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DO FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS (FBOS) BRING SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPMENT?

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Abstract

Whereas there is no comprehensive historical account of the start of FBO's involvement in development, some notable documentation trace such involvement to the fifteenth century (1552) England, which started with the keeping of the register of the poor by the church, on which the state relied on, in order to provide social services to the poor (Bloy, nd a). Some critics have questioned the real benefits of involving FBOs in development, considering their role in aggravating gender inequality and other forms of social injustices; their achievements in the area of sensitization, empowerment and poverty alleviation cannot be overlooked. There is a wide acknowledgement that FBOs' participation in social service delivery system and community provisioning bring added advantages. However, care should be taken to ensure that such participation would not lead to proselytization.

This paper examines whether 'faith based organisations (FBO) make significant contributions to development discourse by focusing on a range of examples. It is divided into four sections. Section one introduces the concept of FBOs, using typologies to operationally differentiate them from other organisations providing social services. It goes further to look at their prominence in development discourse. Section two examines the involvement of FBOs in social service delivery and compares the pros and cons of such involvement for development. Section three looks at the implications for donors and policy makers of involving FBOs in social service delivery. The conclusion recaps the arguments presented in the paper.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Any discussion on whether FBOs make significant contributions to development discourse would largely be enriched by first resolving the ambiguity which surrounds the concept. This ambiguity is partly due to the elusiveness of a common definition (Berger, 2003; Ferris, 2005; Goldsmith, Eimicke and Pineda, 2006; Haar and Ellis, 2006; Sider and Unruh, 2004) coupled with the nebulousness of definitions used by some commentators. For example, the definition by Bano and Nair (2007, p. 9) as "non-profit, tax-exempt organisations" could weaken understanding as it did not make any distinction between FBOs and their secular counterparts who are also non-profit as well as tax-exempt organisations. Irrespective of this, many commentators have made impressive attempts to unpack the concept by propounding more embracing definitions. For example, UNFPA (2009, p. 12) working definition of FBOs is "religious, faith-based, and/or faith-inspired groups, which operate as registered or unregistered non-profit institutions". This definition qualifies the nature of FBOs as 'religious', 'faith-based', and/or 'faith-inspired' which is useful in differentiating them from other 'non-profit, tax-exempt organisations'. It also helps to resolve the ambiguity which blurs the concept by providing space for a wide range of FBOs including organisations such as 'Christian Aid and Islamic Relief' whose ideologies are faith inspired but without formal ties to faith traditions (Smith and Sosin, 2001).

The use of typologies has been made in an attempt to explain the concept of FBOs in a way that will help development practitioners and other stakeholders understand the nature of faith based organisations they collaborate with (James, 2009), especially with the growing interest in faith and development interface. This will also distinguish FBOs from their secular counterparts for the purpose of comparative analysis of their effectiveness in social service delivery. It explains the ways in which faith manifests in development organisations (Leurs et al, 2010) and reveals the true identity of organizations with faith-based ideology. Eimicke and Pineda in their typology identified four types of FBOs, which include; faith-based religious organisations and coordinating bodies, faith-based sponsored projects and organisations, faith-based nonprofit organisations and ecumenical interfaith organisations (Eimicke and Pineda, 2006). This classification provides a fascinating dimension to the concept as it recognizes the involvement of social service organizations, for example, Caritas International etc., with incorporated legal status, which operate as a separate entity, distinct from the religious organization that established them.

One of the most impressive typologies that is used to present a clear understanding of the concept is Clarke's typology, which distinguishes between five types of religious / faith-based organisations as; faith-based representative organisations, faith-based charitable or development organisations, faith-based socio-political organisations, faith-based missionary organisations and faith-based illegal, terrorist or radical organisations (Clarke, 2006). Clarke's typology provides space for a wide range of organisations through an explicit qualification of ties with religion. It also shows the pattern in which faith is deployed in development by religious bodies (Bano and Nair 2007). This helps to unmask the true identity of organisations such as Al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah, Boko Haram and Dove World Outreach Center among others, who use religion as fundamental desire for anti-development agenda. For example, the burning of the Koran by Reverend Terry Jones founder of Dove World Outreach Center which sparked international condemnation viewed by many as a barrier to religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims (BBC, 2011; CNN, 2011). In today's development discourse, the threat posed by faith-based illegal, terrorist

and radical organisations can no longer be ignored or taken for granted considering the severity of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US and its aftermath economic impact on various countries around the world (Harrigan and Philippe, 2002; Bram, Orr and Rapaport, 2002; Makinen, 2002; Long, 2009).

