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Paper by

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What role do faith-based values play in the development process and in wider social and economic change in developing countries?

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.” Desmond Tutu
Introduction

In this brief presentation, I'd like to make a few general points about the role of faith-based values in development processes:

1. In recent years there has been increasing focus on the role of religion or faith in development, often associated with the contribution that faith can make to improved development practice.

2. While it is important to focus on this contributory role, I am arguing here that if we are to understand the role that faith-based values play in development, we need to interrogate these values and processes, be they 'faith-based' or 'developmental' from the perspective of what they say about us, about others, about inclusion/exclusion and about our understanding of transformative change.

3. For me, faith-based values and 'development processes' are neither inherently 'good' or 'bad', it depends on how we interpret and practice them. It is my contention that faith-based values play diverse and often contradictory roles in development – they can be inspiring and frightening, positively transformative and destructive, inclusive and exclusive, open and fundamentalist.

Faith-Based Values in Development

In recent years there has been increasing consideration of the role of faith-based values or religion in development. In 2012 DFID published its 'Faith Partnership Principles – Working effectively with faith groups to fight global poverty”. The central tone of this set of principles is “the important contribution made by faith groups to international development” (2012, p.2). In 2006, Gerrie Ter Haar and Stephen Ellis wrote an award winning article for the European Journal of Development Research on the role of religion in development. There, they argued that one of the greatest surprises, especially in development circles, has been the “resilience of religion” (2006, p.1). Arguing that “religion, whatever form it takes, constitutes a social and political reality”, they cite numerous examples of “momentous political change in which religious forces and institutions have played a significant role” and highlight that “the potential role of religion as an agent of development... has not escaped some leading European donor institutions” (2006, p.2/3) including DFID, and the financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. Both of these publications identify a common discourse in the consideration of faith or religion in development – the contribution that faith or faith-based organisations can make to 'good development practice'. However, this is not the only dimension of the issue. In 2007, a Kimmage MA graduate, Niamh Brennan presented a paper at the Irish Aid conference in Galway entitled 'Faith: An Obstacle or an Element of Development?' In the paper, she explores.
how faith can be element of development when it is “‘anchored in the cultural norms and values of the affected society’ and that aspirations, beliefs and spirituality ‘needed to be recognised as a prerequisite for the success of development programmes’” (World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) 2001 in Brennan 2007, p.6). She also identifies faith as an obstacle of development when it has a hidden agenda of conversion, when it divides rather than unites or when it is viewed as spiritual purity in opposition to the material focus of development.

Both Ter Haar and Ellis and Brennan argue that there are significant commonalities between religion (or faith) and development. Ter Haar and Ellis (2006) review the historical associations between notions of development and the belief in progress (characteristic of mainstream notions of development) with the traditional Christian belief “in the prospect of a new and perfect world that will come into existence with the return of Christ to Earth” (2006, p.4). They go on to argue that development and religion (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and African Traditional Religions) “both contain a vision of an ideal world and of the place of humans therein” (ibid, p.5). Brennan and Ter Haar and Ellis identify a new-found interest in faith (or religion) in development circles with the move from traditional ‘mainstream’ development approaches to 'human development' where development cooperation emphasises relationships based on partnership, “‘solidarity and mutual respect’” (Commission for Africa, 2005, p.89 in Ter Haar and Ellis 2006, p.3).

Whether we focus on the similarities or the differences between development and faith-based values, or on how a recognition of the importance of faith can 'improve' development practice, for me, the key point here is that the link between faith and development have become 'hot topics' in development circles. In the last year, we at Kimmage Development Studies Centre have introduced a new specialism within our MA programme on Faith and Development - an indication of the interest in and importance of the area. In the light of this 'new' yet 'long-standing' interest, I am suggesting here that we need to interrogate the values faith and development, and to understand how faith-based values are shaping development practice in different ways, depending on how they are both interpreted and practiced.

**Understanding Development**

Let us now take a 'step back' to explore what we mean by 'development processes'. For many of us, the commonly held understanding of development is 'improvement' - development is about 'making things better'. A child's development is interpreted as 'a good thing' - passing through the stages of life, they mature, learn more, become an adolescent and an adult. We don't expect children to remain children all their lives - their development is seen as a natural process of growth and change, and adaptation to the physical, social and environmental factors affecting their lives. This notion of growth, adaptation and progress imbues many sub-consciously and consciously held understandings of development, be they social, political or economic development. It underpins most economistic and modernist perspectives of development which support
development arguments for economic growth, adaptation to the global economy, the need for foreign direct investment, a 'smart and flexible economy which can compete on the world stage', the building of infrastructure... that kind of thing. For years during the Celtic Tiger, development in Ireland was another word for building, more and bigger houses, hotels, roads, shopping centres. But that is not real development, I hear you say, or at least it's not development which is grounded in faith-based values...

