A DIALOGUE GUIDE

WORKING WITH FAITH-BASED ACTORS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The document you have before you is the final knowledge product in the project 'Working with faith-based actors for development'. It builds on the findings of a research report published in April 2022 and additional insights gained through three case studies. It also incorporates insights from a dialogue between Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), policy makers, and researchers, distilled from a World Café meeting held in June 2022. Although the term 'final' suggests that this document forms some sort of conclusion, in fact it aims to do the very opposite. This Dialogue Guide seeks to provide a starting point for development practitioners and policy makers – both religious and secular – to engage in an open dialogue on the role of religion in development cooperation and the opportunities for collaboration between religious actors and between religious and secular actors. Thus, the final document of this project offers a beginning – a beginning of interesting, challenging, fruitful conversations as a prerequisite for inclusive and sustainable development cooperation that bridges divides of backgrounds, religions, cultures and identities.

BOX 1

ABOUT THE PROJECT: WORKING WITH FAITH-BASED ACTORS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Dialogue Guide is part of the broader research project 'Working with faith-based actors for development'. It was commissioned by Prisma (the association of Dutch Christian NGOs in international development) and four of its members – Woord en Daad, Tearfund, Dorcas, and World Vision Nederland – and carried out by knowledge brokering organisation The Broker.

This guide was preceded by 6 other outputs, together laying the groundwork for this final document:

- A synthesis report bringing together insights of current literature and the knowledge and experience of relevant stakeholders.
- An online multi-stakeholder workshop where barriers and opportunities for faith-secular collaboration were discussed.
- Three case studies that deepen, nuance, and add colour to the findings presented in the synthesis report: A study of the Job Booster programme in Burkina Faso; of the Engaging Faith Leaders and Communities project in the DRC; and of a Religious organisation working in a shrinking humanitarian space (redacted for security reasons).
- A **multi-stakeholder World Café** where key questions about working with faith-based actors were discussed in an open and engaging atmosphere.

Why this guide? And for whom?

The role of religion in the pursuit of sustainable development is an often-debated topic. Although examples of very successful partnerships between secular and faith-based actors are numerous, misunderstanding, biases and lack of trust stand in the way of even more fruitful collaboration. And while there may be instances where secular-religious collaborations are not opportune, this should be judged case-by-case, based on a thorough understanding of the advantages, risks, obstacles and opportunities. A fair judgment, however, hinges on better mutual understanding. In the synthesis report of our research project, one of the key findings reads as follows:

"In pursuing strategic partnerships, work towards identifying shared priorities and establishing a common set of values and language. As the process is bound to bring up a host of real or perceived differences, rather than viewing those as unassailable obstacles, it is imperative to address them through **open, constructive dialogue***."*

Thus, the creation of this guide is a logical result of our research so far. Moreover, whether or not collaborations are established, the pursuit of sustainable development in general will greatly benefit from increased knowledge, mutual understanding and respect between secular and faith-based development actors and between development actors with different religious backgrounds. In addition to well-researched and balanced information – which is what we have tried to generate throughout this research project – dialogue is key to achieving this mutual understanding and respect.

This guide serves to inspire individuals and organisations in the development sector to invest in the dialogic approach in both religious and secular contexts. Dialogue differs from discussion or debate in that it explicitly seeks to bridge differences and opposition. Or, to use the words of author and expert in interreligious dialogue Gerard Forde: "Dialogue seeks to build understanding and confidence to overcome or prevent tensions, and to break the barriers and stereotypes down since they can lead to distrust, suspicion and bigotry."[1]

Given its focus on questions of religious actors and religion in the development sector, this guide aims to be relevant to people and organisations operating in this field – from policymakers and academics to the practitioners working in secular or faith-based development organisations as well as relevant religious leaders. While we have grappled with conceptualisations of the terms 'secular' and 'faith-based', we have stirred away from carving precise definitions, precisely because neither are a homogenous group. But fostering greater collaboration between actors from all backgrounds through dialogue on the role of religion in sustainable development paves the way to improved development interventions and sustainable development efforts in general.

