith leaders. India, in the South Asian region, is now polio free as of this year. Islamic groups changed perceptions in communities and they accepted vaccinations for their children. Interventions for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment by religious leaders and health services provided through various FBOs have helped to ensure that 8 million people today have access to anti retrovirals. WHO is now seeking to engage civil society organizations, including FBOs, around hepatitis as well as HIV.

<sup>11</sup> MDG 4 - Reduce child mortality; 5 - Improve maternal health; 6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

A much more contentious set of health interventions falls under sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. UN and donor agencies involved in these areas maintain they are “necessary for women and girls’ health and empowerment...and intersect with issues of access to education, employment”. Sexual and reproductive health encompasses areas where serious abuses are committed against girls and women, such as sexual violence and coercion, child marriage and FGM/C – all of which have significant social and economic disadvantages. Sexual and reproductive health also covers maternal morbidity and mortality as well as unsafe abortion.

The term sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SRHR) tends to evoke significant controversy, so it is important to deconstruct each word. ‘Reproductive rights’ refers to the ability of women to decide on the number of children, as well as the timing or spacing of them. ‘Sexual rights’ include the rights of women and men to decide on matters relating to sexuality, i.e. to marry, and to practice control over their own bodies and their sexuality. ‘Sexual and reproductive health’ services as defined by the ICPD Programme of Action include ante- and post-natal care; voluntary access to contraceptives; prevention and diagnosis of –sexually transmitted infections including HIV; and access to safe abortion where it is legal.

The speaker referred to the ongoing negotiations by countries of SRHR and affirmed the previously noted point, which is the attempt to integrate into the post-2015 discussions some of the remaining aspects from the MDGs, specifically the need to reduce deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth. Within these frameworks there are three main dynamics to be taken into consideration. The speaker referred to them as “EQA”: 1) equality of access to SRHR services; 2) quality of services; and 3) accountability for and of these services.

Adolescent and youth reproductive health is another area of concern and engagement. The world today has the biggest generation of young people ever, a significant number of whom will become sexually active before marriage. Thus, it is important that they are informed about their sexual health. Equipping adolescents and youth with life skills also has implications for education, employment, and family structures. At the outset of the post-2015 discussions, attempts were made to advocate for a youth-specific development goal.

Another health area concerns non-communicable diseases (NCD) which require access to services for treatment, and also for prevention. The speaker noted that most NCDs are related to behaviours (including diet); faith leaders and FBOs could encourage young people to acquire healthy diets, refrain from smoking, and so on.

## B. Food security

The post-2015 focus area of food security is considered foundational to and overlapping with all other development goals. Close to one billion people are undernourished, and 100 million children are undernourished and underweight. Food security, as defined in the World Food Summit of 1996, is when all people at all times have access to nutritious food and food preferences for healthy life. The speaker reminded participants that the first MDG was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and noted that even if the target were achieved by 2015, a great deal remains to be done.

The speaker noted two specific and ongoing challenges. One of these is limited resources, which requires more effective targeting of food assistance. How would it be possible to target those who need food assistance most? How do we assure dietary requirements and restrictions in some cases? UN organizations work on the basis of need without regard for ethnicity, religion or political affiliation. Precisely because food security is critical and because there is little room for contention around the need for it, UN agencies working in this area boast a long history of outreach to thousands of NGOs, including FBOs. Specific FBOs were cited, including Islamic Relief Worldwide, Caritas, Catholic Relief Services and World Vision International.

“We do not work with [FBOs] because of their religious affiliation ... but on the basis of a track record of reliability and efficiency... UN and donor accountability for service delivery is not limited to delivering food to the hungry alone, but is a feature of their commitment to “providing religiously and culturally sensitive food to those in need.”

A governing principle in these partnerships is the humanitarian principle of humanity and impartiality. “We do not work with them because of their religious affiliation, however, but on the basis of a track record of reliability and efficiency,” A participant explained. Most of the UN and donor agencies who partner with FBOs around food security, also noted that their accountability for service delivery is not limited only to delivering food to the hungry, but is a feature of their commitment to “providing religiously and culturally sensitive food to those in need”.

Gender dynamics are also considered in food distribution. Carefully documented research about the role of women in ensuring food security for their families, and the fact that women produce between 40-70 per cent of food worldwide, are important considerations underlying food distribution. The fact that women suffer from iron deficiency and that this is exacerbated for pregnant and lactating mothers, is taken into account among the variables contributing to women’s empowerment; efforts must be made to ensure food assistance goes into the hands of women.



