

Interdisciplinary Journal of Best Practices in Global Development

Volume 2

Issue 1 *Impacting Social and Economic
Marginalization Trends*

Article 2

2016

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Recommended Citation

Raney, Alexandra and Raveloharimisy, Joel (2016) "The Contributions of Faith-Based Organizations to Development and the Humanitarian Field: An ADRA Case Study," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Best Practices in Global Development*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 2. Available at: <https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/ijbpgd/vol2/iss1/2>

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Cover Page Footnote

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The Contributions of Faith-Based Organizations to Development and the Humanitarian Field: An ADRA Case Study



Volume 2, Issue 1, April 2016

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explain the contributions of faith-based organizations (FBOs) to development and the humanitarian field. To do this, we used mixed methods research to conduct a case study of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), evaluating its mission, mandate, organizational resources, and activities conducted in 136 countries around the world. We argue that the contributions of FBOs to development and the humanitarian field are explained by the interplay of their identity, resources, and opportunities to do good. The paper concludes with recommendations for FBOs as we move toward the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, while improving delivery for beneficiaries, and simultaneously upholding human rights and their core values.

Keywords: Adventist Development and Relief Agency, development, humanitarianism, faith-based organizations, Sustainable Development Goals

The Contributions of Faith-Based Organizations to Development and the Humanitarian Field: An ADRA Case Study

We live in an age unparalleled by any other. We are hovering at the intersection of various and often-competing forces. Any traces of the thin veneer of isolation have been wiped away by globalization. Interconnectedness is the new global norm. And, as we face challenges incomparable in magnitude to any previous age, many look to faith for developmental solutions. By nature, faith and development share “enormous areas of overlap, convergence, ... concern and knowledge, and a core common purpose” (Marshall, 2005, p. 11). Religion plays an inextricably important role in the lives of people around the world, particularly in the context of developing nations. And “faith is arguably the terrain where justice, peace and the struggle against inequality interface” (UNFPA, 2014, p. 2).

It is evident, then, that practitioners, policy-makers, and politicians should understand and explore the ways that faith interacts with development, specifically in the work of faith-based organizations (FBOs). Until the late 1990s, predominantly secular development theorists had largely ignored this topic, preferring to believe that a sanitized separation between what FBOs believe and what they do is possible. However, we are increasingly realizing that these lines are blurred and that this somewhat-disingenuous perspective is unhelpful, if not outright harmful.

Over the last decade, researchers have begun to fill in the gap caused by the inattention to faith in development, but the gap (although diminished) still remains. More research needs to be done to provide in-depth analysis of the mechanisms that determine and influence the actions of FBOs. Consequently, our main research question is: what explains the contributions of FBOs to development and the humanitarian field? To answer this question, we are employing a case study of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

Literature Review

The term faith-based organization (FBO) is problematic for many reasons. Perhaps the greatest danger in its usage is the assumption that because multiple organizations claim to be FBOs, they are all homogenous. In fact, we should see the term FBO as a multidimensional, heterogeneous categorization, spanning many diverse types of organizations. “The current catch-all term faith-based organizations confuses and divides because no clear definition exists of what it means to be faith-based” (Sider & Unruh, 2004, pp. 109, 110). However, despite the dispute, the

term FBO is increasingly more widely used (Tomalin, 2012), which highlights the need to develop and use a more complex typology than a simple faith-based/secular divide (Tomalin, 2012).

Typologies can be used for different purposes: to identify distinct types of organizations, classify large sets of organizations, and locate individual organizations in a matrix of different organizational types (Tomalin, 2012). And, “while typologies are never comprehensive and may obscure as much as they reveal, they are nonetheless useful in extending descriptive definitions” (Tomalin, 2012, p. 695). One of the first typologies to appear in the literature was developed by Sider and Unruh (2004). Their study proposed an inductively derived five-fold typology of social service and educational organizations and programs based on their religious characteristics, and different scholars have applied it to FBOs worldwide. To operationalize the types, there are eight organizational and two programmatic characteristics. The following list is a summary of the five FBO types in addition to the secular type (Sider & Unruh, 2004):