And this view is shared by many development critics of this economistic, growth-led model of development. There are those who argue that it is precisely this kind of development which causes 'under-development' in many parts of the world (Frank 1969 and Cardoso 1982 in Peet with Hartwick 1999) - over-consumption and exploitation of trade relationships, of resources, of peoples vulnerable to corrupt governments and inequalities around the world. They clearly highlight how the wealth of some (mostly, though not all in the global North) has been created on the backs of the poor (the majority - most of whom live in the countries of the Global South). Of course these criticisms of capitlist, materialist and consumerist development are not new. They are, though, either increasingly modified - governments in the South (and Ireland) searching for ways of integrating into the global economy - or associated with radical movements like the 'Occupy Movement' (http://www.occupytogether.org/) or 'the World Social Forum' (http://www.fsm2013.org/en), which gain little mainstream media coverage when the World Economic Forum is the 'biggest show in town'. It seems to be a battle between the 'If you're not in, you can't win' and 'Another World is Possible' slogans and advocates, with the former winning out so far.

Criticisms of the inadequacy or injustice of global capitalist development are not the only criticisms of development, of course. Many have argued that this 'mainstream development' notion of progress and growth is not what development is at all. They see development as far more about meeting basic needs (Max Neef 1998), or rights (www.ohchr.org), or freedom (Sen 1999). Back in 1973, Schumacher published 'Small is Beautiful, A Guide to Economics as if People Mattered'. Anisur Rahman (1993) has suggested for years that development is about 'people's self-development', which, he argues, implies that development is about realising the creative potential of all, especially the most vulnerable. In multiple, often-localised, community initiatives, people all over the world have been trying to realise alternative forms of people-centred development to the 'mainstream' economic model. From Muhammad Yunus' Grameen bank (established in 1976) to the Pastoral Women's Council founded by Maanda Ngoitiko (a former participant at Kimmage), in Ngorongoro in Tanzania, people are choosing and living alternatives in the face of the powerful forces of mainstream thinking and choices. In the early 1990s, Tierry VerHelst argued that development practice needs to critically take account of culture and values and Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2001), another eminent development scholar, links 'alternative development' to the 'goals or the values of development'.

Increasingly development organisations all seem to be borrowing from these alternatives and using the language of people-centred development values - NGOs talk
about ‘empowerment’, ‘partnership’, ‘good governance’, ‘participation’. They seem to value something more, something different, something ‘other’ - at least some of them do, sometimes. At the launch of the recently published new policy for international development ‘One World, One Future’, the Táiniste Eamon Gilmore said: “this is about Irish values. We have never been a people who could look the other way, and the Irish people can be extremely proud of the difference that we make to the lives of millions of families who struggle to survive on less than €1.25 a day. Although times are difficult at home, we stand by the children struggling to reach their fifth birthday in a world where 7.5 million children die before this age every year. And we stand in solidarity with the subsistence farmer, whose crops have failed because of drought and whose family faces a perilous future. We do this because of our sense of justice and compassion, born of a history of famine, suppression and conflict. And we do it because it is the right thing to do in an increasingly inter-connected world” (http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/news-publications/press/pressreleasearchive/2013/may/irish-aid-launches-new-policy/). The fact that he goes on to talk about “supporting sustainable economic growth in our partner countries to assist them to exit from aid and to increase trade opportunities for Ireland” and “we will use our strong partnerships to identify trade opportunities and to stimulate mutually beneficial relationships. This will be good for the countries that we are working with. And it will be good for us”, raises some questions about the motivations of this new policy. So with the Irish values of solidarity go hand in hand with Irish interests for trade.

This mix of ‘alternative development values’, which sound great, and ‘self-interest’ development motivations create confusion and apparent contradictions in terms of what development is about. The challenge with alternative people-centred development language and values is that organisations use them differently, so much so, they have become, according to Cornwall (2010), fuzzy and meaningless. So how do we make sense of what development is when all sorts of different organisations and groups are using similar language but they are clearly not all meaning the same thing? This difficulty with the language or ‘values of development’ has led some to look more deeply at the processes and practices associated with development. If everyone is using ‘the nice words’ how can we really know what's going on?