Cultural challenges are present even where there is general appreciation for the notion that “when food is received by women, the whole family benefits”. FBO partners can become involved with and can contribute towards addressing these challenges. An example of successful partnership with FBOs concerns interventions for girls wherein special incentives are given to families so that girls remain in school. These have worked in certain countries including Islamic countries.

Decades of experience point to a long-term solution to food security challenges: empower women. In order to achieve this goal, many social protection programmes are designed to target women and the most vulnerable populations. Given the overlap of women’s empowerment with cultural dynamics and social norm considerations in many countries, one of the keys to success is working with faith communities to advocate for the messaging as well as ensure that women access and benefit from programmes.

### C. Resources to support shared concerns

Another presenter shared the experience of engaging with religious institutions in the United States, as implementing partners around malaria intervention and treatment. Eventually, after discussing approaches with a range of civil society (including faith-based) partners, a coalition of the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod came together to form the Lutheran Malaria Initiative.

Fundraising structures were set up internally to raise money to support two goals: 1) support the denominational work in Africa of the partner organizations; and 2) support the malaria portfolio of the Global Fund. A few years into the initiative, the FBO members split among themselves over acknowledging same sex marriage and supporting gay clergy. This created a gap in what was intended as shared work on malaria. Eventually the multimillion dollar programme was restructured.

The experience highlighted several lessons:

- Raising significant resources for shared developmental concerns, from within FBOs, is possible and can be life-saving, not least because the FBO community outreach is significant and impressive.
- There are challenges related to transparency. Since much of the giving tends to be based on or derived from the faith community, developing appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools is not a straightforward enterprise.
- Working with a conservative US Congress, an FBO is far likelier to receive a better reception and elicit better traction than a UN agency or donor country.
- FBOs are averse to being coopted by donors or by UN agencies. This should prompt UN and donors to invest in “learning their language” and their working

modality, e.g. what are the words and strategies, what kind of role could there be for church members, including young members?.

- Some FBOs, with the exception of the Catholic Church, are susceptible to organizational change. Partnership agreements need to provide, as much as possible, for the eventuality of a disruption to the structure, as well as to the programme, i.e. include some sort of agreement on an ‘exit strategy’.

#### D. Discussion highlights

The discussants to this section had a dual role: synthesize some of the highlights and introduce the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, which seeks to create an evidence-base to support engagement with FBOs for development.

##### 1. On the need for constructive engagement

Health and nutrition are key to development, and engagement with faith communities is key to the successful partnerships for that. Many examples of this constructive engagement were shared, including how faith communities can inform and facilitate religious and culturally- sensitive service delivery in health as well as nutrition.

Examples of good practice include the Polio vaccine where, again, religious leaders were able to bring down cultural barriers and overcome fears about immunizations. In addition to what was shared, there are numerous instances of the role of faith leaders in promoting breastfeeding in communities, thereby contributing positively to child survival rates. There is an ever-growing body of literature showing the distinctive assets of FBOs in taking an holistic approach to health.

At the same time, faith communities “have the potential to – and indeed have done a great deal of harm”, participants cautioned. This may be through preventing access to care, as some of the experiences highlighted in the areas of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health. Reference was made to the complications of division and belief, which have delayed life-saving interventions.

Concrete policy implications, it was argued, would need to take into account the priority of ensuring the *sustainable* engagement of FBOs, i.e. beyond project specific interventions. This would entail interventions to build capacities of faith leaders, including on and around human rights, as well as of service delivery FBOs.

##### 2. On the Joint Learning Initiative

The Joint Learning Initiative (JLI) is an international and cross-sectoral collaboration that operates through learning hubs to address some key questions around faith and

development, such as what do we know? how can that be better communicated? and where are the critical research gaps that we could advocate for funding? Like an intervention mentioned earlier, JLI does not view data as a hammer to convey truth; rather data should equip people with information for their communities and provide some of the rational spaces where meaningful engagement can take place.

The JLI has over 80 participating organizations involved. Its membership continues to grow through interest in how faith affects every one of the existing and emerging development goals. It has several learning hubs including maternal health and HIV/AIDS, and resilience and conflict resolution. One of its findings is that there is an increasing body of knowledge about FBO interventions, but this is not necessarily being connected with the questions being asked by policy makers.

