



## Religions and Development Research Programme

# The role of faith in the charity and development sector in Karachi and Sindh, Pakistan

Nida Kirmani and Sarah Zaidi

'Faith-based organizations' (FBOs) are gaining increasing attention in development circles amongst practitioners, funders and policy-makers, as well as academics. There has been some discussion of the meaning of the term 'FBO' in academic circles, but little empirical research has been conducted on how the term is defined in different contexts. In addition, especially in developing countries, there is little research on what kinds of FBOs actually exist, and how they approach and either contribute to or hinder processes of development. Furthermore, little is known about how, if at all, these organizations differ from 'secular' non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This report explores how 'faith-based organizations' are understood and operate in the Pakistani context, with a focus on Karachi and Sindh.

In Pakistan and in South Asia in general, religion has historically been deeply involved in attempts to alleviate poverty, most often taking the form of philanthropic activities. Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Sikhism all have strong traditions of serving the poor and underprivileged. Pakistan, although a majority-Muslim country, has benefitted from the philanthropic contributions of all the major faith communities. The emergence of NGOs, however, is a more recent phenomenon, beginning in the period following Partition in 1947, when voluntary organizations emerged to address the refugee crisis. However, it was not until the 1980s, against the backdrop of the Afghan War and the accompanying influx of foreign aid, that this sector grew exponentially. These developments have shaped the context of contemporary civil society, particularly the voluntary/philanthropic sector, and must frame any discussion of 'FBOs' in the Pakistani context.

The research focuses on Karachi, within the wider context of Sindh province and Pakistan as a whole. The study is qualitative in nature and is intended to shed light on the role of religion in organizations engaged in development-related activities. It focuses on six case studies (the Al Khidmat network, the Alamgir Welfare Trust, the Saylani Welfare Trust, the Edhi Foundation, the Behbud Association and Caritas) and looks at the varying role of religion in these organizations. They are then placed within the wider context of the development

sector in the region and are compared with professional development organizations, for which religion has no apparent role. The findings are based on semi-structured interviews with staff, volunteers and beneficiaries in Karachi and Sindh.

The key findings of the analysis are:

- With the exception of Caritas, the Christian organization studied, most of the organizations identified as 'faith-based' are locally-based and funded through local, individual donations.
- Faith is intertwined in the work of local charities to different degrees; these can be distinguished from professional development organizations, which have no apparent relationship with religion.
- Local charities focus on meeting immediate, individual needs rather addressing than long-term development objectives.
- There is little or no cooperation or dialogue between charities and professional development organizations.

The study concludes that:

- 'FBO' is a problematic category in the Pakistani context, as religion operates in complex and varied ways within organizations.
- Religion is implicit in the values and functioning of Pakistani organizations that are charitable in nature, with the exception of minority religious organizations, whose religious identity is explicit.
- Organizations that frame themselves as being part of the 'development sector' are generally non-religious or secular in nature.
- The role of religion within an organization is tied to its funding structure; its location within local, national and international networks; and the political and ideological profile of its members.

Source: Kirmani, Nida and Zaidi, Sarah (2010) *The Role of Faith in the Charity and Development Sector in Karachi and Sindh, Pakistan*. Birmingham: Religions and Development Working Paper 50.

<http://www.rad.bham.ac.uk/index.php?section=47>

