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Domains of Faith Impact: How ‘Faith’ is perceived to shape Faith-Based International Development Organisations

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Abstract

Increasing interest in faith-based international development organisations (FBOs) recently has improved understanding of these agencies. One reason for complex, often contradictory findings is the lack of frameworks analysing the interactions of worldviews on organisational structures, processes and behaviours of agencies, and development outcomes. We utilise Lincoln’s (2003) four ‘domains of religion’ to explore how the literature reports faith impacting the shape of development FBOs’ structures, behaviours and outcomes. Literature suggests faith has a significant impact upon these agencies. We outline very specific similarities and differences, highlighting the importance of nuanced analysis of faith’s role in FBOs. Further research is now needed to build more evidence around these impacts of faith on FBOs.

Key Words

Faith-based organisations, FBO, NGO, development, faith, impact
Introduction

The past 20 years have seen increasing scholarship exploring faith-based development organisations and the place of faith or religion in international development. What was previously a poorly understood area of development practice is now increasingly well-documented (Rakodi, 2012a; Clarke & Jennings, 2008; M. Clarke, 2013). However, the literature reveals complex and seemingly contradictory findings about the ways faith or religious motivation shape both faith-based organisations (FBOs) themselves and development processes. In some contexts, the faith-base appears to enhance organisational function and FBOs are well-received by communities, with their faith apparently linked to a range of beneficial outcomes (Aiken, 2010:3). In other contexts, the faith-base of FBOs appears to induce negative outcomes (e.g. Bradley 2009; G. Clarke, 2007; Green et al 2012).

While the same mixed impact could be said of all types of NGOs (Lewis & Kanji, 2009:17ff), one reason the large number of studies has not produced clear, consistent findings is that researchers have lacked a common set of definitions of what constitutes an FBO, as well as a clear analytical framework for understanding the impact of faith upon their structures, agency processes and behaviours, and development outcomes. The issue of mixed results has been compounded by the difficulties of defining FBOs in relation to other NGOs and types of organisations, which are dealt with elsewhere (see for example, G. Clarke, 2007; Clarke & Ware, 2015). However, the impact of faith remains untested, despite recent calls for such research to occur (Rakodi 2012b).

Given the number of studies and, at times, conflicting evidence, this paper offers a realist synthesis of academic papers in the field, to begin investigating ways faith shapes FBO activities, outcomes and structures. Approximately 170 papers were identified in the literature, including grey literature, of which 80 were selected for inclusion in a modified realist synthesis analysis, later further reduced to 50 papers for citation (see Pawson, 2006). In the process we apply Lincoln’s definitional framework to explore the domains of influence that faith is claimed to have on FBOs. In this paper, we aim to categorise the broad claims that are made about faith impacts on FBOs. We do not vouch for the truth or otherwise of these assertions – rather we attempt to categorise them, in order to map out areas for further research.

Papers were selected on the basis of relevance, quality, and contribution of new theory or evidence, with papers published prior to 2000 and non-peer-reviewed papers only included where a gap was noted in later literature. Secular NGOs are not independently studied, and only included in this paper where they are used as a point of comparison in the FBO literature. For the purposes of this analysis, Clarke and Jennings (2008:6) very general definition of an FBO is adopted, namely, that an FBO “derives inspiration from and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within a faith.”
Before proceeding with an exploration of the nature of faith’s influence on development structures, activities and outcomes, a brief overview of the broad types of claims made in the literature about how faith shapes FBOs is firstly provided. The literature often differentiates FBOs from secular NGOs, but there is little agreement about whether they are a subset of NGOs or something which contrasts with them (see M. Clarke, 2011a; Clarke & Ware, 2015). In many respects, FBOs are quite different types of organisations, yet there is significant overlap – they are the same yet qualitatively distinct (Kirmani 2012). The dichotomy between FBOs and secular NGOs is rather artificial and problematic, and does not reflect our views on the relationships between faith-based and secular development agencies. Nonetheless, in attempting to faithfully report on claims made in the literature, we adopt this dichotomy here as being representative of a typical characterisation made by many authors in this field.

The primary area of overlap is in activities undertaken by both FBOs and secular NGOs. The values, motivations and means of belonging (both within the organisation and the community) show quite distinct differences, as do the organisational structures in some cases (Green et al 2012; Kirmani 2012). The literature suggests faith can shape things like priority-setting, value-sharing with local communities (Aiken, 2010; James, 2009), dialogue (or lack thereof) as a means of operation (Bradley 2005; Haynes, 2009; Marshall, 2005), the nature and type of programmes provided (Sadiq 2009), and the degree that FBOs engage in proselytisation.

