

**WORKING WITH FAITH-BASED ACTORS FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**A CASE STUDY OF A RELIGIOUS
ORGANISATION'S WORK IN A
SHRINKING HUMANITARIAN
SPACE**

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INTRODUCTION

WORKING WITH RELIGIOUS ACTORS: A RESEARCH PROJECT

This document represents an unpublished case study. More information on why we cannot share the full case study can be found on page 3.

This case study was conducted as part of the research project, 'Working with religious actors for sustainable development', executed by The Broker and commissioned by Prisma and four of its members: Dorcas, Tearfund, Woord en Daad and World Vision. The project seeks to fill existing knowledge gaps about the role of religion and of faith-based actors – particularly among 'western' secular development actors – in sustainable development efforts. The first phase of this project was finalised with an [interactive workshop](#) and resulted in a [synthesis report](#).

The second phase of the research consists of three case studies of faith-based development programmes, aiming to add more colour, depth and nuance to the findings of the synthesis report. By interviewing actors involved in programme inception and implementation, we highlight the role of faith in those actors' experiences on the ground.

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

During the development of this case study, the lead organisation of the programme we were studying came under scrutiny of country authorities. Our key informants explained that the pressure put on their organisation is because of their religious identity. To ensure we do not risk jeopardising the continuation of the organisation's work and to protect the aid workers involved, we have decided not to publish.

This situation confronts us, as authors, with our own lack of knowledge of how development organisations' faith identities can clash with local authorities and religious majorities. Our [synthesis report](#) is primarily focused on the prejudice FBOs can face when working with secular actors and vice versa. It does not cover how religious majorities, especially when in a position of authority, can hinder or even forbid faith-based organisations from helping people in need simply because of their faith. Any organisation, faith-based or other, working to assist those in need must be able to continue their work without obstruction. Religious identity alone is not a reason to deny humanitarian access. The organisation in question, as we found when conducting this case study, upholds the highest humanitarian standards. We hope very much that their work will continue.

Despite our decision not to publish the case study, we can share our key take-aways in relation to the role of faith in sustainable development efforts:

Key take-aways

- This case study **severely challenges the assumption that programmes led by FBOs always contain proselytising elements** [1]. Secular organisations partnering with the FBO in charge of this programme stress that the leading organisation's own faith does not influence programme activities. On the contrary, the lead organisation is very cautious about sharing its faith identity so as to gain and retain humanitarian access to the target area.
- In addition to other experiences shared by our informants, the fact that publishing this case study could jeopardise the work and safety of the organisation confirms our earlier finding that **FBOs can face disabling prejudice in their working environment from various sides** [2]. In this case, national and local authorities are suspicious that the FBO will only provide aid to people of similar faith and exclude the religious majority to which authorities belong.
- The studied programme, in which collaboration with religious leaders from all faiths is central, seeks to promote social cohesion between people from all backgrounds in a volatile area marked by longstanding conflict. From this programme it is evident **that a deep understanding of the role of faith in conflict is essential to peace building** and hence, the religious sensitivity of the investigated FBO is an indispensable asset.

References

[1]Yannicke Goris and Martha Kapazoglou, "A Synthesis Report: Working with Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development" (The Broker, December 2021), 18

[2]Yannicke Goris and Martha Kapazoglou, "A Synthesis Report: Working with Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development" (The Broker, December 2021), 11

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