

Faith and development: The role of local religious organization in community change in Papua

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Abstract. Religious organizations have an important role in development aid. For a long time, this role was not acknowledged by the main players in the development arena, but this has changed over the last few decades. Yet, this role is not without tensions, as in particular western donors hold secular perspectives on development and find it hard to deal with organizations that want to provide help as well as spread their religion. In this study, I review the literature on faith-based organizations (FBOs) and present a case-study of how churches in rural areas of Indonesia's Papua province fulfill key roles in local development. To come to a fruitful cooperation between large development organizations and such indigenous churches, an important condition is that the role of religion in daily life of these Papuans needs to be acknowledged.

1 Introduction

In 1998, the World Bank's president James Wolfensohn started the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) as an independent think-tank and established a 'Directorate on Faith' within the World Bank. Both initiatives targeted to facilitate the cooperation between development donors such as the World Bank and faith-based organizations (FBOs). Soon, these initiatives received broad criticism, as many were afraid this would blur the boundaries between church and state [1]. Despite these criticisms, the World Bank has initiated – or exemplified – a trend towards involving FBOs more in the development agenda. At the same time, the criticism around the role of FBOs remains the same: blurring church-state boundaries, only linked to one faith-group, evangelism, et cetera. In this study, I will first review the role of faith-based organizations in local development and next present a case study of how churches help in developing local communities the Papua province in Indonesia.

2 Development aid and religion

For a long time, FBOs did not get much attention in development aid policies and studies. The main opinion was that development aid policy should focus on economic aspects:

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development is about improving the economic situation of the poor [2]. Thus, most attention was focused on government policy, improving market circumstances, and providing help in the material aspects of life. In this set of factors, religion was supposed not to play a role, or if any, a detrimental one. The background of these opinions is often formed by the secularization thesis: through economic development religion will become less important in countries where religion still plays an important role. Also governments that focus on the macro-level of other governments have not factored in the role of religion and FBOs. Moreover, *non-governmental organizations* (NGO's), even those who work at the micro-level of individuals and communities, tend to neglect FBOs [2,3]. This is not only due to the fact that religious organizations were deemed less important; the lack of attention to FBOs is also influenced by the low-profile presence of many FBOs, which are not very visible because they work very much locally [4].

Over the last few decades the attention to FBOs has increased. G. Glarke states that this change could be attributed to the increased religion in the US, especially since the Reagan administration [5]. In particular after the year 2000, the efforts of FBOs in development aid have received more attention. Big donors like the World Bank have influenced this movement, as they started to recognize that religious organizations are important to reduce poverty in multiple countries [1,3,6]. In fact, many FBOs who were active in developing countries liked the increased attention as it often gave them more means to run their programs. Another factor was the Jubilee-campaign in 2000, which advocated a shift toward more attention for the role of FBOs in development aid. Moreover, more and more people acknowledge that religion is not disappearing from the scene when the world moves forward and becomes more modern. For about 84% of the world population religion is important for their daily lives and this percentage is not decreasing [7].

2.1 Faith-based organizations (FBOs)

FBOs are important in many countries. Not only in developing countries, but also in the Western world. About 20% of all programs to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic is ran by FBOs [8]. Some even mention that about 30% up to 70% of all aid is delivered by FBOs, although these numbers cannot be confirmed with certainty [8,9].

The term *faith-based organizations* (FBOs) refers to a broad group of organizations, ranging from mainstream churches, mosques, and temples to religion-based terror organizations like Islamic State (G. Clarke, 2006). In the center of this spectrum are for example foundations that deliver development aid from a religious inspiration, such as Oxfam Novib. In some cases, this religious origin has been backgrounded and is not really important anymore. Attempts to develop useful typologies for FBOs have first and foremost raised the question whether, if at all, it is possible to develop such a comprehensive typology. Some even state that it is impossible to really differentiate FBOs from organizations in which faith does not have an important role. Such authors rather want to differentiate between locally-embedded versus not-locally embedded organizations [e.g., 10]—if at the local level religion is important, then religion will also be important in the organizations that are locally embedded. Others have proposed to rather look into the extent to which religion influences the activities conducted by organizations, instead of focusing on the level of religiosity of the organization itself [10,11]. For this study, the details of this debate are less relevant, and I therefore include studies about organizations that consider themselves as religious or based on religious inspiration.