- Faith-permeated - the religious connection is evident at all levels of mission, staffing, governance and support and the religious dimension is essential to program effectiveness. Participation in religious elements is often required.
- Faith-centered - organizations were founded for religious purpose and remain strongly connected with their faith community. Programs incorporate explicitly religious messages and activities but participants can readily opt out.
- Faith-affiliated - retain some of the influence of founders, but do not require staff to affirm religious beliefs or practices (except for some board members and leaders). They may incorporate little or no explicitly religious content, but may affirm faith in a general way and make spiritual resources available to participants. These programs may have the intent of conveying a religious message through nonverbal acts of compassion and care.
- Faith-background - look and act like secular NGOs. They have a historical tie to faith tradition. Religious beliefs may motivate some staff, but this is not considered in selection.
- Faith-secular partnership - whereby an FBO works together with secular agencies to create a temporary hybrid that resembles faith background. This type of organization is typically secular in its administration but relies on the religious partners for volunteer and in-kind support.

- Secular organizations - have no reference to religion in their mission or founding history, and they regard it as improper to consider religious commitments as a factor in hiring and governance. Secular programs include no religious content.

Clarke and Jennings (as cited by James, 2009) also propose four categories of FBOs in their second typology, which captures a wide range of faith in organizational forms in different developmental contexts: passive, active, persuasive, and exclusive.

To address the research question and explain the contributions of FBOs to development, we should first explain why FBOs are in the field in the first place. Even a brief look at the typologies makes it clear that faith-based development organizations have myriad reasons to do development and humanitarian work. For the purposes of this paper, we are limiting our scope to Christian FBOs, which arguably have dominated the research discussion until recently. This is a limitation of our research, and we stress that further work needs to be done to provide context-specific, case-based studies of non-Christian faith-based development organizations.

When we examine the bedrock of motivation for Christian FBOs, it is evident that regardless of the ways in which these FBOs operationalize their faith (and the role that faith plays in their values and activities), they are in the field to represent Christ. Isaiah 58:6-8 describes the life and actions of a faithful Christian (NET Bible):

I want you to remove the sinful chains,
to tear away the ropes of the burdensome yoke,
to set free the oppressed,
and to break every burdensome yoke.
I want you to share your food with the hungry
and to provide shelter for homeless, oppressed people.
When you see someone naked, clothe him!
Don't turn your back on your own flesh and blood!

So then, if the purpose of a Christian FBO is to represent Christ, how does that influence its identity and explain its contributions?

[I]t is in practice difficult to assess whether or not and in what ways faith influences the nature of an organization and how it carries out its activities, since faith cannot easily be disentangled from other influences such as the impact of donor practices; the interplay of local, national, and global political forces; historical, cultural, and

social factors; and the nature of the particular development problems being addressed. (Tomalin, 2012, p. 698)

Proposition

Consequently, we propose that FBO's contributions to development are heavily influenced by the interplay between their identity, resources, and the opportunities they have to do good. Identity—or the interaction of what we believe and our values—influences our actions, but it is not the only determinant. What FBOs do is also governed by other factors. These factors include both the social and financial resources available, as defined by donors' agendas, the organizational goals and organizational mechanism, and different development problems or humanitarian crises that arise and can be responded to.

Methodology

To further understand the contributions of FBOs to development and the humanitarian field, we have chosen to study a particular FBO: ADRA. The literature acknowledges that FBOs may or may not have comparative advantages, but also that generalized claims should not be made. Instead, to evaluate the contributions of FBOs, a “more context-sensitive and case-by-case approach is recommended” (Tomalin, 2012, p. 700). It is also certain that there is “undoubtedly a need to develop a wider knowledge of FBOs, given their previous neglect in development studies” (Tomalin, 2012, p. 700). The use of case study to explain the processes of various phenomena is quite familiar in the social sciences (Lieberman, 2001). Our choice to study ADRA specifically was warranted because this FBO is not addressed by the literature, which seems odd given the scale and scope of ADRA's accomplishments.