Some authors suggest a qualitative difference between FBOs and secular NGOs. For example, Tyndale (cited in Lunn, 2009:945) suggests that FBOs empower people in a way that brings ‘…personal dignity, self-worth and contentedness, which in turn bring hope and vision’. This claim, of course, rests in religious claims to transcendent meaning. FBOs are sometimes claimed to offer a difference in terms of heightened sensitivity to local cultural and religious contexts, particularly indigenous FBOs (Nishimuko, 2008), and the flexibility of being able to tailor their organisational style and activities to local contexts (Lunn, 2009; Olson, 2008; Saddiq, 2009). Faith is said to shape an FBO’s structure, activities and outcomes, even providing an alternative to more secular theories of development (Aiken 2010: 6; Lunn, 2009; Para-Mallam 2006). For example, many FBOs view poverty as having spiritual components that need to be addressed to most effectively improve material circumstances (G. Clarke, 2007).

However, other authors claim that faith is linked to promotion of idealised types of the poor and needy, leading to limited engagement with the community’s perceptions of needs (Bradley 2005). Likewise, some FBOs use relief and development to proselytise (Bradley 2005), although it should be noted that even where FBOs do engage in proselytisation, the literature argues anecdotally that poverty alleviation remains an integral and equal motivation (Dilger, 2009:99-100; see also Ware et al., 2013).

Faith can powerfully motivate engagement in development, as well as the donation of substantial resources (Bradley, 2009). It is recognised that faith motivates workers and donors in both faith-based and secular development agencies (Tomalin, 2012), and that the
motivation provided by faith covers a wide spectrum, from an ethical imperative to intervene on behalf of the poor through to a sense of divine guidance and instruction to act (J. Berger, 2003; Bradley, 2009; Flanigan, 2008; James, 2010). This notion of divine calling to engage in development and a sense of righting wrongs caused by wrongdoing or injustice may create a political identity for FBOs, where they see themselves as having a unique voice into 'a predominantly secular discourse about the nature of the new world order' (J. Berger, 2003:35; see also G. Clarke, 2007; Dilger, 2009; Nishimuko, 2008).

Faith does not have to be made explicit to have an impact (Aiken, 2010:6), although some grey literature suggests what we might term the ‘intensity’ of an organisation's faith-orientation influences, to a fair degree, the impact of that faith in the above dimensions (James, 2010:2). De Cordier outlines a range of factors he suggests affect this intensity: the presence of conflict; the level of social mobility in the community; the role of religious actors in forming local identity; whether social fault lines converge with religious ones; the state of civil society; the presence, types and agendas of other humanitarian agencies in the same space; the opinion climate and the way it is shaped by the media (De Cordier, 2009:679 – 80). James (2010:2) also suggests there is a choice that is made about how FBOs ‘choose to operationalise their faith identity’ and that a given identity ‘should not be assumed’. Thus there are diverse perspectives on the impact of ‘faith’ on FBO activities, motivations, and structures, although it does appear clear that the impact varies from organisation to organisation, from context to context.

Following on from this brief overview, the rest of this paper is set out as follows: section 2 introduces the domains of influence used to explore the similarities and differences between FBOs and NGOS (section 3). The final section concludes the paper with some overall findings and suggestions for further research.

**Domains of influence**

The diverse impacts of faith documented briefly above are excessively general and subjective. Few studies discuss the basis of their analysis, many lacking a breadth which would capture the diversity of potential impacts, positive or negative. To move the discussion forward, a more objective means of classifying faith impacts is therefore required.

Further, understanding the impact of faith on FBOs’ development activities requires a point of comparison. Within this paper, the chosen point of comparison is other NGOs – although, as noted above, this dichotomy is an artificial one based mainly upon how comparisons are reported in the FBO literature. FBOs and NGOs have significant similarities, and at times are indistinguishable (Green et al 2012), but they also sometimes differ. It is these points of distinction that provide insights into faith impacts. A framework for exploring this systematically is required to allow these similarities and differences to be demonstrated.
Sider and Unruh (2004), Hefferan et al. (2009) and Thaut (2009), amongst others, have attempted to develop FBO typologies based around the role of faith on or within the organisation, including the organisation’s founding, financial support, connections between religious content and programming, how ‘faith-based’ or religious an FBO might be, and in what ways. Sider and Unruh (2004) consider criteria like mission statements, board member and staff selection, and financial support, while Thaut (2009) examines how Christian theologies of social engagement inform FBO variation. These studies’ major contribution is the observation that FBOs constitute a very broad spectrum, and the influence of faith on the characteristics of the organizations and their programs varies greatly. While these typologies are useful, they do not offer an easy framework for what we are attempting to do in this paper: namely, to explore the ways in which religious belief influences structures, activities and development outcomes of FBOs in international development. Instead, to better capture key dimensions of the impact of faith, we turn to consider the nature of religion itself.