2.2 Advantages of aid through FBOs

The current discourse on development aid includes academics and policy makers who are in favor of the role of FBOs, as well as those who are (very) critical. In between those groups are multiple researchers who point at the fact that many claims lack sufficient rigorous evidence from studies that include control groups, and as a consequence it is really hard to assess the true impact of FBOs and compare them to secular or neutral aid providers [8,12]. Yet, in general—even sometimes without support—researchers mention a number of advantages and criticisms. First, I will present a number of often-mentioned advantages of FBOs, and subsequently I turn to the critique.

2.2.1 Higher levels of motivation

The Abrahamic religions (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, Islam) prescribe explicit duties to help the poor and the vulnerable. Islam has the *zakat*-duty—as one of the five pillars of its belief-system—to give alms to the poor, which is often defined as the duty to give at least 2,5% of one's income. The Bible prescribes that someone should give tenths to God and others, on top of help in all sorts of situations. Judaism describes *tzedakah*, which refers to the duty to establish justice to prepare *shalom* by providing a good life for those who cannot provide that themselves. It is often assumed that aid inspired by such religions gives a strong motivation to help others and that such a motivation results in higher levels of commitment compared to people who do not have such a religious-inspired motivation [13].

2.2.2 Providing aid at the right place

Especially in fragile states, without a properly functioning government system, many organizations face severe difficulties to provide aid at the right place [14]. In contrast, churches and other religious organizations often have a strong infrastructure, especially at the grassroots level, which is typically ran by volunteers so that also the costs are low. For instance, in Papua New Guinee (PNG), a country with severe poverty and poorly functioning government services, Australian Aid started in 2004 to collaborate with local churches which jointly involve 99% of the total population and which have a presence all over the country [15]. Before that time, Australian Aid only collaborated with the government or tried to find other channels, but results were very limited. Eventually, through the collaboration with churches, which are in fact responsible for a large share of education- and healthcare services in the country, AusAid was able to get better results and therefore decided to continue collaborating [15].

Of course, such results depend on the context and on whether FBOs indeed have a strong local embeddedness. For instance, if a certain area has a large share of Muslim-believers, it could be helpful to reach this area via Muslim-FBOs. This could still be the case if a marginalized focal group (e.g., refugees) consists of believers of one religion. Yet, if the focal group is not homogeneous in terms of religious beliefs, it could be that the religious identify of an FBO does not bring advantages in the form of a strong local network and may in fact be disadvantageous.

2.2.3 Large networks and good ability to raise funds and mobilize volunteers

Many FBOs have a large network, even up to high levels in the government and society [16]. For instance, FBOs which are connected to the Roman-Catholic church have often networks in the highest levels of the government, through their connections in the Vatican or because of Roman-Catholic members of the government. Such networks facilitate raising funds, but

also smoothen the search for volunteers and in-kind contributions that help to provide aid [16].

2.2.4 High levels of satisfaction by the receivers of aid

Many claim positive results of providing aid through FBOs, but there is little rigorous evidence for these claims. Yet, there is clear evidence that the receivers of aid are more satisfied by aid provided through FBOs than those who received aid from non-faith-based organizations, such as through government clinics [8].

2.3 Critique on providing aid through FBOs

Critiques of FBOs often refer to proselytizing by FBOs, the concern that FBOs focus on their own religious group only, that it would be more expensive to provide aid through FBOs, and that FBOs have other principles around death and life.

2.3.1 Proselytizing

The most important critique, in particular regarding Christian and Muslim organizations, is that one of their main goals is to convert others to their faith [13,17]. Sometimes, such proselytizing is related to a lack of respect for and understanding of local cultures; in particular evangelical missionary movements are critiques for this behavior [13]. At the same time, a certain level of proselytizing is one of the key elements of a missionary religion, and thus it is not surprising that FBOs who are related to those religions also engage in proselytizing. Estimates show that there are about 400.000 missionaries worldwide (people who do not work in their home countries) who often also engage in providing aid [11], so neglecting organizations that engage in some form of proselytizing excludes a relevant share of aid-providing organizations. In fact, also secular organizations are sometimes accused of some form of proselytizing as they prefer that their counterparts are secular or become secular [11].

