3 Religion and Education

Three case studies for the Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development Cooperation (including bibliography).

1 Introduction and formulation of the problem

Education is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and as the key to sustainable development, peace and stability within and between countries. It is considered an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the 21st century, which are being affected by rapid globalisation. Access to basic education, in particular, can enable young men and women to escape from poverty and subjugation.

Nevertheless, in the year 2000, over 113 million children had no access to primary education, 880 million adults remained illiterate, gender discrimination continued to permeate education systems, and the quality of learning and the acquisition of human values and skills fell far short of the aspirations and needs of individuals and societies. Many young people and adults were denied access to the skills and knowledge necessary for gainful employment and full participation in their societies.[1] The international community agreed that unless there is accelerated progress towards education for all, we will fail to achieve the nationally and internationally agreed targets for poverty reduction. As a result, inequality between countries and within societies will deepen even further.

Global consensus on the importance of education is reflected in the Millennium Development Goals. Goal 2 aims to ensure that by 2015, boys and girls everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women, Goal 3 emphasises the need to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education.

In line with these MDGs, the UNESCO-sponsored World Education Forum has committed to the Dakar Framework for Action of 2000. This is a collective commitment to action concerning six Education For All (EFA) objectives.[2] Their added value is that they give equal emphasis to quality and access. Supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both agreements start from the

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1   Dakar Framework for Action, 2000
2   The 6 EFA goals are:
   i)   expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
   ii) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
   iii) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
   iv) achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
   v)   eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
   vi) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

understanding that all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term. This is understood as 'an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be; an education geared to tapping each individual's talents and potential, and developing learners' personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies.[3]

'In the past five years, some progress has been achieved,' as the UN MDG report of 2006 indicates. Net enrolment ratios in primary education have increased to 86% in the developing world, ranging from 95% in Latin America and the Caribbean to 64% in sub-Saharan Africa. The largest numbers of non-attending children live in remote rural areas. High rates of poverty in rural areas, demand for child labour and lack of access to good-quality schooling make this a persistent problem. Another persistent problem is the gender gap in education: worldwide, more than one in five girls of primary school age do not attend school, compared to about one in six boys. Of particular concern is the wide gender gap in sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia, where almost 80% of the world's out-of-school children live.[4]

Much remains to be done, not only in improving availability and access, but especially in improving the quality and relevance of education. There is a great need for an ongoing collaborative effort by agencies and organisations, both governmental, multilateral and non-governmental.

Historically, churches and other faith-based organisations have always played a crucial role in the provision of basic education. Although, generally, education policymakers do not consider these faith-based organisations as equal partners, the latter often have a long experience in providing high-quality basic education. Local communities often have greater confidence in them than in government and/or (I)NGOs. This is particularly true of marginalised groups, and regions and situations at risk. Faith-based organisations are increasingly being recognised as discussion partners of governmental authorities in policy development (e.g. in public-private partnerships). They are potential drivers of behaviour change, for instance by actively involving local communities and integrating areas such as health, food security, hygiene and HIV/AIDS prevention. They are not always uncontested as concerns their transfer of religious and other beliefs and values, but no sweeping generalisations should be made here.

To help address the neglect of faith-based education by policymakers, this chapter presents the findings of three case studies about the contribution of religious ideas and organisations to educational development commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prisma and ICCO:

1) *The Role of the Islamic High Council in the Development of Basic Education in Mali* by Cheick Oumar Fomba, for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 2006.
2) *Religion in Vocational Education and Training* by Prisma, September 2006.
3) *Religion as Driver of Change in Ugandan Education* by Wim Westerman and Laurus van Essen, for the ICCO Alliance, March 2007.

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3   Dakar Framework for Action, 2000
4   The Millennium Development Goals Report, UN, 2006

Complementary to these case studies, existing literature and research reports have been used to substantiate points made and add critical comments. This study is necessarily limited for practical reasons to the focus countries of Dutch development cooperation, and mainly deals with Christian and Islamic faith-based education. The chapter closes with policy implications.

2 Religion and education: main findings of the case studies

This section discusses the main findings of the case studies under the following headings:

a) Education ethos
b) Transfer of values
c) Focus on vulnerable groups
d) Faith institutions and faith-based schools
e) Church-state cooperation

a) Education ethos

The case studies show that faith-based organisations have a holistic educational ethos. UJCC-Uganda states for example: 'The outcomes of education should be the total formation of each individual.' … 'We don't want education for its own sake but we wish to promote education founded on Christian principles, which will mould tomorrow's God-fearing citizens of Uganda.'