No universally accepted definition of religion or faith exists, accounting for wide variations in religious beliefs, deities and practices across the world. Indeed, extensive theological, philosophical, sociological and anthropological literatures on religion and faith highlight the difficulties of trying to define these concepts. Geertz’ definition is perhaps the most widely accepted definition of religion:

(1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz, 1973:90).

So this definition captures the notions of religion comprising symbols (part 1), commitments to certain beliefs and behaviours (parts 2 and 5), an order to the social, natural and supernatural world(s) which seems internally consistent (parts 3 and 4).

However, this definition ignores the context within which symbols have meaning – namely, the institutions and social structures which codify and interpret beliefs, and motivating, regulating and embodying their practice (Deneulin & Bano, 2009:58-9). Davie (2007) therefore argues definitions of religion and faith must be both substantive – ‘what a religion is’ – including its ‘beliefs and practices which assume the existence of supernatural beings’; and functional - ‘what religion does and how it affects the society of which it is part.’ We argue here that this would also extend beyond definitions of religion to explorations of its impacts upon social organisations. Further, while Davie’s definition moves us closer towards being able to explore the impacts of religion upon faith-based development agencies, one shortcoming in this context is the substantial overlap between functional and substantive aspects of religion and its outworking in socio-religious organisations. This potentially clouds it usefulness for analysing the impacts of faith on FBO activities, structures and outcomes.

Rakodi’s (2012b: 644) work is the first to attempt to link a definition of religion to an analysis of its impact upon development and social change. She explores three areas in particular. The first is the everyday experience of religion – the nature of religion in forming
people’s values and their attitudes towards religion. The second area is the interaction between religion on the one hand, and society and politics on the other. This includes an analysis the influence of religion upon social norms, and hence on development policy, and how a conducive environment for development can be created (e.g. by building peace in conflict-affected regions). The third area of her framework explores the role of religious institutions in development processes. While not specifically referencing Davie’s work, this framework expands Davie’s framework, by delving into how religion might interact with multiple personal and social areas to influence development.

Thus, Rakodi’s framework is quite comprehensive. While this provides a broad means of mapping current and future research into religion’s influence on social change – of which ‘international development’ may form one part - it is too broad for any one study to fully cover in a comprehensive manner.

The current study does not seek to explore social change broadly. Rather it seeks to specifically explore the impact of faith upon FBOs, including their activities, structures and development outcomes. Thus, there is a need to utilise aspects of all three areas of Rakodi’s framework, in a cross-cutting manner – at the same time, without attempting to answer every question posed within it. That is, we attempt to take aspects of the everyday experience of religion to analyse how this is reported to influence the development policies of FBOs, their role in creating environments conducive to development, and the ways in which they therefore do development.

Lincoln’s framework provides a means to achieve this by including aspects of both Davie’s and Rakodi’s work. Lincoln's (2003) definitional framework (cited in Deneulin and Bano 2009) involves important aspects of both Davie’s and Rakodi’s conceptualisations of religion and its impact upon development. Lincoln outlines four ‘domains’ of religion, which seem to capture the broadest definitions of religion well and allow us to explore both the impact of the substantive nature of religion’s potential influence on development, as well as its horizontal (social) and vertical (organisational or hierarchical) functional aspects organisational element of the above frameworks. It also captures all the key aspects of Geertz’s definition.

These domains can be summarised as: believing, behavioural expectations, belonging and boundary keeping. These dimensions form the basis of our investigation of the reported impacts of faith on FBOs:

**Believing** (affect) is in response to a truth-claims discourse based on transcendental authority, concerned with things above the human, temporal and contingent world.

This results in **behavioural expectations** about private and communal practices embodying this religious discourse within this human, temporal and contingent world.

Religions are built though **belonging**, as communities of members construct their identities with reference to religious discourse and practices, even if they disagree around some aspects of these.
And finally, **boundary keepers** are powers and structures that regulate, reproduce or modify religious discourses, practices and community, while always reaffirming their transcendental value.