Organisation of this guide

The following pages serve to facilitate dialogue on issues and questions related to the role of and collaboration with faith-based actors in development cooperation. The first section discusses three domains for dialogue: 1) (Mis)perceptions, principles and barriers; 2) The role of faith: benefits and opportunities; 3) Equal partnerships & shifting the power. These thematic domains are all treated in similar fashion. After briefly introducing the topic, the most important findings and recommendations that have resulted from the research project are presented.

Thereafter, issues and questions related to the topic are suggested. These are based on the findings generated in this project – findings that can spark debate, may trigger criticism, and draw attention to obstacles, (mis)perceptions and, importantly, opportunities for collaboration. Thereafter, the second section takes a more practical approach. It provides guidance on creating the conditions for an open and constructive dialogue: four key principles are presented as well as some practical recommendations and links to useful resources. Eventually, the aim is that the questions of the first section, when addressed in a setting that adheres to the principles presented in the second section, provide a useful starting point for open and constructive dialogue that promotes collaboration for development.

CHAPTER 1
THREE DOMAINS FOR DIALOGUE

1.1 (Mis)perceptions, principles and barriers

Introduction

In our research we found that non-religious actors – like governments, international donors and secular development organisations – often lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of FBOs to appreciate their wide diversity and dynamism. Similarly, religious actors also hold ideas about their secular counterparts that are biased and based on incomplete knowledge. Dialogue between these religious and non-religious actors is essential to address this knowledge gap and improve mutual understanding. Below, we present the common misperceptions and barriers our research revealed, synthesising the conclusions and recommendations we formulated in the report and case studies that have already been published. Many of these findings and recommendations can spark new questions and provide a useful starting point for dialogue: these are presented in the final section.

Findings & Recommendations

- As **faith-based actors constitute a very heterogeneous group**, it is not helpful to think of them in terms of several clearly distinguishable types or categories. This is also confirmed in our three case studies, in which a multitude of faith-based actors express varying worldviews and differ significantly in the way faith translates into their programme implementation. The heterogeneous nature of faith-based actors as well as the diversity present among secular organisations, as was noted during the World Café, mean that faith-secular collaboration cannot be taken for granted. Faith-faith collaboration often requires similar efforts for open and unbiased dialogue as for faith-secular collaboration.

- The most persistent barriers that stand in the way of more and more efficient collaboration between secular and faith-based actors do result from **real differences in worldviews, approaches and objectives**, but are also informed and augmented by **biases and preconceptions** about 'the other'. This is not only the case for faith-secular collaboration, but also in the relationship between FBOs and local authorities of different faiths, as we learn from our third case study.[2] Here, prejudice against the faith identity of the FBO resulted in active obstruction of its efforts to provide aid to those in need.[a]

- FBOs operating in the development sector are often **pigeon-holed to work on issues of freedom of religion and healthcare**. While FBOs do indeed have longstanding experience in these fields, they can and do make significant contributions in other domains of development as well. See for example Woord & Daad's work on youth employment in Burkina Faso.[3]

[a] This case study could not be published in full due to the scrutiny of authorities on the organisation regarding their faith. It is therefore referred to as 'third case study' rather than naming the organisation. More information can be found in the case study document

- With regards to some topics – most notably gender equality, family planning and the freedom and inclusion of LGBTQI communities – **it is assumed that FBOs are, by definition, repressive and restrictive**. While this may sometimes be the case, this should not be taken as 'given' but judged case-by-case. For example, our case study into the Christian NGO Tearfund's programme shows that FBOs can be instrumental in addressing harmful social and gender norms through religion: they start a conversation with leaders of different faiths on verses from sacred scriptures that address sensitive topics. Keeping the dialogue going, they sketch alternative interpretations of and perspectives on those verses in line with gender equality principles.[4] Though these topics may be sensitive and/or uncomfortable to talk about, efforts should be made to do so. Our studies have shown that these **difficult conversations can enhance mutual understanding and build trust**.
- Secular development actors can sometimes be sceptical of faith's centrality in FBOs' activities; fearful it might pressure programme beneficiaries to convert to a certain faith.[5] The so-called **proselytising assumption is often not confirmed by FBOs' practice** – especially in the case of Northern / European development FBOs. That said, faith does play a central role, which means that its impact on beneficiaries cannot be denied. Some FBOs, as was the case for the organisation in our third case study, avoid elements of faith in programme implementation entirely, while others choose to strike a balance, such as the case of Woord & Daad in Burkina Faso[6], where faith components were explicitly separated from other elements of their programme.
- In some cases, differences in terms of religious affiliations and principles or worldviews cannot be overcome. Yet, if dialogue is continued, **new opportunities for complementarity and collaboration might arise** in the future.

