

“Right-sized,” Contextualized Faith: The Challenging Cooperation of FBDOs with Institutional Donors

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Abstract

This paper explores the challenging cooperation between faith-based development organizations (FBDOs) and institutional donors. It argues that FBDOs need to find their “right-sized,” contextualized faith by understanding their unique developmental and spiritual contributions and the challenges they face. Five distinctive contributions of FBDOs are described: extensive networks, community engagement at multiple levels, holistic and innovative approaches, higher trust level, and spiritual capital. Then four challenges they face are set forth: instrumentalization, a need to constantly prove themselves, proselytism, and downplay of spiritual identity. In light of the FBDOs distinctive contributions and challenges, seven practical recommendations for FBDOs to achieve “right-sized,” contextualized faith are presented, namely, to aim for a) “right-sized, contextualized programs, b) “right-sized” funding, and c) “right-sized” faith.

Keywords: FBDO, Faith-based Organizations, Institutional Donors, Faith Identity, Humanitarian Development, Spirituality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no other interface is as important as that of faith and management in the context of humanitarian development work. More than 700 million people including an estimated 356 million children are still living in extreme poverty, struggling to survive on less than \$1.90 a day. Even more staggering: 1 billion—the number of children worldwide who are multi-dimensionally poor – without access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water (UNICEF, 2021). Multiple international donors such as World Bank, The United Nations, USAID, and European Aid coordinate a multitude of humanitarian development and disaster response activities. Inevitably, they encounter one formidable force which demands special attention: religion. 84% of the world’s population is estimated to belong to some religion (Pew Research Center, 2015). For most people of the “South” spirituality is integral to and inseparable from their understanding of the world and their place in it. Religion, therefore, is central to their decisions about their lives and their communities’ development (Ver Beck, 2000, p. 31).

At the interface of development and religion, Faith Based Development Organizations (FBDOs) have emerged as influential actors. Among evangelical mission agencies, six of the seven largest are now FBDOs. These six are Christian Aid Ministries, Compassion International, Feed the Children, Food for the Hungry, MAP International, and World Vision (King, 2012, p. 924). These FBDOs are unique in the ways that faith identity is expressed through development. FBDOs are not simply faith or development actors but faith-based development ones. Their impact depends on the interaction of faith and development: “faith identity feeds development interventions, which in turn feed back into the perceived faith identity” (Jennings, 2021, p. 73). This interaction of development and faith consequently gives rise to a critical question: how can FBDOs cooperate with institutional donors while maintaining their faith identity?

Mandaville et al. (2017, p. 11) coined the term “right-sized” religion in a very narrow sense as that in which religion avoided any extreme expression. Bartelink et al. (2020, p. 49) broadened the meaning of “right-sized” religion as that in which religion was assigned an appropriately important role. In my view, however, the term “right-sized” religion can be used of FBDOs only when they have considered fully two things: a) their unique spiritual and developmental contributions and b) the perception that external stakeholders, such as communities, governments, and institutional donors, have of their spiritual identity and the specific contributions they make. This paper argues that the challenge for FBDOs is to find their “right-sized,” contextualized faith through a clear understanding of their own unique spiritual contributions.

Definitions: Faith Based Development Organizations (FBDOs)

FBDOs are not a homogenous group of organizations. Some are nearly indistinguishable from other NGOs, but others seek actively to evangelize (Benedetti, 2006, p. 853). A widely cited definition of FBDOs is “any organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of a faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within that faith” (Clark et al., 2008, p. 6).

El Nakib et al. (2015, pp. 6-7) introduce the following topology for FBDOs: a) international faith-based organizations as major players, b) national faith-influenced organizations, c) local faith-influenced organizations, d) local faith networks, e) informal local faith communities mobilizing in the context of crisis, f) local faith leaders. This topology classifies religious actors based on their organizational structure and realm of influence. The principal mission of FBDOs is directly to fight poverty by developing and implementing programs that help the poor and by raising awareness of poverty among various stakeholders (Clarke, 2006, p. 841).

