Faith-based organisations, conflict resolution and anti-corruption

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Question

What is the evidence on faith based organisations' (FBOs) role in conflict resolution? What is the evidence on FBOs and corruption?

Contents

1. Overview

This rapid report reviews the literature on faith-based development organisations (FBOs) and their role in conflict resolution and anti-corruption. In both areas the literature suggests that **religious actors could play a decisive role, but that this has not been realised**. There is hesitation from both donors and communities about the role which religious actors could or should play in development.

Most of the literature agglomerates faith-based actors and treats them as a group, including religious leaders, congregations, church institutions, charity organisations run by churches, international development NGOs based on faith teachings, and NGOs which do not declare a faith interest but are born of a community which holds inherent faith-based values. As a result, this report also takes a **loose definition** of faith-based organisations and includes many of the above. This report considers any faith actors formed into organisations, but excludes faith actors working as individuals. There is a considerable literature on the role of religious individuals, particularly leaders and preachers. The report aims to focus on the various roles faith organisations can play, and does not delve into detailed definitions or taxonomies.

The **evidence** on FBOs and conflict resolution is moderately robust. Nearly all literature provides case study examples, or interviews with NGO workers, but there is almost no comparative work and no

comprehensive literature reviews or systematic reviews. There are few programmatic interventions and evaluations. However, there is a lot of material, drawing from differing conflicts, allowing some lessons to emerge. Section 2 provides an overview of FBO attributes which contribute to conflict resolution, then presents examples of the roles FBOs have played, which include: early warning; emergency relief and support; observers; information and data collecting; advocacy; education and teaching; convening dialogues; mediation; and healing. The report does not include examples of where FBOs have disrupted conflict resolution processes. The examples given are illustrative only, as there are plenty more which suggest similar outcomes.

There is no body of evidence specifically on FBOs and corruption. There is some work on religion, religious values and corruption, but not on how faith-based development organisations work on corruption issues. Section 3 first reviews FBOs' work on anti-corruption, then looks at corruption within FBOs.

The report concludes with a list of selected FBOs which are mentioned often in the literature.

2. FBOs and conflict resolution

Religious actors can take up a number of roles in conflict resolution: educators; advocates; intermediaries; mediators; they can help to change behaviours; provide peacebuilding education, health or relief services; disseminate ideas such as democracy and human rights; or encourage disarmament (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Their legitimacy as civil society actors gives them a strong and influential position (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

A distinction is made in the literature between peacemaking, which many religious institutions are prepared to do, and peacebuilding, which is a more complex process of long-term social change (Flanigan, 2013). Religious leaders may be underprepared or underskilled for the latter.

FBO attributes

The Dutch organisation Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO) has identified the following attributes of FBOs in support of conflict transformation (van Ommering, 2009).

Social assets of FBOs are:

- Long history of involvement;
- Extensive networks and ability to mobilise people;
- Includes religious moderates as well as conservatives;
- Includes single-faith as well as multi-faith actors;
- Involvement in advocacy.

Moral and spiritual assets of FBOs are:

- Faith may connect people to strive for peace and human rights;
- Moral and spiritual authority;
- Potential initiator of change;
- Mobilisations through moral ideas.

Sterland and Beauclerk (2008) suggest that the key to the usefulness of institutions within the faith communities lies in the degree to which they are *of* the religious community, without *being* the religious community. Being part of the community means they are trusted by the community, but by not being the community itself, they can retain autonomy, allowing them to explore new peacebuilding areas.

FBOs have a unique position in being able to access and mobilise faith communities (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Through sermons and preaching they can reach out to a large number of people with relative ease (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). They may have access to both grassroots communities and high-level leaders (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Additionally, religious actors may be able to mobilise sister communities both locally and internationally, lending a conflict resolution movement more momentum (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

Religious actors are more likely to be seen as trustworthy, just, and to have a moral and spiritual motivation for peace, with fewer ulterior motives (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

There is some suggestion in the literature that Muslim actors tend to operate as individuals rather than in formal NGO structures (Abu-Nimer & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2008). Christian actors are often formed into organisations, and often have an ability to draw on international networks with rich Christian countries, giving them a solid financial base (Owen & King, 2013).

FBO roles

FBOs' operations and mandates vary widely. Haynes (2009) outlines the four main contributions of FBOs to conflict resolution: (1) emotional and spiritual support to war-affected communities; (2) effective mobilisation for their communities and others for peace; (3) mediation between conflicting parties; and (4) a conduit in pursuit of reconciliation, dialogue, and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. Some empirical examples follow of roles which FBOs have played in recent conflicts.

