

WORLD FAITHS DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

33-37 Stockmore Street, Oxford OX4 1JT, United Kingdom.

Tel/fax (44) 1865 790011. E-mail wfdd@btinternet.com

BULLETIN NO.1 - November 1998

Communications

This is our first *Bulletin*! We hope very much that it will be a catalyst for communications from you to us. **We shall welcome any comments and any requests of help from you.** From now on we shall be getting in touch with you three times a year, giving you information about the progress of the WFDD as well as analysis and ideas.

We shall also be circulating *Occasional Papers* on issues related to the Dialogue. The aim of these will be to share thought, knowledge and experience.

If you would like regularly to receive our information and/or to contribute, please fill in the enclosed form.

Publication of the faith's papers

For the conference at Lambeth Palace in February this year, each of the nine faiths involved in the WFDD presented two papers: one on the relation of their faith to economics and the other on development criteria. These papers are now available from WFDD for £5.00 (\$8.00). This includes postage.

Progress of the WFDD

After four months of working with a full-time coordinator, we now have an outline for a programme in each of our three areas of work: a) Thinking together b) Engagement Groups and c) Training.

However, we have a great deal of rigorous thinking to do, if we are to take full advantage of the opportunities open to us.

Occasional Paper No. 1 (enclosed) takes up the challenge facing the faiths to move on from broad faith statements to specific recommendations for development policies and criteria, particularly in relation to our engagement with the *World Development Report 2001* (see below). **We would greatly appreciate your comments and contributions, where possible with illustrations from anti-poverty programmes on the ground.**

a) Thinking together

Our first major opportunity to make a contribution to the thinking of the World Bank is through the discussions around the *World Development Report 2001*. The World Bank issues an annual *WDR*, which is a staff document with policy recommendations. The *WDR 2001* will be a key report on poverty.

Buckingham Palace

On 21 October Professor Joseph Stiglitz, Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist of the World Bank, who is the Director of the Bank's *World Development Reports*, spoke at a lunch hosted by His Royal Highness, the Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace. He then introduced the WFDD's first debate

on the *WDR 2001*, also held at the palace. The debate was chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In his opening talk, Stiglitz explained that the main task of the *WDR 2001* is to point out directions for an anti-poverty strategy for the future, taking into account such factors as the changes in the global economy, the turbulence of the global financial market, the impact of technical changes and information technology. All these changes present great opportunities but also huge risks for the poor.

Stiglitz predicted that inequality was likely to be one of the key issues addressed by *WDR 2001*. Structural questions such as land tenure, access to education and ethnic and gender discrimination will be analysed.

Another key issue may be how international financial and economic rules affect the poorest households, and how risks can be reduced for poor families and communities. More often than not, said Stiglitz, the poor bear the burden of mistakes made and more often than not their voices are not heard.

The *WDR* team is looking to the faiths particularly for an input into the Bank's thinking about the values and norms underlying the definition of poverty. The faiths' experience in anti-poverty work on the ground should be a source of learning for all involved.

Replying to Prof. Stiglitz, Tim Gorringer, Professor of Theology at Exeter University, began by saying that, from the standpoint of faith there is a deep perception that an acceptance of limits is a crucial part of what it means to be

human. This seems to be at odds with the view that economic growth is the only way to combat poverty.

Linked to this point is the commitment to equality, common to many of the faiths. This seems impossible to achieve in the framework of the present economic order, given the ever-widening gap between rich and poor.

Gorringer expressed scepticism about the possibility of the poor gaining real empowerment unless traditional power structures are changed. And he insisted that that poverty is not only about material progress but is a deeply cultural matter. Globalisation is in danger of destroying local cultures, and, with them, social networks, which have helped the poor to survive.

He suggested that the sanctity of creation was another area for urgent debate, highlighting the tension between the demands of the market on one hand and the need for environmental preservation on the other. Another theme he picked out as a priority is the neglect of the community while the individual is continually emphasised as an agent to maximise profit.

Gorringer's final plea was that the Bank and other institutions should pay more attention to reputable economists the world over who are proposing alternatives to the prevailing economic system.