Reflections for practical application

When establishing potential collaborations between faith-based organisations and secular actors, such as NGOs, policymakers and institutional funders, it is important to realise that religion is just one defining quality of an organisation. Religious organisations' programmes, although guided by religious identity, are also defined by organisations' own unique experience and expertise. Finding these multiple defining qualities, necessitates constructive dialogue between faith and non-faith actors. Recommendations on how to conduct such a dialogue are elaborated on below.

Questions for constructive dialogue

Common principles

A dialogue on principles and worldviews can be a very constructive exercise if the focus is not on differences. First, in terms of some basic commonalities, for most actors in the development sector a set of core principles underpins everything they do. Whether informed by a religious or secular worldview, principles usually revolve around respect for human rights and freedoms, striving for human wellbeing and equality, as well as the idea of 'leaving no one behind'. Having a dialogue that goes beyond the worldviews but looks at what is at their core, often reveals more common ground than participants may expect. Common ground may also be found by examining the terminology used in dialogue. Different definitions can (inadvertently) divide dialogue participants. It is, therefore, useful to unpack definitions, which can reveal more similarities that one might initially expect.

- *What are the norms, values and principles you share?*
- *What principles do you assume do other holds that are different from yours? What elements of these (assumed) different principles align with your views?*
- *(Note: here the 'other' can confirm, correct or nuance assumptions and confirm or add to elements of principles that are in alignment).*
- *Where do terms and definitions used in dialogue differ? Can alignment be found in the interpretations of different terms and definitions?*
- *When ideas appear to differ dramatically, is it possible to simplify them and still find common ground at the very core of the principle?*
- *When others' principles are, in fact, dramatically different, how can they be reconciled with your own principles?*

(Note: this is a thought experiment! See this as a challenge of how to make two unmatching pieces still fit in theory. It might help identify pathways for synergies in practice.)

The difficult topics

As concluded in our synthesis report, some topics are particularly sensitive when it comes to collaboration between FBOs and secular actors. Gender equality, SRHR, and LGBTQI are some topics that are often painstakingly avoided – by secular as well as faith-based actors. It is because of this avoidance, that misperceptions and false assumptions persist around these topics. Some secular actors may indeed be biased and assume 'the worst' of all FBOs; others may be more open. Some faith-based actors may indeed be repressive on these issues; others may be more progressive. Take, for example our findings in the DRC, where Christian NGO Tearfund focussed specifically on addressing harmful social and gender norms[7]. Addressing the difficult issues may bring to light and/or confirm some fundamental differences; but it may also reveal commonalities and synergies. As noted, the DRC case study shows that transforming harmful gender norms – embedded in religious beliefs – was possible not in spite of but because of the efforts of a Christian development organisation. Their religious affiliation gave them the legitimacy needed to collaborate and connect with local faith leaders.

- *·What are themes you would identify as 'sensitive' or 'loaded topics' when entering into a secular-faith dialogue? Why?*

(Note: In answer to the 'why' question, be as specific as possible and avoid 'blaming' the other)

The following questions can be used to talk about specific topics that were selected before the dialogue, or resulted from the foregoing question.
- *In your perception, what elements of your worldview overlap / align with the worldviews of your dialogue partner around this topic?*
- *In your perception, what elements of your worldview differ from / clash with the worldviews of your dialogue partner around this topic?*
- *Are shared perceptions about differences and commonalities in worldviews correct? Can more overlap be found?*
- *Can you think of ways to make differences in worldviews or approaches vis-à-vis this topic complementary rather than opposites?*

