Country-Level Mapping Methodology

Building upon previous projects from the first phase of collaboration with the Luce Foundation, the Berkley Center’s Religion and Global Development Program and World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) are exploring key religion and development work at the country level in Bangladesh, Senegal, Kenya, and Guatemala. A team of researchers, under the leadership of Katherine Marshall, will draw from WFDD’s previous country mapping work in Cambodia to expand to the four new countries. This country-level approach will make significant contributions to understanding the nature of faith-linked development work within each country, contribute to dialogue at the national level on implications and lessons, and draw general conclusions with broader applicability. This document outlines the methodology used by WFDD and Berkley Center researchers to map the intersection of religion and development at the country level.

DESK REVIEW

WFDD’s country mapping begins with an extensive desk review of existing scholarly and grey literature on the country in question, which is focused on two broad areas: the country’s religious landscape and its development progress and challenges. Often WFDD will have some prior knowledge of the country and some contacts and may build on these to establish a preliminary research agenda.

Research on the development context seeks to identify broad narratives, critical focal areas, and interesting and relevant (for the review of religious dimensions) activities or approaches, as well as obvious entry points for engagement with faith actors. It begins with analysis of assistance strategies and planning documents, as well as other gray literature from government and major international development organizations active in the country. Government development strategy documents, including five-year plans, are used to identify primary sectors of interest and engagement. These strategy documents help to construct a picture of development priorities, approaches, and the activities and financial engagement of a range of international partners (World Bank, UN system, bilaterals, major NGOs). The documents are also searched for explicit mention of religion, ranging from a general acknowledgement of the complex religious dimensions of development challenges to detailed plans for partnerships with religious institutions, leaders, or communities.

In parallel, the desk review investigates the country’s faith landscape, compiling existing material and identifying gaps in knowledge. Researchers rely primarily on academic sources, including scholarly monographs, edited volumes, and journal articles from a number of disciplines ranging from political science to anthropology. The social dimensions of religion are of particular interest in this review, which might involve the ways in which religious traditions and practices relate to social attitudes and norms as well as traditional social services and aid provided by religious actors. Development engagement is focused as much as possible on key development priorities, for example the role religion plays in the construction of beliefs and practices around gender or religious systems for poverty reduction such as zakat.

1 Full project details and corresponding outputs can be found at http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/religion-and-development-country-level-mapping
The third stream of the desk research is a cursory mapping of faith-inspired organizations (FIOs) active in the country. This can be based on government NGO registration lists, if available, or other lists from NGO associations or UN clusters. In many cases, the number of FIOs can be prohibitively large to survey individually, if all local civil society organizations were included. To limit the sample size in this initial ‘country-level’ mapping, WFDD begins at the macro-level, focusing on FIOs that work nationally, regionally, or have particularly significant roles historically or in key sectors. Criteria for inclusion will vary by context, but could involve the type of government registration i.e. NGO vs CSO, whether they receive international funding, or whether they implement projects or have activities in all regions of the country. As active FIOs are identified, researchers search online for available information regarding the organization’s history and mission, size, focal areas, strategic approach, and active projects. Program-specific gray literature produced by FIOs themselves and published online is also reviewed. This process helps to identify an initial group of organizations that will be targeted for visits and in-depth interviews during fieldwork.

The analysis of this material contributes to a ‘concept paper’ that is used as a basis for discussion at the subsequent consultation and as a guide for further research work.

CONSULTATION

Following the desk review and development of the concept paper, WFDD convenes a consultation of leading international scholars, development practitioners, and activists with relevant and in-depth knowledge of the country. The goal of this consultation is to provide feedback on the initial desk review (in the form of a concept note), explore themes for investigation during fieldwork, identify potential obstacles, and provide recommendations to shape a feasible research plan. WFDD invites 10-20 people to attend what has normally been a short (eight-hour) event. The meeting is typically divided into thematic sessions, each with a number of questions to prompt discussion. Katherine Marshall facilitates each session. The day ends with a summary of the discussion and a rough outline of next steps, which is then developed as a meeting summary that is reviewed by participants and posted online. Most consultations have operated under “Chatham House rules” to ensure frank and open discussions. The consultation will solidify five to eight focal topics (usually key development priorities that have strong religious dimensions) to serve as central areas of investigation during fieldwork. The consultation will also point to potential local partners that can support and facilitate fieldwork, typically local universities, scholars, or research institutes.

The consultation group continues to serve as a vital resource throughout fieldwork and report writing. They may be asked for referrals for fieldwork, acting as ‘gatekeepers’ who can provide introductions for initial interviews and other logistics. During report writing they can point to important resources and eventually review drafts prior to publication.