Unruh and Sider (2005, pp.114-118) propose six types of organizations, i.e., faith-permeated, faith-centered, faith-affiliated, faith-background, faith-secular partnership, and secular. Each type of organization is analyzed taking into consideration eight organizational characteristics such as mission statement, founding, affiliation, controlling board, senior management, other staff, personnel religious practice, and support. Furthermore, four religious program characteristics are added which are religious environment, program content, integration of religious components, and expected connection between elements and desired outcomes. The advantage of this model is that it is multidimensional; recognizing that the religious characteristics of an organization may differ from the specific programs it operates and may also depend on the specific context of the activities planned.

Religion as Development Taboo

Ver Beek (2000, p. 37) scanned three of the most prominent development studies journals for articles on religion and spirituality from 1982 to 1998. He found that the topic of spirituality was systematically avoided and played no central role at all. Spirituality, he concluded, seemed to be “a development taboo.” Marginalized by modernization and by Marxist ideology, religion was for long absent or peripheral at best in the development arena (Freston, 2015, p. 141). Humanitarian development was firmly located in the secular domain and set strictly apart from religion. We encounter, therefore, a pervasive secular-religious dichotomy (Fountain, 2013, p. 9).

Emerging interest of Governments and Multinational Organizations

Three major events--the World Bank Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics in 1998, US President George W. Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative and the war on terror in 2001, and the Kyoto Declaration in 2006--are crucial milestones in the emergence of FBDOs as important in development. These events brought about an emerging interest of governments and institutional donors towards joint development activities with FBDOs.

The first event was the Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics, established in 1998 by James Wolfensohn, then president of the World Bank together with George Carey, then

Archbishop of Canterbury (Jones, 2011 p. 1294). This Dialogue served as the primary focal point for engaging with religious leaders and faith-based organizations (Fountain, 2013, p. 15). It initially received little attention from development institutions. Nevertheless, Wolfensohn clearly cast a vision of engaging faith communities in the fight against poverty, considering them vital to the success in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). He also saw great potential for new and different forms of partnership that would utilize the respective strengths of the different communities (Marshall, 2004, pp. xi–xiii).

The second ground-breaking event was President George W. Bush's 2001 Faith-Based Initiative. Its effectiveness has been questioned (Heist, 2016, p. 3) and its motives have been challenged in the light of Bush's war on terror (Holenstein, 2005, p. 32). In his Faith-Based Initiative, Bush signed several executive orders to eliminate pervasive government discrimination against FBDOs receiving federal funding. To end this discrimination, the President established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) along with subsidiary centers across eleven federal agencies, including USAID (Turner Haynes, 2021, pp. 3-4).

The third significant event took place in Kyoto, Japan in 2006. The joint declaration of "A Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children" was formally adopted there at the Eighth World Assembly of Religions for Peace. The Kyoto Declaration has served as an invaluable resource for those engaged in multi-religious cooperation and advocacy for children (Kyoto Declaration, 2006). One of the most encouraging signs of a closer cooperation with FBDOs is the establishment of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD, 2021), organized by the German Government Development Agency (GIZ). PaRD brings together development "partners from all over the world to harness the positive impact of religion and values in sustainable development" (Tomlin, 2021, p. 111).

The Kyoto Declaration further advanced the cooperation of institutional donors with FBDOs as they and religious groups became important partners in UNICEF's work with children across the globe (Grills, 2009, p. 507). UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres acknowledged that faith-based actors had a role to play from the beginning of a crisis. They could promote durable solutions, prevent conflict, and help refugees integrate in their new communities (Guterres, 2012). The changed attitude of institutional donors led to increased funding for FBDOs. For example, US foreign aid to faith-based groups almost doubled from 10.5 per cent in 2001 to 19.9 per cent in 2005 (James, 2011, p. 114).

