

Faith and Development Leaders Meeting
Faith-inspired networks and organizations:
Their contributions to development programs and policies

A meeting organized by the Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics at The World Bank, the UK Department for International Development, and the World Faiths Development Dialogue

Accra, Ghana, July 1-3, 2009

**Concluding remarks by Ms. Katherine Marshall, Executive Director,
World Faiths Development Dialogue**

This has been a wonderful meeting. We are immensely appreciative that you joined us in Accra, and that you spoke so openly, honestly, and thoughtfully. Every one of you here was engaged and, as we had hoped, you were full of insights and ideas that will prove immensely useful for our work and inspirational for our future paths. We have appreciated and enjoyed each and every one of you. As Cardinal McCarrick observed, the meeting includes a wonderful blend of people whose names are known around the world, people whose names we are likely to hear in the future, and many unsung heroes, who work quietly and with determination for what is truly God's work.

My comments focus on the journey we have travelled, where we are now, reflecting on the meeting, and next steps.

The journey

The WFDD journey began over eleven years ago, motivated above all by a personal passion for social justice and a determination to fight world poverty. For George Carey and his colleagues from nine different world faith traditions, their engagement showed a faith in the World Bank, for all its complexity and foibles, as well as curiosity to know more. They believed that it represented far more than money and brains, and that much could be built on a shared commitment to social justice and the development of human potential. Jim Wolfensohn, representing the World Bank, saw early on, as many more do today, the vast reach of religions, the trust that poor people have in faith institutions, and the deep and ancient concerns of religions with poverty and exclusion.

Several stalwart colleagues on the journey are here today, others in spirit: Jim Wolfensohn, Mats Karlsson, Jean-Louis Sarbib from the Bank, joined now by Graeme Wheeler and Joy Phumaphi. Diarmuid Martin has been part of the effort from the very beginning, and David Saperstein and Cardinal McCarrick are veterans of the process. And Dr. Handa has been a remarkably intelligent and generous supporter – a rare philanthropist, working by faith and instinct as well as analysis, he has accompanied us closely on the road.

And George Carey deserves our warm thanks and particular tribute. Faithful to the WFDD idea from the very beginning, he has stuck with it and with us despite countless frustrations, always ready to pursue the ideal and always practical in moving forward when and where we could.

The WFDD journey has involved two intertwined paths: the important leadership meetings and the effort to institutionalize them in WFDD, the institution. Beyond the WFDD history which we distributed to you

I highlight the centrality of the MDG challenge for this special network especially over the past six years and the continuing effort to link the vision and inspiration of global leaders who care about development to the daily realities of communities.

Each meeting of leaders has had its flavor and character and many have commented, at the time and years later, that the Canterbury or Dublin or Lambeth encounters transformed their ideas about development, and the development institutions, giving them fresh ideas and impetus. New partnerships and alliances have emerged each time and the network has expanded in many ways. The Bank learned immeasurably from the encounters, and it fueled work on cases studies and reflections on partnerships at many levels.

From the second meeting, the need for continuing efforts to ground and build the efforts inspired the WFDD as an institution. Always conceived as small and catalytic, with close links to the World Bank and other development institutions, WFDD was based in the UK, then moved to Washington DC where it is now based. The idea was that this institution, created with strong Bank support, would do what the World Bank could not and perhaps should not do, but with a tight relationship along the way. Working with the World Bank, WFDD worked to build partnerships and a network, to explore ideas, to support policy work and both the WDR and PRSP process, and to build a body of case narratives of partnerships and faith inspired work that would make clearer how development and faith were linked.

Where we are: Accra Ideas

I am still processing the many ideas and insights that this meeting has generated, but I want to highlight a few significant themes that echoed over these two days.

- We still have far to travel to bring into the light the work and contributions of faith institutions on development. There were calls for greater *visibility*, then greater *clarity*, and *understanding* of quality and distinctiveness, and also of *impact*. The World Bank has long been preoccupied with the challenge of *adding up* – ensuring that wonderful work can catalyze broader and lasting change and that challenge emerged clearly as we heard about the diverse, innovative, and determined work of so many communities.
- *Partnership* is a large continuing preoccupation: what does it involve, how can it work better, what are the pitfalls along the road? Agnes Abuom offered practical experience-based advice on principles even as she pointed to the dangers inherent in imbalances of power and particularly the dominance of financial interests. There is work to do.
- Many questioned a *neat distinction between advocacy and service delivery*, suggesting that the lines are more blurred than commonly understood; advocacy and action go together and should be seen that way.
- The special roles and insights of many faith traditions and institutions on the gnawing problem of *exclusion* came out strongly. With increasing focus on fragile states and problems of conflict, there are many unexplored as well as proven roles for faith institutions.
- *Quality* emerged as a clear theme: there can be no compromise with the goal of excellence for faith institutions or development agencies, even as the importance of keeping the human face in mind is vital for all. The significance of excellent and innovative faith-led work and directions deserves more focus.

