

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development/PaRD

A Global and Inclusive Partnership to Harness the Positive Impact of Religion in Development and Humanitarian Assistance

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Background

Religion has become a hot topic of our daily news: Conflicts and crises around the world often have a religious component to them and frequently religion is made responsible for instability and violence – the Islamic State and its hijacking of a religion in its very name serves as one devastating example. Indeed, research undertaken by the Pew Research Center suggests that roughly one third of 198 observed countries experienced some kind of hostility in which religious motivations play a role.¹ Myanmar, Iraq, Syria, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Kenya or South Sudan are some of the countries in which religion influences conflicts and their dynamics.

However, the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) estimates that only 14 percent of all current conflicts in the world are significantly caused by religious factors² and,

¹ Pew Research Center, *Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High* (Washington, D.C., 2014), <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/>.

² Institute for Economics and Peace, *Five Key Questions Answered on the Link between Peace and Religion: A Global Statistical Analysis on the Empirical Link between Peace And Religion* (Sydney: IEP, 2014), <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Peace-and-Religion-Report.pdf>.

according to the international Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a multitude of factors such as social injustice, economic disparity, and corruption are to be seen as significant drivers of conflicts alongside tensions between ethnic or religious groups.³ Most often, it is impossible to single out just one of these factors and the causes of a given conflict remain a complex phenomenon,⁴ even in situations marked by self-proclaimed religious conflict parties. Equally to denying religion's role in many conflicts, it would be wrong to name religion as the one and only significant source of conflict in our times.

Without question, we acknowledge the negative role religion *can* play in development. But at the same time, we want to highlight religiously motivated actors as positive forces towards sustainable development. Subsequently, we introduce the reader to the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD). The partnership's goal is to further and institutionalize dialogue and cooperation between secular and religious organizations (ROs)⁵ active in development and humanitarian assistance, and to harness the positive impact of religion in these fields.

Deneulin and Rakodi emphasize the complex role religion plays in development and demand that development researchers, practitioners and policy makers “must recognise that religion is dynamic and heterogeneous.”⁶ In their study, they name three main trends that have brought religion to the forefront of attention in development policy. One of these trends is the rise of “political Islam” and its role as a source of conflict. Religion in this perspective is clearly detrimental to development. However, the scope of this article is not to reflect on this perspective further. The second trend named by Deneulin and Rakodi is the realization in research and public policy that religion has remained as a significant societal force shaping public life and individual identities around the world. Indeed, more than 80 percent of the global population affiliates with a religion, and religious values and leaders influence the thoughts and actions of billions

³ OECD, *Aspekte der Fragilität 2015: Lassen sich die Ambitionen der Post-2015 Agenda erfüllen?* (Paris: 2015), http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/aspekte-der-fragilitat-2015_9789264234345-de.

⁴ David Keen, *Complex Emergencies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

⁵ PaRD uses the terminology “religious organization” in place of other commonly used terminologies (FBO/FIO/etc.), as its scope is wider and includes religions who themselves do not identify with the terminology “faith.” A religious organization (RO) is understood as a registered non-profit organization or initiative whose mission and activities in the field of development and/or humanitarian assistance are explicitly inspired by religion and a peaceful and impartial approach.

⁶ Séverine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi, “Religion and the Transformation of Development Studies: Re-Assessing the Relationship between Religion and Development,” *World Development* 39:1 (2011), 45-54, at 48.

of people.⁷ Huge variations between countries exist, but this share tends to be higher in poorer nations than in those with higher incomes.⁸ The wide acknowledgment of these two perspectives in public discourse, research, and policy has turned growing attention to the role of religion over the past years.