A call was made for more systematic surveying by governments and donor organizations around what policy makers specifically need from FBOs. The call was also made to “seek a stronger collaboration among donors – and commitment to fund - a strengthened evidence base.”

### 3. On the role of narrative again

Discussion turned once again to narrative as a major factor in faith-specific engagement. An example was shared of a Norwegian FBO intervention to seek to put an end to the harmful practice of FGM/C among a certain community in Ethiopia. Rather than leveraging the laws alone, the FBO partners chose to reference religious texts. “Holy books are a good entry point for moving step by step into a difficult terrain.” As the speaker explained, “We used the holy books... and we asked where does it say that we should cut our girls? Within three months, the practice had stopped.” A similar strategy was tried regarding hate language towards homosexuals: “We asked, where does Jesus say that we should hate?”

This example led to the observation that some harmful health practices are more a function of culture and/or tradition, such as FGM/C, while others are more a matter of politics, such as the current challenging context of polio vaccines in some countries. These issues present another side to the question of the instrumentalization of religion. There was some pushback on the distinction made between religion and culture/tradition. While this may be true, participants said, the refrain that “this is not really religious” is all too common. At the same time, faith voices articulate, loudly and clearly, that some of those harmful practices merit religious justification. What can be done about that?

### 4. On specifying ‘the ask’ of one another

The consultation was tasked to specify ‘the ask’ for food security. They said a clear target would be to create sustainable food systems while also mitigating food loss and waste thereof. “If the amount of waste from one part of the world were reduced, then we could feed everyone”. Faith leaders can and do have a role to play in the required advocacy, and

FBOs can themselves share their own successful experiences of recycling and distributing food to eliminate waste at the community level.

The Joint Learning Initiative experience yielded another perspective. The ask would be two-fold: “What are DFID [UK aid] and the World Bank looking for from FBOs?” “What resources are they willing to allocate to complement those of the JLI or Tearfund (the executor of the JLI), such that they could provide answers to these queries?”

Concrete policy recommendations were made to help define ‘the ask’:

5. To pick two or three specific thematic areas and have a colloquium on these, utilizing specific frontline practitioner questions and experiences; which can build on shared knowledge, engagement and trust.
6. To undertake a systematic surveying by governments and donor organizations as to what policy makers want from FBOs.
7. To seek a stronger donor collaboration for a strengthened evidence base.

## Chapter 8: EDUCATION

Statistical data relevant to educational enrollment and attainment, including sex disaggregated information, was shared in the presentations. This information can be accessed through UNESCO and the British Council’s extensive on-line publications. Important nuggets were shared in relation to religion, and faith-based engagement, as summarized below.

### A. Religion and schools

Investing in girls’ education is a critical means to fight religious extremism, an argument by Nicolas Kristoff echoed by speakers. Not educating children costs more in the long terms, including lost productivity. The experience of various UN bodies in terms of incentives provided for girls’ education was also shared.

Religion was identified as both a force for good as well as for bad regarding education. Globally, there are hundreds if not thousands of religious schools, pertaining to all faiths. Many provide an essential service and a high-quality education. At the same time, not all religious schools are alike, and some harbor teachings of forms of exclusion, bigotry as well as violence. Little comparative and consolidated research or data is currently available within the UN system that links international development assistance to religious-based or inspired education. This is an area of knowledge worth supporting.

The historic example of Catholic-led and Protestant-led schools in Sweden was shared. One of the outcomes of this work was the progression from religiously-led (both Catholic and Protestant) to secular/government-led educational systems, which has ultimately resulted in a “market driven educational system”. The market-driven approach, speakers said, “is not a system that enhances our ability to solve common challenges... and is sustainable”. It is important to ensure that education is seen as and attended to as a right, as well as a public good.

The discussant observed that, in some countries, it is still possible for Ministers of Education to discuss the theme of education without mentioning the Church, in spite of the fact that many of the present-day schools were initially set up – and some are still managed by – the Churches. Echoing the concern about the declining educational standard, the discussant said, “We should have encouraged governments to cooperate with church/religious-run schools, instead of allowing a handover for a collapse.”