Some (Escobar 1995, Esteva in Sachs 1993) would argue that the very notion of development is the problem because at its heart is a superiorist, ethnocentric and economistic notion of progress which assumes that development is what ‘we have in the global North’. We may tinker with the ways that development is realised, but fundamentally, working from our own assumptions that we have somehow 'got it', whatever ‘it’ is, we try to mould and shape the world according to our own image. Sounds far-fetched? Well, many people think so, but when we look at what's happening in Ireland these days with our desire to be the ‘good girls and boys of Europe’, to be IMF compliant, without question, we may need to think again about who sets the agenda, what the agenda is and why we are following it apparently unquestioningly. Is it that we don't really see an alternative to accepted notions of what development involves?

Despite the negativity of these perspectives, one could argue that there are many
governments, including Irish Aid, and NGOs and FBOs who are genuinely trying to make the world a better place for more people. For some, their focus is on emergency relief - meeting people's basic needs (e.g., GOAL); for others, development is about tackling poverty - helping people to adapt to climate change in their agricultural or pastoralist communities - or hunger (e.g., Concern), or promoting good governance and basic services; for others it's about justice and human rights - empowering communities through radical education programmes to tackle the injustices wrought on them by their own government, by MNCs, by the privatisation of water, the lack of movement on land rights, the destruction of forests, the injustice of debt - you name it (e.g., Trócaire, Action Aid, DDCI). For others, it's about care - care for the most vulnerable - doing 'the best they can in the face of immense odds'. These central values run through the heart of many development organisations, sometimes separately, sometimes together - meeting basic needs; human rights; tackling poverty; justice and the empowerment of communities.

But many of these values can be realised without challenging existing power relations and inequalities. It is possible to promote poverty reduction or to provide assistance to the poor, for example, without challenging the systems and actors which create poverty in the first place or to challenge development inequalities 'out there' without looking at policies 'here' which have a negative impact on poverty in the global South. In addition, the increased emphasis on management and business practices within the development field - the technical professionalisation of development, with its 'logical' and 'results based frameworks' - has led some to argue that the radical is gone from many of the so-called 'alternative approaches' within the new mainstream NGO sector. In recent years, the 'aid effectiveness' agenda has become central for many development organisations. “Aid effectiveness generally refers to how effective aid is in achieving expected outputs and stated objectives of aid interventions” (Kindornay and Morton, 2009). The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) explores effectiveness through five concepts: ownership, harmonisation, alignment, results and mutual accountability. That, and the role of NGOs as service-providers for state in international development has led many NGOs to walk a tight-rope between what they'd like to do and what they feel they can do. In the middle of all the talk about 'values', it is useful to remember Robert Chambers' question 'Whose Reality Counts?' (1997).

In recent times development in Ireland has become about 'survival within the global capitalist economy' - by all means possible not being seen to question the leaders of 'global development' as it is perceived - taxes imposed on ordinary people to pay back for bank debt in Ireland; cuts in public services and the potential sale of state assets to appease the European Central Bank, the IMF and the EU; concessions made to foreign companies to allow them to make as much profit here so they won't go to a 'cheaper economy'; cuts in the community and voluntary sector, in social welfare payments - all to ensure that we're with the 'in crowd' at European level. At a national level we have been told 'there is no alternative but to grin and bear it'. And this is the same catch cry that many peoples in the countries of the global South have heard from their governments for years. In the end, it always appears that those in power are never really challenged, that
the 99% bear the brunt of the imperatives of so-called ‘development’, and only expect to have their say on election day, and even then, it's a choiceless choice. So when we talk of development values and processes and actors, we need to think about what's happening here and there and everywhere. Granted, they are not all the same. They are not all bad but neither are they all good.

I think a key question is what is being done by development actors (NGOs, FBOs and CSOs, for example), to address these issues? Is it justifiable to focus on emergency relief only when it's clear that the causes of emergencies run much deeper? Is care sufficient when it tackles the symptoms and not the causes of problems? On the other hand, is advocacy enough when people need immediate assistance? Some people argue that there are a range of tools or roles available to development organisations and that each of them is equally valid. I'm not so sure about that, especially when many of them don't question the power relations which underlie inequality, or hold decision-makers to account, fearful often of a cut-off to their funding supply.

