

Pulje til støtte af kapacitetsudviklingsinitiativer

PULJE PRAxis #3

Religion and Development

“Pulje Praxis” er en række korte dokumenter, som giver en introduktion til udvalgte kapacitetsudviklings-koncepter, modeller eller redskaber. “Pulje Praxis” tager så vidt muligt udgangspunkt i erfaringer fra initiativer støttet af Puljen. Målet er på baggrund af eksempler, erfaringer og aktuel tænkning at inspirere kapacitetsudviklingen blandt danske CSOer og deres partnere.

Samlet af:

*Jørgen Thomsen (contact: jth@dca.dk) DCA Senior Advisor on Religion and Development,
Mette Østergaard Nielsen DCA Intern, and Kent Grinderslev Rasmussen DCA Intern and
MA student of theology,
November 2016*

INTRODUCTION:

DanChurchAid is a member of the Danish Network on Religion and Development, which has received support from Global Focus Pool of Funds for Capacity Development on the role of religion in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

As part of this process, DanChurchAid has renewed its internal reflection on the role of religion as backdrop for development in general and has developed a simple tool for improved analysis of this in its new generation of country programmes. The following is a short account of the thinking behind and the tool that we use.

What is the role of religion in development work?

In year 2000 the sociologist Kurt Allan ver Beek carried out a comprehensive study of development literature and concluded that religion seemed to be a **development taboo**. Neither development academics, nor development practitioners took an interest in the role of religion in development. Instead, they all seemed to consciously avoid the subject due to the very secular perception, that religion was at best irrelevant for societal development and at worst was an obstacle for the advancement of social development and human rights.

Today religion is no longer a taboo in political science and development literature. Overall there has been a noticeable **discourse change**. The previous understanding that ‘religion will gradually disappear when economic growth and modernization/globalization spreads’ has been replaced by a growing recognition that religion can play an important role in development. Studies furthermore show that 80% of people in developing countries describe religion as a defining aspect of their lives. Religion informs and nurtures people’s understanding of the good life, their hope, their self-esteem, their belief in own dignity and rights, their courage to fight for these rights and their resilience in times of disappointment. Therefore, religion must be considered in development work. The last two decades has seen this change come around – both in theory and increasingly also in practice.

Definition of religion in a development context

Religion has never been defined in a broadly recognised way. Nevertheless, everyone knows in some way what is at stake. In development work, religion can be defined as systems or deeply rooted traditions of belief or more loosely affiliated faith-based organizations. The primary religious actors are faith-based communities, organizations (FBOs), and local or national religious leaders (RLs) as the agents of sustainable change in a given context.

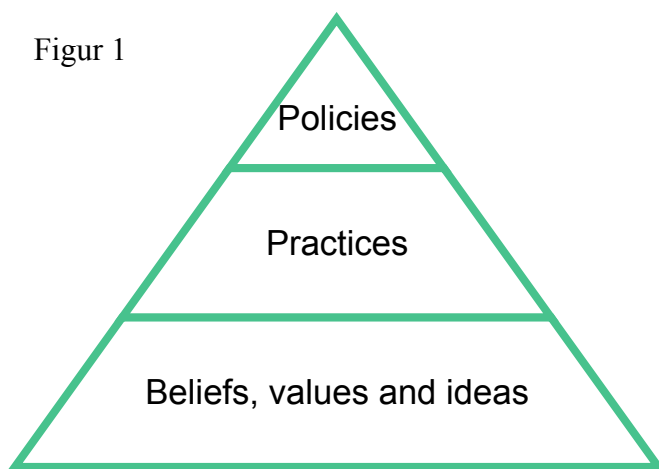
Why are considerations about religious actors an important part of development programs?

