



Religions and Development Research Programme

The development activities, values and performance of non-governmental and faith-based organizations in Magu and Newala Districts, Tanzania

Maia Green, Claire Mercer and Simeon Mesaki

In Tanzania, a 'civil society sector' with roles in governance and development is a recent, largely externally-driven phenomenon superimposed on previously existing social and religious organizations. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are imagined to be 'close to the poor' and therefore better at implementing 'development' activities and playing a role in democratization. This study examined the position and role of religious organizations within a wider range of CSOs at the local level in two rural districts (Magu, prosperous, largely Christian, and Newala, remote, poor, largely Muslim), to assess whether faith-based organizations play a significant and distinctive role in development.

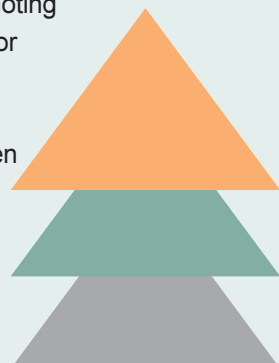
The traditional Christian churches (especially Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican) established educational and health facilities during the colonial period and continue to have a major role in service delivery (e.g. 13 per cent of dispensaries, 22 per cent of health centres and 40 per cent of hospitals in 2006). In addition, they and other churches have established projects or organizations for other development purposes. Only the largest of these organizations can raise significant funds from their own and their parent churches, enabling them to take some independent initiatives. Although significant in national terms, their facilities are thinly and unevenly spread over the country – they do not have any sizeable facilities in Magu or Newala. Provision of educational and health services by Muslim organizations is mostly small scale.

During the period of one-party rule, autonomous civil society organizations were rarely permitted, but since political liberalization in the early 1990s, a civil society sector has been aggressively promoted through international spending and targeted programming. Today, larger CSOs are mostly branches of international NGOs;

the majority of CSOs are small and revolve around a founding person or small group of people.

The research in Magu and Newala found that

- CSOs are mostly small and almost entirely dependent on external donors, with much of the funding stream in the five years prior to the study linked to
 - HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, disbursed through TACAIDS (Tanzania Commission for AIDS), or
 - Welfare support for Most Vulnerable Children (poor children and orphans), especially USAID funding distributed through Pact (an American organization) to CSOs via District Councils.
- By 2009, most CSOs in the districts studied (including FBOs) saw these as their key areas of work, even though many had been established to undertake other activities. Supply-driven funding has led to increased numbers of CSOs and competition between them for small grants to undertake similar activities.
- While formal registration is required to access funds, no expertise in the relevant area (HIV/AIDS or MVCs) appears to be required. Where specialist knowledge or skills are needed, implementation tends to be sub-contracted to other organizations or local authority staff.
- There are fewer organizations associated with Islam than those linked to the main churches, although BAKWATA, the government-supported Muslim umbrella organization, has assumed a role in promoting projects that can obtain international donor funding.
- In such a donor-driven and aid-dependent context, the assumed boundaries between CSOs, NGOs and FBOs are blurred and the different types of organization have similar development aims and activities, while most of those involved in NGOs



are religious adherents. FBOs do not appear to be especially close to the poor or to have a special religiously informed view of development.

- It is difficult to assess whether religious values lead to different developmental outcomes or FBOs' contribution to the achievement of development objectives, first because there are few institutional settings in which religious values are not influential and second, because the funding available to CSOs, including FBOs, is for intangibles (HIV/AIDS awareness) or short-term.

Donor support has been central to the evolution of the civil society sector, including FBOs: capacity building and criteria for accessing funding favour those organizations that fit an international template, determine which organizations are active (those that succeed in obtaining funding) and largely determine their activities (those for which funding is made available).

Based on Green, Maia, Claire Mercer and Simeon Mesaki (2010) *The Development Activities, Values and Performance of Non-governmental and Faith-based Organizations in Magu and Newala Districts, Tanzania*. Birmingham: Religions and Development WP 49.

Implications for donors, government and FBOs include

- Donors should re-assess
 - (a) their support to the formation of a civil society sector with shallow roots in Tanzanian society, especially if it is at the cost of improving government capacity.
 - (b) the use of competitive bidding processes for short-term grants for donor-specified activities.
- In contexts of high religious adherence and aid dependence, FBOs do not appear to have distinctive approaches to development, so there may not be grounds for prioritizing them in allocating funds for local development activities.
- FBOs should appreciate the potential outcomes of increased compliance with standard requirements and donor dependence for their independence and distinctiveness.

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