### B. Discussion highlights

#### 1. On girls’ education, and poverty

An intervention highlighted the links between the figure of 10 million girls out of school in Nigeria, and a similar figure in Pakistan, and factors such as child marriage. The concern some rural families have, according to one discussant, is that the government-run

educational establishments are not compatible with religion and, indeed, that they may promote or be breeding grounds for “immorality”. Nevertheless, the primary impediment to girls’ attendance of school is poverty. In Nigeria, Pakistan and other countries, primary education is free— but families still must be able to afford the costs associated with schools, such as uniforms, chalk and so on.

Among the questions raised in the discussion was whether there were any successful practices of working with religious (especially Muslim) educational institutions to effectively change the curriculum with a view to mitigating against radicalization. A positive example from Nigeria was shared wherein a hybrid system of education combined Quranic study with the formal national school curriculum system, while also developing ways to help students (in this case girls) and their families with the affordability of school-related needs.

Also referencing poverty, this time from a Latin American viewpoint, one discussant affirmed the context of a lack of option for poor families, who send children to work and earn a living earlier. Much of this happens, it was argued, because governments do not prioritize education in their national budget allocations. While UNESCO is hoping to inspire governments to allocate at least 7 per cent, many developing countries may be allocating closer to 4 per cent. These dynamics are further exacerbated by weak governance mechanisms, and the relatively poor coffers of certain states, particularly, though not only, in times of conflict.

Religious schools may continue to seek to fill the vacuum in education. This was tied to ever-increasing jargon and practical implications regarding what the UN is referring to as ‘fit for purpose’. It was contended that many of the educational policies, the curricula and the tools for teachers, are in fact “not fit for marketable skills”. Presenters spoke to fear as one of the many common elements underlying schools and educational systems.

## 2. On diverse scenarios of engagement

Societies can be mobilized through parental and wider community involvement such that they send their children to school. The flip side of this, however, is when schools are of poor quality. Another scenario is one where the parents move to the next phase, which is monitoring. This entails holding teachers, principals and local councilors accountable for fulfilling their roles in schools. Another option is when an FBO has direct responsibility as a service provider, thus obliging it to fulfill the obligations that would have been largely those of the parents.

In each of these three ‘roles’ for FBOs, it was argued, there must be an acceptance that government would have a key role to play alongside the FBO to work with local schools and national ministries of education. FBOs’ roles would extend beyond influencing curricula to convincing local authorities that school is not just a matter of reading the constitution and voting on election day; rather, they should be rendering schools a venue

for appreciating and respecting values which religious institutions are trying to institute. These issues need to be thought through carefully, a discussant warned: “If we [FBO] claim we have something good to do, then we should accept what it takes to be responsible for other people’s children.”

Another intervention highlighted the importance of the education sector in the social accountability framework upheld by the World Bank, and reiterated the need for more evidence and data.

FBOs have a role in this area — whether as direct service providers, development entities with links to the myriad religious institutions in charge of a range of educational establishments, and even as partners to governmental bodies working to provide/enhance education-related endeavours. No reliable data captures the extent of ‘religious schools’ yet given the variety thereof across the world, one participant correctly observed that among the many participants at the consultation, there was bound to be at least one who had attended a religious school of some sort, at some point in life.

As the oldest social service providers, faith-based entities (particularly traditional religious institutions) have consistently provided educational services in all communities. However, the extent to which international faith-based development NGOs have included education in their mandates, is another matter entirely, a participant argued. Participants from the UN and from FBOs expressed concerns about the extent to which ‘madrassas’ for instance, were engaged with, and what policies were used to identify them or work with them. Some noted that incorporating madrassas as part of the grid of national education systems came with political controversy within the development organizations themselves, whether secular or faith-based.

## Chapter 9: Attributable nuggets, in Lieu of a conclusion

### A. Key takeaways

The following was submitted by Michael Pajonk of the United Nations Foundation.

#### Key takeaways when working in day-to-day partnership with FBOs

- Recognize that a FBO is likely different than other types of partners, even other organizations that are member-driven. Their core mission and yours are essentially different, yet the partnership can and should be mutually beneficial.
- FBOs have tremendous upside. They represent many people, perhaps millions, and their collective actions and voices can make a difference unlike other constituencies.