2.3.2 Serving their own faith only

Another concern, which is in fact opposed to the outreach and proselytizing of FBOs, is that that FBOs would favor serving members of their own faith. Yet, there is little evidence backing this concern, as studies show for instance that even people from different faiths opt to go to church clinics because of their quality [8].

2.3.3 More expensive and less organized

Because FBOs do not use government funds, or only to a limited extent, they might need to collect more money from those who receive their aid. Therefore, it is often assumed that FBOs are more expensive, at least for those who receive their aid. Yet, evidence is scarce in this respect [8]. It is also unclear if the total amount of expenses is higher than in other organizations. Part of the problem is that FBOs are less accountable than other (semi-)public organizations, partly because there is less pressure to be transparent as they do not use public funds. FBOs often collaborate with many volunteers, who often have less training and also feel to a lesser extent responsible to be accountable toward external donors when compared to paid employees. As a result, the accountability and quality of the organization is less developed compared to professional organizations [16].

2.3.4 Different opinions regarding illness, life and death

In particular in healthcare, some FBOs differ significantly from other (secular) organizations and donors when it comes to how to deal with illness, life and death [18]. An often-mentioned example is how the Roman-Catholic church does not want to distribute condoms as a strategy to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Most FBOs also do not want to provide abortion as a service to women who do not want being pregnant. Moreover, some FBOs have strong opinions about immunization and they do commonly also not want to provide euthanasia [18]. Such opinions, even though the communities where these FBOs operate often share these opinions, can be an obstacle in the collaboration of secular and faith-based organizations.

3 Tensions or fruitful collaboration? The church- and community mobilization case

FBOs have an important role in development aid—even though this role is only recently recognized by other partners in the field. Especially in *fragile states*, countries with governments that largely fail to deliver reasonable quality healthcare and education services, FBOs have crucial advantages. As an illustration, I turn to a project, ran by a couple of churches in the highlands of Indonesia’s Papua province.

3.1 Setting and data collection

The Papua province, and in particular the remote highland regions, is characterized by rugged terrain and isolated villages without access by road. Although officially almost every village has a health center and a school, in practice most of them are not functioning. Health workers and teachers only appear now and then and absenteeism is one of the biggest problems in running these services [19,20]. Government representatives tend to reside in the cities, where the money is being distributed, rather than in the villages they represent. As a result, government programs often do not reach the people where they were designed for [21]. In this context, organizations that work through church networks might get closer to help with the real needs, especially in the rural and remote villages.

In 2015, Yapelin, a foundation linked to the Gereja Injili Di Indonesia (GIDI) adopted a program called Church and Community Mobilization (CCM). As the GIDI church is one of the largest churches in Papua (claiming to have more than 1 million members all over Papua and also at other islands of Indonesia), this program might have a serious impact on the communities in Papua. CCM programs have ran and are still running all over the world and predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa. The goal of a CCM program is to strengthen the churches to be a catalyst of positive change in their communities, by unlocking potential and creating hope in the lives of individuals, families and communities. In the context of Papua, Yapelin noted that communities experience poor self-esteem, lack of identity, broken families and extreme social pressures, and therefore initiated a pilot of a CCM program to help communities find potential solutions. The CCM program being used by Yapelin is based on the so-called Umoja-methodology [22,23]. The program provides training for facilitators or teams of facilitators in each of the involved local congregations (often using tribal languages). Next, these facilitators work through regular sessions (often every week or biweekly) in their congregations. These sessions consist of Bible studies focused on giving direction and inspiration for understanding the goals and mission of the congregations, as well as activities aimed at creating a shared vision, common understanding of the situation, and ultimately the creation of action plans to improve the given situation. As the level of education and experience with training was low, the trainers from Yapelin decided to train

step-by-step instead of providing the entire manual. The material for each of the steps was adjusted based on the experience of previous steps.

In this study, I focus on the key mechanisms of the CCM method as a FBO program. Existing evaluations of CCM-methods describe mainly the key outcomes of CCM such as positive change for individuals and increase of community well-being [e.g., 24] or present key factors for CCM processes such as the use of local resources, the role of the facilitators, and good cooperation between the church, government and local community [e.g., 25]. Yet, there is a need to understand the process and underlying mechanisms of CCM methods [24]. Therefore, this study aims to identify and evaluate the mechanisms of this FBO training program. Such mechanisms explain why a certain outcome is produced in a particular context [e.g., 26,27].