(Note: this is a thought experiment! See this as a challenge of how to make 2 unmatching pieces still fit in theory. It might help identify pathways for synergies in practice.)
- *If, for the topic at hand, differences seem insurmountable, what aspects of your dialogue partner's viewpoint do match with your views on this topic?*

Experiences of bias and barriers – the constructive approach

Our research has shown that biases persist and barriers stand in the way of more, and more effective, collaboration between secular and faith-based development actors. When engaging in dialogue, participants bring along their own experiences: in terms of real or perceived biases 'against' them, of holding assumptions that might be biased, of more tangible barriers in partnership formation, etc. This baggage may pile up to become a barrier itself, which is why sharing experiences is of utmost importance. There is a real danger here, however. Sharing negative experiences of bias and barriers runs the risk of turning into a 'blame-game' which undermines the entire idea of constructive dialogue. When sharing stories of experienced bias or barriers, also think of potential solutions for the future – what could each partner do differently in future to ensure a more positive experience for all involved?

- *What biases or barriers have you experienced in your work when seeking collaboration across the secular-religious divide?*
- *(Note: In your answer, be as specific as possible and avoid 'blaming' the other).*
- *What could you have done differently to avoid / minimise the barrier or correct / nuance the bias that affected collaboration?*
- *What advice would you give the other in addressing the barriers / biases in future?*

(Note: In your answer, try to place yourself in the others' shoes; i.e. thinking of solutions / actions possible in their position and viewpoint, and avoid 'blaming' the other).

1.2 The role of faith: Benefits and opportunities

Introduction

In addition to clarifying misperceptions and identifying barriers to collaboration, in our research we also found that FBOs can be of great added value to inclusive development; that highly fruitful faith-secular collaborations exist; and that there are promising opportunities for increased cooperation. There is increasing recognition for the added value of collaborating with religious actors, in the Netherlands and in developing countries. This also became apparent during the World Café meeting, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed how the added value of working with religious actors has resonated within the ministry for some time. It is, therefore, important to capitalise on the momentum and continue the dialogue about possible mutual benefits and discover together where faith-secular complementarities and synergies lie.

Findings & Recommendations

- Working with religious actors, and with FBOs in particular, generates **practical benefits**. It allows, for example, for efficient use of the infrastructure, networks and resources of FBOs. In the case of Tearfund in DRC, inclusion of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) was made possible by collaboration with churches situated within IDP camps.[8]
- Collaboration with FBOs for development can generate **greater trust in and legitimacy for development programmes**, as evident from Woord & Daad's implementing partner's longstanding relationship with the local and national government, which enhances local embeddedness of the programme.[9]

- Contrary to what many believe, FBOs can and do play a positive role in addressing sensitive thematic issues and changing mindsets towards more inclusion and equality. This was exemplified by our DRC case study. The (shared) religious background of local faith leaders and implementers helps, as this creates a bond and mutual understanding that makes difficult subjects easier to broach.[10]
- FBOs can contribute to religious-sensitive and context-specific development programming. This **religious sensitivity can enhance the match between programme and context** and, by extent, **improve the effectiveness of an intervention**. As 2017 research by OXFAM revealed that, among secular stakeholders in the development sector, religious sensitivity is very low, and much can be gained from more collaboration and mutual learning.[11]
- FBOs were found to be particularly well-equipped to fulfill a **bridging function: facilitating meaningful engagement of secular stakeholders with local communities regarding their religious beliefs and practices**. In this way, they promote programme design and implementation that better matches and respects the local context as well as the values espoused by programme beneficiaries (whose religion often plays a central role in their lives).
- Special attention to religion in development programming, particularly in volatile settings, is of crucial importance. As our third case study also showed, while religion and religious differences may be the drivers of conflict, **a religious-sensitive approach that brings together people from different faiths, can enhance social cohesion in communities and thus promote stability.** Promoting social cohesion between religious communities is a pivotal element of the programme and is fed by a deep understanding of the role of faith in both conflict and peace building.[12]
- The knowledge, networks and resources of **faith-based and secular actors can complement one another**, providing opportunities for great impact and more effective interventions. By intensifying collaboration with the private sector, Woord & Daad's programme improved in quality and cost-effectiveness, and resulted in higher youth employment.[13]

Reflections for practical application

The findings from the project showcase the relevance and added value of religious sensitivity in sustainable development programmes and initiatives. As faith-based organisations routinely employ a religious sensitive approach at different programmatic levels, it is suggested that faith-secular collaborations capitalise on the former's knowledge and expertise in religious sensitivity and recognise the potential of faith actors to fulfil a 'bridging function' between secular actors and the communities where their programmes operate.

