

WORLD FAITHS DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE REPORT 2001-2

Publications

In the spring of 2001, the first attempt was made to draw up a comprehensive “history” of the WFDD, since 1998. This was published under the title *Exploring a Dialogue: A report on Progress July 1998-December 2000* and widely circulated. The report tells of different efforts to pursue a dialogue at the international level, from the *Comment* written on the World Bank’s *World Development Report 2000/1* to participation in conferences and the initiation of the WFDD’s own web site. It describes, too, the three country-based initiatives in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Guatemala. It highlights the publication of bulletins and Occasional Papers and, above all, the importance of the network of participants in the WFDD, without whom the work could not have been carried out. An attempt was made to list those who have played a specific role in various events, but in full recognition that there have been many more people who played an essential part in those first years of the Dialogue.

In January 2001, a first paper on *Cultures, Spirituality and Development* was circulated for comment to everyone on the mailing list. It was written by Thierry Verhelst, from the Network Cultures in Belgium, probably best known as the author of *No Life Without Roots: Culture and Development*, Zed Books, London 1990. Many comments came in and, after a lot more work, the final version was produced as a WFDD publication in July. The aim of this booklet is to show how vital the incorporation of people’s culture and spirituality is for long-lasting development programmes which are acceptable to local communities.

Country-based work

Visits were made by WFDD staff members and/or trustees to all three of the countries in which work had been started in 1999/2000.

The Tanzania Inter-Faith Forum (TIFF) completed an inventory of faith based organisations working on the delivery of social services in which the faith groups and the social services they deliver are identified and categorised and the pattern of distribution of the services is indicated.

The inventory shows that faith groups are the major supporters of the public efforts in the delivery of social services in the country. This has been revealed by the fact that there are more than 56 faith groups operating and widely distributed to cover all 20 regions and also in rural areas where majority of under-privileged population live. Many of them work in co-operation with various government ministries and also with international NGOs, which give them financial support.

The Ethiopian Inter- Faith Forum for Development Dialogue and Action (EIFFDDA) spent most of the year on a drawing up an agenda for its work. This included extensive discussions on the Mission and the Vision of the Forum.

The Guatemalan Inter-Religious Dialogue on Development (DIRGD) focused its work on the distribution of the joint document on the Values of the Religious Communities in Guatemala, as the basis for deeper discussions about the development agenda in Guatemala. This has been linked to work with the Ministry of Education on the new curriculum being drawn up for Guatemalan schools.

The WFDD values the partnership of these three inter-faith organisations and hopes to continue to work with them on specific issues of common interest.

Case Studies

In September 2001, Wendy Tyndale went to New Delhi, to spend some days with Dr. Kamla Chowdhry planning a series of case studies of spiritual movements working with the poor in India and Sri Lanka. These will be published in India but will also be the subject of a seminar in 2002, hosted by the Ford Foundation in India, to discuss spirituality and development.

Two months later, in November 2002, Dr. Chowdhry and Wendy Tyndale travelled to Trivandrum in the state of Kerala to gather material about the National Forum of Fishworkers, a Christian inspired fish workers' movement. From there they went on to spend some days with the Buddhist Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka, with the same purpose. Wendy Tyndale also paid a visit to Satyodaya, an NGO in Candy, Sri Lanka, which draws its inspiration from all the great faith traditions.

Conferences/ Seminars

1. Ariyavinaya Conference

In January 2001, Wendy Tyndale attended a conference in Thailand on the Ariyavinaya Project, which has been set up by Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, a leading lay Buddhist and human rights activist. The aim is to restore the Noble Rules (*ariyavinaya*) for life, principally in the *sangha*, the religious orders, but also in society in general. The discussions on the contribution of Buddhism to society in the 21st century were particularly interesting for the WFDD.

2. Interfaith Network

An important step forward for inter-faith work was taken in March 2001, when 14 international inter-faith organisations meeting in Oxford decided to set up the Interfaith Network, with the aim of closer co-ordination and sharing of ideas and practice. The members of the Network are: Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions, International Association for Religious Freedom, International Interfaith Centre (which has taken on the co-ordinating role for the first period), Interfaith Youth Core, Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, Minorities of Europe, Peace Council, The Temple of Understanding, United Nations Spiritual Forum for World Peace Initiative, United Religions Initiative, World Conference on Religion and Peace and World Faiths Development Dialogue. E-mail communication has been lively and fruitful since the founding of the Network, the next meeting of which will be held in August 2002.

3. Seminars at Harvard University

In the spring of 2001, carrying on from 2000, two more seminars, whose aim was to maximise and analyse information about religions and their role in development around the world, were held at Harvard University, Massachusetts, and background papers were produced with a focus on the religious traditions of various countries.

4. Swedish Mission Council

In March, Wendy Tyndale was invited to speak at a conference in Uppsala, hosted by the Swedish Mission Council to help to prepare a "Christian contribution" to the review process which was taking place of the Swedish government's overseas co-operation programme. The WFDD had been asked to make a contribution on Poverty and Development.

5. Fez Music Festival

In June, Katherine Marshall attended the international music festival in Fez, which, under the theme of *A Soul for Globalisation*, included workshops and talks by many different people from all over the world.