A third trend is identified in the role of ROs as providers of essential services, in particular in developing and fragile countries. The tremendous significance that ROs have in many regions has been attributed at least in part to the “pressure to downsize the state in the 1980s [which] led to renewed reliance on non-state providers in service delivery.”⁹ In contrast to the aforementioned trends, this positive role of religion in development has received less attention and the need for more research remains. While studies on ROs’ contribution to sustainable development are rare, the available data indicates their high significance. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates a minimum of 40 percent of health services in Sub-Saharan Africa are delivered by ROs. The tremendous role of ROs becomes even more apparent in the field of humanitarian assistance: In 2013, roughly 420 million USD were spent by ROs on humanitarian assistance. Around 15-17 percent of all international funds for humanitarian aid were allocated to and implemented by ROs, while 11-16 percent of all NGOs registered with United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) have a religious origin or background.¹⁰ Furthermore, on an individual level, religion plays an important role in the lives of those affected by emergencies as their own individual religious beliefs and practices provide them with coping mechanisms in times of need.¹¹ Moreover, ROs often offer “safe spaces” for victims of humanitarian emergencies and refuge from being judged or marginalized.¹² As indicated by several inputs at the World Humanitarian Summit and events during the 2016 United Nations General

⁷ Pew Research Center, *The Global Religious Landscape* (Washington, D.C., 2012), <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/Fact>.

⁸ Steve Crabtree and Brett Pelham, *Religion Provides Emotional Boost to World's Poor*, Gallup, 6 March 2009, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116449/religion-provides-emotional-boost-world-poor.aspx>.

⁹ Deneulin and Rakodi, “Religion and the Transformation,” 48.

¹⁰ Chloe Stirk, *An Act of Faith: Humanitarian Financing and Zakat* (Global Humanitarian Assistance: A Development Initiative, March 2015), http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ONLINE-Zakat_report_V9a.pdf.

¹¹ Stefano Lass and Daniele Mugnaini, “Role of Religion and Spirituality on Mental Health and Resilience,” *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience* 17:3 (2015), 661–63.

¹² Christine Godall, *Shouting towards the Sky: The Role of Religious Individuals, Communities, Organisations and Institutions in Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, New Issues in Refugee Research, Research Paper No. 275 (UNHCR, 2015), <http://www.unhcr.org/554764b49.pdf>.

Assembly, ROs respond immediately to emergencies and turn churches into hospitals, mosques into kitchens, and temples into first aid centres.

The above numbers show that many ROs and secular actors, such as bi- and multilateral development agencies, already cooperate extensively. Their cooperation is owed to their shared vision on sustainable development, most recently agreed upon in the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 17 expresses the need to “revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” and calls upon “governments, the private sector and civil society” to build “inclusive partnerships . . . upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place people and the planet at the centre.”¹³ Clearly and openly, the SDGs encourage all actors identifying with them to work together to realize their shared goal.

Framework of PaRD

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development was established on the basis of the 2030 Agenda in February 2016 at the Berlin conference “Partners for Change – Religions and the 2030 Agenda.” Its members and partners believe it is crucial to include the positive potential of the world’s religious communities to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Membership in PaRD is open to bilateral donors and multilateral development agencies as well as intergovernmental programmes active in the field of religion and development or humanitarian assistance.¹⁴ Partners of PaRD are civil society and non-governmental organizations such as ROs, secular NGOs, community initiatives, foundations, academic institutions, and other relevant development organizations – secular and religious alike. Through active participation in PaRD and by contributing

¹³ Sustainable Development Goal 17: “Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development,” see <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/globalpartnerships/>.

¹⁴ As of November 2016 the 16 Members of PaRD are the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (AU ECOSOC), the Global Fund (GFATM), the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (UNOGPRP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), the World Bank, and the World Food Programme (WFP).

their knowledge and insights in various ways, members and partners shape the discourse on religion and development on a global stage and on a country level. They are unified by their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and aim to better understand each other's genuine approach to development and to improve their own work through mutual exchange. To that end, PaRD's goal is to further and institutionalize dialogue and cooperation between secular development actors and ROs active in development and humanitarian assistance.