Surprisingly, FBDOs have gone from "marginalized to legitimized, to prioritized actors in international development" (Turner Haynes, 2020, p. 2). Initially, the interest in religion was driven particularly by big multilateral and bilateral donors rather than by universities and research organizations (Jones et al., 2011, p. 1292). In a remarkable about-turn, however, development studies have rediscovered religion and devoted considerable effort to analyzing FBDOs (Feener et al., 2018, p. 1). Such studies became an invaluable reservoir of knowledge and insight into the complex and urgent questions FBDOs were now forced to deal with due to their prioritized status for institutional donors. Would an influx of donor funding alter a FBDO's way of planning and implementing program activities, its religious practices, and spiritual identity? If yes, how? What distinctive contributions can FBDOs make in working with donors? These questions are still crucially important.

2. METHODOLOGY

Literature was identified through database research focusing on academic journals, book chapters, evaluation reports, and institutional donor websites. Minimal use was made of FBDOs' own media coverage and promotional materials to ensure a more objective perspective on how FBDOs are perceived by external stakeholders. Sources were selected based on quality and relevance to an exploration of the interactions, perspectives, and perceptions between FBDOs and institutional donors. It is important to note, however, that not every study published on

FBDOs and religion could be included in this review. The author chose to confine the search and subsequent analysis of literature to studies which could contribute to the concept of “right-sized,” contextualized faith. Many high-quality studies were excluded from this review because they were not directly relevant to the research question.

In addition, as a practitioner, the author shares some current experiences and perspectives that could complement the findings of the literature review.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Distinctive Contributions of FBDOs

One way to assess how FBDOs can make distinctive contributions to development goals and programming is to review different aspects of their activities: a) inputs (design of programs, source of funding choices), b) ways of operating (selection of staff, beneficiaries, and religious practices), c) outcomes (activities), and d) impact (achievement of development objectives) (Radoki, 2012, p. 646). These aspects of distinctive FBDO contributions focus mainly on tangible and quantifiable matrixes. Secular agencies appreciate the social and access capital that FBDOs bring to the table. Less acknowledged, however, is the importance of harnessing FBDOs' spiritual capital, drawing on faith traditions, spiritual practices, teaching, and authority (Palm et al., 2019, p. 2). The first step for FBDOs to find their “right-sized,” contextualized, faith is to identify and assess what distinctive organizational and spiritual contributions they can make. We suggest five distinctive contributions.

Extensive Networks

An outstanding strength of FBDOs consists in their extensive networks. They have often established enduring and extensive horizontally and vertically organized networks comprised of affiliates, congregations, individuals, and organizations. These networks serve both as highly effective channels of communication and as channels of human and financial resources. Large national social networks offer the potential to engage powerfully in advocacy and reconciliation activities (James, 2011, p. 113). UNFPA emphasizes the importance of FBDOs' distinct moral standing, broad social networks, and their ability for fast social intervention. FBDOs are capable of mobilizing “legions of volunteers which no other institution can boast worldwide.” They are also owners of the “longest standing and most enduring mechanisms for raising financial resources.” This ability is especially relevant at a time when traditional secular organizations face serious resource shortages (Karam, 2014, p. XI). FBDOs probably provide the best social and physical infrastructure in the poorest communities because churches, mosques, temples, and other places of worship are focal points for the communities they serve (Jones, 2011, p. 1296). Often this social infrastructure has been gradually built up over a long time with most FBDOs having a long-term track record of presence and service in their geographical areas (Davis, 2011, p. 136). World Vision, for example operates *Area Development Programs (ADPs)* with the duration of 10-15 years tailored to address the needs of a specific community. Typically, ADP team members are based in a small office in the district where the ADP is located. They can work closely with government partners and communities on a daily basis.

Community Engagement at Multiple Levels

The long presence of FBDOs in their areas of development profoundly influenced the attitudes, beliefs, and norms of communities. They also contributed to multiple socio-ecological levels of influence, through tailoring communication with congregants (Kraft, 2020, p. 7). If FBDOs can impact a target community at several levels, they will greatly increase the efficacy of programs (Kraft, 2020, p. 6).

