

Further reflections

It is often asserted that ROs are both distinctive and 'add value', because of their presence in poor communities, the respect they enjoy, the moral high ground they occupy and the insights into issues of the day provided by their religious beliefs. A preliminary assessment of these claims indicates that:

- While faith communities are present at the local level, large ROs engaged in development activities such as those which participated in the pilot projects, may not always have a grassroots presence.
- Religious leaders are respected and in Nigeria were trusted to make the ROs' submission known in government circles. However, caution is advisable in relying on them to convey the views of their followers rather than their own or what their government associates prefer to hear.
- Both submissions reported claims by religious leaders and communities that governance and implementation will be improved only if they are involved, but evidence was scarce.
- Neither submission contains material that is distinctive in the sense that it is directly inspired by Christianity or Islam, or is at odds with non-religious views.

Many of the participating organizations were ambivalent about being grouped with other CSOs. However, in countries like Tanzania and Nigeria, where personal religious faith is ubiquitous, those who work with CSOs and government will almost certainly be Muslim or Christian. In these circumstances, any attempt to strengthen the voice of the poor needs to be doubly clear about the grounds for paying special attention to ROs and not subsuming them within the larger category of CSOs.

Conclusions and implications

In the early 2000s, ROs' involvement in PRSP consultative processes, whilst varied in both countries and stronger in Tanzania than in Nigeria, was generally weak and not obviously influential. The pilot projects indicate that:

- There is potential for religious organizations to work together using approaches similar to those tested to contribute positively to policy consultation processes.
- Religious organizations are able to assemble and represent the views of poor and marginalized people, although their willingness and ability to do so depend on power relationships within religious organizations and between faith communities and the state, which must be carefully assessed.
- Similar approaches to those tested could, with appropriate support, be rolled out more widely and also sustained, if the necessary financial resources can be obtained.
- This could increase the capacity of religious organizations to represent the experience and priorities of poor and remote communities to government and enable them to contribute to policy-making processes, but it may be more appropriate in some circumstances for them to work with other civil society organizations, rather than being singled out for support.



Religions and Development Research Programme

Strengthening the voice of the poor: participation by religious organizations in PRSPs in Nigeria and Tanzania

The conditionality that governs qualification for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative requires national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) to be locally owned, implying that the preparation process should be country driven and participatory. Despite their organizational strength, legitimacy and grassroots membership, religious organizations have been little involved in policy consultation processes. This project

- examined whether and how they have been involved in Nigeria and Tanzania
- provided support to enable a group of religious organizations to increase their engagement in PRSP preparation and review processes.

Background

PRSP processes are now well established in many countries. They provide opportunities for wider participation than traditional approaches to policy making, have been adapted to local circumstances and have been integrated with national planning processes. In some countries, ongoing monitoring and review of the strategies has widened the political space for deliberation and the scope for poor people (or civil society organizations that purport to represent their views) to influence policy and resource allocation, although there is also scepticism about the extent to which they provide opportunities for meaningful participation.

Despite the organizational strength, legitimacy and grassroots membership of religious organizations (ROs), none of the early assessments of PRSP processes examined whether they had participated in PRSP preparation. Consultations by the World Faiths Development Dialogue indicated that they had been little involved, with the organizations concerned attributing this to a lack of capacity.

Aims

This project set out to

- examine the extent and nature of ROs' engagement in PRSP processes in Nigeria and Tanzania
- devise and test an approach to building the capacity of selected religious organizations to participate in policy consultation processes, by strengthening their ability to speak effectively to governments on behalf of poor and marginalized communities.
- assess whether the pilot projects demonstrated a viable model for future engagement in policy processes by ROs.