In addition to the commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, PaRD's members and partners further identify with a set of guiding principles, which define the ways and means of their interaction within PaRD. Most prominently among these are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its emphasis on the equality of all human beings. Members and partners agree to leave no one behind and pay close attention to being inclusive and diverse in such aspects as regional, religious, and gender representation. PaRD fosters new and increased cooperation between its members and partners. In addition, the partnership uses synergies with existing networks and initiatives to contribute toward a more coherent and effective international agenda on religion and development serving to achieve the SDGs.

In their joint work, members and partners focus on joint activities in the following areas of cooperation:

- knowledge sharing and learning exchange
- networking and dialogue
- capacity-building
- policy advice
- monitoring, reviewing and joint learning

Members and partners agree to reciprocity by each contributing their own expertise in order to exchange ideas and learn from each other. Contributors do not cease to be owners of their intellectual property. It is crucial that governance structure and decision making procedures of all members, partners, and the partnership itself are transparent and that review mechanisms are in place for regular and critical assessment of one's own work. Last but not least, the dedication to building bridges and new partnerships is vital for the success of PaRD.

Themes and Cooperation between Members and Partners

PaRD is relatively young and has only been operational since February 2016. Being a partnership, processes to set an agenda and define how members and partners

cooperate with each other are structured as an open discourse and take their time. However, the past months have produced significant results both defining the upcoming agenda and the way in which this agenda will be pursued. So far, PaRD's members and partners have chosen to focus on three thematic areas: "Religion, Peace and Security"; "Women of Faith"; and "Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights." These focal areas emerged from the dialogue between members and partners, who identify the greatest need for cooperation and the greatest possibility for joint success in these areas, while sharing a long-standing history of engagement with them both in terms of their own activity and cooperating with each other.

Within PaRD, members and partners not only share knowledge and experiences. Their unique position within development cooperation is also complementary. Partners from across the globe often work closely within their local communities but lack access to the international stage of policy formation. Members, on the other hand, frequently desire a more direct connection to their beneficiaries while being present on the global political stage. In this sense, members and partners are in a strong position to cooperate and bridge these gaps. The objective of PaRD is to encourage knowledge exchange and facilitate open dialogue between actors, who until now have been largely working *in silos* from one another. Through cooperation, two huge potentials may be unlocked at once: implementing the 2030 Agenda on a local level close to the community, and at the same time being present, visible, and heard in international processes.

The World Humanitarian Summit of May 2016 is an example of effective inclusion of religious actors into the international discourse on humanitarian assistance and relief efforts through events co-convened by members and partners of PaRD. A Special Session titled "Religious Engagement" convened by the United Nations Interagency Task Force (UNIATF) on Religion and Development featured religious actors from across the globe and of different faiths alongside policy makers and secular humanitarian actors. More than 250 representatives of humanitarian organizations and ROs gathered at the special session and were addressed by speakers including His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, Cardinal Antonio Tagle, and Dr Hany El-Banna from the side of ROs, as well as Gerd Müller, German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Anne Richards from the US Department of State.

The special session was successful in securing concrete commitments from religious leaders and other humanitarian actors to increase the efforts of faith-based actors in reducing humanitarian need and suffering. Simultaneously, the event highlighted the importance

of including religious actors within policy and decision-making efforts at all levels of the humanitarian response. In an unprecedented display of solidarity, major faith-based and humanitarian actors committed unanimously to the principles of compassion, humanity, and impartiality in providing humanitarian assistance, preventing and resolving conflicts regardless of religious components. Most notably, the value of faith and religion as a source of resilience for communities and individuals was highlighted as a crucial contribution to sustainable solutions to humanitarian crises. Thus, the event not only highlighted that ROs already engage in sustainable, impartial humanitarian relief and peacebuilding efforts, but also emphasized their efforts to be in line with the SDGs. At the same time, the genuine perspectives of ROs were prominently recognized on a global political stage, highlighting their complimentary approach to humanitarian assistance provided by secular actors and states. The event demonstrates one way in which PaRD provides its members and partners with ways to build new partnerships in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda.