There is a general conclusion in the literature that the potential role of religious actors and FBOs has not been fully realised (Flanigan, 2013). Two main limitations of FBOs are: (1) a failure of religious leaders to understand and/or enact their potential peace building roles; and (2) many religious leaders lack the ability to exploit their strategic capacity as transnational actors (Haynes, 2009).

Early warning

FBOs have been able to act as early warning indicators, due to their close connection to communities. For example, in Sierra Leone, in 1997, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone was able to alert the president to the worsening security situation (Flanigan, 2013).

Emergency relief and support

Many FBOs provide immediate relief during and in the aftermath of conflict, providing social services and psychological support. Some of the literature suggests that this area is where FBOs feel most comfortable. There are many examples of this kind of development assistance, and only a few are outlined below.

In Nigeria, following violence in Jos in 2008, faith communities and FBOs provided immediate support to victims and their families, through prayer and counselling, rehoming, food, clothes, and medical distribution (Best & Rakodi, 2011). The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) organised a week-long fasting and prayer session (Best & Rakodi, 2011). In this instance, most organisations provided support to their

own faith communities first, and most did not reach out to people of other faiths. Many FBOs in Nigeria also provided building materials to individuals, a form of relief which lasted much longer than the immediate post-violence period (Best & Rakodi, 2011).

In the former Yugoslavia, the FBOs providing services were largely dependent on international funding (Sterland & Beauclerk, 2008). The organisations tended to be dominated by their mother church and lacked autonomy. They primarily provided a public relations function for the church, by dispersing relief items and providing food and shelter, without contributing overly much to peacebuilding (Sterland & Beauclerk, 2008).

Observers

The international FBO Peace Brigades International places observers in conflict zones to accompany human rights activists under threat (Flanigan, 2013). The observer's presence can discourage unlawful action and enables the documentation of human rights violations (Flanigan, 2013). Similar initiatives include accompanying returning refugees and seeking hostage release (Flanigan, 2013).

Information and data collecting

Documenting the effects of violence is an important first step in resolving conflict. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) established a documentation committee to count the number of Christians killed and churches destroyed (Best & Rakodi, 2011). The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and the Ansurul Islam both set up committees to collect data on the impact of violence on their members (Best & Rakodi, 2011). Several FBOs are known to have reported data back to the government to assist in making reparations, and some monitored the distribution of relief to ensure it was reaching all communities fairly (Best & Rakodi, 2011).

Advocacy

FBOs are able to pursue activism and lobbying of governments to push for peace (Flanigan, 2013). The Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka, founded on Buddhist principles, is a strong actor in peace advocacy and lobbying for government social and economic reform (Flanigan, 2013).

In Kano, Nigeria, the radical Islamic movement Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah Wa'ikamatis Sunnah (JIBWIS) used lobbied the government for fairness in distribution of relief items and for justice for victims (Best & Rakodi, 2011). In Kenya, the Muslim FBO Wajir persuaded the government to begin including peace education in schools (Abu-Nimer & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2008). In Nepal, larger-scale interfaith organisations have lobbied on disarmament, youth issues, and space for faith-specific burial grounds (Owen & King, 2013).

Education and teaching

Religious actors can play a role as educators and in bringing people together for conflict transformation. They have a legitimate position from which to teach, including educating about others' religious beliefs and in preaching tolerance and understanding (Flanigan, 2013).

Some FBOs have experienced success in their peacebuilding efforts because they are rooted in faith teachings (Flanigan, 2013). Basing development work on a specific religious doctrine can have intrinsic value to members of that community (Flanigan, 2013).

In Mindanao, Philippines, military officers have been sent to **peacebuilding workshops** facilitated by FBOs (Berkley Center for Religion Peace and World Affairs, 2011). Peacebuilding training provided by Catholic Relief Services has helped the military understand the different positions in the conflict, and has also helped other actors see the military as colleagues rather than opposition (Berkley Center for Religion Peace and World Affairs, 2011). This educational initiative has trained peacebuilders who have gone on to establish bridges between communities, and changed attitudes within the military. This has been significant in reforming the military's reputation and enabling them to build relationships with communities.

In South Africa, the Damietta Peace Initiative, a Franciscan Christian organisation, focuses on empowering individuals as a route to peace (Clark, 2011). It trains community groups to address community conflicts in a non-violent way, teaching peace and tolerance (Clark, 2011). It aims to help poor and black communities value themselves, leading to reconciliation through empowerment (Clark, 2011).