Similarly, we need to consider our commonly held understanding that development is about something 'out there', for 'the countries of the South'. Separating North and South, the local and the global in this way serves to reinforce a eurocentric, narrow construction of development which fails to take account of the same global processes at work ‘here’ and ‘there’ and ‘everywhere’. If we cannot understand the interconnections between what's happening in Ireland, whether it's about our relationship with oil companies or the IMF, we are failing to see development, underdevelopment and inequality in all its manifestations - we are back with the assumption that ‘development is what we do down there because we're already developed, thank you’. The same applies to government, which needs to question its motives and values when it comes to development. The connections between trade and development are long established among donor governments, with the OECD DAC praising the Irish government for years for its untied aid. If development is used as an avenue for trade, then what kind of development are we really talking about? When Chambers asked ‘whose reality counts?’, he was trying to ask us to examine inequalities in development relationships and the motives or values of development practitioners, with a view to challenging development practices which perpetuate rather than address injustice and inequality.

So it is clear that some development institutions, values and practices challenge existing inequalities and unjust power structures and others don't. Some are about the inclusion of the most marginalised in society and others are not. Some question their own role in supporting neo-colonial relationships of domination and others don't. The question is, where do faith-based values and organisations come into all of this?

Faith-Based Values and Development Processes

There is a sense among many, and often based on experience, that 'faith-based' values lead to a 'different' kind of development – the best kind of alternative people-
centred, human development. But is that always the case? There are those who share the same 'faith', often understood in this sense as 'religion', but who do not share the same 'values' and between 'faiths' there are also clear differences. These diversities of understanding and contradictions regarding 'values' and what constitutes 'faith-based values' muddy the water when it comes to identifying their role in development processes. In the same way that not all NGOs are the same, not all FBOs are the same either. For me, as with understandings of development and development processes, faith-based values are often confusing, contradictory and diverse. They can be inspiring and frightening, positively transformative and destructive, inclusive and exclusive, open and fundamentalist. Let's explore some of these issues....

I have just recently returned from The Grail Centre in Kleinmond, South Africa, a centre set up by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, the authors of the Training for Transformation series of books. The Grail is "a community of women, rooted in Christian faith, strengthening and supporting one another in their search for God... The spirit of the Grail is expressed in practical work towards our international goals:

working for justice and solidarity

developing intercultural understanding

building bridges of trust and breaking down barriers

healing our planet and the divisions among us

enabling women to be co-operative and support one another in their spiritual search, and their efforts to develop their full potential in different walks of life" (The Grail Centre promotional leaflet).

At this centre, which is a partner institute of Kimmage DSC, they provide a certificate and diploma course in Training for Transformation which enables participants to adapt Paulo Freire's work to a changing reality. The aims of the TfT programme are:

"to develop a new level of leadership in the development education field that is grounded in good theory and practice; to build the capacity of teams from NGOs, FBOs and CBOs so as to enhance their ability to engage with local communities to become self reliant in development efforts, link local initiatives to national and global civil society movements; to build confidence, knowledge and skills to work with and challenge local and national governments to ensure macro-economic policies that are to the advantage of the marginalised" (GRAIL promotional material 2013).

The Grail centre, clearly embodies a particular set of faith-based values – feminist, intercultural, questioning, critical, enabling and challenging – and my experience is that they 'walk the talk', so to speak. These, and countless others influenced by faith-based values are inspiring, inclusive and open.

When I was preparing for this presentation today, I reviewed a document prepared by...
Sr. Geraldine Henry and others at Misean Cara (and being presented at this conference) which outlines 'the missionary approach to development', and which explains its core values as respect, justice, commitment, compassion and integrity'. This document summarises the development standards to be adhered to and the criteria applied to projects - things like 'enable each person to determine the direction of their own development being sensitive to cultural/religious differences', 'engage in inclusive and non-discriminatory development practices', and 'challenge unjust practices that exploit the right of the marginalized and most vulnerable'. Words like dignity, solidarity, empathy, sustainable development, accountability, transparency, partnership and collaboration with local communities are evident throughout this impressive document, which suggests the best of alternative development approaches while taking account of the need to embrace good 'technical development practices' such as ensuring 'quality standards in all our work'. One phrase stands out - ‘ensure the best value for money is obtained while keeping the dignity and rights of the person as paramount'. Of course, this 'value for money' focus can turn an otherwise critical FBO into one which ‘talks the talk' but doesn't 'walk the walk'.