A convincing example of this increased efficacy occurred when Byran et al. (2020, pp. 1-3) conducted a randomized control trial on the work of International Care Ministries (ICM), a local evangelical Protestant anti-poverty organization, founded by Filipino pastors and operating through a local network of pastors in the Philippines. The 16-week program consisted of three

teaching components, namely a) Christian theology, values, and character virtues, b) health behaviors, and c) livelihood (i.e., self-employment) skills. Participants were ultra-poor people, most of them with a religious background. The evaluation showed that 6 months after the end of the program, the participants reported higher income and increased religious intensity. 30 months after the end of the program the relative economic status was higher with a consistent religious intensity. The authors propose that the economical improvements were related to greater perseverance of effort. This study indicates the improved efficacy of reaching out to the community at different levels (spiritual and economical). The spiritual component appears to improve the dedication and perseverance of the ultra-poor beneficiaries as they deploy their newly learnt self-employment skills.

Holistic Programs

FBDO are especially well suited to foster holistic programs, which address multi-dimensional needs such as physical needs in tandem with spiritual and social needs (Kraft, 2020, 7.) For example, The Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief Worldwide jointly developed a "Guidance on Mental Health and Psychosocial Programming." What makes this "Guidance" outstanding is that it integrates care management, psychological interventions including structured counseling, and a consistent focus on the faith and community resources, offering a sense of hope despite traumatic circumstances (French, 2018, p. 7).

Holistic programs fall and raise with the level of staff engagement in general and more specifically the faith of the staff as source of motivation for ensuring compassionate and personalized care.

Van Wees (2020b, pp. 177-187), for example, analyzed how donors engaged with FBDOs in the Cameroonian health system, focusing specifically on Christian Health Centres of Excellence. As one health official commented: "the patient is at the centre of everything" (Van Wees, 2020b, p. 182). Even more essential, however, for health officials was the FBDO's ability to provide specialized care due to the advanced equipment which was funded through its consistent donor engagement and links to Christian mission agencies. Consequently, one official stated proudly: "our clinic is like a European hospital."

Research on how FBDOs provide relief materials to people with AIDS/HIV in Nigeria confirms the centrality of faith for holistic programming and staff motivation. As part of their program design, FBDOs include dedicated counselors who are available to offer support for individuals facing challenges. As a result, recipients can foster their spiritual development as well as their material wellbeing (Davis, 2011, p. 136).

High Levels of Trust

Close and lasting relationships between FBDO staff and beneficiaries require a high level of trust. The World Bank was one of the first international donors acknowledging that FBDOs have a strong reputation of establishing trust in the communities they serve. "Most state institutions score poorly. NGOs and religious organizations are more trusted than state institutions" (Narajan-Parker, 2000, p. 199). Hilary Benn, UK Secretary of State for International Development, affirmed that FBDOs are among the most accessible and trusted institutions of the poor (Aiken, 2010, p. 3). FBDOs build trust by the ability of their staff to reach people at the grassroots level (Ware, 2016, p. 14), to speak their language and to respect their sentiments and culture (Heist, 2016, p. 5). Important also are the FBDO staff's compassionate and considerate working attitude, the so-called "servant-hearted" approach to assistance (Aiken, 2010, p. 9). FBDOs also have longstanding relationships with poor communities. Ager (2018, p.4) observed high staff turnover in both non-governmental and governmental organizations. In contrast, religious leaders occupied long-term leadership positions. We need to note also that it is much easier and more likely for FBDOs to form trusting relationships with local communities where their faith identity and programs align with local religious beliefs (Davis et al., 2011, pp. 142-3).

Spiritual Capital

Since faith plays an important role for FBDOs' holistic programming and staff members' motivation, it can be termed "spiritual capital." The locations and circumstances of different beneficiaries appear to affect the role faith has. Spirituality, faith in God, and connection to the sacred in nature are an integral part of poor people's lives in many parts of the world (Narajan, 2000, p. 222). The poorest are usually hit hardest by crises and disasters.

Pargament et al. (2010, p. 195) suggest four major functions of faith in the face of adversity: a) meaning, which can provide hope in times of crisis, b) emotional comfort or reduced fear due to the presence of a benevolent deity, c) interconnectedness with a group having a common set of beliefs, practices and values and d) most importantly, communion with and knowledge of the sacred. Hope changes how events are perceived. It encourages people to go beyond the visible and to search both for hidden meaning and purpose and for the transcendental other.