- FBOs provide perhaps as much as 50-60 per cent of health care, social services and education in rural areas of the developing world. So they are embedded in their communities in geographic areas where national governments are unlikely to provide much support.
- Understand the mission of FBOs and what they are getting out of the partnership, e.g. a greater opportunity for others outside their denomination to learn about their good works, young people in the FBO seeing their church in a new and different light, providing the FBO with platforms and access to people and events that they have not had before, etc.
- Not all FBOs are the same. Get to know the one who are working with. Learn their “language” and culture. Understand what they mean when they say, “That’s not the way we do things at \_\_\_\_\_.” Always appreciate that your partnership is a two-way street and not merely an opportunity for your organization to help meet its own needs.
- Identify a ‘champion’ within the FBO you want to work with who can provide you access to senior leadership other decision makers in the organization. Similarly, but also quite differently, identify and nurture senior leadership at your FBO partner to gain their commitment and keep them engaged in the objectives of your partnership.
- Recognize different organizational structures among FBOs. For example, one organization may have a ‘flat’ structure where all units are equal and there is no single office that can direct or influence the rest. Or there may be a hierarchical organization where one office/individual sets the tone and direction for the organization.
- FBOs may not have experience in or be comfortable with working in partnership with a secular organization. Recognize those issues and address them to the extent possible. Define your expectations with an appreciation of your partner as being different than the professionals you might be used to in your particular area of interest.
- Even professional staff at an FBO may not have the direct experience and skill set you need for them to carry out the duties of a partnership, e.g. in fundraising, advocacy, or programme implementation. Encourage the use of consultants, where appropriate, and be prepared to guide/teach FBO staff along the way.
- FBOs have potential for significant fundraising efforts, but you must provide the means and support for them to do so, especially if they have not engaged in organization-wide or denomination-wide campaigns before.
- Don’t expect FBOs to take on activities for which they are not prepared, don’t have the expertise, or haven’t allocated the budget to be successful. To the extent

that you can provide resources, do so, but don't expect an FBO, or other organizations, to take on activities for which they have no budget or existing structure.

- With the Government of the United States, FBOs have tremendous potential as advocates for global health and other issues in a way that has never presented itself before. People of faith speaking on behalf of government funding for a particular health issue or theme can be a highly effective voice with legislators and opinion leaders.

## B. Concluding thoughts on the consultation

The following was submitted by Konrad Specker of the Swiss International Development Agency.

- Throughout the consultation the role of the role of religion in development was not contested. Rather, it was assessed through different lenses, in many cases also by storytelling.
- There remains an ongoing need for shared analytical and definitional clarity when dealing with religion in development processes, as well as the role of religion and religious actors in societies, more generally.
- With regard to the link of faith and of FBOs with the post-2015 agenda, the question of “on what issue?” is crucial. Is it a matter of faith leaders and of FBOs enhancing their advocacy engagement to promote the 2015 Agenda? Or is it a matter of faith leaders and FBOs to contribute to the shaping of the goals? If it is the latter, then it does not only concern the faith-based, but also secular organizations and voices.
- Moreover, the shaping of goals ought not to be a matter of faith, but of competence. Thus, the relevance of possible contributions from FBOs is not inherent to the faith they relate to, but emerges from the competencies, knowledge and performance record of these organizations. The key issues are thus: the respective competencies and track record; the capacity to critically reflect the context and the positioning therein; and the capacity to develop targeted and effective policy proposals.
- Several participants advocated for conscious instrumentalization of faith leaders and FBOs for development. It was even mentioned that if development agencies do not do so, FBOs might be instrumentalized by other (including obscure) forces. It remains important to acknowledge that faith leaders and FBOs are not just passive actors to be made use of, but living forces and bodies with various inherent dynamics of their own, as well as internal contradictions. It is equally