- *Interfaith* work was cited often as a powerful if difficult tool, with benefits both for development work per se and for intercommunal relationships and social cohesion.
- The “*seat at the table*” issue, a theme from the start of the dialogue, is as present and perhaps as complex as ever. The notion that “if you do not have a seat at the table you will end up on the menu” was repeated often.

All these insights suggest heightened focus and attention.

One point, I suggest, deserves more attention. Aid harmonization is a central theme today for the development community as it recognizes the high cost of fragmentation, overlap, duplication, and working at cross purposes. Faith interventions are part of this problem, even as silence on the topic here suggests they are not yet enough part of the solution.

Finally, we were challenged to focus on the crossroads where we stand, with stakes as high for humankind as they ever have been. Incremental and timid change is not enough, you emphasized, and faith voices and institutions need to be central actors in bringing home the imperatives for change and the paths it can take.

Looking Ahead

We have spoken about or provided as background much information about the ongoing work that WFDD, with the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University and, in some cases, the World Bank, is doing. Briefly, our continuing focus is on three areas, with “mapping” a central theme (a theme that echoes concerns about knowledge and visibility, as well as highlighting the policy implications for faith inspired development work). First, we are exploring, region by region, faith inspired development work, with consultations and reports completed for the US, the Muslim World, Europe and Africa, and Latin America. Work on Asia is underway. Several of you have contributed to and are part of this work, which will culminate in a capstone conference next year.

Second, we are focusing on specific development issues from a faith “lens”, with reports on HIV/AIDS, malaria, gender, governance, and shelter completed to date and work ongoing on children and tuberculosis.

In parallel, we are working to address a question that came up quite often during the conference: what is distinctive or different about faith development work and what issues does it present? We are finding a series of in-depth interviews with practitioners to be a gold mine of information. And the first answer to the questions is clearly: “it’s very complicated”, with enormous diversity and complexity. We have interviewed several of you here (Dan Starrett, Jacques Dinan, Gideon Byamugisha, for example) and hope to complete interviews with more of you.

As we look ahead, we underscore how different the landscape for faith and development efforts is today from 12 years ago. Then, WFDD was alone and unique, but now exciting new institutions are working to similar ends: notably the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and CIFA (Center for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty). The World Bank DDVE is revitalized and moving in some new directions. We are working together closely in many areas and need to be sure that our efforts, also, are well harmonized and serve the needs and wishes of our networks.

We look forward to your feedback to help us in strategic reflections on our next steps. It will shape our plans and approach. We hope that it can enrich and build our current plans. For these, the mapping work, both global and especially building strong country models, seems vital. Cases studies play a central role.

We also see a continuing role for dialogue in the best sense: exploring difficult issues with a view to transformation. WFDD should be willing to address those issues and questions: why are faith communities not more forcefully engaged on domestic violence issues and corruption? Why has family planning become such a contentious issue and can we help defuse tensions? How can the macro perspectives at which the World Bank excels as well as sector approaches be better linked to work and insights at community levels, where the faith reach is unarguably unparalleled?

Let me reiterate the thanks of Quentin Wodon to the organizing group who have worked so hard to make this possible. From WFDD I honor the long and hard work of Thomas Bohnett, involved over many months, and of Chris Lumry, our summer intern. Brady Walkinshaw, now with the Gates Foundation, was part of the conception discussions and early planning. And congratulations to Quentin Wodon; I knew what he was getting into even if he did not. Warm thanks to Graeme Wheeler and Joy Phumaphi who have been such integral parts of the effort.

Many thanks again to you all for being with us, for accompanying us along this important path.

Some Questions during the discussion:

Faith communities need to address some leading development issues, like domestic violence and corruption, but what about the World Bank, for example in its willingness to stick with authoritarian or repressive regimes?

That is a critical point and is central to the idea of WFDD, that as an independent organization it can work with but also confront issues for both faith and development partners.

Aid coordination and harmonization are important BUT they can heighten exclusion, for example of youth groups or smaller faiths.

That is indeed a major challenge and a reason some are skeptical about greater aid harmonization. It should not mean that a single vision dictates all action, nor that only governments and development institutions have a voice. We need to work together, hard, to bring voices into the dialogue more effectively.

What about using media more effectively?

A crucial point. Faith communities often have a genius for communication, and have large media outlets. Internet use is enormous. We should work to build on this.