The faith-based values identified here are not universally held ones, unfortunately. This lack of universality is one of the challenges we face when we begin to question the role of faith-based values in development processes and in social and economic change more broadly.

For example, on 22nd May we saw the very public killing of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich in the UK. According to the Guardian newspaper, "With the body of the victim lying yards away, the man said: "We swear by almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you. The only reason we have done this is because Muslims are dying every day. This British soldier is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."” ([http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/may/22/woolwich-attack-cleaver-knife-jihadist](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/may/22/woolwich-attack-cleaver-knife-jihadist)). In response, there has been considerable criticism by the Islamic community in the UK of Islamic fundamentalism. Dr Usama Hasan explains fundamentalism as “the reading of scripture out of context with no reference to history or a holistic view of the world” ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22640614](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22640614)). He argues that counter-narratives to the Islamist (fundamentalist) narrative need to be developed: “Narrow approaches do not work in our modern world”. He goes on to suggest that Sharia and Jihad “have had dozens of schools of interpretation over the centuries”, and argues that, when it comes to Sharia, “the Koranic spirit of freedom, equality, justice and compassion must be reclaimed, with an emphasis on Sharia as ethics rather than rigid ritualism” ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22640614](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22640614)).

Here we see that within Islam, there is open acknowledgment of a diversity of values and a willingness to be internally critical of violent, dangerous, exclusionary or fundamentalist values. There's a call for broad approaches, for a re-thinking of the role of Islam in development in today's world. Is that same openness evident or possible among people of other faiths?

Within Irish tradition, the Catholic faith has played a significant role in our understanding of what constitutes 'faith-based values'. We pride ourselves in our 'missionary tradition', from
the Roman Catholic and other Christian traditions. We generally regard as positive the role this missionary tradition has played in the establishment and continued emphasis on international development co-operation in Ireland, as evidenced in the Minister's statement at the launch of the new Irish Aid policy. But, we need to interrogate Christian faith-based values in the way that Usama Hasan has done with fundamentalist Islamic ones. Where and in what contexts are they open or closed, exclusionary or inclusionary, dangerous or positively transformative?

In their article on the role of religion in development Ter Haar and Ellis (2006, p.6) suggest that “for analytical purposes, religious resources may be divided into four major categories, which can be applied to all the religious traditions in the world, in different constellations of importance. Religious ideas... religious practices... religious organisation... and religious – or spiritual – experiences”. As with development processes more generally, often the ideas sound great, but the practices and organisation associated with these ideas are not congruent. Far too often faith-based values are channeled into the provision of services (e.g., schools and hospitals) (and often for the elite) without questioning the States that don't or can't provide them. They are often based on ‘care’ – a laudable and much valued faith-based value in the Irish context – but when care is based on charity to the detriment of questioning structures of inequality, it leads to the maintenance of the status quo rather than the positive transformation which values human rights, self-determination and freedom. Faith-based values are as often used to support oppressive regimes, e.g., in Zimbabwe and Syria, as they are to challenge injustice and domination, e.g., in the large faith-based membership of the Debt and Development Coalition in Ireland and in the work of local church communities to fight for land rights for the poor all over the world.

**Conclusion**

Some of the best and worst development practice I have seen in 25 years as a development activist and educator have been inspired by faith-based values. I could stand here and cite numerous examples of the outstanding individuals from different religious persuasions who have been motivated by their faith to work tirelessly for justice and the rights and needs of the most marginalised. I could also recount numerous stories of ‘well-meaning’ faith-driven people who have perpetuated what, for me, is the worst of development practice, uncritical, ethnocentric or self-serving patronage. In the end of the day, as many people of faith believe, we are judged by our actions – who we are, how we are and what we do. There is no doubt that faith-based values play a considerable role in development but these faith-based values and development values and practices need to be questioned. We cannot assume that there is some automatic positive in either – we need to question both. Desmond Tutu, an inspiring faith-driven leader suggests that “we are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We
all belong to this family, this human family, God's family”. When we consider faith-based and development values, perhaps it is useful to question to what extent our development is really 'people-centred'. As faith-based or development organisations, do we include or exclude? Are we open or fundamentalist? Are we engaged in destructive development efforts in our maintenance of the status quo or are we actively challenging structures of injustice and realising real transformation? Maybe when we begin to ask these questions we can get an insight into the different roles that faith-based values play in development processes.

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