The correspondence between Lincoln’s (2003) domains on the one hand, and Davie’s (2007) and Rakodi’s (2012b) schema can be summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lincoln’s domains</th>
<th>Davie’s definition</th>
<th>Rakodi’s framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believing</td>
<td>Substantive</td>
<td>Everyday religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural expectations</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Religion, societies and politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Substantive, Functional</td>
<td>Everyday religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary keepers</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Religion, societies and politics, role of religious institutions</td>
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Thus Lincoln’s domains allow us to take aspects from Davie’s definition of religion and the first two parts of Rakodi’s research framework, and use them to explore one area of the third aspect of Rakodi’s schema. So we explore how aspects of the nature of religion (what it represents in terms beliefs, and the ways in which they are lived out in community) impact upon the role of religious organisations (i.e. FBOs) in international development. In particular, we use them to explore one question posed by Rakodi:

> **Do religious and faith-based organisations make distinctive contributions to development and service provision? How and why, with respect to: i) inputs (the choice of activities, design of programmes, source of funding); ii) ways of operating (e.g. recruitment of staff, volunteers, beneficiaries; use of religious teaching, symbols and practices); iii) outcomes (results); iv) impact (contribution to development objectives such as poverty reduction or gender equality)** (Rakodi 2012b: 646).

Lincoln’s framework not only allows us to explore the relationships between religion (or faith) and development, but it also provides a framework with which to contrast religious and secular NGOs, to assess whether tangible differences in development worldviews, processes, organisational structures and outcomes exist.

**Mapping claims of faith impacts**

In this section, we now utilise these four domains to present the perceived impacts of faith on FBO structures, activities and outcomes, as reported in the literature. In each domain, we outline contrasts and similarities between FBOs and secular NGOs, as these are reported in the FBO literature. It is not the aim of this paper to analyse the accuracy or otherwise of these claims – rather we report on some broad areas of impact documented in the literature. It is hoped that in documenting these and providing a framework for understanding the way in
which religious beliefs and the social role of religion impact upon FBO development activities, organisational structures and development outcomes, further research will have a framework for testing the accuracy of such claims in a more nuanced manner – thereby contributing to more nuanced policies and funding programmes.

In developing this section, we found that the domains tended to overlap at times, so that characteristics reported in one domain could easily belong to two or more. This perhaps reflects just how interconnected religious beliefs, behaviours and institutional forms are. Once again, this section’s discussion presents a generalised list of distinctives, which varies between organisations. The literature comparing FBOs to secular NGOs highlights the following distinguishing traits.

Believing

Teasing out real differences between FBOs and secular NGOs is more problematic than finding similarities, given the diversity of both FBOs and NGOs. Often ‘… there is no clear dividing line between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ visions and approaches’ (Rakodi, 2012b:644). This is further muddied by the fact that many FBOs employ people who do not particularly hold religious views, and many staff of secular NGOs in highly religious societies are personally religious and are both motivated by and act out of their religious beliefs (Davis et al, 2011). Nonetheless, a range of distinctive characteristics emerged from the synthesis in qualitative descriptions of FBOs, compared to NGOs. The chief area of difference lies in underlying motivations and the range of values informing these organisations.

Grey literature commentary suggests some modes of operation, activities and outcomes of FBOs are seen by many partners and recipient communities to add additional value to development activities otherwise similar to those of NGOs (J. Berger, 2003; Davis et al, 2011; James, 2009). In particular, faith (belief) may provide a strong motivation to act; FBOs are seen to provide more efficient services due to being ‘less self-serving’, particularly in smaller scale projects (Aiken, 2010; Olson, 2008); and they bring an added dimension of spiritual authority due to religious leadership, which may enhance their ability to achieve development goals in communities, particularly those sharing the same faith.

A shared set of beliefs can also allow FBOs entrée into communities and potentially more significant development impacts. Where faith is central to a community’s way of life, ‘… development practice must recognise that material and spiritual needs may be intertwined’ (Bradley, 2009:101). The ‘… faith-led identity of [FBOs] seems to impact on their style of practice and how close they get to directly meeting the needs of local people’ (Bradley, 2009:102). Thus, the literature suggests FBOs are more likely to be trusted where programme implementation aligns with local religious beliefs (Davis et al, 2011:142-3).

In line with this, Boehle suggests ‘peace and justice’ is the second most common goal held by Christian FBOs in the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN (Boehle, 2010: 282), and
Marshall notes the World Bank entered memoranda of understanding with several FBOs addressing 'peace and reconciliation' (Marshall, 2005: 10).