Lessons learnt from the Haiti earthquake response confirmed that spirituality contributed to improved quality of life and mental health by reducing anxiety and depression and by causing fewer instances of suicide and alcoholism (Schafer, 2010, p. 123). Based on extensive fieldwork in Sudan, Holton (2010, p. 7) argues that "the ability of a community to see their own role in the story of God in the world, especially in times of tragedy, provides a deep well of resilience that fosters hope and may help mitigate the damaging effects of trauma." Hope plays a crucial role in any humanitarian crisis. It serves as an effective antidote against dependence, desperation, fear, powerlessness, and resignation that are root causes for many development problems and barriers against behavioral change.

Spiritual teaching emphasizes some critical principles both from a development as well as a faith perspective such as compassion, justice, reconciliation, and stewardship. Compassion and care for the poor is at the heart of most religions. Justice is the bedrock of development. Reconciliation is central to many religions and are desperately needed in the world today (James, 2011, p. 113). Many programs include teaching components with a spiritual background. World Vision as a global interdenominational Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation helping children, families and communities overcome poverty and injustice, irrespective of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender developed the Channels of Hope (CoH) program. The CoH is probably the most widely used curriculum with extensive spiritual teaching. This program, originally designed to help churches respond to HIV/AIDS, gradually grew and has been used to mobilize faith communities for the care and prevention of both HIV/AIDS and Ebola in Christian and Muslim communities. It was also used to foster maternal and child health and child protection. It includes examples of biblical or religious teaching, encouraging participants to reevaluate certain habits and structures in their lives, families, and communities. For example, a woman from Zimbabwe, shared that CoH had brought "spiritual growth and change of behaviour in the community" (Bartelink et al., 2020, p. 51).

Transcendental power is at the heart of faith-based development. FBDOs generally tend to believe that divine power energizes human spirits and may even go beyond human effort. For example, many faiths believe that prayer unleashes an "extraordinary" power into development (James, 2011, p. 114). FBDOs often view humanitarian development as caused by divine intervention mediated through human efforts. In 2015, the World Bank together with representatives from major world religions and heads of global FBDOs, launched a passionate call for action to end extreme poverty by 2030. David Beckmann, President of the global FBDO Bread for the World, expressed his view that the unprecedented progress of reducing hunger and poverty is an "example of our loving God moving in the contemporary world, and God is inviting us all to get with the program" (World Bank, 2015).

3.2 Potential Challenges for FBDOs

FBDOs need to be aware of the challenges and potential pitfalls of dealing with institutional donors. We suggest that five areas deserve special attention.

Instrumentalization of Faith Actors

FBDOs need to be aware that they can be used by international donors focusing on their own goals rather than being treated as equal partners (Tomlin, 2018, p.3). Most institutional donors still view development as a secular domain. They are willing to engage with the institutional forms of faith (large and well-established FBDOs), but they remain suspicious about the spiritual dimensions of faith (James, 2011, p. 114).

Both institutional donors and FBDOs are aware that the dynamics of their relationship is diverse, complicated, and prone to the risk of mutual instrumentalization (Karam, 2014, p. V).

FBDOs may be tempted to instrumentalize donors by using government funding not only to implement development program activities but also to promote religious or denominational messages. On the donor side, during the George W. Bush administration, USAID was used to instrumentalize INGOs by favoring FBDOs with democratic background and by withholding funding to Islamic NGOs.

Such instrumentalization of FBDOs can pose serious financial and reputational risks because of sudden shifts of funding priorities or misuse of FBDOs for political goals. FBDOs relying in their programs on donor funding need constantly to monitor the evolving landscape of shifting government priorities. A recent example is the shift of the US government priority and funding from HIV/AIDS to malaria. Although considerable resources were spent on HIV/AIDS assistance and prevention programs, malaria prevention became a new priority under the administration of US President Obama. While treatments for HIV/AIDS require large start-up and continuous costs, sprayed bed nets for malaria prevention can be marketed as a simple and inexpensive solution to a crisis (Lynch, 2011, p. 333). Such politically motivated, sudden priority shifts may leave FBDOs in serious financial difficulty.