The author has been involved in the CCM pilot in Yapelin since the very start in 2015 up to the time of writing this article in Oktober 2017, and in this role he was able to collect data from participants in the programs in Papua. He participated in the programs which were running in two districts, namely the Korupun district (11 congregations) and the Holuwon district (15 congregations). Besides that, he was involved in starting the same process with three congregations in the town of Wamena. The program is supposed to take about two to three years, before the entire cycle of trainings would be finished. Difficulties in logistics, however, have caused some delays and the training is at this moment maybe halfway in some of the villages or just started in other villages. The main source of data were notes taken during sessions, based on first-hand participatory observations. Besides that, the results presented by the participants of the training sessions (e.g., presentations of Bible studies, surveys et cetera) were included as data for this study.

3.2 Key mechanisms

Four key mechanisms were identified from the observational data, predominantly drawing on observations during the trainings in the Korupun and Holuwon districts, as the process in Wamena ended after the second meeting due to the fact that it was difficult to get sufficient commitment from the leadership of these churches the training sessions.

3.2.1 Joint sensemaking of the situation

The CCM method includes frequent sessions in which church and community members share their understanding of the current situation, for instance by making a problem tree, depicting the history of their congregation and community, or relating their current situation to the situation of the first Christian as reported in the Bible (Acts 5). Through making an inventory together of issues in the local church and community, and sharing these issues with each other, people start to engage in joint sensemaking of the current situation. For instance, in Korupun, one congregation reported the following list of issues: 1) some members are not active in coming to church; 2) the preacher does not regularly visit members who are ill or it is difficult for him as some members are living quite far away in the forest; 3) some members are not active in attending the afternoon service; 4) multiple young people go the cities to study, but never come back and sometimes they live in ways that are not good (drinking, free sex), 5) as we don't have many music instruments the young people do not want to come to the church services; 6) some (young) people are so poor that they cannot financially contribute and as a result they have a lack of self-esteem and do not want to gather in public meetings anymore.

As soon as the church and community members started to understand these issues together, actions to solve such issues emerged less or more automatically and people started to see their responsibility and possibilities for changing the situation. For instance, in

Korupun they noted that one of their biggest issues was that young people (highschool age) live in the cities without proper supervision by their parents or other family members. There are in fact a few dorms, but there is nobody involved in supervision in those dorms. As people saw that most people shared this concern, they quickly came to the conclusion that it would be quite easy to establish a small home in the dorm where one or a few of the elder villagers could live and thus have an eye on the youth living in the dorm.

3.2.2 Inclusion: men and women, youth

The second mechanism through which the CCM program establishes profound change in the community is through inclusion of all different groups. A pastor from the 'El Shaddai' congregation in Korupun: "Previously, we were mainly focused on the activities of the pastor and the other groups in the congregation did not have so much a key role. Now we involve all groups in the church activities, we for example we now even have a schedule for the Sunday service in which the youth groups, the women's groups, the man's groups get their own tasks, for instance for praying, leading the music et cetera." The society in the villages still can be characterized by a separation of activities and lives of men and women. In the past, and to some extent still up to this day, men and women resided in different huts and the tasks of men and women were clearly delineated. Yet, to face the challenges for these traditional societies, collaboration between men and women, and also between young and older people is important. The CCM training sessions deliberately involved people from the church leadership, as well as the youth and women groups, who jointly run the different activities in CCM. As a result, this program appears to unleash some of the potential that resides in collaboration by these different groups. As one pastor remarked: "I felt I had to do everything myself, but now I see that many others share the same concerns."