In this case study, we have employed mixed methods. Qualitative data were collected from the ADRA website and their constitution documents. A content analysis of ADRA's self-descriptive text—mission and identity statements, beliefs, core values, philosophy— was conducted, and job descriptions posted on the organization's website were reviewed. Qualitative data were used in order to complement the lack of quantitative data. However, quantitative data was collected from ADRA's annual reports (2011-2013) and annual audited financial statements. This mixed methods approach has been found useful and rewarding in the analysis of social phenomena (Bennett & Braumoeller, 2006).

Analysis

In order to determine how ADRA fits into the Sider and Unruh (2004) typology, we analyzed each of the ten characteristics and looked for a pattern that could categorize ADRA as fitting into one or more types. For example, characteristic one is an analysis of the FBO's self-descriptive texts. The following is a sample of ADRA's self-descriptive texts (ADRA International, 2014):

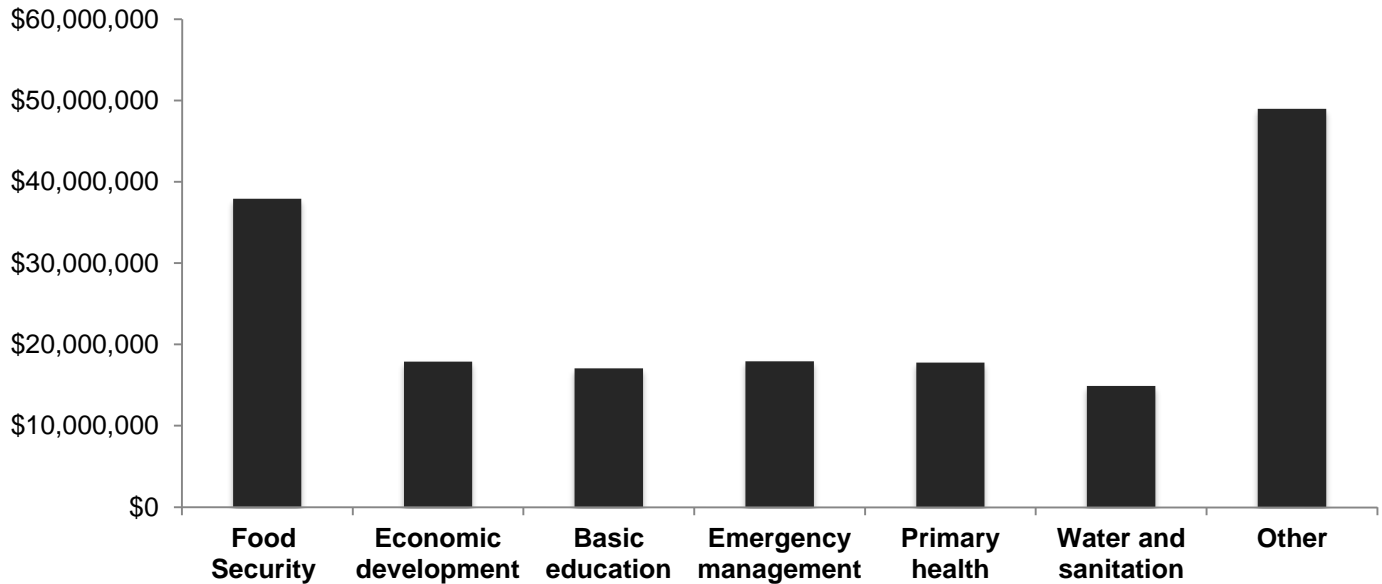
Mission Statement: ADRA works with people in poverty and distress to create positive change and justness through empowering partnerships and responsible action.

Identity Statement: The Adventist Development and Relief Agency is a global humanitarian organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that demonstrates God's love and compassion.

As demonstrated, ADRA's self-descriptive text can have either explicit religious references or be neutral/implicit when referring to religion. For this characteristic, that would put ADRA into the "Faith Affiliated" type of FBO. And in fact, on average, ADRA's organizational characteristics fit most often into this type. However, programmatically, ADRA operates like a secular organization. This division "reflects the fact that an organization may run a program that has a different set of religious characteristics than the organization" (Sider & Unruh, 2004, p. 118).