The first stage was undertaken by teams at the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) in Ibadan and the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of Dar es Salaam respectively. The results were shared with the ROs concerned and relevant government departments. The ROs then established local management groups comprised of the organizations

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Further information

This policy brief is based on Michael Taylor (2011) *Strengthening the Voice of the Poor: Faith-based Organizations' Engagement in Policy Consultation Processes in Nigeria and Tanzania*. Birmingham: Religions and Development WP 61 and a number of unpublished reports produced by research teams led in Nigeria by Olakunle Odumosu at the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan, and in Tanzania by Ernest Mallya, University of Dar es Salaam, and the Tanzania Ecumenical Dialogue Group (under the care of the Christian Social Services Commission).

Photo courtesy of Comfort Davis

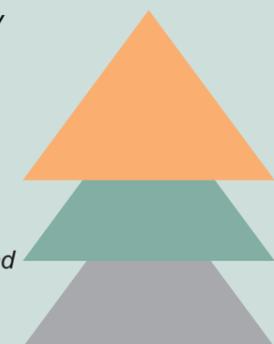
<http://www.religionsanddevelopment.org/index.php?section=47>



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Research on participation by religious organizations (ROs) in the preparation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies in Nigeria and Tanzania and pilot projects that developed their capacity to contribute indicate that:

- Increased participation depends not just on civil society organizations (CSOs) but also on governments offering opportunities and taking the outcomes seriously.
- There is potential for ROs to work together to contribute positively to policy consultation processes.
- ROs can assemble and represent the views of poor people, although whether they do so in practice must be carefully assessed.
- Similar approaches to those tested could, with appropriate support, be rolled out more widely and also sustained, if the necessary funds can be obtained.
- In some circumstances, it may be more appropriate for ROs to work with other CSOs, rather than being singled out for support.



interested in further participation. The pilot projects aimed to build the capacity of researchers from the participating organizations to collect and analyze data and assemble reports for submission to the relevant government departments, as a contribution to PRS preparation or review (see boxes).

NEEDS and SEEDS in Nigeria

2001	Start of process
2004	Completion of <i>National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy 2004-7</i> (NEEDS I).
2004	Started at state level: <i>State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies</i> (SEEDS) prepared in most states by 2007, including Oyo and Plateau.
2007	Review of NEEDS I, production of draft NEEDS II (2008-11)
2008-10	Stalled by political upheavals: election of new President, his illness and death, impending elections

MKUKUTA in Tanzania

1998	Start of process
2001	Completion of interim and full PRSPs: <i>National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty 2001-4</i> (in Swahili, <i>Mkakati wa Kukuza na Kupunguza Umasikini Tanzania</i>)(SGRP/MKUKUTA I)
2005	Completion of revised PRSP: MKUKUTA II 2005-10.
2010-	Review of MKUKUTA II, preparation of MKUKUTA III

RO participation in consultations

In both countries, the government had adopted a traditional technocratic approach to the preparation of earlier economic policies and poverty reduction strategies. There was no consultation prior to preparing the interim PRSPs. In Nigeria, selected private sector and civil society actors were invited to comment on the draft NEEDS I, mostly during ad hoc workshops. In Tanzania, there were a few consultations during the preparation of MKUKUTA I.

Critics in both countries noted that the consultative processes

- gave too much discretion to the national government to select participants and the topics for discussion
- provided no opportunities for the views of the wider public to be expressed
- sidelined representative structures (especially parliament)
- did not put governments under any obligation to change the drafts in response.

Civil society actors responded by organizing shadow consultations, in the process forming networks that enabled them to take advantage of the marginally better opportunities for participation in the preparation of the draft NEEDS II in Nigeria, the Poverty Monitoring Systems established to monitor the use of funds made available as a result of debt relief and the more extensive consultative arrangements during the preparation of subsequent MKUKUTA strategies in Tanzania.

Semi-structured interviews with key informants from religious and other civil society organizations and relevant government departments confirmed that ROs in Nigeria and Tanzania have not generally been present or influential in the preparation and implementation of poverty reduction strategies. Those that had participated were mainly the larger organizations. Reasons included:

- the lack of opportunities for civil society participation, especially in the early stages and especially in Nigeria
- lack of awareness of available opportunities
- reluctance, arising partly from earlier experiences of government failure to incorporate their inputs into policy documents
- uneasy relationships between governments and both CSOs in general and faith communities in particular.
- ROs' lack of relevant resources and capacity to collect evidence from poor communities and represent them to government in ways that command respect.