Vocational Education and Training (VET) curriculums in schools supported by Prisma not only aim to contribute to the trainees' income generation and self-reliance, but also to 'more holistic objectives, like responsible citizens, dignified life and life skills.' The Mali case study does not explicitly state the ethos guiding the 'madrasahs': Islamic educational institutions which traditionally focus on teaching Islamic theology and religious law but nowadays often include general education. Yet it is noted that 'Mali has a strong cultural potential for support (for basic education) on the basis of its people's Islamic faith'. Many parents prefer their children to attend a Koran school or madrasah rather than a secular state school.' This preference shows that Islamic teachings and values are considered as an indispensable part of education.

This holistic thinking is not limited to the few Christian and Islamic schools of the case-studies, but broadly anchored in various religious traditions. Within Christianity, both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant World Council of Churches hold a broad vision of education. True education, in their view, must strive for the integral forming of the human person, which anticipates the person's final end and at the same time works toward the common good of societies. Children and young people are to be educated and brought up in such a way that they can harmoniously develop their physical, moral and intellectual talents, that they acquire a sense of responsibility and correct use of freedom, and that they be educated for active participation in social life.[5] Much of modern Catholic thinking about education is rooted in the Vatican's *Declaration on Christian Education* of 1965.[6] Protestant churches can draw upon the World Council of Churches' project on Holistic Education

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5   Brian Kelty: *A Vision for Catholic Education in the Twenty-first Century*. Australian Catholic University.
6   Declaration on Christian Education, Sacred Ecumenical Council, Vatican, 1965

(1999-2005). The resulting Holistic Education Resource Book identifies as core elements of Holistic Education: seeking wholeness, a new praxis of knowing, teaching and learning, pedagogy of universal love, community orientation, and affirming spirituality as being the core of life and hence central to education.[7] Education, in brief, is seen as education for transformation.

Similar views are put forward by Islamic thinkers. 'Islamic education is concerned not only with the instruction and training of the mind and the transmission of knowledge (*ta`lim*) but also with the education of the whole being of men and women (*tarbiyah*). The teacher is therefore not only a *muallim*, a 'transmitter of knowledge' but also a *murabbi*, a 'trainer of souls and personalities'. 'The Islamic educational system never divorced the training of the mind from that of the soul.' Islamic education ideally aims to provide a context for the total and balanced development of every student in every sphere of learning – spiritual, moral, imaginative, intellectual, cultural, aesthetic, emotional and physical – directing all these aspects towards the attainment of a conscious relationship with God, the ultimate purpose of man's life on earth.'[8]

In both the Islamic and the Christian religious tradition, lively debates are ongoing about how to constantly adjust and improve educational practice in the direction of explicitly stated ideals.[9] Common to all these debates is a critical assessment of the commercialisation and utilitarianism of current educational systems in the Western world and in other countries which have adopted them. Education is seen as being geared to economic performance, competition and efficiency above all else. By emphasising the holistic nature of education, faith-based groups constantly remind us that human development is total development, including the moral, spiritual and emotional domains as much as the intellectual and physical.

Another critical argument often mentioned by orthodox religious groups is that modernisation equals Westernisation, and should therefore be rejected. Faith-based education of this kind, whether Christian, Islamic or otherwise, gives considerable emphasis to tradition and morality, thereby often reinforcing traditional gender relations. This view is expressed in an extreme form by religious educational institutions that promote anti-Western views and attitudes and propagate the superiority of their own belief. Violence against non-believers is considered to be sometimes justifiable. In the context of the Bush administration's 'war on terror', these practices fuel heated debates on how to control extremist madrasahs such as those found in Pakistan and other countries with significant Muslim populations.[10]

b) Transfer of values

The case studies show that transfer of values is a key feature of education provided by faith-based schools. The Uganda case study states that 'Christian values that should be promoted in schools are discipline, respect, decency, stewardship, a sense of the divine, tolerance, and

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7   Peter Schreiner, *Holistic Education as a Challenge for Modern Education.* WCC, EEF-NET 18/19, November 2006.

8   Seyyed Hossein Nasr, quoted by Jeremy Henzell-Thomas in *Excellence in Islamic Education: Key Issues for the Present Time*, Bath, UK, 2002.

9   An interesting review of the current education debate within Islam can be found in *A Vision of Effective Islamic Education* by Dawud Tauhidi; Islamic-World.net.