Questions for constructive dialogue

Religious and worldview sensitivity

Our research has focused predominantly on the religious sensitivity of faith-based actors; and the added value it brings to development programming. This finding is illustrated in all case studies, but perhaps most strongly in the case of Tearfund's work in DRC. Within the programme, they engage with both Christian and Muslim communities to change harmful gender norms by examining both Quran and Bible verses related to gender and starting dialogue on how these verses could be interpreted differently.[14] In addition to the ability of faith-based actors to operate in a manner that is sensitive to the religion of the communities they work in – often coinciding with their own religion – it is also important to look at the flipside. Secular actors may be better equipped to be sensitive to those groups that are not religious in a predominantly religious context, so mutual learning and complementarity!

- *What does religious sensitivity mean in your work? How do you define it and what does it look like in practice?*
- *Having heard the answers of your dialogue partners, what elements of their religious sensitivity – definition and practice – could enrich or complement your own?*
- *Reflect and share your thoughts: In your opinion, to what extent does your religious affiliation or particular worldview have a positive effect on programme impact and the relations with local partners and communities you are working with?*

(Note: For example, your worldview may facilitate easier connection to the community; and/or lend legitimacy and foster trust)

- *Reflect and share your thoughts: In your opinion, to what extent does your religious affiliation or particular worldview have a negative effect on programme impact and the relations with local partners and communities you are working with?*

(Note: For example, your worldview may create barriers for certain groups (with different worldviews) to be included in programming; and/or cause suspicion among certain actors)

The following questions build on the answers given to the foregoing two questions. Keep in mind a particular programme or project you are/were involved in. For secular actors, imagine you are now a faith-based actor carrying out that same programme. For faith-based actors, imagine you are now a secular actor carrying out that same programme.

- *In your new role, in what way do you think your new worldview or religious affiliation would positively affect your impact and the relations with local partners and communities? Why do you think this is the case?*
- *In your new role, what particular challenges and risks do you expect to encounter that are the result of your worldview or religious affiliation? How could collaboration with the 'old you' ameliorate the problem?*

Experiences of successful collaboration – and opportunities for the future

Though misperceptions and lack of knowledge are still a problem and much potential of secular-faith collaboration remains untapped, it is also true that successful partnerships between FBOs and secular actors do exist. While creating these partnerships and in implementing their programmes, these actors have had to overcome their differences for better impact. And these efforts, as our research has shown, can yield very positive results. It is clear from our case studies that the complementary skills and networks of the secular and faith-based actors generate great results: we saw how secular actors played an essential role in allowing FBOs to gain access to volatile regions, while FBOs have the capacity to access vulnerable communities who might otherwise be excluded. Sharing successes and drawing lessons from them in dialogue is a great way to identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration.

- *What faith-secular collaborations have you been part of or experienced in your work? What particular challenges did you encounter?*

(Note: In your answer, be as specific as possible and avoid 'blaming' the other).

- *What steps did you and your partner take to overcome the challenges of collaboration?*
- *For the faith-secular collaborations you have been part of or experienced, what particular successes can you describe that were the outcome of the collaboration?*

(Note: Try to focus in your answer on those successes that you suspect would not have been realised – or to a lesser extent – had there not been a faith-secular collaboration)

- *What steps did you and your partner take to achieve the successes?*
- *In listening to the answers of your dialogue partner(s), what lessons are new and/or particularly useful to you?*
- *Based on your experience, what are the most important lessons you would want to impart on other (secular or faith-based) actors to realise successful collaborations?*

(Note: In your answer, be as specific and concrete as possible).