Meanwhile, Clarke (2008:32) (cited in James, 2009, p. 13) represented Clarke's initial typology in four operational ways as follows; (1) Passive - were faith is considered subsidiary to broader humanitarian principles as motivations for action. (2) Active – in which faith is explicit motivation for action. (3) Persuasive - using faith as the ultimate motivation for action which aims to seek new converts or advance faith tradition at the expense of other people. (4) Exclusive - where faith is the primary motivation for action in socio-political discourse and expressed in violent, militant, terrorist or radical approach, which is often directed against rival faith.

The implication of the above operational classification is that, the way FBOs fit into the typologies will depend on how it operationalises its faith in a number of identified ways. These include; Structural affiliation and governance, Values and staff motivation, Mission, Strategy and theory of development, Selection of partners and choice of beneficiaries, Faith practices and teaching in programming, Staffing and leadership, Organisational culture and decision-making, Constituency and sources of funding and External relationships. Irrespective of the typology adopted the overriding issue is that FBOs exhibit many characteristics similar to other organisations providing social services. They also operate within similar "political, social and economic contexts" (Ferris, 2005, p. 316). However, the main difference is their motivation by faith, a constituency broader than social service provisioning to include lobbying and advocacy activities (Ferris, 2005). Meanwhile, Bano (2009) argues that the adoption of the 'FBO identity' is a necessary condition, in order to distinguish them from their secular counterparts in places like 'South-Asia, Middle-East and North Africa' with interwoven state-religion relationship.

Although there is no comprehensive historical account of the beginning of FBO's involvement in development, some notable documentation trace such involvement to the fifteenth century (1552) England, starting with the keeping of the register of the poor by the church on which the state depended in order to take care of the poor (Bloy, nd a). The introduction of the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 was a consolidation of the former welfare legislations into one law, which gave greater responsibility to the church in social service delivery. Beyond this era, the England's Speenhamland Act of 1795 provided for the involvement of the church in social service delivery to the poor (Bloy, nd b; Reingold, Pirog and Brady, 2007, p. 247). The significance of this era is the lack of separation of the church from the state which could have accounted for much of the role played by the church in the delivery of social services. In the eighteenth century, social services delivery in Europe and North America were done by mission societies who sort to extend their evangelical message to other parts of the world and at the same time deliver social / humanitarian services (Ferris, 2005).

The recent phenomenal popularity of FBOs in development discourse, started in 1980 (Garland et al, 2006) when Ronald Reagan assumed office as the US president and mobilized the 'Christian right' to derive support for his domestic and foreign policies, especially his policy against communism (Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, the influential US welfare reform of 1996, known as the 'Charitable Choice legislation' (Amirkhanyan et al., 2009; Boddie, 2003; Clerkin and Grønbjerg, 2007; Cnaan and Boddie, 2002; Conradson, 2008; Wagner

2008) which gave FBOs the power to operate much like their secular counterparts while retaining their religious identity (Cnaan et al., 2002; Ebaugh et al, 2003). The legislation was "principally an attempt to offer FBOs equal footing with secular organizations in securing federal funding for the delivery of social services" (Conradson 2008; Fischer, 2004, p. 25). This follows realisation that FBOs have a comparative advantage in social service provisioning, partly due to the fact that, they have formal structures at the grassroots where most of the poor and needy live and on the other part, they have access to volunteers in parts of the community where social services are needed (Odumosu, Olaniyi and Alonge, 2009).

A key factor, which contributes, to this phenomenal rise in popularity of FBOs is the favorable treatment they receive in most countries around the world, like their secular counterparts. In England, for example, FBOs receive the same tax benefits from HM Customs and Revenue, while donations made to them are treated as tax exempt deductions. The effect of immigration (Clarke, 2006) is also another influence on the prominence of FBOs, which has resulted to 'multicultural' and Multifaith nations particularly in the West. From year 2001, much of the impetus accorded to FBOs came from the US following the establishment of the office of Faith-Based and Community initiatives by president George Bush after his assumption of office as the US president (Clerkin and Grønbjerg, 2007; Cnaan and Boddie, 2002; Ebaugh et al, 2003; Firoz and Matthews, 2002; Garland et al., 2006; Goldsmith et al., 2006), partly to fulfill his election promises of engaging FBOs in the provision of social services, arguing that such engagement has the potential of improving social service delivery (Ebaugh et al., 2003) and on the other hand, due to the limited role that the US government plays in civic life (Cnaan et al., 2002). This momentum continued with the new administration led by President Barack Obama who reinvigorated the FBOs' involvement in development with the launch of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighbourhood Partnerships which aimed to strengthen the capacity of FBOs, stressing the crucial role they play in social service delivery (White House, 2009).