When planning and designing a development intervention, there are three ‘levels’ of barriers for rights fulfillment in a rights based perspective (see Figure 1 below). Successful change towards rights fulfillment requires work at all three levels. For example, if the issue is gender equality, change is often needed of laws and regulations (top level). Also the modalities of implementation and management of laws and policies will have to be changed (level 2): Maybe women and men are

equally eligible for parliament by law, but do political parties actually include female candidates in the list of candidates? – and with such ranking on the list that some are likely to get elected? Finally, when an intervention aims at ensuring lasting social change it is of crucial importance to also target the bottom level and thus the local values and beliefs. Better laws do not lead to change unless they are put into practice AND unless backed by popular acceptance and ownership because people see the new laws as expressions of what is right and good.

At this level, the level of beliefs, values and ideas, religion and religious actors play a central role. As earlier mentioned, 80% of the population in developing countries consider religion to be a major determining aspect of their lives. This means that religion has a huge influence on how people think and act in questions related to gender, health, education etc.

Figur 1



Take the issue of maternal health as an example: If a development project seeks to affect policies within this area it might succeed in improving national laws or increasing the amount of funds allocated from the state budget. But improved laws and budgets – or maybe even improved access and quality of health clinics – cannot alone solve the problems related to maternal health. It could be the case that the women (or their husbands) due to various cultural or religious beliefs, are resistant to basic family planning methods. In this case, it would therefore be beneficial and possibly the only sustainable solution to engage religious actors and get their assistance in informing their local communities on the importance of family planning. In this way, the achieved change has a possibility to be sustainable.

Another recent example from Uganda, proves the same point. In a workshop, our female Ugandan colleges were asked who or what they would consider to be most influential in forming their ideas about men and women. Without hesitation, the women responded that local and national religious leaders – through their religious messages in word and action – were the most influential people in their context. Again, this demonstrates that in order to change people's perceptions and practices within a given area, it is necessary to work with religion and religious actors.

How to implement considerations about religion and religious actors in your development programs

There are various ways of including or taking religion and religious actors into consideration in development. One of the ways we in DanChurchAid seek to do so, is by reflecting in our context analysis on the role of religion and religious communities and then integrate the findings in the design and partner base of a given country program.

The following is a number of questions to consider in order to assess the role and potential of religion and religious actors for sustainable change in a given country. We encourage users to adapt the questions or focus on those questions most relevant to the particular country /regional analysis. Questions 1 - 4 and 11 will be relevant in all countries. The questions are taken from DanChurchAid's own guide for context analysis (NN = the given country).

1. What is the religious composition of society in NN historically and today?
2. What positive and/or negative relations exist between different religious groups in NN?
3. What values do the most important religious groupings promote in today's NN?
4. How do different religions/religious groups address societal issues?
5. What religious forces from the exterior might influence NN?
6. To what extent do FBOs have legitimacy and ability to be 'honest brokers' and/or voice of the poor/marginalized in NN?
7. To what extent can FBOs play a mediating role, and to what extent do they tend to defend and nurture the self-interest of their community?
8. How does government or traditional authorities view religion and religious authorities in NN?
9. What does the constitution or legislation in NN say about religion and the role/space of religious institutions?
10. How good are religious groups in formulating and transmitting 'political' advocacy messages effectively?
11. What is the positive potential of faith communities and FBOs in NN that your organisation could build on?
12. Is there anything your organisation should be alert to or avoid when working with FBOs in NN?

These questions are the product of working with this topic for several years within DanChurchAid, and could provide a foundation for including considerations around religion and development into country programming and partner portfolio.

” Uganda has witnessed some of the world's most courageous religious institutions and leaders, who have stood out and spoken against repression (e.g. Bishop Janani Luwum killed by the government of Idi Amin). Even today, we continue to hear strong voices of religious leaders who speak on behalf of the people.

Quote from DCA's Uganda country program 20016-2020, page 13

Example of context analysis

A selection of extracts from DanChurchAid's Uganda country program from 2016 are presented below to illustrate what a context analysis of religious actors in a country can look like.

