

## ‘Mission in the Context of Inequalities’

The implications of faith communities being channels of distribution of development aid

(if possible in panel: Faith based NGOs and Economic Development ,chair: Päivi Hasu)

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Since the 1990’s, a significant locus of concern in development studies has been civil society, but this concern has been noticeable for its lack of interest in faith communities and their role in international development (Clarke & Jennings 2008). This study is interested in faith-based organizations (FBOs) and other faith communities, suggesting that these can play a vital role in reducing poverty. The aim of this article is to find out: What are the consequences to faith communities in being involved in aid distribution?

Previous research emphasizes that the FBOs are crucial in managing international aid as they provide services including health and education, they advocate and support human rights, and they uphold ideals of democratic governance (Clarke 2007, Clarke 2008). Previous development research has not, however, focussed on the impact of faith communities on the alleviation of poverty. While extensive reports such as the Human Development Reports, as well as the Millennium Development Goals Reports and World Bank development reports have been published, few of these comment on the impact of faith communities on development. This can be considered a drawback due to the great importance attributed to religious life-views and organisations virtually throughout the Global South. Official, publicly funded development organisations understandably work on a non-confessional basis. However, a great number of development organisations are centrally funded and are run by people of faith.

Faith-based organisations and faith communities are interesting objects for study for several reasons. One reason is the traditional perception of religion as social or societal ‘glue’ (Durkheim 2001) as a means of social cohesion. Religious organisations thus have the potential to create and increase social capital among individuals and groups internal to the organisation (bonding), but also to create and increase social capital linking individuals and groups across borders, cultural, social, economic and religious (bridging). Another reason is religion’s ‘independent’ role in society, as a critical and oppositional presence and its detachment from a purely civic to one in the freer ‘space’ of civil society (Furbey 2008, 129).