3.2.3 Realizing own potential

The CCM method triggers the communities to think about the use of their own resources. The communities that were included in this study felt they had become too much dependent on the government, which provides large sums of slush money (block grants) for the villages through programs such as PROSPEK as well as regular "village-money". As someone remarked: "If something is broken, we try to send a proposal to the government, rather than trying to fix it ourselves." In Korupun, the inefficiency of the government programs, however, is clearly visible as the government-built health facilities are all empty and have never been used. One of the side-effects of the government facilitated "money-season", as some villagers call the bi-annual village fund schemes, is that everything now costs money, as participants in Holuwon remarked. "In the past, we used to give things and get things for free. Now, people only want us to pay for everything." Yet, through discussing these issues, and by focusing on their own resources, the people participating in CCM started to realize that they have huge potential in their villages. There are people who can build new bridges when one breaks down, there are people who are trained to provide basic healthcare, et cetera. Even without salaries and other payments, activities can be done to improve life in the village.

3.2.4 Collaborative planning for action

The fourth key mechanism is that CCM enables joint planning for action. As soon as communities jointly realize their problems, and see their joint potential, the solutions kind of automatically start to emerge. Therefore, the last step in the CCM process is joint planning for action. In the two villages that were studied, this final step is not yet reached; yet in the

informal discussions along the process people already have undertaken joint actions (such as building a house for a supervisor in the Korupun dorm) that show the power of collaborative planning.

3.3 Contextual conditions for these mechanisms

Mechanisms describe how a certain effect is produced in a particular context [27,28], therefore it is important to describe the context of the mechanisms that were identified. First, one of the conditions is that these villages are isolated and form relatively traditional societies. The pilot project in the city of Wamena (approximately beyond 200.000 inhabitants) was not successful as church leaders as well as representatives of the different groups in the church and community were busy with many different things and not sufficiently committed to invest a few days every month for the training. Two training-sessions were run and during these sessions there was almost no continuity in terms of who attended the trainings, which makes it hard to facilitate an ongoing process (which would in the end take more than two years). Therefore, it was decided to abort the trainings in the city and focus on the villages, at least temporarily. In the villages, there are (almost) no competing activities, which makes it easier for people to commit their time to the CCM process.

A second important condition is that the village communities are relatively homogeneous. The villages consist of members of the same tribe and have only one church denomination. Sometimes, a few others live temporarily in the village, but they often do not really engage in the social village life and activities. In less homogeneous villages, especially with people from different faiths, the collaboration facilitated solely by church meetings would probably exclude those of different faiths.

4 Discussion and conclusion

This study reviewed the literature on FBOs and described the advantages and disadvantages of involving FBOs in development aid. Subsequently, the case of CCM was presented, to identify the underlying process mechanisms as well as to relate this case to the advantages and disadvantages as presented in the literature. Table 1 summarizes the findings from the literature review and relates the advantages and disadvantages to the CCM case.

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of FBOs

Advantage/disadvantage	Body of evidence	Presence in the CCM case
Advantages		
Higher levels of motivation.	Supported by evidence.	Cannot be compared to other organization, except for the government. In the latter case the church performs better.
Providing aid at the right place.	Supported by evidence.	The church – and church-related organizations – are the only aid actors in the villages.
Large networks and good ability to raise funds and mobilize volunteers.	Supported by evidence.	Networks seem to be limited, maybe due to the isolated village setting. Sufficient volunteers.

High levels of satisfaction by the receivers of aid.	Supported by evidence.	Levels of satisfaction with the CCM program are high so far.
Disadvantages		
Proselytizing	Supported by evidence.	Not relevant, as (almost) the entire village is already belonging to the GIDI church.
Serving their own faith only.	Not supported by evidence.	Not applicable as the entire village belongs to the same faith.
More expensive and less organized.	Scarcely supported by evidence.	Compared to government programs, the CCM program is definitely less expensive.
Different opinions regarding illness, live and death.	Supported by evidence.	Not applicable as the local community, the CCM team as well as the CCM donors (Tear Australia and Tear Netherlands) share the same opinions regarding these matters.

In sum, this study illustrates the relevance and potential of involving FBOs in development in Papua, especially as the government infrastructure in rural areas is not functioning. Also in cities it might be the case that church networks are stronger and more cost-effective (less corruption involved), although also many churches have become quite entangled with government and politics which increases the risk that the management problems of the local government are also transferred to the churches. Regarding the CCM case, follow-up research is needed to follow the remaining process steps and to related the mechanisms to the outcomes of the process. Besides that, it is necessary to search for comparable cases, in particular cases in which multiple faith groups are present, to be able to further assess some of the disadvantages of FBOs.

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