The EU and faith-based organisations in development and humanitarian aid

SUMMARY

All over the world, faith-based organisations (FBOs) are active in the fields of development and humanitarian aid. Their faith-based character can stem from various dimensions (link to a religious organisation, funding, mission statement or main beneficiaries), but collectively they are important actors on the ground. Nonetheless, there is no fixed definition of an FBO, and in practice there are many different forms of FBO active in providing aid and development assistance. Indeed faith-based organisations are among the biggest NGOs active in the development and aid fields.

In the past 20 years, national and international funders have developed an interest in better understanding and cooperating with FBOs. The World Bank, and a number of EU Member States have developed programmes and expertise in this field. Part of the reason for the growing interest in the work of FBOs is the recognition that religious affiliation often plays a major role in the beneficiary societies, and that working with religious leaders in those communities is often the most effective way of reaching local people.

The European Union itself also cooperates with FBOs in development and humanitarian aid, through various programmes with civil society and on human rights. Nevertheless, the EU does not keep precise statistics, because the faith-based character of the beneficiary is not among the criteria for selecting them as partners.

In this briefing:

- Faith-based organisations: definition and action
- International and national engagement
- EU funding of faith-based organisations
- Main references

Faith-based organisations: definition and action

Definition

As with many other concepts in development, it is sometimes difficult to give a clear definition of faith-based organisations (FBOs). FBOs can be active in the fields both of development or humanitarian relief, as well as in education, health or environment.

Independent of states, FBOs are of three types: congregations affiliated with physical structures (i.e. local churches); national networks of congregations, including national denominations and their social services affiliates; and unaligned or freestanding religious organisations, which are separate from congregations and national networks.

They can work in different fields, for instance, defending a religious agenda, providing services, engaging in dialogue, undertaking advocacy, playing a political role, proselytising, or even undertaking criminal or terrorist activities.

Other elements of a definition may include a reference to a particular faith in their mission statement, support from religious organisations, a board whose membership is determined by religious affiliation, or having a decision-making process based on religious practices.

FBOs can be active in collecting funds, distributing them to other NGOs or providing assistance on the ground. Some of them, like the Nordic FBOs, used to channel their aid primarily through local churches, but now rely more and more on local secular and inter-faith NGOs because of stricter rules related to efficiency and financial regulation from the EU and other donors.

Examples of global FBOs

Some of the biggest development or humanitarian NGOs in the world are faith-based.

– **Caritas Internationalis**, which is linked to the Catholic Church, mobilises around US$5 billion every year for its actions in 162 countries.
– The **Aga Kahn Development Network** (AKDN), created in 1957 by the Aga Kahn, 49th hereditary imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims. The AKDN's annual budget for non-profit development activities is approximately US$925 million. Every year, more than 5 million people benefit from the assistance of AKDN in healthcare.
– **World Vision** (WVI), an evangelical Christian development aid NGO created in 1950, is active in 100 countries. Its total income (cash and in-kind) for 2016 was more than US$2.7 billion.

In some cases, it is difficult to detangle the various dimensions of their action, with the link between relief and missionary activities sometimes criticised by the beneficiaries.

International and national engagement

For decades, donors' engagement with religions and faith-based communities had not been an issue in western development aid. Nevertheless in the past 15 years, it has come to be taken into account more and more, generating a growing number[1] of conferences, reports and strategies from big donors.

A major part of development aid is directed to regions in which religion is an important part of social life, and sometimes religious leaders are the only way to reach local communities. For example, in Africa, the World Bank, through the TerrAfrica partnership, has been engaging with the Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC) to restore land and prevent further land degradation. It has supported 27 faith groups – with a potential reach of 184 million people – as they prepared long-term plans to care for the

environment. In this region, half of all aid and education services are provided by faith-based organisations, and international donors therefore have to consider the work of FBOs on the ground.