Role of FBOs in Social Service Delivery and Development

The willingness of development institutions and donors to engage FBOs as agents of development in recent times has been remarkable (Amirkhanyan et al., 2009; Bano, 2009; James, 2009; Lunn, 2009; Nishimuko, 2008). Perhaps, the most significant involvement of these organisations in development discourse is the role played towards the formation of the United Nation, through lobbying and advocacy activities (Ferris, 2005). Some other outstanding accounts echo the involvement of FBOs in various other advocacy activities that transformed human development around the world (Berger, 2003; Ferris 2005, pp. 313-315). In Mozambique and Zimbabwe, FBOs were among the prominent organisations that supported the liberation struggles. In Latin America also, FBOs played active and laudable roles in the development of liberation theology (Hanlon, 1991). Regardless of these contributions, faith has been neglected within development arena (Lunn, 2009) probably due to the influence of the modernisation thesis, rooted in the secularization ideology which advocated for the replacement of traditional values with modern ways (Giddens, 2006). This has had a significant influence on the acceptance of faith in development discourse considering that faith is akin to tradition with its conservative approaches to life issues.

Many scholars argue that FBOs have long played a vital role in development through the delivery of social services (Bartkowski and Regis, 2003; Campbell, 2002; Chaves and Tsitos,

2001; Cnaan et al., 2002; Ebaugh et al., 2003; Ferris, 2005; Fischer, 2004) and has largely gone indicated (Ferguson et al., 2006). However, a number of other scholars have critiqued the so much rhetoric about the effectiveness of FBOs' participation in development, arguing that such false value is quite 'faith-based' without substance, due to the lack of a comprehensive framework on which to judge their phenomenal success in social service delivery, over their secular counterparts (Amirkhanyan et al., 2009). Their opinion based on a comparative study of faith-based and secular nursing homes, by measuring quality of service, as well as its accessibility. Although their interpretation fails to prove that FBOs perform better than their secular counterparts in social service delivery, in the context of nursing homes, based on the outcome of their regression analysis. However, most of the references mentioned in their research noted excellent quality and accessibility of FBOs social services relative to secular providers (Ragan, 2004; Weisbrod and Schlesinger, 1986; Desmond and Maddux, 1981; Wuthnow et al., 2004; Detroit, Eisinger, 2002; Reingold et al., 2007) (cited in Amirkhanyan et al., 2009, pp. 492-493).

Although, some other observers argue to the contrary (Kennedy and Bielefeld, 2006) (cited in Amirkhanyan et al., 2009, p. 493). The limitation with Amirkhanyan et al., study is the difference in methodology, scope of research and homogeneity of data referenced in the study. Lipsky (2011) had advocated the need to develop a framework on which to evaluate the effectiveness of FBOs in social service delivery, especially with the increasing interest in faith and development interface by the international communities and development practitioners. A Comparative study of faith-based programs serving homeless and street-living youths in Los Angeles, by (Ferguson et al., 2006) showed that FBOs have unique capabilities in providing social services to vulnerable population. For example, "impoverished families, prisoners in their rehabilitation and reintegration processes, children of prisoners, homeless individuals and high-risk youth" (US DHHS, 2002) (cited in Ferguson et al., 2006, p. 1513). An assertion acknowledged by Compassion Capital Fund (CCF), managed by the US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families which has led to increased funding of FBOs for social service provision (Ferguson et al., 2006).

The increasing participation of FBOs in development issues across the globe in recent times, is an acknowledgement that they make a distinctive contribution to social service delivery and play a vital role in grassroots mobilization as well as in other aspects of development, "including conflict resolution and reconciliation; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; environmental protection and conservation; politics and social movements; and social welfare and development" (Lunn, 2009, p. 943). However, this enthusiastic endorsement of FBOs as agents of development is threatened by skepticism and mixed reactions due to past donor experiences working with some FBOs which emanate from the, "paternalistic and welfare-oriented approach to development" (James, 2011, p. 111) adopted by most FBOs. There are also fears that aid funds could be used to finance proselytization. Joseph Hanlon, in his book; Mozambique: who calls the shots?, cited a case of large FBOs who gave priority treatment to their members, supported irrigation projects only in places were church members are given preference (Hanlon, 1991) as well as supporting religious activities and doctrine with aid funds, "they bring in missionaries under the guise of aid staff, distribute bibles, build churches, and give out food and clothing at the end of church services" (Hanlon, 1991, p. 215).