For secular actors, imagine you are now a faith-based actor carrying out that same programme. For faith-based actors, imagine you are now a secular actor carrying out that same programme.

- *In your new role, what is the first thing your prospective partner with a different faith or worldview (i.e. the 'old you') should change/address to improve the chance of successful faith-secular collaboration?*
- *In your new role, what steps can you take to create opportunities for faith-secular collaboration?*

(Note: Think of concrete actions or characteristics. Be as specific and concrete as possible).

1.3 The localisation agenda

Introduction

A final topic that provides fruitful ground for dialogue has to do with the localisation of development and humanitarian aid. Conversations around this topic centre around the question how to rid North-South partnerships from their inherent power imbalances and enable local actors to take the driver's seat in development initiatives.[15] In our research we found that historically, FBOs have worked with local faith actors as part of larger, usually transnational religious networks and structures. Similarly, secular actors have developed approaches to localisation that have yielded valuable insights. As secular and faith-based actors are struggling with the same questions when addressing the challenge of shifting the power, more collaboration and mutual learning could lead to progress for all involved.

Findings & Recommendations

- FBOs were found to seek out **local, faith-based stakeholders and leaders as partners**, based on a deep appreciation of faith and its added value in development cooperation. The partnerships with Local Faith Actors (LFAs) provide them with **much-needed connections to the grassroots level**, which allows them to reach remote and often marginalised communities, as demonstrated by Tearfund's access to IDPs in DRC.
- Partnerships between LFAs and FBOs do at times showcase **similar power imbalances as those observed in secular North-South partnerships**, provoking debates on the decolonisation of aid and the localisation of humanitarian action. [16]
- There are however, promising examples of Northern FBOs working with local faith actors in a more equitable partnership. Our case study of Woord & Daad's Job Booster programme illustrates this point: implementing partner 'CREDO' is viewed as an equal partner and co-develops the programme from conceptualisation to implementation.[17]
- **Local partnerships across the faith-secular divide** are also yielding very promising results in terms of practical advantages and logistics. Considering our third case study, the lead organisation likely would not have been permitted to access the project location without the help of secular partners.
- Working with local faith-based actors has proven to be crucially important for less tangible benefits as well: collaboration with LFAs – with their local networks and knowledge – **can enhance local embeddedness, trust in and legitimacy of development programmes and strengthen local lobby and advocacy efforts**, as evident from Woord & Daad's implementing partner CREDO's longstanding relations with local and national government, as well as its success in partnering with the private sector on a national level.[18]
- Intimate **collaboration with local faith actors**, especially communities of faith and religious leaders, can **enhance the reach of development programmes** and their **capacity to include the most vulnerable**.[19]

Reflections for practical application

Localisation of development and humanitarian aid is an often debated topic in the development sector. But operationalizing and implementing the localisation agenda in practice is still a challenge for many organisations, faith and secular. Considering the perspective and the actions of religious organisations on the topic may present opportunities for mutual learning on how to implement the localisation agenda.

Questions for constructive dialogue

Local partners and networks

Both secular and faith-based development organisations from the global North work with local actors. Interestingly, their networks are often very different and show limited overlap. To increase programme effectiveness and make better use of and support local capacities, finding complementarities in local partners and networks through dialogue would be beneficial to all.

- *For secular actors: to what extent do you work with LFAs? If this collaboration is limited, what are the main reasons? And if collaboration with LFAs occurs, are there specific challenges you encounter that result from the difference in worldview?*
- *For faith-based actors: to what extent do you work with local non-religious actors? If this collaboration is limited, what are the main reasons? And if collaboration with secular local actors occurs, are there specific challenges you encounter that result from the difference in worldview?*

Together, identify countries or regions that dialogue partners share as target areas.
- *What partners do you work with in these overlapping areas?*
(Note: work from top to bottom, i.e. start at the national level, all the way to the local level)
- *What partners do you share? And which ones differ?*
- *Are there particular partners in your network that might be beneficial for / could contribute to the efforts of your dialogue partner? How can your dialogue partner contribute to the efforts of your local partners?*

Experiences of localisation & shifting the power – the learning approach

As we found in our research, both secular and faith-based actors are making efforts to put the localisation agenda to practice. What is missing however, is a structured exchange and collaboration. This is a missed opportunity, as both are running into similar challenges and making progress – mutual learning could enhance the efficiency and success of the process.