Like secular NGOs, many FBOs conduct a range of advocacy activities based upon the particular beliefs that are of most importance to them (BerkleyCentre, 2010; Marshall, 2001; Para-Mallam, 2006). For example, religious leaders and organisations are often the most vocal critics of the World Bank’s work and policies in the 1980s (Marshall, 2001: 348). Another example is an interfaith organisation in Mozambique (Religions for Peace) who formed an advocacy network representing children orphaned by AIDS, and providing practical assistance to them (BerkleyCentre, 2010: 10).

However, because FBOs have often been established with holistic emphases embracing both physical and spiritual wellbeing, they often mobilise religious discourse in advocacy, particularly attempting to affect broad social change (Davis et.al, 2011: 108). Para-Mallam (2006:409-410) documents religious associations in Nigeria who provide social, economic and spiritual support for women. In this context of major inequity due to customs and laws, FBOs attempt to redefine religious discourse to mobilise in a distinctive, faith-based way to gender discrimination:

One of the leaders [of a local FBO] contended that the perceived anti-male stance and extreme liberalism of Western feminism had failed to deliver its promise of freedom to women. At the centre of this failure, she argued, is the rejection of God and godly values. For women in these organisations, true freedom comes from within and resides in a close relationship with a Creator who, properly understood, transcends gender delineation and inspires holistic human development. It is such beliefs that provide faith-based activists with ‘power from within’ – a form of internally motivated empowerment to challenge prevailing conventions (Para-Mallam, 2006:418).

While Para-Mallam suggests that this FBO’s treatment of gender was quite positive, it should be noted that gender is not always treated positively by FBOs (e.g. see Tadros, 2010). And it is unclear from Para-Mallam’s study whether genuine changes occurred here, or whether this approach merely re-framed inequity in order to avoid addressing it. Further research would be required to tease this out. In fact, FBOs face a range of conundrums due to aspects of religious discourse shaping their programming and advocacy on a range of issues, like gender, sexuality, and even interaction with authorities. One study found some FBOs have an aversion to overtly challenging authorities due to particular beliefs about power (Ware et.al, 2013).

Another area of reported similarity between FBOs and secular NGOs is in education, and the motivation for providing support to this sector in developing countries. Nishimuko (2008) suggests that by providing primary education in Sierra Leone, FBOs may be contributing significantly to building of democracy. This occurs by developing informed citizens, improving communities’ moral conduct and outlook, building sufficient trust for effective democracy, and building marginalised groups’ confidence to participate (Nishimuko,
She further suggests it may be FBO legitimacy in terms of religious organisations and long-term commitments to local communities, which facilitate a greater impact in teaching about democracy and other political matters in highly religious settings.

FBOs are often uniquely valued and trusted because of the central role of religion and religious organisations play in many poor people's lives, (James, 2009; Lunn, 2009; Davis et al, 2011; Nishimuko, 2008). Religious leadership of FBOs can also provide increased trust in contexts where religious leaders are held in high trust (Olson, 2008:397), particularly where there is a close fit between the FBO’s and community’s beliefs and behavioural expectations.

Behavioural expectations

Overall, the most notable similarity between FBOs and secular NGOs is their outworking of behavioural expectations. Vander Zaag (2013: 335) suggests that while FBOs tend to have more of a focus on "humanitarian and shorter-term needs and on rural and agricultural communities" than other NGOs, and tend to shy away from sensitive challenges (e.g. human sexuality), they otherwise engage in very similar areas of development activities. The literature provides evidence that FBOs are heavily involved in: humanitarian aid and relief; advocacy; education, health and other social services; peace building and peace brokering; and livelihoods.

Lunn (2009), Olson (2008) and Saddiq (2009) discuss FBO relief activities, suggesting that all major religions have long been 'key participants in civil society' (Lunn, 2009:943) in providing 'charitable assistance, relief... humanitarian aid... [and] disaster relief ' (Lunn, 2009:943) or 'humanitarian work' (Saddiq 2009:4), including 'distribution of material goods' (Olson, 2008:397 – 8).

Provision of social services, like education, health and care of orphans are arguably the area in which FBOs have the longest, most significant involvement (Dilger, 2009; Lunn, 2009; Marshall, 2001, 2005; Nishimuko, 2008; Saddiq, 2009; Ware et. al, 2013; Winkler, 2008). Actually involvement of FBOs in development issues like education and health is ‘as old as the hills’ (Aiken 2010:2). Both NGOs and FBOs are involved in education services including running/sponsoring primary and secondary schools; after-school activities such as homework clubs; student sponsorship (primary, secondary and tertiary levels); and technical training. Health services provided by FBOs and NGOs include community health centres; immunisation; surgery/treatment; palliative/AIDS care; and health promotion.