10   See for example Mukhtar Alam, *Madrasahs and Terrorism: Myth or Reality?* 2004; and reports by the International Crisis Group on Pakistan Madrasas and Violent Extremism, 2007.

faithfulness in marriage. Besides practical vocational training, the VET curriculums devote considerable attention to ethics, character training, values and norms such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, discipline, dedication, punctuality, trustworthiness, sincerity, diligence and being cooperative. In the Mali case study, reference is made to the contribution of Islamic education to national peace and harmony; moral training and character building also receive considerable attention.

The case studies reveal a variety of means through which the transfer of values occurs:
- ethical elements in the curriculum, formal or informal courses or sessions on (work and business) ethics and/or life skills, extramural activities;
- religious education: knowledge about one's own religion; sacred books and their relevance for daily life; sometimes knowledge about other religions;
- religious rituals: weekly or daily prayers, celebration of religious festivals;
- lifestyle: selection of teachers on the basis of faith commitment or affinity; teachers are seen as role models who embody the desired values and norms;
- the school chaplain: this person organises activities to cater for the spiritual needs of students, and their appointment is church-funded.

None of the case studies mentions negative experiences in terms of the immediate social environment's response to the transfer of faith-based values. At the Christian schools featured, the faith of non-Christian students is respected. They are free to attend religious education or not to do so. The parents' written consent is required in advance. The Christian schools respect non-Christians' freedom of choice in the matter of religious education.

Among madrasahs, a distinction should be made between traditional and modern institutions. Traditional madrasahs are seen as centres for religious instruction and therefore attract only Muslim students. Modern madrasahs, frequently founded by Islamic NGOs, combine religious education with a general curriculum and are often open to non-Muslim children as well (see below, point c.)

When it comes to values transfer, there are critical issues relating to intolerance, proselytism and discrimination against women. These tend to be characteristic of orthodox or zealous religious groups that adhere to a literal interpretation of sacred texts. These exist in all religions and include Christian Evangelicals as well as orthodox Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist groups. Suggested ways for dealing with these issues are:

- Not to reject these practices right away, but try to understand and dialogue about the underlying vision of human wholeness and fears of loss of traditional values. Some of these organisations feel the need to defend their values against the perceived threat of modernisation. Others zealously wish to save souls in order to achieve a new social order. All of them, in one way or another are a response to modernisation processes. Their fears and values should be acknowledged (not necessarily agreed with) as a first step to creating an opening for further discussion about how to prepare children effectively for participation in a rapidly changing society.
- Avoid the pitfall of cultural relativism, meaning that all cultures and religions have their own values that should be respected. While cultural-religious diversity is a great good, discriminatory practices or harmful hate messages should not be tolerated. Such

practices need to be confronted, preferably by forces from within the society/religion concerned, with global standards of human dignity and rights.[11]

- As concerns gender sensitivity, it is important to identify and assess <u>which</u> explicit or implicit messages faith-based schools transfer about gender roles and responsibilities. The key question here is whether the education contributes to the freedom of choice and empowerment of girls (and boys), and if it does so in a culturally appropriate way. Sewing lessons for girls, for example, may look rather old-fashioned to Westerners, but they have proven to be empowering since they give the girls access to skills and a potential source of income in a culturally acceptable fashion.

c) Focus on vulnerable groups

Another striking characteristic of faith-based education is the focus on vulnerable or marginal groups. The Uganda and VET case studies mention this explicitly as an expression of Christian love for one's neighbour. In Uganda this is manifested by special forms of education for the disabled (deaf schools), for girls (girls' schools) and for pastoralists (mobile schools). In the same spirit of service to the least privileged, the regular Christian schools have also replaced their past elite orientation by broadly accessible education for all.

In a comparable spirit of service, the Malian Koran schools and madrasahs attract mostly children from poor rural families. In various Islamic countries, Islamic NGOs take up the challenge to offer basic education to the rural and urban poor by starting nursery, primary and high schools in urban poor neighbourhoods and rural areas. These madrasah schools combine teaching of the core values and beliefs of Islam with secular learning (numeracy and literacy) in a child-centred way. In this way, they aim to equip young people effectively for their role in a rapidly changing society. An interesting example of this trend is visible in East Africa, where the Aga Khan Foundation (which receives funding from various sources, including the Canadian government) has established numerous schools, supported by the Institute for Educational Development in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.[12] Many of these schools attract not only Muslim children, but Christian and Hindu children as well.