Historically, FBOs have played a key role in delivering social services to the poor and marginalized, especially in the fields of health and education (Davis, Jegede, Leurs, Sunmola, & Ukiwo, 2011; Lipsky, 2011; Marshall, 2005). Additionally, FBOs are increasingly working in all other sorts of humanitarian and charitable capacities. FBOs are more and more involved in advocacy and conflict resolution, and are gradually becoming more politicized (Davis et al., 2011). The issues that FBOs address are as diverse as the types of FBOs themselves. ADRA has five major dimensions of actions/service in terms of program spending: food security, economic development, basic education, emergency management, and primary health (water and sanitation) (ADRA International, 2013). The following chart shows the three-year averages for ADRA's program outputs in the major areas of focus:

ADRA Program Outputs in USD (means for 2011-2013)



These dimensions of service are not different from many other non-profit organizations—FBO or secular. In fact, ADRA and Mercy Corps International, a secular non-profit organization, receive the same grant from USAID to work in both Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (USAID & U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2013). And their program outputs are quite similar.

So then, what is the value of being faith-based, if in many cases FBOs like ADRA are doing the same work as their secular counterparts?

Findings

Our case study of ADRA emphasizes the interplay of the components of our proposition: identity, resources, and opportunity to do good.

Identity

One merit of being faith-based is to be able to retain and nourish a strong organizational identity. “Coherence between identity and action is vital for any organization, faith-based or not” (James, 2011, p. 7). In fact, the “development of a strong identity [can] galvanize an organization and motivate employees to perform above the call of duty” (Yip, Twohill, Ernst, & Munusamy, 2010, p. 463). “Organizational identity is what is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization” (Young, 2001, p. 139). And identity is a deeper concept than a simple “mission” or “vision” statement, although these operational statements are derived from a deeper sense of

identity (Young, 2001). FBOs should use their identity as a competitive advantage as they focus on the market niche that harmonizes with their values. FBOs “must know who they are to make successful strategic and structural choices” (Young, 2001, p. 140).

However, even though “we are not often aware of it, our identity can ‘bind and blind’ our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours” (Yip et al., 2010, p. 468). Some FBOs might try to keep their faith identity vague and ambiguous, downplaying their faith in order to receive more funding, recruit diverse staff, and work easily even other faith contexts, but this lack of clarity and ownership of faith identity can cause internal and external tensions (James, 2011). FBOs are often hesitant to identify and leverage themselves as faith-based, even to the extent that they feel the need to be apologetic for their faith-based identity (UNFPA, 2014). Since their faith identity can profoundly affect how FBOs operate internally and it can alter how they relate externally and with whom, it can affect how they build their own and others’ capacity (James, 2009). FBOs have the responsibility to courageously and clearly “define for themselves and to outsiders what their faith identity means and how it is operationalized in their work” (James, 2011, p. 7). ADRA is not shy of its identity as an FBO and strives to provide levels of transparency and accountability to its stakeholders that are comparable to any of its secular counterparts. In her book, *Gospel Workers*, White says that:

The religion of Christ does not require us to lose our identity of character, but merely to adapt ourselves, in some measure, to the feelings and ways of others. Many people may be brought together in a unity of religious faith whose opinions, habits, and tastes in temporal matters are not in harmony; but if they have the love of Christ glowing in their hearts, and are looking forward to the same heaven as their eternal home, they may have the sweetest and most intelligent communion together, and a unity the most wonderful. (2012a, p. 400)

In the merging of faith and development, the identity of an FBO needs to be able to adapt and respond to the needs of its stakeholders, but it need not be diminished or hidden.

Resources

FBOs, more than their secular counterparts, are capable of significant social mobilization because of their connection to religious institutions. Beyond the convening capacities inherent in raising and utilizing legions of volunteers (which no other institution can boast worldwide), they

are owners of the longest standing and most enduring mechanisms for raising financial resources. In times when traditional ‘secular’ development is confronting its strongest set of resource challenges, these capabilities cannot be underestimated. (UNFPA, 2014, p. xi)

And unlike their secular counterparts, FBOs can rely on sources of internal as well as external funding. They also can be found in the most remote of places, where government services do not reach and they can reach the poorest at the grassroots because faith structures (churches, mosques, temples) are at the heart of the communities they serve (James, 2011). ADRA, as the humanitarian and development arm of the Seventh-day Adventist church, can capitalize on the social resources and church structure and presence as a global church. As such, ADRA is active in around 136 countries around the world. This number far exceeds most FBOs and secular non-profits of comparable output and size.