Need To Constantly Prove Themselves

To work with international donors, FBDOs must recognize that they constantly need to prove their compliance, credibility and worthiness and need to adapt to donor requirements. This requirement of proving themselves has a twofold impact. First, FBDOs need to prioritize programs and actions which demonstrate accountability, efficiency, sustainability, and transparency (Lynch, 2011, pp. 194-195).

Transparency is crucial. FBDOs need to respond to the same quality criteria as any other actor and not expect to be treated as a separate or special category (Karam, 2014. p. 4). Currently, some practices of engagement with FBDOs or local faith actors appear to be poorly developed, disseminated, and documented (Ager, 2018, p. 1).

However, such transparency comes with a cost to comply with donor requirements. Some German donors demand the payment of interest penalties if requested funds cannot be utilized in the projects within four months. While this demand certainly makes sense in a German context, it causes undue hardship and bureaucracy in highly fragile development contexts. Often, FBDOs lack skilled personnel, particularly in contexts of poverty, low literacy rates, and remuneration levels to deal with the multiple donor requirements (James, 2011, p. 111).

Second, institutional donors engage mainly with large global FBDOs and require these FBDO partners to accept secular terms (Grills, 2009, p. 517). Large, global FBDOs are often preferred partners for cooperation due their ability to express their programs in terms of activities, impacts,

and outcomes, using the language of project models and descriptions which are familiar to institutional donors.

Fear of Evangelization and Proselytism

FBDOs need to be aware that there is a strong fear on the part of international donors of evangelization and proselytism (Fountain, 2015, p. 80). FBDOs unfortunately are viewed by institutional donors and the academic world as doing something quite unacceptable in mixing development and religion. Thus, a clear separation between religion and development is considered imperative. The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the umbrella body for Australian NGOs, for example, states in its Accreditation Guidance Manual that religious activities as supporting or promoting a particular religion, including activities undertaken with the intention of converting individuals or groups from one faith and/or denomination to another, are not to be countenanced (DFAT, 2018, p. 39).

Such strict separation of development and religion, however, cannot be easily practiced. The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross attempts to de-link the spread of religious opinions from humanitarian actions. It disallows the use of aid to “further” a religious standpoint but grants humanitarian agencies the ability to “espouse” religious positions in agreement with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Fountain, 2015, p. 82). The difference between “further” and “espouse” a religious position is entirely unclear. In contrast, what is broadly accepted is that coercive “conversion,” tying of humanitarian aid to the beneficiary’s religious beliefs or utilizing aid as a tool to manipulate changes in the recipients’ religious adherence, is not acceptable. Not only institutional donors, but also recipients of humanitarian aid have widespread concerns that religious communities seek to take advantage of crises as opportunities for proselytizing fragile communities (Ager, 2018, p. 4).

Having recognized this concern, the World Council of Churches, the Catholic Church, and the World Evangelical Alliance promulgated a set of recommendations on how to conduct Christian witness in a multi-religious world (WCC, PCFID & WEA, 2011). Christians are called to fulfil Christ’s commission in an appropriate manner, particularly within interreligious contexts of development work. They are called to act justly, to love tenderly (cf. Micah 6:8), to serve others and in so doing to recognize Christ in the least of their sisters and brothers (cf. Matthew 25:45). Development work providing education, health care, relief services and advocacy is an integral part of witnessing to the gospel. But such witness should never lead to an exploitation of situations of poverty and need, which has no place in Christian outreach. Christians should denounce and refrain from offering all forms of allurements, including financial incentives and rewards, in their acts of service.

Most FBDOs (appropriately) follow these recommendations and proscribe faith and evangelization to avoid any appearance of coercion (Ager, 2011, pp. 464-465). World Vision, for example, emphatically argues that proselytizing is a contravention of its policy and humanitarian codes of conduct (Schafer, 2010, p. 125). In fact, they serve everyone they can carefully within cultural contexts to build respectful interfaith relationships. Such work within cultural contexts, especially in adversarial ones, is crucially important in order not to jeopardize fellow aid agencies’ operations and staff or to risk the lives of beneficiaries (Thaut, 2009, p. 325).