In a more general sense, various reports[13] show that parents in many development countries prefer faith-based schools to governmental schools because of :

- congruence in religious values;
- broad accessibility and rootedness in society, open to the poorest and most vulnerable;
- trustworthiness and integrity;
- quality of education.

Considering the fact that many government schools in developing countries struggle with problems of corruption, poorly paid and motivated staff, and negligence of remote rural areas, this raises the issue of long-term policies to improve the overall educational system (see below).

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11 See Bas de Gaay Fortmann in *Human Rights and Religious Pluralism*, 2007, for a state-of-the-art contribution to the debate on universal human rights versus religious pluralism.
12 Don Cayo, *Teaching in Africa: Kenya.* Vancouver Sun, April 8, 2006
13 Ton Dietz, *Participatory Evaluation of Development Interventions in a Vulnerable Environment (West Pokot, Kenya)*, 2006.

d) Faith institutions and faith-based schools

In many developing countries, faith institutions have a long history of providing social services, including education, as an expression of their core beliefs about holistic human wellbeing. Where faith-based schools belong to faith institutions, however, one should be aware that power relations also play a significant role. The question is whether and how religious politics affect educational policy and practice at these schools. One way in which this can happen is through funding. In all major religions, radical groups exist that use funding of faith-based schools as a strategy to promote their radical agenda, whether right-wing Christian Evangelicals in the USA, ultra-orthodox Jewish groups in Israel, Gulf State political Islamists or ultra-nationalist Hindutva groups in India.

Another way is through institutional dependency of schools on the religious institution to which they belong. The case studies on Uganda and VET curriculums make a relevant distinction between policy level and operational level. At the policy level, the influence of churches is clearly reflected, for instance in the appointment of church members to the school boards. In this particular instance, however, the practice has not led to any problems. At the operational level, the case studies reveal that the high professional level of the school organisations proves to be an effective barrier against eventual power claims of local churches. Lines of influence are informal and run as much from school to church as vice versa.

In majority Sunni Islam, the situation is different because there are no comparable religious authorities. Madrasahs can operate relatively autonomously. This autonomy may be threatened, however, by dependency on foreign funds, as is demonstrated by current controversies over the radicalisation of madrasahs in Asia and Africa as a result of foreign funding. In response, governments try to make new laws that require madrasahs to be accountable for their funding sources. As has been previously mentioned, similar funding strategies are being followed by radical groups within other religions.

e) Church-state cooperation in education

Different arrangements exist in practice, depending on whether the religion has a majority or minority position. In a majority situation, a special religious institution is often responsible for contacts with government. In the case of Mali this is the Islamic High Council of Mali (HCIM). In Uganda it is the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC). With regard to these institutions, the following factors require assessment:

- representation: Does the institution represent various religious denominations (Council of Churches) or one single denomination? And to what extent does the institution represent grassroots religious organisations?
- professionalism: Does the institution have specialised staff with expertise in education?

The Uganda case study shows that the broad Council of Churches (UJCC) with specialised education staff can be potentially regarded as a serious player in the field of education. It addresses the following issues:

- ensuring a coordinated involvement of churches in policy advocacy and other issues relevant to the provision of quality education, including education for girls;
- advocacy for a clear institutionalised mechanism for collaboration between government and churches as foundation bodies in the management of educational institutions,

policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- exploring ways of raising resources to support churches in their ministry to vulnerable groups and development of relevant materials in support of the curriculum.

Church-state cooperation in education in Uganda is embedded in a Memorandum of Understanding. The state fixes the core curriculum and monitors the quality; the churches are implementers, administer schools (they often own schools and land) and acquire funds. This model can be found in (or could be applicable to) other countries with a majority religion that is active in education.

In various Islamic countries, governments have proposed new laws and institutional arrangements in an attempt to get more control over madrasah education. A case in point is India's madrasah modernisation scheme. This has received strong opposition from traditionalist *ulamas* as they see this as interfering with their functioning and curtailing their autonomy. Some even fear ulterior motives, namely the destruction of Muslim faith and identity. While more liberal Muslims see the need for modernising madrasah education (through new subjects like mathematics, science and English, better teacher-training, etc.) to avoid further marginalisation of young Muslims, strong opposition from traditionalist and fundamentalist *ulamas* make this a long and arduous road.[14]

In a minority situation, the situation is more complex. The state sometimes opposes religious minority schools out of fear of proselytism or social tension. Formal representative platforms or institutional arrangements are often lacking, which puts the minority schools in a vulnerable position. For this reason, the Christian minority schools in the VET case study are very cautious about displaying their religious identity. Considering the government's overall responsibility for basic education and for managing (potential) social tensions, appropriate institutional mechanisms for dealing with schools of religious minority groups should be advocated here as well.