Opportunity to do good

While ADRA relies on its faith-based identity for motivation and capitalizes on the significant and unique resources it has access to, it also remains open-minded to opportunities it can seize for doing good. In this context, “doing good” means that the FBO’s focus should be on the needs and the wellbeing of the people that they are trying to help. This focus goes further than simply addressing the immediate needs by providing people with the opportunity to ensure their livelihoods.

Like secular organizations, FBOs respond to crises that occur around the world. However, FBOs have a chance to view these opportunities through the lens of religion. Matthew 25:40 reads, “And the king will answer them, ‘I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me’” (NET Bible). An FBO views disaster as a chance to not only represent Christ, but to also minister to Christ in the form of the “least of these.” Faith-based identity drives FBOs beyond the concept of wealth generation and human dignity, to the realm of the divine.

Implications and Recommendations

So what does it mean then to lead in the field as an FBO? What does it take to have more impact and to represent Christ more fully?

We suggest that to be leaders, FBOs must develop four proficiencies that relate to the intersection of faith and development. These proficiencies are applicable to FBOs on the spectrum from fervently faithful to secular. They encompass FBOs as practitioners, their constituents,

donors, and beneficiaries—all of whom are also located somewhere on the faith spectrum. The proficiencies are religious literacy, religious tolerance, religious competency, and development literacy.

Religious literacy

“To engage with religion requires a certain level of ‘religious literacy’ on the part of development actors—an understanding of the complex roles that religions play in contemporary global, national and local contexts” (UNFPA, 2014, p. 5). Religious literacy involves enhancing your knowledge of the importance of religion in people’s lives in developing contexts and also learning about the beliefs and practices embodied within different religious traditions (Tomalin, 2013). It is the process that involves moving beyond stereotypes and a “veneer of passing reference to faith to [a] more sophisticated understanding” (Marshall, 2005, p. 9). Developing a culture of religious literacy should happen by first educating the staff and constituents of the FBO. The recommendation that we have for ADRA is to conduct training sessions in religious literacy and reach out to educate the constituents in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Perhaps ADRA could cooperate with the religious liberty department of the church to achieve this end.

Religious tolerance

The Bible declares in 2 Corinthians 3:17 that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (New King James Version). As religiously literate people, we understand that there is a wide spectrum of religious beliefs, and the concept of freedom and tolerance of other people’s freedom is both a tenet of Christianity and also a humanitarian. “Human rights and their underlying values such as tolerance and freedom are seen to have foundations across different religions and cultural traditions” (Tomalin, 2013, p. 139).

So what *is* tolerance? “Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human” (General Conference of UNESCO, 1995). Not only that, but consistent with respect for human rights, the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions. *It means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs.* It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behaviour, and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others. (General Conference of UNESCO, 1995)

1 Corinthians 10:28, 29 says, But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? (English Standard Version) Why should my freedom be limited by what someone else thinks? Or, perhaps, the real question is: why should someone else’s freedom be limited by what *I* think? Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, ... [and] to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance” (United Nations, 1948). Leading in the development field means cultivating religious tolerance in both identity and in practice. Once again, White (2012a) has some practical advice for those who seek to do good by means of faith.

Do not reproach the Christian religion by jealousy and intolerance toward others. This will, but poorly, recommend your belief to them. No one has ever been reclaimed from a wrong position by censure and reproach; but many have thus been driven from the truth, and have steeled their hearts against conviction. A tender spirit, a gentle and winning deportment, may save the erring, and hide a multitude of sins. God requires us to have that charity that “suffereth long, and is kind.” (1 Corinthians 13:4)

ADRA sets a standard in the proficiency of religious tolerance that is exemplary—both in its commitment to practicing “blind aid” and its willingness to seek and be in partnerships with other organizations of different denominations, or with no religious affiliation at all, who share ADRA’s development concerns (General Conference Committee, 1983). Our recommendation for ADRA would be to maintain this religious tolerance and search for opportunities at the same time to educate their constituents about religious tolerance. Because of their proficiency, ADRA’s practice of religious tolerance has developed into religious competency.