- important to understand and to contextualize the intra-faith dynamics, and to look into the potential (un-intended and possibly even invisible) secondary and tertiary effects of engaging with faith leaders and FBOs.
- This issue of intended or conscious instrumentalization of faith leaders and FBOs was the most problematic aspect of the discussions. It would need more in-depth reflection, motivated and indeed informed, by a ‘do no harm’ approach.
  - Also discussed at different moments was the importance of evidence-based knowledge in continuing to build a case for the pros and cons of engagement between the diverse actors. In that regard, evidence is also called for to inform critical research gaps, some of which have been mentioned throughout the deliberations. It is critical to substantiate and link any recommendation for further evidence, to direct policy relevance and developmental needs. It is equally important to seek to contextualize all evidence gathered, on a case-by-case basis.
  - With regard to situations of conflict and to the promotion of stable and peaceful societies, it is important to look into the ‘profane’ causes of conflict. Religion is rarely the cause of conflicts, but it can enhance conflicts and passion. It is very important to look into the local, regional and geopolitical dimensions of conflicts and to analyze the role of religion and of faith actors, within this multi-layered dynamic.
  - When integrating the engagement with FBOs, it is important to ensure that they respond to the same quality criteria and scrutiny as any other actor in a given context. Faith in itself does not give FBOs a special status. There must be evidence about the competence and performance of FBOs. The promotion of learning platforms and joint collaborative learning initiatives, should involve both faith-based and secular organizations as a matter of course.
  - In-depth dialogue is important when engaging with faith leaders and FBOs. But the collaboration should be based on genuine negotiations, mutual holistic understanding, and a transparency of positioning.

### C. Concluding action agreed

The gathered participants agreed, in principle, to forming a loosely connected Network of Peers, titled the **Network on Religion and Development Post-2015**. As Network members, they agreed to share information about the post-2015 developments when possible, and to make themselves available for consultations around their specific concerns. Some form of quarterly communication among members was discussed but no specific decision was taken in that regard. An offer was made to have a follow-up consultation in 2015 in Norway, in which an assessment could be made by the FBOs, the UN agencies and the donor representatives of the emerging sustainable development goals (SDG) agenda, as well as past and potential interventions by the FBOs since this

meeting. In addition, the implications of the SDG roll-out, for collaboration and partnerships, could be outlined.

A request was made by the participants that they be kept informed, and be guided when and where possible, as to opportunities and avenues for contribution to the post-2015 deliberations. The proposed follow-up meeting in Norway in 2015 would provide an opportunity to assess progress in interventions and policy debates; assess the post-2015 process and the resulting sustainable development goals identified by and through the UN General Assembly, and review the discussion on the need for evidence of FBO impact.

This report is intended to serve as a record of the discussion, largely without attribution, except where and when the permission to attribute would be provided by the presenter. The report is to be shared between the members and posted online.

## Annex 1: Illustrative goals and targets

Source: United Nations. 2013. “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development”. New York: High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

### UNIVERSAL GOALS, NATIONAL TARGETS

<sup>1</sup> Candidates for global minimum standards, including 'zero' goals.

<sup>2</sup> Indicators to be disaggregated.

<sup>3</sup> Targets require further technical work to find appropriate indicators.

	<b>1. End Poverty</b>	<p>1a. Bring the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day to zero <b>and</b> reduce by x% the share of people living below their country's 2015 national poverty line <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>1b. Increase by x% the share of women and men, communities, and businesses with secure rights to land, property, and other assets <sup>2,3</sup></p> <p>1c. Cover x% of people who are poor and vulnerable with social protection systems <sup>2,3</sup></p> <p>1d. Build resilience and reduce deaths from natural disasters by x% <sup>2</sup></p>
	<b>2. Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality</b>	<p>2a. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against girls and women <sup>1,2,3</sup></p> <p>2b. End child marriage <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>2c. Ensure equal right of women to own and inherit property, sign a contract, register a business and open a bank account <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>2d. Eliminate discrimination against women in political, economic, and public life <sup>1,2,3</sup></p>
	<b>3. Provide Quality Education and Lifelong Learning</b>	<p>3a. Increase by x% the proportion of children able to access and complete pre-primary education <sup>2</sup></p> <p>3b. Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, completes primary education able to read, write and count well enough to meet minimum learning standards <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>3c. Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, has access to lower secondary education and increase the proportion of adolescents who achieve recognised and measurable learning outcomes to x% <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>3d. Increase the number of young and adult women and men with the skills, including technical and vocational, needed for work by x% <sup>2,3</sup></p>
	<b>4. Ensure Healthy Lives</b>	<p>4a. End preventable infant and under-5 deaths <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>4b. Increase by x% the proportion of children, adolescents, at-risk adults and older people that are fully vaccinated <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>4c. Decrease the maternal mortality ratio to no more than x per 100,000 <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>4d. Ensure universal sexual and reproductive health and rights <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>4e. Reduce the burden of disease from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases and priority non-communicable diseases <sup>2</sup></p>
	<b>5. Ensure Food Security and Good Nutrition</b>	<p>5a. End hunger and protect the right of everyone to have access to sufficient, safe, affordable, and nutritious food <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>5b. Reduce stunting by x%, wasting by y%, and anemia by z% for all children under five <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>5c. Increase agricultural productivity by x%, with a focus on sustainably increasing smallholder yields and access to irrigation <sup>3</sup></p> <p>5d. Adopt sustainable agricultural, ocean and freshwater fishery practices and rebuild designated fish stocks to sustainable levels <sup>1</sup></p> <p>5e. Reduce postharvest loss and food waste by x% <sup>3</sup></p>
	<b>6. Achieve Universal Access to Water and Sanitation</b>	<p>6a. Provide universal access to safe drinking water at home, and in schools, health centres, and refugee camps <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>6b. End open defecation and ensure universal access to sanitation at school and work, and increase access to sanitation at home by x% <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>6c. Bring freshwater withdrawals in line with supply and increase water efficiency in agriculture by x%, industry by y% and urban areas by z%</p> <p>6d. Recycle or treat all municipal and industrial wastewater prior to discharge <sup>1,3</sup></p>

