

WORLD FAITHS DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

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Over the last six months our work has made progress as you will see from what follows and, I'm glad to say, we have won some additional funding support. We still have some way to go however in clarifying WFDD's role. A rather formal and bureaucratic, but important development illustrates one aspect of this. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Bank. This makes two things clear. First that WFDD is quite separate from the Bank as an organisation. Second that we intend to co-operate as indeed we have been doing on recent visits to Malawi and Uganda and at our July meeting on PRSPs (see below).

Serious dialogue means fostering understanding and co-operation between all parties committed to poverty reduction and human development and allowing room for independent voices and constructive criticism. That is a healthy tension that many have to live with as some of the debates surrounding the Earth Summit on sustainable development and partnerships with the private sector have illustrated. I believe it is a tension that WFDD and our colleagues in the Bank well understand.

Before we write to you again, George Carey will have retired as Archbishop of Canterbury. He has been a great inspirer and leader of WFDD's work and we are glad that he has indicated his eagerness to stay very much involved.

Michael Taylor

Conference on Religious Involvement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy process

From 28-31 July 2002, WFDD hosted a conference in Canterbury, England, to find out how far religious communities have been involved in the drawing up of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) and to discuss ways in which WFDD

might encourage them to become more engaged with the process of consultation

about development policies in their own countries.

The PRSP are country-based strategies being drawn up by governments together with civil society as a pre-requisite for receiving debt relief and concessionary loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. They thus provide a meeting point for religious communities and the International Financial Institutions at the country level.

16 people from 15 different countries participated in the conference, as well as consultants from Eurodad, the UK Department for International Development and the World Bank. A full report is available on the WFDD website.

The discussion broadened out far beyond the PRSP, with particular focus on *the link made by faith-based communities between spirituality and development*. It was generally agreed that too little work has been done on this up to now. WFDD will try to stimulate debate and action by:

- Gathering and sharing information about existing materials and actions being taken
- Publishing study guides on the teaching of the different religions about poverty and wealth and also case studies of faith-based communities which are involved in development
- Promoting training.

Another area of discussion was about *how religious communities can influence development policy and practice*, not only by the work they do themselves, but by providing a voice for those who are not easily heard in these debates. In the light of this, WFDD will look especially at:

- The role of religious leaders

- Promoting greater agreement on poverty reduction among the faith communities themselves
- Constitutional issues
- How faith communities can engage more effectively in lobbying governments and agencies, as well as encouraging discussion and sharing their information.

A third focus was *the role of women*. WFDD had already highlighted this topic for research and discussion but will revise its plans in the light of the consultation.

Finally, it was agreed that *one of the most useful roles for WFDD* was networking, to share knowledge, experience, ideas and good practice, and help with skills-training requests (e.g. for PRSP monitoring). All agreed that close co-operation with the conference participants should continue.

Visit to Malawi and Uganda

In preparation for the conference, WFDD visited Malawi and Uganda, two countries where the PRSP process was well under way. The visit was a rich learning process which revealed some positive experiences. However, it also showed how difficult it had been for the faith communities and civil society in general to ensure their inclusion in the PRSP consultations. This difficulty was compounded by their own lack of capacity to take up all the opportunities offered to them. A report is available on the WFDD website.

Religious Leaders' meeting

At the invitation of James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, and Dr George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, a third meeting will be held for religious leaders on 7-8 October, also in Canterbury, UK. The themes of the meeting will include: the Millennium Development Goals, the continuing challenge of HIV/AIDS, hearing new voices by way of PRSP processes, good governance, conflict and practical ways forward.

Faith in the Global Economic System

WFDD is undertaking a project to explore and analyse the attitudes found within the different religious traditions to the global economic system and the possible faith assumptions within the system itself, with the aim of increasing engagement and consensus building among the faith communities. The most important ingredient of the research will be widespread consultations among faith communities in various continents.

We shall be advertising shortly (also via our web site) for a Project Director.

Case studies

At the end of September, WFDD is participating in a workshop, hosted by the Ford Foundation together with the Vikram Sarabhai Foundation, to discuss four case studies showing the achievements in poor communities of spiritual movements in India and Sri Lanka. Through the web site and also through a series of publications, WFDD will share more widely some of these case studies, as well as others which will be gathered from Cameroon and Guatemala.

A particular interest lies in how the vision of spiritual and religious communities, as well as their ways of working, may differ from those of secular organisations or from what might be called mainstream development. We would welcome any such case studies from our readers and we also hope for their comments on the ones we publish.

Web site

Our web site has been in sad disarray for nearly a year, owing to legal problems about its ownership. It is now up and running and we are working hard to refurbish it. WFDD projects, reports of activities and essays, talks and reflections on the theme of faith and development are all being posted. We would be happy to receive your comments.