Religious competency

Religious competency is about practicing religion and exercising your right to freedom of both expression and religion, while at the same time living in harmony with your neighbours who also have the right to practise and endorse their own religion. FBOs like ADRA have an ethical

obligation to integrate and promote human rights and freedoms into their own practice. This duty to upholding human rights can be broken down into three categories (Green, 2001):

1. The duty to *respect*, that is, not actively to deprive people of the guaranteed right.
2. The duty to *protect*, that is, not allow others to deprive people of the guaranteed right.
3. The duty to *fulfill*, that is, to work actively to establish political, economic, and social systems and infrastructure that provide access to the guaranteed right to all members of the population.

FBOs need to move from not just respecting (religious literacy), and not simply protecting (religious tolerance), but actively fulfilling (religious competency) human rights.

In the past, FBOs have been criticized for their practice of selective human rights, but FBOs will find themselves without a “seat at the table” if they persist in practicing selective human rights. Including religious actors (like FBOs) “should not come at the expense of human rights, nor should diversity or difference justify a breach of any one human right. We should certainly engage with FBOs, it was maintained, but always within broader framework of human rights” (UNFPA, 2014, p. 19). Fortunately, FBOs have a valuable role to play in the realizing of these human rights. The field is recognizing that “approaching human rights from within religious frameworks could help bridge the chasm between theory and realization of rights within development” (Tomalin, 2013, p. 122).

Christ himself recognized no caste, no nationality; the compassionate Redeemer laboured among all classes (White, 2012b). And speaking of someone who was providing relief to the needy but was outside of the disciples’ circle of faith, Jesus said in Luke 9:50, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you” (English Standard Version). James 1:27-2:1 says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their time of trouble, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. My brothers, stop showing favoritism as you live out your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (Mounce New Testament). The question then remains: *what are the best ways to retain a unique identity, while practicing religious competence?* This perhaps is a direction that further research can take.

Development literacy

The final proficiency for FBO leaders in the field to cultivate is development literacy. FBOs must reciprocate the effort by global actors to engage with and understand religious forces by cultivating their own literacy about development. Engaging with the new global “Sustainable

Development Goals” (United Nations, 2015) will be an essential and powerful part of this commitment. FBOs such as ADRA need to acquire an awareness of the post-2015 development goals (SDGs) and maintain and strengthen relationships with each other, secular organizations, and global actors such as the United Nations (UNFPA, 2014). “The MDGs [Millennium Development Goals] were a social agenda, but this is being greatly expanded into a radically different universal agenda that is not just about ‘poor people,’ and is not just decided on in capitals. In fact, all are expected to take action, everywhere” (UNFPA, 2014, p. 2). It is also important to recognize that “the organizational culture of FBOs themselves is a product of development and not just a network through which development happens” (Tomalin, 2012, p. 692).

Development literacy for FBOs involves the intersection of development, ethics, and religion. “Development, ethics and theology thus go hand in hand in his works, both critically and constructively” (Fretheim, 2011, p. 309). Crocker (as cited in Fretheim, 2011, p. 304) argues that Development ethics consists, then, not only of concrete critique and judgements of moral responsibility, but also reflection on both the general direction in which a society should develop and the abstract ethical principles that can guide the choice of these goals. In other words, while ethics can be defined as a reflection on ethical theory and moral practice, development ethics is the reflection on the content, meaning and implications of development.

Becoming literate about development will require FBOs to participate in development discourse in constructive ways. In order for development to happen, attitudes and values generally must change—and “values and attitudes are the core business of religion” (James, 2011, p. 5). Faith communities make significant contributions to development work, and FBOs can “add value to development in a number of ways” (James, 2011, p. 2) but all this must be done in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways.

Conclusion

In this case study, we have shown that ADRA maintains its distinct faith identity, accesses worldwide resources (both internal and external), and actively seeks to respond to crises and development opportunities as a means of fulfilling its mandate to do good to all people. ADRA could stand as an exemplary model of a faith-based development organization.

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