Policy implications

1) Educational ethos.
    It is important to be acquainted with the educational ethos of faith-based schools, their underlying values and the practical application of these values in education.
    Besides implementing a government-prescribed core curriculum, faith-based schools have their own normative ideas and ethics that influence their way of teaching. Often, these are much appreciated by parents and communities due to congruent values and beliefs.

    More orthodox religious groups in all religions tend to be more forceful in the transmission of their values and norms than liberal religious groups. From a developmental point of view, the important criteria to be assessed here are intellectual freedom and the empowerment of girls.

2) Context:
    It is important to discern different contexts in which faith-based schools operate:

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14   Sources: Fahimuddin, *Modernisation of Muslim Education in India*, New Delhi, 2004; M. Akhtar Siddiqui, *Empowerment of Muslims Through Education*, New Delhi, 2004; Yoginder Sikand, *The State and Madrasah Reform: An Indian Deobandi Perspective*, 2007. For Indonesia, see Martin van Bruinessen in *On the Edge of Many Worlds*, 2006 and *Zem Zem* (Arabisering van de Indonesische islam?), 2006.

1)   *Minority situation*: the religion is a small minority in a diffuse religious context or co-exists alongside a majority religion;
2)   *Diffuse situation*: the religion is one of several major religions;
3)   *Majority situation*: the religion is the majority religion.

Each of these situations influences how partners perceive themselves in relation to their context and the way their religious identity is expressed in their educational curriculums. All the case studies show that institutional arrangements involving government and faith-based schools are possible and desirable – although this is admittedly easier to achieve in a majority situation. Trust-building and transparency about one's motives for engaging (e.g. quality improvement) are vital for creating a favourable climate for cooperation.

3) Transfer of values:
In a theoretical sense, faith-based schools operate at three different levels:

1)   *reflected level*: official statements, reports, policy documents;
2)   *spoken level*: informal ideas such as found in newspapers, magazines, textbooks;
3)   *experienced level*: what is going on in everyday life: actual lessons, informal conversations, hidden curriculum, etc.

Practically, it may not always be possible to identify what happens at each of the three levels. From a developmental perspective, it is vital to collect basic information on:

- Accessibility of education for students from a range of religious backgrounds.
- Tolerance and respect for various religious beliefs, including optional attendance at religious instruction, and no proselytism.
- Gender sensitivity: explicit and implicit messages about gender roles and responsibilities. Contribution to empowerment, emancipation, and freedom of choice for girls.

4) Long-term educational strategy
Support of faith-based education should be embedded in a long-term strategy for strengthening the whole educational sector (state and non-state) in specific countries. Depending on the context, different approaches may be needed here. In countries where the state is weak and/or corrupt, it would be valid to make use of existing faith-based schools, since they often have the only functioning infrastructure. In countries where the state is relatively stable, state education can be supported in conjunction with a policy of respect and support towards non-state education that meets the criteria of quality, accessibility, tolerance and gender sensitivity. Where there is an acceptable state education system, faith-based schools could be assisted to change their position within the education sector from service delivery to a more advocacy/lobby oriented organisation.

5) Impact of funding on intra-religious dynamics
It is important to analyse the formal and informal organisational structures and power relationships within the religion concerned. How are faith-based schools related to these structures and mechanisms? And what is the possible impact of external funding on the

curriculum content and on the internal dynamics within the religion concerned (e.g. well-funded schools versus poor churches)? An assessment of internal structures and relations will give insight into the power dynamics and internal checks and balances for the spending and accounting of funds.

6) Church-state cooperation

Depending on whether the context is majority or minority, different church-state arrangements concerning education are possible. Where Christianity is a majority religion, a special religious institution is often responsible for contacts with government. This offers a platform to negotiate a framework for cooperation which identifies, among other things, the core curriculum and quality standards to be met by each school. Where Islam is a majority religion, central faith-based education institutions do not always exist. Different strategies are called for here, such as affiliation of madrasahs to state boards or government-recognised madrasah education boards or councils (outside direct state control). State assistance to faith-based education, if given at all, could be financial (providing teachers' salaries), or in kind (in the form of books, teaching equipment, etc.).