The pilot projects

In 2008/9 a pilot project in each country set out to foster inter-faith co-operation, increase skills in data collection, and use the evidence gathered to put forward constructive proposals. The outputs were to represent the experiences and opinions of grassroots communities where ROs are universally present. The projects were small-scale and experimental (see boxes); the potential for the approach to be replicated was also assessed.



Community meeting, Kano State

The pilot project in Nigeria

In Nigeria the work was undertaken in the Federal Capital Territory, Plateau State (a religiously mixed state in the Middle Belt) and Oyo State (a largely Christian state in the SW).

Of the 32 Christian and Muslim organizations contacted during the first part of the research, 14 participated in the pilot projects (six Muslim and eight Christian). Of 27 trainees, nine undertook research in each location (54 interviews and 27 FGDs). There was rough parity in each between men and women, and each group contained participants from both Christian and Muslim organizations.

Training was provided and the project managed by a team from NISER, under the guidance of a management group (five members from four ROs). Support was provided in both countries by the RaD team in Birmingham.

The pilot project in Tanzania

In Tanzania, the team and the organizations involved are based in the capital, Dar es Salaam, although many of the ROs operate throughout the country.

Of the 21 ROs contacted during the first stage, six participated in the pilot projects. Sixteen trainees undertook research in eight districts in four regions chosen to reflect differences in levels of prosperity and religious composition (interviews with 88 religious leaders and other key informants and 306 'ordinary' members of local churches and mosques).

The project was guided by a management group (six ROs) and managed by the Tanzania Ecumenical Dialogue Group, under the care of the Christian Social Services Commission. However, lack of in-house capacity meant that the training, supervision and data analysis was sub-contracted to external consultants.

In both countries, participating ROs agreed that the PRSP policies were generally acceptable and identified the main problem as lack of progress with implementation. Data collection and analysis therefore focused on

- assembling evidence on progress and challenges
- making constructive suggestions for both government and ROs themselves on how to tackle the problems identified.

In Nigeria, the study focused on health and agriculture, deemed the two sectors of most concern, and in Tanzania on the cluster of good governance policies.

Qualitative research methods were adopted. The trainee researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with local informants, including 'ordinary people' and 'poor groups', as well as religious and community leaders and some local government officials. They also participated in the analysis and report preparation. The reports were submitted to members of the Nigerian National Assembly, six State governors and members of the Oyo and Plateau State Assemblies in July 2009 and the Tanzanian government department concerned with MKUKUTA in September 2009.

Evaluation

In early 2010, evaluations assessed whether the approach adopted provides a successful model capable of being replicated and sustained. The main criteria for success were the quality of the two submissions and their reception by the Nigerian and Tanzanian governments. The *content* of the local research teams' findings and proposals are not of direct relevance to this assessment.

The assessments found that:

- The ROs involved set out to present 'competent, constructive and united' submissions to their governments; this was largely achieved.
- The submission appears to have been more influential in Tanzania than Nigeria, where relationships between religious organizations and the state are more sensitive, government interest in participatory processes more limited, and there have been political upheavals and a stalled policy process. However, insufficient time has elapsed to fully judge this.
- The local management arrangements worked reasonably well but the pilots alone were insufficient to overcome all the capacity constraints.
- In addition to the perspectives of local leaders, the submissions appear to reflect the perspectives of 'the poor', but care is needed in the use of categories such as 'ordinary people' and 'the poor'.
- Networks of ROs working together to represent the voices of the poor and influence policy are feasible and the networks developed or reinforced during this project are likely to continue, especially in Tanzania.
- The model piloted is replicable but not sustainable without external resources.