Almost half of education and health services in many African countries are provided by FBOs, particularly in the context of states which are either unable (or unwilling) to provide these basic services (Marshall, 2001:357). Indeed, there appears little observable difference between FBO and NGO activities in this space.
Primary schooling may perhaps be the chief education activity funded by FBOs, although many also provide scholarships for secondary, tertiary and technical education programs (Aiken, 2010:2; Saddiq, 2009:4). In addition to providing hands-on teaching, FBO roles in primary education can also include activities like purchasing land, constructing facilities, scholarships, recruiting/training teachers, and promoting schools to parents (Nishimukō, 2008:177).

However, the role of FBOs in education has not always been positive – some FBOs are closely linked with colonial practices (Lunn, 2009:943; Saddiq, 2009:2) and others noted for their role in recruiting and training militant/terrorist groups (G.Clarke, 2007:89). Likewise, many health and health-related services have long been provided by FBOs, including establishing health centres for basic health care (Dilger, 2009:97; Marshall, 2005:2), building hospitals (Lunn, 2009:943), providing sanitation and hygiene products and teaching (Aiken, 2010:2), health promotion (BerkleyCentre, 2010:8), AIDS prevention and care (BerkleyCentre, 2010:8), and palliative care (Marshall, 2001:357; Winkler, 2008:2109 –10).

Building livelihoods in poor communities is another area of similarity, although FBOs sometimes may have distinctive ways of implementing livelihood activities based on differing beliefs about economic wellbeing. For FBOs, economic development often comes in a range of subtle forms, like training members of religious groups to save money (Marshall, 2005:9), providing education (Saddiq, 2009:3) and by micro-finance (Saddiq, 2009:3). In a study a Bangkok Buddhist temple’s role in development, Tiramano suggests the temple provided several roles in economic development in the local community, including

… providing areas inside the temple for trading area rental, promoting tourism in temple areas, conducting the project of Buddhism [sic] practice for children and youth, and, implementing the activities for Buddhism dissemination (Tiramano, 2010:160).

FBOs have mixed roles in relation to conflict and peacebuilding. Some authors propose that while religious difference is often at the centre of conflicts, with religious organisations often involved, the same organisations are also vital to peacebuilding due to their ‘… abiding truths and principles that provide the first antidote to violence and extremism’ (Kimball, 2002, cited in Kelleher and Johnson, 2008:152). In other words, they can draw on behavioural expectations like peace-oriented teachings, or repentance for furthering reconciliation, and use negotiation between denominational or interfaith organisations to bring people together for dialogue in ways secular NGOs may not be able to (Kelleher and Johnson, 2008:160).

Because FBOs are often ‘keen to maintain their autonomy and avoid co-option by donor agencies’ (G.Clarke, 2007:81), they therefore tend to rely more on a membership base and other private sources for fundraising, outside traditional major NGO donor sources such as government funding agencies (Vander Zaag, 2013:339). De Cordier finds Islamic agencies

…often [derive] funding from non-traditional sources... contributions [often come from] families, communities and organisations in affected countries; diaspora
remittances; and contributions from governments and other donors in the Islamic world (De Cordier, 2009:664).

The same tends to be true of most FBOs. FBOs often operate on lower budgets than secular NGOs as they can more readily mobilise volunteers, both at home and on the field, because of strong connections to international religious networks, *behavioural expectations* based on *beliefs* about the importance of sacrificial service and a sense of ‘calling’ (Davis et. al, 2011:109,141). Secular NGOs, conversely, often rely more heavily on external donors and funding sources, paid staff, and marketing to develop broader donor bases.

However, faith can also value-subtract from development activities. Where proselytisation occurs, tensions caused by FBOs can greatly reduce benefits of a given development activity (Aiken, 2010; Flanigan, 2008; James, 2009). One conference presentation on religion and development in Sri Lanka (Flanigan, 2008) posited a range of international FBOs of all major religious backgrounds have become sources of tension recently with the Government of Sri Lanka, largely because funds were channelled via FBOs – avoiding government corruption.