Schools or educational institutions can play a role in promoting peace through their position as conduits of values, behaviour and attitudes (van Ommering, 2009). Education develops child wellbeing and can be used to promote tolerance, which both contribute to the longer-term processes of peacebuilding (van Ommering, 2009). Faith-based education can additionally offer mental resilience, a source of hope, and a specific social structure (van Ommering, 2009). The Dutch Christian organisations ICCO and KIRK in Actie partner with southern educational FBOs which promote ideals of peace, tolerance, coexistence, inclusion, and non-violence. One partner organisation is ZOA in Sub-Saharan Africa, which promotes conflict transformation in its school programmes through interreligious and interethnic cooperation, equal access to services, and accountable governance, amongst others (van Ommering, 2009).

Caritas Southern Africa is carrying out peacebuilding in schools throughout South Africa (Clark, 2011). Its programme aims to help children deal with feelings of anger and frustration in a constructive manner, to help prevent turning to violence (Clark, 2011). World Vision in Nepal has offered similar workshops to children, aiming to help build positive attitudes (Owen& King, 2013).

Convening dialogues

Interfaith dialogue has been embraced by governments and organisations as a key tool for facilitating peacebuilding in situations where conflict has some inter-religious element (Hayward, 2012). In some academic work, fostering relations between different communities is also referred to as building social capital (van Ommering, 2009). There are very many examples of this kind of work, which is a key focus of many FBOs. Some examples follow.

The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel brings together 60 FBOs and facilitates dialogue and study groups, including studying each other's sacred texts, which can promote greater understanding (Flanigan, 2013). Similarly, Caritas Southern Africa brings black people together in South Africa to work on community projects, with the aim of increasing understanding and tolerance between violent groups (Clark, 2011). Caritas Nepal carried out inter-faith reconciliation through community projects, including providing the building materials for Hindus and Muslims to construct houses together (Owen & King, 2013).

In Jos, Nigeria, after violence in 2001, many organisations participated in or established seminars for peacebuilding and dialogue. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) organised meetings between Christians and Muslims, participated in inter-faith seminars and built dialogue with Muslim counterparts (Best & Rakodi, 2011). The Islamic organisation Jamatul Nasril Islam led Christian-Muslim dialogue and participated in all the peace committees organised by government (Best & Rakodi, 2011). Religiously mixed workshops appeared to have helped build trust between participants. Other strategies included mixed-

faith sports matches, workshops on non-violence, targeting different sectors such as students and indigenous peoples, and radio messages of peace (Best & Rakodi, 2011).

Mediation

Mediation studies have consistently shown that the identity of the mediator plays a role in the success of the intervention (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Religious actors have often acted as mediators in conflicts. Quite often, participants in the conflict request faith-based mediators rather than secular ones. Religious actors often have long-term commitment to their communities, and their social position as cultural insiders gives them credibility and authority (Flanigan, 2013).

Some mediation processes highly value the neutrality and impartiality of the mediator; processes involving religious actors tend to fall at the other end of the spectrum. FBOs which know the dispute, are engaged with the parties, and who will not leave the area after the resolution, are considered cultural insiders who have a vested interest in reaching a resolution for peace, without favouring either side (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). This helps them motivate communities for peace.

Whether or not they belong to the same religious community as the parties in conflict, religious actors are likely to be able to **win trust from both sides** (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). This is because they are seen as having a primary commitment to doing God's work and the lack of vested interests in the outcome other than peace (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone was made up of mixed-faith people from the communities in conflict, which allowed them to discuss with leaders from all warring parties (Flanigan, 2013). In other cases, actors from outside the community, or from other faiths, have been successful (Flanigan, 2013).

FBOs may use **religious mediation strategies** to help parties reach an agreement. These could include prayers, meditation, religious rituals, religious vocabulary, values and myths (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Within Muslim communities, FBOs have successfully used traditional conflict resolution methods (*suluh*[1]), which are familiar and therefore legitimate (Abu-Nimer & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2008).

Healing

Psychological wellbeing and healing past incidents is an important part of achieving reconciliation (Clark, 2011). Mercy Ministries South Africa delivers counselling and trauma services through Christian activities (Clark, 2011). People are brought together to discuss their loss, trauma and pain, which are written down, then nailed to a cross and burnt, to symbolise release and transferring pain to God (Clark, 2011).

3. FBOs and corruption

There is **no body of evidence** specifically on FBOs and corruption. There is some work on religion, religious values and corruption, but not on how faith-based development organisations work on corruption issues. Most of the literature looks at corruption within religious institutions. The literature suggests that the role

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[1] *Suluh* refers to traditional Muslim conflict resolution methods, which draw directly from the Quran, using examples of the prophets and other religious figures, and which emphasise traditional Muslim values such as collective responsibility, maintaining social relationships, and forgiveness.

religious actors could play in governance and anti-corruption has not been fully realised, although it is recognised conceptually and in some policy directions.