- *How does your organisation's worldview affect your understanding and conceptualisation of localisation?*
- *What strategies and initiatives have you implemented to localise your interventions?*
(Note: Try to be as concrete as possible).

- *What are examples of particularly successful localisation efforts - either your own, or implemented by others?*
- *What are examples of efforts towards localisation that did not yield the envisioned success? What were the main challenges or obstacles?*
- *In listening to the answers of your dialogue partner(s), what lessons are new and/or particularly useful to you?*
- *Based on your experience, what are the most important lessons you would want to impart on other (secular or faith-based) actors to realise localisation?*

For secular actors, imagine you are now a faith-based actor seeking to shift the power and advance the localisation agenda. For faith-based actors, imagine you are now a secular actor with the same purpose.
- *In your new role, what steps can you take to create opportunities for faith-secular collaboration?*

(Note: Think of concrete actions or characteristics. Be as specific and concrete as possible).
- *In your new role, what local partners would you want to approach that are not currently part of your network?*

CHAPTER 2
PRINCIPLES FOR DIALOGUE

The purpose of this document is to facilitate dialogue between people with different beliefs, worldviews and religions, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and finding common ground for potential collaboration. In this second section, four principles are identified that help to create a safe and constructive space and ensure the right conditions are in place for a fruitful and open dialogue.[20] To some, these points may be highly familiar and obvious, but reiterating such fundamentals can only help in realising the best conditions for dialogue. Thereafter, a few practical points are presented to facilitate the process. Please note, the following is far from exhaustive and many extensive guides exist for dialogue facilitators and organisers. To navigate this massive amount of information, the final section concludes with some useful resources.

2.1 Four Principles for Dialogue

An open mind

In our research we found that many ideas, biases and assumptions exist on the part of secular actors about religious actors and vice versa. It is inevitable that participants enter an interfaith dialogue with existing ideas and mental images of the worldviews and perceptions of 'the other'. The idea of an 'open mind' does not mean that these ideas should somehow be erased – a near impossible task – but that people enter the conversation with a willingness to have their ideas and mental images challenged and changed. [21] During the World Café meeting, it was found that honesty about one's perceptions is as important as accepting challenges to those perceptions. Make your own basic assumptions clear, and suspend judgement on what others may say. Creating a space in which participants feel safe to voice and challenge perceptions is essential for dialogue to bear fruit.

"Ideally, a dialogue between people of different religious and cultural backgrounds is a two-way encounter that can lead to change, in which both sides learn something about the other side – and about themselves."

- The inter-religious Think Tank

Radical respect

The biases and ideas secular and religious actors hold of one another can, at times, form obstacles in establishing collaborations.[22] Some of the ideas are based on clichés and partial knowledge and hence can be challenged and corrected through dialogue. At the same time however, it must be acknowledged that there are some key differences between secular and religious actors. The notion of 'radical respect' is related to these differences. Radical respect refers to the idea that all participants in the dialogue should be recognised as equal partners, and their intellectual positions have to be accepted as fundamentally legitimate. In practice, this means that in a truly constructive dialogue between people with different beliefs – be they religious or secular – the central tenets of that belief are not up for debate. Thus, radical respect also includes accepting that there will be limits to how far we can understand each other.[23] Radical respect, in other words, lets fundamental differences exist but does not exclude the option that common ground can still be found. During the World Café meeting this was referred to as 'connectivity': seeking the connection without giving up one's own values.

It is a process, not a one-off

Learning from and about another's worldview and seeking opportunities for rapprochement or collaboration will not happen in the blink of an eye. Realising a truly open and constructive dialogue in which trust and mutual understanding are built takes time. Especially when assumptions are longstanding, embedded in cultural or historical contexts, or even held subconsciously, dialogue should be seen as a process. Therefore, organise multiple moments of dialogue to identify and then reach a common goal.