The conservative culture of most faith traditions promotes inequalities, women subordination, and various other forms of social injustices. For example, the Christian religious text (bible)

depicts a stereotype gender role for women, which legitimizes the Patriarchy social system by directing women to be subordinate to their husbands (Ephesians 5, vs. 22-24, Good News Bible; Peter 3, vs. 1, Good News Bible; Colossians 3, vs. 18, Good News Bible) in a way akin to negating gender equality. In the Jewish faith tradition, morning prayers, which epitomize the height of gender inequality, are used to reinforce man's superiority over woman, in which the man blesses God for not creating him a woman (Andersen, 2006). Although, Islam condemns the oppression of women; however, it does support the patriarchy system viewed by feminist theology as oppression of women (Legenhausen, 2008). Islamic faith tradition also supports the traditional gender role which is anchored on the concept of wife and motherhood as the primary role of the woman 'after that of servant of God' (Legenhausen, 2008).

Taslima Nasrin, in her interview with Irshad, argues that the level of cruelty with which Islamic religion treats Muslim women is shocking and asserts that coupled with the denial of human rights (Nasrin, 2002) reinforced by various cases of human right abuses of Muslim women around the world. For example, the various cases of women sentenced to death under the Sharia law, by stoning for alleged indulgence in illicit sexual relationships, while their male counterparts were not brought to justice (Robinson, 2002). This has led some modernists Muslims to claim that, the exclusion, domination and subordination of women in Islam risked sustaining which reinforces the stereotypes of women as silenced victims (King, 2009). The implication of this is the derailment of any development programme aimed at gender equality as well as poverty reduction initiatives particularly those affecting women.

Although religion contributes to gender inequality and social injustices, it has been an invaluable source of power to feminist theology and other socio-political ideologies that helped in understanding liberation (Andersen, 2006; Berger, 2003; Ferris 2005, pp. 313-315; Hanlon, 1991). FBOs are also remarkable for providing opportunities for education, leadership and organisation development skills for women (Andersen, 2006). The divergence of interpretation of religious texts of the various faith traditions has led to the perception that religious beliefs legitimize gender inequality (Andersen, 2006; Gilkes, 2000).

FBOs have been particularly prominent in health care delivery and education provision in the, global south. For example, FBOs provide the majority of the HIV / AID prevention and care services (Aaron, Yates, and Criniti, 2010; Leurs et al., 2010; Maman et al., 2009) and are considered to provide about 50% of health care services in Sub-Saharan African communities (Bano, 2009; DFID, 2009; James, 2011; Institute for Reproductive Health, 2006; Leurs et al., 2010; Maman et al., 2009) also bring in other unique capabilities to development arena, which include, their credibility in the community (Aaron et al., 2010; Institute for Reproductive Health, 2006; James, 2011) which is acknowledged as a necessary condition for the permeation of development efforts in communities that are in most need of help. Most observers consider FBOs as alternative to secular approach to development (James, 2011) due to the manner in which FBOs combine spirituality with material welfare in development programming. This has been acclaimed as a powerful force (Haar and Ellis, 2006) which transcends all culture and race which "equips many of the world's people with the moral guidance and the will to improve their lives" (Haar and Ellis, 2006, p. 353).

Implications of FBOs Involvement in Development for Donors and Policy Makers

Donors and policy makers should make a case by case decision in FBO engagement after a thorough due diligence. The ambiguity that surrounds the definition of FBOs, and the difficulty involved in segregating radicalized FBOs from non-radical and non-violent FBOs. Donors and policy makers need to understand the nature and 'context' of individual FBOs (Leurs et al., 2010).

There is a need for donors and policy makers to invest in more research studies about FBOs. Many institutional development agencies have sponsored such research in the past. For example, DFID, Tearfund, European Union and UNAIDS. Such research studies will provide evidence of the positive contributions FBOs make in community development (James, 2011). It will also assist in the proper identification of the nature and context of FBOs.

Conclusion

This paper has made an attempt to unpack the ambiguity that surrounds the concept of FBOs. This ambiguity has been the greatest obstacle in understanding the role of FBOs in development. Proofs were presented which indicate that FBOs have contributed to development efforts for a long time, although such contributions have only been phenomenally visible in recent times. Some critics have questioned the real benefits of involving FBOs in development, considering their role in aggravating gender inequality and other forms of social injustices; their achievements in the area of sensitization, empowerment and poverty alleviation cannot be overlooked. Again, donor funds may be used for proselytization and discrimination. Irrespective of these criticisms, compelling evidence suggest that FBOs bring distinctive benefits to development.

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