The World Bank launched the first informal discussions in the late 1970s on how to analyse the nexus between religions and development, with religion being acknowledged as an important factor in development policies in 1995.[2] Some EU Member States followed quickly, in line with the World Bank, like the United Kingdom. In 2005, the Netherlands' ministry for foreign affairs created a 'knowledge forum for religions and development policies' in order to engage religious leaders and FBOs in the discussion of development policies. In 2006, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned a £3.5 million, five-year research programme on religions and development. In 2015, the German ministry for economic cooperation and development published a report on the role of religions in German development policies. Some Member States, like the UK, have organised specific workshops to encourage Islamic faith-based humanitarian organisations to apply for funding and to assist them in applying, and have reflected on how to use the potential of religious donations.

EU funding of faith-based organisations

On one hand, the EU is more and more involved in defending the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), as embodied in the 2013 EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or beliefs and the creation in 2016 of the position of Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU (Ján Figeľ, former European Commissioner, in place since May 2016). On the other, the EU has a non-discriminatory policy when choosing partners to implement development policy.

Thematic programme on Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities

The EU does not give any preferential treatment for faith-based NGOs, and is committed to non-discrimination and humanitarian principles. Over the 2007-2016 period, 263 grant contracts were signed with FBOs, amounting to €150 million or around 9 % of the total amount of the Thematic programme on Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and Local Authorities (LAs).[3]

European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

The EIDHR, created in 2007, with a total budget of more than €1.3 billion for 2014-2020, mainly channels support to civil society organisations whose projects are selected following calls for proposals. The EIDHR is a highly flexible instrument and enables the EU to support a variety of organisations, or even individuals, on the ground through direct or indirect funding. In 2013, coinciding with the adoption of the EU Guidelines on FoRB, for the first time the EIDHR published an explicit global call on combating discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, with a new global call on FoRB to be launched in autumn 2017.

A non-exhaustive list of projects funded under the EIDHR in 2007-2016 shows around 40 FORB-related civil society projects, mainly in Asia. The European Commission does not usually publish precise data on the nature of beneficiaries, because the faith-based character of the

> **Example – EU-funded FBO project in Bangladesh**
> The project 'Establishing vulnerable peoples' rights and access to social safety net programmes', implemented by World Vision, is implemented under the CSO-LA thematic programme, following a call for proposals launched by the EU Delegation in Bangladesh. The project started in 2016, and will run for 48 months (EU contribution: €1.2 million). Its objective is to empower local, indigenous civil society organisations, local authorities and communities to promote access to Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs) for the most vulnerable communities, by enhancing transparency and account-ability in the provision of SSNPs.

organisation is not among the selection criteria. Hence, although external relations instruments do give substantial funding to CSOs, there is no systematic data on the faith-based orientation of CSOs, and hence no readily available figures about funding to FBOs specifically. In addition, some projects are kept confidential because they are implemented in sensitive contexts.

EU broader engagement with FBOs

Faith-based organisations, as part of broader civil society, are encouraged to apply for EU funds. In 2016, the Commission signed Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) with some CSOs after an open call for proposals. One of them, *Coopération Internationale pour Le Développement et la Solidarité Internationale* (CIDSE, an international alliance of Catholic development agencies), is among the 24 NGOs and platforms included in the Framework Partnership Agreement with the Commission.

In addition, there are other signals of the EU's interest in a dialogue on development with faith-based organisations: in 2017, for the first time, a panel on religions was organised during the European Development Days and a category on FoRB was included in the Commission's Lorenzo Natali Media Prize. A call for proposals to support intercultural and religious dialogue was also launched under the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

Main references

'The Role of Religions in German Development Policies', Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany, 2015.

Rees J.A., Religion in International Politics and Development: The World Bank and Faith Institutions, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011.

Swart I. and Elsabé N., 'Religion and Development: The Rise of a Bibliography', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 72, No 4, 25 November 2016.

Endnotes

[1] I. Swart and N. Elsabé, 'Religion and Development: The Rise of a Bibliography', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 72 No 4, 25 November 2016.

[2] J.A. Rees, *Religion in International Politics and Development: The World Bank and Faith Institutions*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011.

[3] All the statistics provided in this briefing have been kindly provided by the European Commission, but they are incomplete and rely on non-representative samples, because the EU does not keep any data on the faith-based status of organisations it supports.

Disclaimer and Copyright

eprs@ep.europa.eu
http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)
http://epthinktank.eu (blog)