The debate continued with view points from other faith traditions. A Hindu contributor emphasised the need to promote local cultures and enable them to become a more dynamic element in development. He said that spiritual and

moral values should be furthered in the community and children brought up with a sense of moral values and a true concern for others.

A Buddhist participant insisted that, although people are born with different *karma*, and therefore not all equal, it is our task to make sure that they all have an equal chance to improve their lives. There is no need for poverty to continue. Poverty flourishes in a world of ignorance and arises from people's separation one from another.

The Sikhs stressed the importance of taking account of religious-based values in measuring the outcome of anti-poverty work. They pointed out how difficult it is for people from the eastern religions to have a real dialogue with western institutions.

Prof. Stiglitz ended by insisting that people at all levels of society must participate in development work. Observing that faith communities are in a much better position than the World Bank to reach people at the grass roots, he said that in the past there had been too much focus on governments and macro-economics at the expense of individuals and their families.

In talking about culture as the “glue which holds societies together and helps them to function well” he cited Bhutan as a positive example, where “developers” from the west had not interfered with local traditions.

Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development of the UK, stressed the urgency of taking action, in view of so much suffering among the poor, especially women and children.

The debate ended on a rather sombre note with a representative of the Swiss government reminding us that development programmes over the last fifty years have not achieved their aim. He suggested that the neglect of spiritual elements might partly explain this.

We were also reminded, by a Christian theologian, that combatting poverty has been seen as a secular concern by most religious people. Many faith leaders will be challenged by the idea that it is their task to take action to help to change the world.

The event was interesting, useful and threw up many truths, but the lack of any real engagement about the relationship between secular economics and faith-based values, demonstrated how easy it is for people of two such different worlds to talk past each other. We suggest that it is only when we enter into more specific recommendations that we shall be able to start off a real dialogue about the meaning of poverty and development in practice.

Johannesburg, January 1999

The next encounter between the *WDR 2001* team and the WFDD will be at a workshop in Johannesburg, 11-14 January 1999. We have been asked to send ten people, three of whom will be key speakers. The main topics of the workshop are the values and norms underlying the concept of poverty and how we measure poverty.

We are gathering participants for the event, but **if there are people known to you who have studied these topics in**

relation to their faith, please let us know as soon as possible. We shall hold a preliminary meeting in Rome on 6-7 December, to discuss the themes, with *Occasional Paper No1* as the basic paper. The issues are difficult. Your help is needed!

b) Engagement Groups

Plans have been made to set up “Engagement Groups” on the four topics selected after the Lambeth Palace conference for priority attention – Hunger and Food Security, the Delivery of Social Services, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Culture as an Element of Development. Each group will have one convenor from the faiths and one from the World Bank.

Countries or regions on which the work will focus will be selected and about eight people invited to become part of the longer-term Engagement Group.

The groups are expected to identify the problems they propose to tackle, research how the World Bank and the faiths are currently addressing them, analyse the results and make recommendations. They will be asked to present a first report by November 1999.

We would welcome your suggestions of people with experience of faith-based development programmes who have specialised in any of the four topics. (For Social Services please contact Louise Fox: Fax (1) 202 522 3252 lfox@worldbank.org or Azim Lakhani Fax 0171 388 3076 azim.lakhani@lshtm.ac.uk)

c) Training

We are investigating the possibility of a pilot seminar on project planning and

implementation. An important element for consideration will be how development projects can be carried out within the framework of faith-based values and without the danger of the local people losing their cultural identity.

No time-scale has been fixed for the training programme, but **if you would be interested in it, please tell us who you are, your area of work and your special interest in the training.**

Future plans

Researcher

We hope appoint a researcher in the new year to help us to map out existing faith-based development work and to put us in contact with research centres and universities where studies are being done which could be of interest to us.

Please let us know of any interesting faith-based anti-poverty programmes put us in touch with academics from the faiths working on relevant issues.

Finance

Through the generosity of private as well as public donors, we have raised enough money to cover our main activities until the end of 1999. But we will need more funding for the Engagement Groups, and naturally we are looking for long-term commitments which will keep us going for a period of at least five years.

If you know of a foundation, individual or any other possible source of financial support, please let us know.