1. What is the religious composition of society in Uganda historically and today?

The main faith groups in Uganda are Christianity and Islam. The Christians in the country form a number of denominations. These are the Catholic and Protestant / Anglican Churches. Other denominations included amongst the Christian churches are the various Pentecostal Churches, such as Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), The Baptists, the Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's witnesses, the Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints) and the Orthodox Church. The Islamic religious groups are also many and include among them the Suni Muslims, further divided into Tabliq, Salafi among others. Other Muslim groups include the Ahmadiya Muslims, the Ismaili Muslims. There are a number of other minority religions too, including among them, Hindus, the Baha'i and the Sikh. According to the 2002 Uganda census, the religious composition was: Roman Catholic 41.9%, Protestant 42% (Anglican 35.9%, Pentecostal 4.6%, Seventh-Day Adventist 1.5%), Muslim 12.1%, other 3.1%, none 0.9%.

2. What positive and/or negative relations exist between different religious groups in Uganda?

[...] FBOs like Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) and Inter-religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) also focus on interfaith work and matters of national reconciliation [...]

Although Uganda has not had any major religious conflicts in the recent past, there are pockets of tension that cannot be ignored. Yumbe district in West Nile for instance, with close to 90% of its population Muslim, is known for sporadic conflicts with the few resident Christians. The same district also is known to have had cases of external infiltration by Asian Islamic extremists who are said to be sowing seeds of radicalisation among the youth. Uganda also potentially faces a negative influence from American evangelical groups and Islamic fundamentalists from within the East African Region. This was evident during the drafting of the anti-homosexuality law that was challenged in court and the constant threats Uganda faces because of her presence in Somalia.

3. What values do the most important religious groupings promote in today's Uganda?

A few FBOs and specific religious leaders are involved in promoting active citizen participation in demanding for rights from duty bearers, speaking out on corruption, calling for electoral reforms, monitoring service delivery and liaising with central and local government on behalf of the people, while others concentrate on the 'safe areas' that are directly beneficial to their communities and seen as non-confrontational to the state.

4. How do different religions/religious groups address societal issues?

FBOs address challenges in the church or mosque/ body of the laity, promote unity amongst their followers, promote peace building, monitor actions of political leaders and generally 'support the people'. FBOs provide a variety of services. The education and health services in Uganda have strong foundations from the early missionaries, who established some of the best schools and health centres and some are still being run as such. Some of these institu-

tions have social development arms that work as NGOs while others are formed with very specific mandates even outside the confines of the church or mosque but espousing values from thence.

5. What is the positive potential of faith communities and FBOs in Uganda that DCA could build on?

Religious groups, faith-based organisations play a crucial role on issues of participation, human rights, gender justice and climate justice. Religious leaders and church leaders have the ability and potential to cultivate good relations with political leaders and public institutions. Along with cultural leaders, religious leaders command moral authority and are able to shape public opinion through their strong and influential voice, which can mobilise the support of communities and address entrenched negative social norms and bad governance.

As demonstrated from the example above, there are many aspects to consider when analysing a specific context, and it is not possible to describe all the aspects in full. The most important is however to consider who the important religious actors in the given context are and to evaluate their potentials. In this case, it is worth noticing that the religious leaders often stand with the people and at the same time have a voice in the political arena. Religious leaders therefore have a great potential for effective advocacy e.g. for civic space, justice etc.

Summary

The importance of considering the role of religion and religious actors, when working strategically in development countries has attracted more attention over the last decade or two. The need for staff capacity building for religion in development is also getting more attention. This short paper is meant as an inspiration for deliberate considerations of key questions when analysing a present or new context for a country program or similar. The paper could perhaps also be used as an inspiration for a debate at Theory-of-Change- or programme-planning workshops.

The key aspects of a good context analysis of the role of religion in a country/region is based on a thorough analysis of the composition and profiles of religious actors in the area. With an overview of the important religious actors, it is relevant to focus on their connections and interlinkages, their values and their potential for the programme.

These considerations are an integrated parts of DanChurchAid's context analysis as we try to improve our work with faith-based organisations and religious actors as agents of change.