IN-COUNTRY FIELD WORK

Exploratory in-country fieldwork follows the consultation. This stage lasts anywhere from three months to a year depending on funding and the size and complexity of the country, but fieldwork should aim to involve interviews with a minimum of 50 individuals or organizations. Methodologically, the study primarily relies on semi-structured interviews with key informants. Interviewees are drawn from international development practitioners, religious leaders/institutions, faith-inspired organization staff, local civil society, and local government officials. Fieldwork typically begins with a visit by WFDD’s Executive Director (or other Berkley Center senior fellow), which focuses on high-level contacts i.e. country directors of bi- and multilateral development agencies, development banks, UN agencies and some of the larger international NGOs as well as representatives of government ministries. These meetings provide an opportunity to inform these critical
stakeholders about the project and get a sense of both knowledge of and sensitivity to issues around religion in the country.

Potential interviewees are identified using multiple sources, but largely drawn from list of known FIOs active in the country developed during the initial desk research. Additional local expert contacts will have been identified during the literature review. This list is further supplemented by the recommendations of the consultation group and the wider Georgetown University community. Consolidating these lists, WFDD staff create and maintain a spreadsheet of contacts. When setting up interviews, WFDD initially approaches the executive director as this individual has the most comprehensive understanding of the organization and its projects, as well as importantly how religious ideas and values inform the organization’s mission and dictate its approach and focal issues. Further interviews can be conducted with program officers working on one of the previously identified focal issues if time allows. Grey literature is also collected during the visit, including annual reports or project overviews and evaluations.

After the initial round of interviews WFDD utilizes snowball sampling to expand the mapping. Following each interview, the researcher inquires about individuals and organizations that the interviewee suggests would be important in developing a comprehensive picture of faith-inspired development actors in the country. As interviewees often recommend individuals or organizations that they are most familiar with and with whom they interact regularly, this process can help to identify informal networks. In order to counter bias in snowball sampling, WFDD works to include FIOs from a full range of religious traditions and ideologies, as well as a diversity of organizational sizes and programmatic foci. Attempts are made to highlight unique or noteworthy organizations and approaches.

As interviews reveal networks involving FIOs, it is important to understand how FIOs relate to non-faith organizations. This can help to illuminate the level of integration and coordination of FIOs with the broader development community, but can also help point to other actors for interviews. For this reason, the sample also includes non-faith secular development actors such as UN agencies, NGOs, government agencies, and local scholars in order to deepen understanding of the development context. These interviews are selected based on prior engagement with faith actors or if there are important religious dimensions within a given sector.

This sampling technique has various limitations. This initial mapping is focused on nationally influential actors and therefore has a bias towards larger organizations, which are formally registered as NGOs with the government and that have higher level of foreign (English/French/ Spanish) language proficiency and web presence. Most interviews take place at organizational headquarters in the capital city with limited visits to regional centers. There is an additional nonresponse bias as interviews are limited to those organizations willing to meet with us. Religious actors in some contexts can be suspicious of foreign groups for various reasons or wish to maintain a low profile. Smaller or grassroots organizations may be included occasionally, but generalizations cannot be made based on these interviews, given that these will be a handful out of the hundreds or thousands nationwide, it will be noted that they are not representative of the national context.

**INTERVIEWS**

Because of the sensitivity of the topics broached it is essential to build rapport and trust prior to the interview. This begins by explaining the research purpose and introducing WFDD’s history and mission. Where technology allows, researchers email research objectives and scope, as well as examples of prior interviews, reports, and other documents. Occasionally formal letters from a local partner i.e. university will be requested. Knowledge of local language, cultural, and religious traditions can also help build rapport. Doors can also open when organizations understand that the meeting can increase their visibility or more broadly draw
attention to the importance of the development work undertaken by faith-inspired actors. Importantly, interviewees are asked explicitly for their consent, generally with a written form that allows them to determine if any content from the interview, including their name or their organization’s name, can be used in WFDD publications or online materials.

Interview questions are drawn from a standard model (see appendix) and supplemented with questions particular to the specific organization based on background research. In preparation, the researcher reviews relevant material from the desk review, as well as any information gathered from the organization’s website and publications. The interview provides an opportunity to confirm, challenge, or nuance issues found from publicly available sources. The interview questions also expand or build on interviews with others in order to draw out and expand on emerging themes.

FIOs interview content will vary case by case but generally includes: history and mission of the organization; motivation for involvement in development [sectors]; strategic approach; partnership and networking with other faith and/or development actors; challenges and trends over time; future plans; stories of success or lessons drawn from failures; perspectives on the place of religion in the country; perspectives on what ‘development’ in the country should look like; perspectives on what makes their work unique i.e. religion or values in mission or programming.