There is an assumption in the literature that religious people have a deeper concern with ethics than the non-religious, and that therefore religion may be a tool against corruption (Marquette, 2010). At the time of writing, this assumption is not clearly borne out in evidence. Marquette's (2010) review of the literature shows that there is no evidence for a causal relationship between religion and corruption, either positive or negative. This is largely due to the methodological weakness of the studies (Marquette, 2010). This paper suggests that a research agenda also needs to employ qualitative methods at country and individual levels, in addition to the current aggregated country-level quantitative approach.

The World Faiths Development Dialogue suggests that religious institutions and faith-inspired organisations tend to focus their international development efforts on poverty reduction and immediate relief services (Marshall, 2009). Anti-corruption and good governance are not considered as high a priority as these other areas.

FBOs working on others' corruption

Marshall (2013) highlights that there are **few religious institutions which take an active role in anti-corruption** efforts. This may be because they may not agree with what constitutes integrity or may feel it distracts from greater problems of global inequality and injustice; they may not have their own 'houses in order'; or they may lack the technical skills.

A recent article drawing on fieldwork in India (Marquette, Pavarala, & Malik, 2014) suggests that religious organisations do not have an anti-corruption role. Instead, it finds that co-opting religious organisations into anti-corruption programming is unlikely to increase the success of the programme. In countries where corruption is perceived to be systemic, **religious institutions are also viewed as corrupt**, and are unlikely to help reduce corruption. Many of the respondents identified corruption within religious institutions, which reduced their trust in the organisations' ability to be anti-corruption actors. In a country where corruption is seen as 'normal' and religious actors are not seen as having integrity, they are unlikely to play an effective role against corruption.

In a case study of religion in India, Pavarala and Malik (2010) examined attitudes through in-depth interviews with 120 respondents. Respondents indicated that they did not think that ethical or spiritual training in professional life would be worthwhile. They suggested that lectures or classes on values and ethics would not contribute to changing people's opinions: if they were already inclined to corruption, classes would not change this. They expressed that the reasons for perpetuation of corruption were around social expectations and structural factors in the civil service, which individual ethics could not address. They also expressed strongly that a religious ethical value system which attempts to tackle corruption needed to be inculcated when young. Many believed that religion would not make a difference to people's attitudes towards corruption.

FBOs' internal governance and corruption

FBOs which have a spiritual or religious leader can be prone to internal corruption. Leaders who have an extra dimension of spiritual authority have greater opportunity to block or effect change within the organisation (James, with CABUNGO, 2009). Staff members may not feel able to question their decisions

as they may be seen to be voicing the word of God and to challenge this is to challenge God (James, with CABUNGO, 2009). In some countries where hierarchical structures are common, this can result in a high concentration of power in one person (James, with CABUNGO, 2009). These leaders may also be resistant to internal accountability measures (James, with CABUNGO, 2009).

Two further specific challenges of staffing are (James, with CABUNGO, 2009):

- Hiring staff based on faith rather than merit may undermine the effectiveness of the organisation.
- Remuneration tends to be lower than in other NGOs, which may undermine professionalism.

4. List of selected FBOs

International FBOs

Aga Khan Foundation: http://www.akdn.org/akf

American Jewish World Service: http://ajws.org/

CAFOD: http://www.cafod.org.uk/

Catholic Relief Services: http://crs.org/

Christian Aid: http://www.christianaid.org.uk/

Islamic Relief: http://www.islamic-relief.org/

Muslim Aid: https://www.muslimaid.org/

Muslim Hands: http://muslimhands.org.uk/

Tearfund: http://www.tearfund.org/

World Jewish Relief: https://www.wjr.org.uk/

World Vision: http://www.worldvision.org/

Umbrella organisations

Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance): http://www.actalliance.org/about

Caritas Internationalis: http://www.caritas.org/

International Network of Engaged Buddhists: http://www.inebnetwork.org/

Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel: http://icci.org.il/

Lutheran World Federation: http://www.lutheranworld.org/

Religions for Peace: http://www.religionsforpeace.org/

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Key websites

- Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs –Religion and Global Development: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/programs/religion-and-global-development

- United States Institute of Peace – Religion and Peacemaking: http://www.usip.org/category/issue-areas/religion-and-peacemaking

- University of Birmingham – Religions and Development Research Programme: http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government-society/departments/international-development/rad/index.aspx

- World Faiths Development Dialogue – Global Mapping of Faith-Inspired Organizations and Development: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/global-mapping-of-faith-inspired-organizations-and-development

- World Faiths Development Dialogue – Religion and Development Database: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/religion-and-development-database

- World Bank – Directory of FBOs:
  http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/PARTNERS/EXTDEVDIALOGUE/0,,contentMDK:22363829~pagePK:64192523~piPK:64192458~theSitePK:537298,00.html

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