6. Rockefeller Foundation: Discussion on Ethics and Globalisation

WFDD was invited to take part in a seminar, hosted by the Rockefeller Foundation in June in New York on Ethics and Globalisation. The participants included a range of academics, theologians and some representatives from NGOs working at the grass-roots. No conclusions were drawn, but the discussion was enriching for the WFDD.

Trustees/ Management

It was in 2001 that the group of “Interim Trustees”, who had taken over from the former Steering Group, which had been dissolved at the time of the review of the WFDD carried out by Bain & Co in 2000, began to be replaced. The gratitude of the WFDD is due particularly to Prof. Jeffrey Solomon, Shams Vellani and Bishop Diarmuid Martin, for all the work they did for the Dialogue. The first of the new trustees, Rabbi David Sapperstein and Dr. Kamla Chowdhry, attended a meeting in Prague, in July 2002.

The year was a difficult one from the management point of view, as the new director – a post recommended by Bain & Co. – was appointed at the end of the year 2000 but withdrew before taking up the job, which left a hiatus of almost a year, until a replacement for him was found. Finally, Rev. Prof. Michael Taylor, was appointed to take up the position on 1 January 2002. Katherine Marshall and Rev. Canon Richard Marsh continued as interim executive directors in the meantime. Wendy Tyndale continued as Co-ordinator of the Dialogue.

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Trustees/Management

Following the appointment of Michael Taylor the Trustees, comprising Akbar Ahmed, Kamla Chowdhry, Richard Marsh (Chair), Katherine Marshall, David Saperstein, met in Washington at the end of January to discuss the future work and funding of WFDD. In order to achieve charitable status in the UK and access to charitable funding a second UK based Trustee, Dame Rosemary Spencer, has been appointed. The Trustees are due to meet again on 9 October.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed by WFDD and the Bank making clear their separate identities and their commitment to co-operation.

The office of WFDD has now been moved to

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UK

Michael Taylor, Wendy Tyndale (Research Officer) and Maggie Clay (Administrator) are the full-time staff members. An IT Officer and a project co-ordinator are likely to be appointed in the near future.

Communications

Two issues of the WFDD Bulletin have been produced: in February and September. The mailing list is being updated and the web-site re-designed (wfdd.org.uk).

Country-based work

Processes related to the drawing up of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in poorer (often HIPC) countries were recognised as a specific area of potential dialogue with highly practical consequences. These processes are required to be participatory and draw in civil society, including faith-based NGOs and faith communities. They are the strategies of governments but, being a pre-requisite for debt relief and concessional loans, of great interest to the Bank and the Fund as well. The processes therefore involve most of the major partners in WFDD. It was decided to learn more about the contributions of faith communities to these processes and to see whether WFDD could play a useful role in building up their capacity to be involved (in for example policy formation, implementation and monitoring) so strengthening dialogue and co-operation.

As a first step staff began to make contacts through WFDD and other networks with people who were familiar with the PRSP-related processes and with the major faith communities in their countries. 16 people from 15 of these countries (Tanzania, Ethiopia and Guatemala where WFDD already had strong links; Malawi and Uganda which Michael Taylor and Wendy Tyndale had visited in March; Albania, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ghana, Honduras, Mali, Mozambique, Peru, Sri Lanka and Zambia) including Muslims, Christians, a Buddhist and a Baha'i, accepted invitations to a three-day consultation in Canterbury in July. Each visitor spoke of their own experiences and together gave useful guidance to WFDD. The discussion was both informative and rich. Some clear areas of concern where WFDD could play a role emerged. Faith communities can lack confidence in relating their spirituality to social issues including poverty reduction and HIV/AIDS. They have remarkably extensive networks which could enable local, poor communities to become more influential. Given fairly basic skills they could engage with governments more effectively in monitoring progress on poverty reduction on the ground. The role of women in religion and development was frequently referred to and there was a strong call for information, briefing, training and the sharing of good practice. A full report of the conference is available.

Case Studies

WFDD plans to publish three groups of case studies (from Asia, Cameroon, Guatemala) by the summer of 2003 including some of those being discussed at a seminar being hosted by the Ford Foundation in India. They set out to describe how faith communities are working with the poor and to see what lessons can be learned.

Study Guides

WFDD plans to produce a series of international study guides setting out the teachings of the major faith traditions on poverty and development and, in the light of the Canterbury conference, how a tradition relates its spirituality to social issues.

Projects

WFDD is at present working on three further projects for two of which it has received earmarked programme funding. Each project will run for two years and will involve extensive dialogue and consultation with people of different faiths at local and national level. One outcome will be a publication intended to promote dialogue and influence policy and practice. The projects are:

Women in Religion and Development
Co-operation and Competition in Religion and Economics
Faith in the Global Economic System

Further details of all three projects are available.

Visits/Conferences

MT and WT visited Uganda and Malawi in March to study PRSP processes and the involvement of faith communities (a full report is available), Washington and New York in May for meetings at the Bank and the Fund and with various Foundations, and attended a meeting of the International Interfaith Network in Budapest in July. WT will visit India (for the Ford Foundation meeting) and Bangladesh, Zurich (for Spirit in Business meeting) Malaysia (for globalisation conference) and the Cameroon (for case studies) and MT will visit Albania (at the request of Sali Tivari) and Tanzania (for the Episcopal Conference) during the autumn.

Michael H Taylor
September 2002