Belonging

Aid and relief provision by organisations within all major religions pre-dates modern NGOs, including formalised FBOs (Lunn, 2009:943). And whilst many FBOs may commence by working within effected communities with which they share a sense of belonging, evidence suggests that most FBOs operating in disaster or relief situations resist discriminating against non-adherents in distribution of assistance (Aiken, 2010; James, 2009; Saddiq, 2009). Evidence is less clear for chronic poverty alleviation, where FBOs often connect with those in need initially through institutional relationships – although again, usually not discriminating against non-adherents in programme participation.

As noted earlier, several authors document roles both secular NGOs and FBOs play in brokering and building peace in war-torn nations (e.g. BerkleyCentre, 2010; Boehle, 2010; Haynes, 2009; Kelleher and Johnson, 2008; Lunn, 2009; Marshall, 2001, 2005; Nishimuko, 2008). Kelleher and Johnson (2008: 150) note the crucial impact of local NGOs’ work in grassroots peacebuilding, which is often unrecognised by government officials (although sometimes overestimated by the NGOs themselves). They suggest the social relationships secular and religious NGOs have in communities facilitate peacebuilding, with faith being particularly important in healing processes due to its ‘link to cultural practices’ (p.151).

Another reason for this level of trust is sometimes a longstanding relationship with poor communities, and a so-called ‘servant-hearted' approach to assistance (Aiken, 2010; see also P. Berger, 2009; G.Clarke, 2007; Nishimuko, 2008; Olson, 2008). A sense of compassion rooted in religious notions of justice can be a primary driver for many religious agencies’ involvement in aid and development (Aiken, 2010; J. Berger, 2003; Lunn, 2009). This trust can translate into an ability to mobilise volunteer workers (Marshall, 2005; Para-Mallam,
2006; Dalton, 2013), and an ability to act as safety nets where social services are not provided by governments, due to existing religious institutional structures (G.Clarke, 2007; Flanigan, 2009). This trust and deep relationship contrasts with some critiques of other NGOs in the literature, sometimes noted as lacking grassroots linkages, a tendency towards top-down approaches, and concerns approaches are overly tied to rather uncritically implemented donor agendas (Davis et al, 2011:42-3; Lewis & Kanji, 2009:17ff).

Related to this, a large number of studies comment on FBOs’ high levels of access to local, national and international networks (i.e. a high level of belonging) (G.Clarke, 2007; M.Clarke, 2011a; Dilger, 2009; Flanigan, 2009; James, 2009; Marshall, 2005; Nishimuko, 2008). These enduring, strong networks of relationships cross geographic and social barriers (Aiken, 2010; J. Berger, 2003; M.Clarke, 2013; De Cordier, 2009; Dilger, 2009; Flanigan, 2008). While only documented in grey literature, generally these networks seem to give FBOs a clearer sense of identity than secular NGOs (Aiken, 2010; James, 2009; Saddiq, 2009). At the local level, FBOs can have strong connections with faith communities and local communities (Aiken, 2010; Beaumont, 2008; G.Clarke, 2007; McDue-Ra & Rees, 2010; Nishimuko, 2008), and at national/global levels they often link into networks of religious and development organisations (Aiken, 2010; J. Berger, 2003; Haynes, 2009; Olson, 2008).

Links with existing religious institutions often allow efficiencies in operations, by attaching to existing infrastructure (J. Berger, 2003). This does not preclude being able to link with other diverse actors – of other religious persuasions; or philanthropic, development and private agencies (P. Berger, 2009). However, FBOs’ often stronger links with private funding sources of funding can help them maintain greater autonomy from government agencies and policies (J. Berger, 2003; Lunn, 2009).

Boundary keepers

Commentary about the impact of religious organisations’ involvement is dotted throughout the above commentary – perhaps indicating the interrelated nature of these four domains. De Cordier (2009:679 – 680) suggests the level of value-add of FBOs as religious organisations (or boundary keepers) depends on several factors: whether there is religious conflict in the region; religious leaders’ roles in local society and societal attitudes towards them; whether a particular religion (or set of religions) forms a ‘social fault line’; the number of other competing development actors in the region; the way the local opinion-climate has been shaped by local and global media; the level of social mobility (both horizontal and vertical); and ‘… the nature and position of the state and civil society’.

Another potentially negative impact of the boundary keeping role of FBOs can be seen in the representations of local communities by intermediary FBOs (those placed between donors in foreign lands and recipient community). In attempting to promote local needs to a foreign donor base, they can perpetuate a false picture of homogenous and destitute communities to donors, which does not tally with reality, to maintain their funding base (Bradley, 2009).
There have also been cases where religious schools were used as political recruiting grounds for terrorism (G. Clarke, 2007).