Downplay of Spiritual Identity

To avoid even the perception of evangelization and proselytism, FBDO may downplay their spiritual identity. This downplay can result from the positive intention of building communities or from a fear of donor repercussions. For example, Islamic palliative clinics deliberately downplay their religious identity to provide care and support to all patients. The commitment and sincerity of the volunteers have succeeded in providing much legitimacy to and patronage of these clinics (Santhosh, 2015, p. 95).

On the one hand, some FBDOs themselves prefer to keep their faith identity vague and ambiguous. They tend to underemphasize their faith to appeal to the widest possible funding base, to recruit and retain a diverse staff team, and to work easily in a variety of faith contexts (James 2011, p. 115). As mentioned above, World Vision's CoH lays aside traditional development boundaries regarding notions of religious/secular and public/private. However, in formal communications about this program, components of spiritual capital are often downplayed. World Vision staff frequently stress that the program does not aim to change a participant's faith or to introduce new theologies or faith perspectives.

On the other hand, World Vision and FBDOs in general need to think through the message which they indirectly convey by downplaying their spiritual identity. The consequences in the case of the CoH program are clear: a) World Vision obscures how compelling the spiritual component of CoH curriculum is for the personal and spiritual development of its participants. b) It affects World Vision's own programming and evaluation c) World Vision (unintentionally) contributes to the continuing dominance of the religious/secular binary (Bartelink et al., 2020, p. 52).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the daunting challenges for any FBDO is to maintain a healthy balance of projects in the proposal, implementation, and closing stage funded by different sources. To give an example for this complexity, World Vision Germany's project portfolio in 2020 consisted of 87 Regional Development Projects, 94 Private Funded Projects, and 89 Public funded projects in various stages of the project pipeline (World Vision Germany, 2020).

Consequently, this paper argues that FBDOs need to have a "right-sized," contextualized faith to cooperate effectively with institutional donors. To achieve this goal, they need to undertake a deliberate and careful analysis [is crucial], taking into consideration of a) the socio-political country context, b) funding streams and donor priorities, and c) the importance and expression of faith in the FBDO's organization, programs, and staff. We give the following recommendations of how they might achieve this.

4.1 "Right-sized," Contextualized Development Programs

Frequently, new opportunities are coming up concerning a wide variety of projects at different countries financed by various donors.

First, FBDO may want to prepare a list of focus countries to decide which countries and consequently which project opportunities are to be prioritized. For this analysis, it is crucial to assess whether the FBDO has built up over time in the focus countries deep community engagement, extensive networks, holistic project models and profound levels of beneficiaries and communities' trust.

Second, all FBDO have limited technical capabilities and therefore need to assess whether the required technical expertise fits the focus country's context. A mental health project needs access to trained and experienced counselors, while shelter projects require civil engineering and procurement skills. FBDOs need to remember that technical expertise contributes much more to the relationship between donors and FBDOs than questions of faith (van Wees, 2021, p. 486).

Third, the FBDO may want to consider the social-economic and religious context of a focus country. As described previously, World Vision's Channel of Hope (CoH) programs which incorporate explicit religious messages have been implemented successfully to address a wide variety of topics such as early child marriage or female genital mutilation. CoH programs seem to resonate especially well when the beneficiaries have a shared religious background. In contrast, in a country with a predominant atheistic context the same religious messages could be easily misunderstood as an attempt to proselytize the beneficiaries.

4.2 “Right-sized” Funding

Different funding streams imply different levels of funding size, financial reporting requirements and program restrictions. At one side of the spectrum, child sponsorship funding is comprised of tens of thousands of small donations (about EUR 30 each), which are mostly unrestricted, and demand limited financial reporting work. At the other end, public grants for multi-country, multi-partner consortium grants can reach EUR 10 million and consequently require highly sophisticated financial reporting structures and can only be utilized for very narrowly defined and approved project scopes.