For secular development actors the interview includes: an exploration of key development themes and actors involved; an attempt to gauge the sensitivity of religion as a topic in the country i.e. security, fundamentalism, foreign funding sources, proselytism, corruption, snake oil; an exploration of networking or collaboration with local faith leaders; recommendations for strategic involvement of religious elements of particular development issues.

Interviews are ideally recorded for transcription, but if this is not allowed or feasible, notes are taken. Interviewees also often provide project reports, organizational strategic plans, and other such literature. When permission is granted, edited excerpts of the interviews are posted on the BC/WFDD website, offering engaging personal stories that explore the complexities of religion in social life and the role of faith as a motivating factor for development work. It is important to note that these interviews also act as stakeholder engagement and a means to build a network of individuals and groups committed to increased dialogue and collaboration between religious and development communities. This emerging network also facilitates dissemination of the research products and fosters relationships that can provide supplemental guidance in the future.

ANALYSIS AND COUNTRY REPORT

After compiling interviews and grey literature, WFDD staff work with research assistants (RAs) to analysis these resources. Student RAs transcribe interviews taking precautions to ensure the confidentiality of the documents including storing the files on password-protected computers. Transcripts and published material are analyzed using NVivo (or other qualitative analysis software) to identify themes and draw comparisons. Additional desk research expands themes that emerged from fieldwork, including newly recommended or accessible resources. This analysis and supplemental desk research will significantly expand and deepen the initial draft concept paper.

The end product of this process is a comprehensive report, which details the religious landscape of the country and the many intersections of religion and contemporary development challenges. It also provides illustrations of the development work of FIOs in various sectors with detailed organization and project profiles. The country report, which is the core product of the mapping, begins with a brief overview of the country's
development landscape including key challenges and noteworthy successes, drawing attention to critical intersections with religion that will be explored in further detail in subsequent sections. Following this, an overview of the country’s religious landscape offers a historical perspective, an analysis of religion in public life, and an extended description of the country’s religious communities with a nuanced treatment of various denominations and ideological currents. This section will also take up major themes in scholarly literature, as well as those that emerged in field research i.e. exploring religion’s role in gender relations or social conflict. Merging the development context and religious landscape, the report then explores the work of faith-inspired actors in development. It is organized around the five to eight core development challenges identified at the consultation and pursued during fieldwork. Each sectoral subsection begins with a broad look at the engagement of faith-inspired actors within the sector, followed by profiles of noteworthy projects that can provide illustrative examples. Profiles are selected from the large range of projects identified during fieldwork. Given space restrictions, the country report features three to five profiles to demonstrate diversity of approaches and draw attention to innovative or unique features. The report concludes with an overview of key themes and then points to directions for further research.

The report is a thorough and rigorous study, but also intended to be accessible to a wide range of development practitioners. A key goal is to increase faith literacy among the development community at large and ultimately facilitate better understanding and possibly collaboration and exchange between these two communities. Other outputs can include topical policy briefs and occasional papers aimed at informing international dialogue on critical topics. As the mapping expands to further countries this also allows for publications that look at issues and themes across multiple country contexts.

APPENDIX

Sample Interview Questions

1. **About the organization/institution**
   a. What is the history of [your organization] in [country]?
   b. What parts of the country do you work in and how is this determined?
   c. What development topics/sectors is your organization working on?
      i. How do you choose these?
      ii. How do you evaluate your success in each of these sectors?

2. **Development activities**
   a. Could you explain more about the background of [previously mentioned project]?
   b. Are there any other sectors/activities you are planning on getting involved with in the future? If so, what are they and why?
   c. How do you identify your beneficiaries? Does religious identity matter?

3. **Collaboration, formal and informal**
   a. How do you communicate and collaborate with other FIOs, NGOs, other development organizations, and/or the government?
   b. What sort of national or international networks do you belong to?

4. **Role of faith**
   a. Does [faith community] have a special role to play in [country]?
   b. What makes a [faith tradition] approach unique?
   c. Does coming from a faith perspective pose any challenges for development work in [country]? If so, why and how do you manage these?

5. **Motivation for involvement in development**
a. How did you come to work at this organization?

b. What inspires you personally in your development work?

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) is a not-for-profit organization working at the intersection of religion and global development. Housed within the Berkley Center in Washington, D.C., WFDD documents the work of faith inspired organizations and explores the importance of religious ideas and actors in development contexts. WFDD supports dialogue between religious and development communities and promotes innovative partnerships, at national and international levels, with the goal of contributing to positive and inclusive development outcomes.