When facilitating the building of such new partnerships, PaRD emphasizes the value of open collaboration and contribution. Once more, this was practised at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016, where members and partners of PaRD participated in a variety of side events and discussions, including the side event “Bearing Witness: Combatting Human Trafficking and Forced Migration.” PaRD co-convened this event in cooperation with UNIATF, the World Council of Churches, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, the Governments of Italy, Norway and Spain, and the Institute for Strategic Studies and Democracy of Malta. The diverse list of convenors sheds a light on the multitude of actors attending “Bearing Witness,” including concerned Member States, UN agencies, civil society from around the world, and ROs. The side event focused on the phenomena of forced migration and how they can be aggravated by human trafficking and accompanying human rights abuses. Also during the United Nations General Assembly, another session entitled “Keeping the Faith” explored the role of FBO’s in responding to these complex issues. Representatives from civil society such as Ms Hajar al-Kaddo from the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations were able to directly engage with representatives of PaRD members, resulting in a diverse range of insights in an inclusive discussion. At both events, the shared agreement was reached that due to the significant role religion plays in the countries of origin, the religious dimensions of forced migration must also be recognized in receiving countries in order to provide durable and sustainable solutions to this complex emergency.

Looking Ahead

These events exemplify how PaRD members and partners use their unique knowledge and convening powers to create joint initiatives to further and shape the ongoing debates in development and humanitarian assistance. Given PaRD's short time of existence and the long-standing secondary role of ROs in international development policy, these can be seen as remarkable results owed to the commitment of members and partners alike to further each other's work. In the future, PaRD wishes to continue in this way while scaling and furthering cooperation on different levels.

First and foremost, PaRD should not be seen as an organization in itself but a partnership driven by its members and partners to establish a matchmaking mechanism for all those involved in the field of religion and development. Therefore, members and partners determine on their own how they will cooperate and what kind of activities they plan to undertake. Over the past months, the "Women of Faith" initiative has been pursued intensively within the partnership. This initiative is envisioned to build a network among religious actors and faith-inspired individuals engaged in gender equality – within their own denomination and beyond. By providing the infrastructure to plan joint activities, PaRD is capable of amplifying these voices and making them heard on a global stage. It is the clear objective of PaRD's members to establish this platform until the end of 2016 and to make it an operational platform for the exchange of ideas and planning of activities on gender equality and the role religion can play in achieving it. The unique characteristic of this platform is the balance between bilateral, multilateral, and civil society actors engaged in open discussion, each learning from one another and profiting from their distinct approaches to development.

Another initiative in the field of capacity development is to conceptualize and conduct joint learning modules furthering the understanding of both secular and religious actors of religion as a complex social phenomenon having significant impact on sustainable development. As a first product of this initiative, a strategic learning exchange titled "Engaging with Faith Organizations and Communities for Sustainable Development" will be convened by the UNSSC Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development and the PaRD secretariat from November 15th-17th in Bonn, Germany. Its main goal is to increase religious literacy in development organizations as well as knowledge about the 2030 Agenda in ROs. Through increased understanding of the linkages between faith, development, and humanitarian work in the context of the 2030 Agenda, attendants are put in the position to identify and articulate opportunities, challenges, and modalities for partnerships with religious communities in development and humanitarian

assistance. Through critically assessing current development/humanitarian agencies' partnerships with religious institutions and ROs, this exchange and other events of similar format will contribute crucially to PaRD's goal of harnessing the positive impact of religion in sustainable development and humanitarian assistance.

PaRD aspires to increase its community of members and partners in order to establish such initiatives in a multitude of thematic areas not limited to our current focal areas. PaRD's members and partners are supported by an international secretariat located in the offices of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in Bonn and Berlin, Germany. The PaRD homepage offers all interested organizations the opportunity to learn more about the partnership, contact the secretariat, and apply to become a partner.