Language

As our research underlines, language is of crucial importance in conversations about faith-secular collaboration and differences. Terminology used within dialogue is of great importance. Dichotomous language is found to be unhelpful; not in the least because the suggested clear-cut distinction between faith-based and secular actors does not exist: "There is a great grey area within which FBOs and secular actors overlap and collaboration can be found."[24] Similarly, in dialogue between actors with different worldviews and beliefs, steering clear of such dichotomous language is of utmost importance if collaboration is to be found. Inclusive language increases chances of collaboration: "language that is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory views of particular people or groups […] and does not exclude people from being seen as part of a group."[25] Though this might seem evident, the use of inclusive language in practice is often challenging due to unconscious bias.

> *"As someone who grew up Muslim, with not so many Muslim friends, I am now aware of my inherent assumptions."*
>
> *- Marwa Abdulhai, TEDxMIT*

2.2 Practical recommendations

When organising a dialogue between actors with different beliefs and worldviews that is conducive to building trust and mutual understanding, some practical issues should be taken into account:

- Prepare well in advance and make sure participants are prepared as well. Organising a dialogue, especially if it is centred around sensitive topics like religion, should not be rushed. Make sure the right stakeholders are selected to participate – which might require a stakeholder analysis – so as to safeguard that no crucial actors are left behind. Thereafter, invite participants well in advance and communicate clearly about who else is participating as well as the objectives and rules of the dialogue. Additionally, it can help to ask all participants to make known their expectations and hopes prior to the dialogue.
- Create an inclusive environment. Find out beforehand about the rules and needs of participants from other religious communities, cultures or worldviews. Ensuring that all feel respected will help realise a constructive dialogue. Consult all participants to the dialogue beforehand to ensure they are comfortable with the arrangements. Participants within a safe space are more likely to speak honestly about their perceptions and accept challenges to those perceptions, and at the same time maintain the notion of radical respect.
- Pick a neutral location. While this may not be the case for dialogue between Dutch policy makers and Dutch faith-based development organisations, in other faith-secular dialogues the selected location may be of crucial importance. If the aim is to ensure that all parties are made to feel respected and equal, then neutral ground – i.e. not affiliated to a particular religion or the 'home-turf' of one of the dialogue partners – is essential.
- Select the right facilitator. The person or persons facilitating the dialogue in practice must be well-placed to do so. Especially for dialogues around high-stake issues or in conflict settings, the facilitator's ability to build connections, de-escalate tensions and create a safe space is vital. Moreover, the identity of a facilitator matters. As is the case for the location of the dialogue, the person who is to guide the process in practice should be accepted by all participants beforehand

2.3 Useful resources

Guide to interreligious dialogue – Bridging differences and building sustainable societies

Insightful guide developed by the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) which can be used as a beginner's introduction to interreligious dialogue as well as a helpful reference to those already experienced in dialogue facilitation. It includes guiding principles, best practices, various examples of detailed manuals and toolkits, as well as inspiring stories of dialogues.

The Dialogue Handbook - the art of conducting a dialogue and facilitating dialogue workshops

Practical handbook compiled by Mette Lindgren Helde and initiated by the Ambassadors for Dialogue project. The book is a guide to creating dialogue in practice, containing hands-on tools to communicate dialogically, guides on how to plan and carry out a dialogue workshop, insights into the role of dialogue facilitators, and a wide array of exercises and activities suitable for dialogue workshops.

KAICIID Knowledge Hub E-learning.

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) seeks to bring religious leaders and political decision-makers together to develop and implement multilateral social cohesion building and conflict resolution initiatives. The centre also supports experts and organisations working in this area through capacity building programmes, workshops, training and partnerships. Its Knowledge Hub offers many e-learning courses on relevant topics as well as online seminars (live and recorded).

Interfaith Dialogue & Religion in the Tech World

A short TedTalk by Marwa Abdulhai on the importance of interfaith dialogue in the tech sector. She shares her experiences on how to have meaningful conversations with those of other faith traditions. Marwa also introduces the impact these discussions have had on her own research directions in artificial intelligence and reinforcement learning.

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