A final way FBOs and secular NGOs are distinctive is that FBOs may evolve into secular NGOs, but the converse never occurs. Several studies suggested some FBOs may become more secular over time (e.g. Flanigan, 2008; Bradley, 2009). Examples of this are Oxfam, World Vision and Save the Children, which were all founded by religious leaders. However, no evidence was identified suggesting secular NGOs may become religious over time. These suggest that any boundary keeping role of FBOs is perhaps a subordinate priority to what they believe and how they enact this through behaviours and behavioural expectations.

Discussion and Conclusions

So in returning to Rakodi’s question ‘Do religious and faith-based organisations make distinctive contributions to development and service provision?’ (2012b: 646), we find that Lincoln’s framework has been useful in showing a range of ways the nature of religion impacts upon FBOs to produce distinctive structures, activities, approaches to development and outcomes. It also shows that sometimes different underlying beliefs can lead to the same outcomes. The literature suggests that beliefs can be a powerful motivator to act with and on behalf of the most marginalised. It can also provide a ready entrée into communities of the same faith. However, it can also sometimes limit the responses to issues that affect large proportions of the population, such as gender (in)equality.

While FBOs and secular NGOs may start from very different positions in terms of beliefs, they tend to lead to quite similar sets of behavioural expectations and outward programmatic development behaviours. However, FBOs tend to focus more on shorter term humanitarian needs, as well as focusing geographically on agricultural and rural communities. They are also most notably active in the provision of education and health services, having predated the presence of secular NGOs in many contexts. However, some FBOs promote unhelpful strategies in sexual health education, the promotion of gender (in)equality and addressing conflict. Finally, because serving marginalised communities is seen as part of a broader mission, FBOs tend to operate very efficiently on minimal resources, utilising volunteer workers more frequently than secular agencies are able. This mission does backfire in some settings, though, where some FBOs engage in proselytisation alongside delivering aid and development programming.

While most FBOs actively promote programmes that are inclusive of non-adherents to their faith, there can be pressure from within religious organisations to favour members. FBOs likewise sometimes use their shared sense of belonging with communities to facilitate peacebuilding. They are generally highly respected in communities, due to their ‘servant-hearted’ approach to delivering aid, and they can utilise local, national and international networks to mobilise resources, which secular agencies often cannot access.
The boundary keeping aspect of FBOs perhaps yields the most mixed findings. Their roles – positive or negative – in conflict zones depends on issues such as the degree to which religious beliefs are intertwined with the conflict, and their degree of influence of religious leaders. Sometimes intermediary FBOs misrepresent marginalised communities to donor networks, in order to raise funds needed to empower these groups. Somewhat ironically, this contributes to perpetuating their marginalised status.

Hence, Lincoln’s framework appears to be a useful means of categorising the impacts of faith upon FBOs. It may also therefore provide a helpful framework for exploring the impacts of secular beliefs upon secular NGOs, although further research is needed to confirm this. In combination with Rakodi’s question, this framework provides a constructive approach to exploring faith impacts upon FBOs – particularly activities, structures and development outcomes.

However, there are some limitations to this framework, which require further refinement. One limitation of this framework is that it does not separate out behavioural expectations from actual behaviours. So it may need to be extended to reflect this in future studies. Another limitation is the blurring of boundaries between domains, which at times made categorisation of impacts difficult. So it is important in applying this framework to make every attempt to be very clear about what aspect of religious belief and its impact upon FBOs is being analysed.

This framework has also been useful in highlighting some gaps in the current literature. For example, apart from FBOs’ ability to draw upon volunteer workers and a range of networks, there is limited mention of organisational structures of FBOs. Only James (2009) and DeCordier (2009) briefly mention the types of organisational structures some FBOs utilise, which is not a generalisable list, and may not capture the breadth of structures in existence. Further, there is limited rigorous evidence of specific development outcomes which are directly attributable to the faith-based nature of FBOs. Further research is recommended to explore this. Similarly, the impacts of faith on development practitioners with religious beliefs working in secular agencies is not captured in the literature examined here. This is an area requiring further study.

So this framework, and the exploration of the FBO literature here, highlight some additional areas of further research, which would add to our understanding of the role and impacts of FBOs in development. It would be useful now to use these domains to assess secular NGOs activities, organisational structures and outcomes, so that a more rigorous comparison between FBOs and secular NGOs could be made. This would help use to begin assessing the true impacts of faith upon FBOs. Finally, further work is needed to assess how the implications of the similarities and differences could contribute to more nuanced development policies and funding programmes.
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