

WFDD – The Future

A Discussion Paper

At the next meeting of Trustees on December 12th 2003 decisions will need to be made about the future of WFDD, not least the terms in which the post of Director (vacant as from 1 August 2004) will be advertised. The gifts and experience required will depend on the work which now needs to be done.

A one-day meeting in December will hardly allow sufficient time for discussion and for thinking to mature, hence this attempt to start the discussion now.

This paper, drafted by staff members of WFDD and carrying no other authorisation, raises a number of issues which, in their judgement, need to be taken into account. Trustees and other readers are asked to comment on them and on any other issues they think relevant, in the light of which a further briefing paper will be prepared for the Trustees' meeting. Early responses would be appreciated.

1. The aim of WFDD

This has been stated recently (see Workplan October 2002 – December 2003) as:

'to enhance the contributions of faith communities (especially at the grassroots and among the poorest) to poverty eradication and improved development policies and practice
individually
in co-operation with each other
and with multi-lateral agencies
especially as those contributions are inspired and informed by their faith and spirituality'.

The search for improved understandings of human development inspired by faith (pursued for example by WFDD in its case study work and workshops, its project on faith in the global economic system and in its contributions to World Bank World Development Reports) can result in a critique of current approaches amounting at times to explicit opposition. Whilst many faith groups are prepared to co-operate with mainstream development programmes (as promoted by the multi-lateral agencies for example and many NGOs) others find it difficult. Is it agreed that this tension, involving dialogue, radical criticism and co-operation, is healthy and needs to be maintained in WFDD's work?

2. WFDD's relationship with the World Bank

This relationship is, formally, less close and more clear than it was. WFDD's Memorandum of Understanding with the World Bank is between two separate organisations ready to seek and define appropriate areas of co-operation. Although no specific areas have been defined since the MoU was signed, there has continued to be a good deal of contact and co-operation eg with Katherine Marshall's office; the PRSP team; the Development Gateway; country-based World Bank staff; and WFDD enjoys good relations with World Bank personnel at many levels who are invariably friendly and helpful.

Despite the formal separation however, the World Bank remains very influential in WFDD's affairs. The link between them, which owes almost everything to the close interest and commitment of the Bank's President, clearly has real advantages. It gives WFDD a certain standing on the development scene and privileged access to some of the major players, both institutional and individual.

The link also creates difficulties especially over how WFDD is perceived by faith communities critical of the World Bank, the IMF and the perceived policies of the G7/8 etc. Is WFDD sufficiently independent to be a promoter of genuine dialogue? Would closer links with the UN be helpful here?

3. Biased to the local

WFDD, at least in its current programme of work and with its limited resources, has tended to focus on local, grassroots faith communities within countries. This has given WFDD's work a certain concreteness and specificity, which is welcomed.

WFDD's involvement at the international level has been less strong. Staff have been present at international meetings of faith and development leaders (in Lambeth, Washington and Canterbury) where the work of WFDD has been presented and some guidance given (eg on 'scaling-up'); and staff are frequently in touch with faith leaders of international standing. WFDD's staff however played only a small part in facilitating the Canterbury 2002 Leaders' Meeting, and the World Bank and IMF have bi-lateral meetings with world faith organisations (such as WCC) quite independently of WFDD.

The responsibilities in future of WFDD's staff at the level of international encounters and co-operation, including leaders' meetings, may need clarification.

4. Funding

To date, WFDD has received funding from

- a) individuals, governments and private trusts, largely through the good offices of George Carey, Jim Wolfensohn and Jeff Solomon and
- b) from trusts and foundations in response to applications made by staff in order to fund particular pieces of work (\$263,102 in 2002-3).

What are the most likely and appropriate sources of funding for the future?

The Bain Report of 2001 recommended the employment of a full-time development officer (at considerable cost).

As of September 2003, \$1,026,000 additional funding is needed to meet the draft budget for 2004.

5. Existing and future work

The current work of WFDD is set out in a workplan for October 2002 – December 2003 approved by the Trustees, published with additional documentation on its website: www.wfdd.org.uk. How much of this should be continued?

All of the work should doubtless be evaluated. Some of it, like the case studies and the workshops arising out of the Canterbury meeting on PRSPs in July 2002, imply ongoing commitments to those who have actively collaborated with WFDD. One piece of work, the project on Faith in the Global Economic System, ends in March 2004.

What additional work is envisaged for the future? If the present staff of WFDD tried to put into a few words what they are most enthusiastic about, it would probably be promoting reflection and active co-operation among faith communities on tackling the human issues relating to poverty reduction and development which these communities themselves regard as the most important.

6. Interfaith Networks

WFDD is one of a number of international interfaith organisations. Despite its distinctive focus on development there is some overlap with the activities and memberships of others. Some organisations are very much bigger than WFDD. Co-operation and avoidance of duplication is attempted, not always successfully, through the International Interfaith Network (members include: Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions; Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders; Peace Council; Temple of Understanding; United Religions Initiative; World Conference on Religion and Peace).

Every effort is being made to secure WFDD's future. If the viability of WFDD were ever in doubt, one possible way forward could lie in closer co-operation or even merger with an interfaith organisation such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace with its 'chapters' in many different countries. WCRP explicitly mentions 'development' amongst its many activities.

7. Ownership

WFDD is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee in the UK for which the Trustees (self-perpetuating) are responsible under UK charity and company law.

There could be many answers to the question 'who owns WFDD?' such as: two inspired individuals; a board of trustees; an international leaders' meeting; a network of up to 800 individuals and organisations. Faith communities as such have not normally sponsored WFDD or funded it officially.

Maybe WFDD can only ever be an independent organisation but its rootedness in, and sense of responsibility towards faith communities might well be strengthened by the creation of a broad-based inter-faith council of reference.

Please send comments on this paper to Michael Taylor (m.h.taylor@bham.ac.uk; Elmfield House, University of Birmingham, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LQ, UK; Fax: ++ 44 (0)121 415 8358) by (24 October 2003)

Michael Taylor
Wendy Tyndale
Vineeta Shanker
Maggie Clay

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