Fourth, FBDOs may consider what kind of funding streams are available for their focus countries and carefully weigh the pros and cons of pursuing large public grants. If a FBDO wants to pursue large grants, it must ensure that the required organizational, technical and staff capabilities are developed, maintained, and enhanced. In the past, some FBDOs could not resist the temptation of grabbing large grants without sufficient preparation, which caused serious repercussions. For example, selected Cameroonian FBDOs who received large sums of debt relief funding have a very poor reputation today due to claims that they abused funds (Wees et al., 2020, p. 470).

Fifth, FBDO may be advised to seek a balanced funding stream and to not simply refuse to engage with public donors just because of fear of being instrumentalized. Turner Haynes (2021, p. 4) highlighted in a recent study that the percentage of USAID competitive grant funding to FBDOs dropped from 14.2% in 2005 to just 7.7% in 2018. These findings suggest that FBDOs appear to be too overcautious and suspicious in accepting USAID funds.

4.3 “Right-sized” Faith

The unique faith inspired impact of FBDOs depends on how successfully they can integrate faith and development: “faith identity feeds development interventions, which in turn feed back into the perceived faith identity” (Jennings, 2021, p. 73). Finding “right-sized” faith remains one of the most crucial challenges for any FBDO. Historically, we have seen FBDOs evolve into secular NGOs. The converse never occurs. Examples of this are Oxfam and Save the Children, all founded by religious leaders (Ware 2016, p. 5).

Six, FBDOs are advised to have a clear notion of their faith identity, spiritual capital, and pursue their religious convictions with boldness and humility. Faith can “provide fuel for development” offering a viable alternative to secular development theory through a) solid spiritual teachings, b) transcendental power such as prayer and c) conveying a message of hope, meaning, and purpose (James, 2011, pp. 113-114). World Vision seeks life in all its fullness for every child and admits the need of prayer for every heart to make it so as summarized in its vision statement (World Vision, 2022). Prayer motivates many staff members to continue serving in a variety of functions to contribute to children’s physical, emotional, relational, social, and spiritual wellbeing.

“Right-sized” faith requires humility to recognize when witness to Christ can only be done by FBDOs through acts of compassion and when religious activities in word and deed are possible such as conducting CoH programs in many African countries.

Seventh, FBDOs are uniquely positioned to encourage cooperation and unity among various religions, as well as among church leaders to overcome denominational differences by focusing on overarching humanitarian development goals (Aiken, 2010, p. 9). Reconciliation and peace building is central to many religions and are desperately needed in the world today (James, 2011, p. 113).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has demonstrated that “right-sized,” contextualized faith can empower FBDOs to build on, explore, and utilize unique strengths as they make a distinctive contribution to cooperate with institutional donors regarding development work. FBDOs’ extensive networks foster long term

community engagement at multiple levels. Holistic programs not only address immediate physical or social concerns but also aim to engage beneficiaries' deepest spiritual needs. Such holistic approaches can only be effective if strong levels of trust have been formed over time and FBDOs are not afraid to utilize their spiritual capital wisely. In dealing with international donors, FBDOs need to be aware of the challenges they face. The possibility of instrumentalization cannot be underestimated. In working with international donors, FBDOs need to prove themselves and achieve greater transparency of programs by using donor conform monitoring and evaluation tools. Fear of proselytism is the most distinctive donor reservation in working together with FBDOs. It is important that FBDOs maintain a clear spiritual identity without, however, imposing their views on others. FBDOs are best seen as "brokers of development" in the sense of "intermediaries" who take advantage of and play a key role in their position at the interface between the religion–development–humanitarian domain. As brokers of development, they are deeply rooted in and intimately familiar with the needs of local communities while at the same time mastering donor engagement with its specific requirements and demands (Tomlin, 2020. pp. 332-333). FBDOs can navigate between faith and secular spaces (King, 2019, p. 155) and switch between public and local faith community engagement (Tomalin et al., 2020. p. 169). Their challenge is to establish a "right-sized, contextualized faith as they work effectively with international donors.

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Matthias Hoehne

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