	<b>7. Secure Sustainable Energy</b>	<p>7a. Double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix</p> <p>7b. Ensure universal access to modern energy services <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>7c. Double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency in buildings, industry, agriculture and transport</p> <p>7d. Phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption <sup>1,3</sup></p>
	<b>8. Create Jobs, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Equitable Growth</b>	<p>8a. Increase the number of good and decent jobs and livelihoods by x <sup>2</sup></p> <p>8b. Decrease the number of young people not in education, employment or training by x% <sup>2</sup></p> <p>8c. Strengthen productive capacity by providing universal access to financial services and infrastructure such as transportation and ICT <sup>1,2,3</sup></p> <p>8d. Increase new start-ups by x and value added from new products by y through creating an enabling business environment and boosting entrepreneurship <sup>2,3</sup></p>
	<b>9. Manage Natural Resource Assets Sustainably</b>	<p>9a. Publish and use economic, social and environmental accounts in all governments and major companies <sup>1</sup></p> <p>9b. Increase consideration of sustainability in x% of government procurements <sup>3</sup></p> <p>9c. Safeguard ecosystems, species and genetic diversity</p> <p>9d. Reduce deforestation by x% and increase reforestation by y%</p> <p>9e. Improve soil quality, reduce soil erosion by x tonnes and combat desertification</p>
	<b>10. Ensure Good Governance and Effective Institutions</b>	<p>10a. Provide free and universal legal identity, such as birth registrations <sup>1,2</sup></p> <p>10b. Ensure people enjoy freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent media and information <sup>1,3</sup></p> <p>10c. Increase public participation in political processes and civic engagement at all levels <sup>2,3</sup></p> <p>10d. Guarantee the public's right to information and access to government data <sup>1</sup></p> <p>10e. Reduce bribery and corruption and ensure officials can be held accountable <sup>3</sup></p>
	<b>11. Ensure Stable and Peaceful Societies</b>	<p>11a. Reduce violent deaths per 100,000 by x and eliminate all forms of violence against children <sup>1,2,3</sup></p> <p>11b. Ensure justice institutions are accessible, independent, well-resourced and respect due-process rights <sup>1,2,3</sup></p> <p>11c. Stem the external stressors that lead to conflict, including those related to organised crime <sup>3</sup></p> <p>11d. Enhance the capacity, professionalism and accountability of the security forces, police and judiciary <sup>3</sup></p>
	<b>12. Create a Global Enabling Environment and Catalyse Long-Term Finance</b>	<p>12a. Support an open, fair and development-friendly trading system, substantially reducing trade-distorting measures, including agricultural subsidies, while improving market access of developing country products <sup>3</sup></p> <p>12b. Implement reforms to ensure stability of the global financial system and encourage stable, long-term private foreign investment <sup>3</sup></p> <p>12c. Hold the increase in global average temperature below 2° C above pre-industrial levels, in line with international agreements</p> <p>12d. Developed countries that have not done so to make concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP) as official development assistance to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20% of GNP of developed countries to least developed countries; other countries should move toward voluntary targets for complementary financial assistance</p> <p>12e. Reduce illicit flows and tax evasion and increase stolen-asset recovery by \$x <sup>3</sup></p> <p>12f. Promote collaboration on and access to science, technology, innovation, and development data <sup>3</sup></p>