Engaging Development and Religion: Methodological Groundings

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Summary. — Religion is no longer a neglected dimension in development studies. Not only has the literature on religion and development blossomed over the last decade, but partnerships between international development institutions and faith communities have also multiplied. Yet, little is said about *how* such engagement is to take place beyond reference to general principles, and beyond the instrumental use of religion for achieving pre-determined international development goals. The aim of the paper is to propose some methodological grounding for engaging development and religion at the normative level. It does so on the basis of Amartya Sen's capability approach and Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home.* Although the latter is written by the global Catholic leader, it is addressed to every human being and urges a redefinition of the meaning of development. Our paper argues that the encyclical contains a potentially fruitful methodological proposal for engaging development and religion. We analyze how such a methodology has been applied in an exercise by the UK Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) to facilitate a global dialogue on development and religion in different geographical contexts. After addressing some of the limits of the methodology of *Laudato Si'*, we examine how Sen's normative conceptualization of development and methodological proposal toward dialogue and reason about values—including religious ones—could complement some religious approaches and methodologies, such as in *Laudato Si'*, to yield innovative proposals for engaging development and religion.
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1. INTRODUCTION

With 84% of the world's population estimated to be affiliated to a religion,[1] international institutions and governments are increasingly acknowledging the importance of religion in development policy. International development organizations have over the last decade sought to establish partnerships with faith communities and have produced sets of guidelines on how to work together. In 2012, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) launched its 'Faith Partnership Principles'. It is based on the recognition of the prevalence of religion in the lives of people living in poverty, the trust commanded by religious leaders, and the proximity of religious organizations to the most marginalized and the effectiveness of the many services they provide (Alkire, 2006; Clarke, Jennings, & Shaw, 2007; Marshall, 2013; Marshall & Van Saanen, 2007; Narayan, Chambers, Shah, & Petesch, 2000). DFID (2012) has selected three principles to underpin its work with faith groups: transparency (being clear about one's beliefs, values and objectives); mutual respect (respecting each other despite differences and disagreements); and understanding (gaining more knowledge of the values and ways of functioning of the respective organizations). In areas of disagreement, DFID's strategy is to respect different views while working at what can be commonly agreed upon.

Similarly, UNICEF published in 2012 a document about 'Partnering with Religious Communities for Children'. Based on the common ground shared by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the inherent dignity of every human life held in religious traditions, UNICEF works in partnership with faith communities. Like DFID, UNICEF focuses on principles such as transparency, mutual respect and understanding, while stressing the importance of cultivating certain attitudes like curiosity, openness, not being prejudiced, willingness to learn, and sensitivity toward others. But unlike DFID, UNICEF (2012) recognizes the heterogeneity of religious traditions, and the need to address areas of disagreements or sensitive issues beyond what is readily agreed upon. For example, it may be easier to agree with a Catholic organization on the care of HIV/AIDS orphans than on the distribution of condoms to prevent the spread of the virus, but this does not foreclose the need for discussion and sustained debate about the most effective means to protect human life. The equal dignity of boys and girls and access to similar opportunities is another area where disagreements between UNICEF and some faith groups may arise. However, UNICEF's document indicates that often discriminatory and harmful practices are based on cultural traditions that contravene religious principles. Hence there is a need to engage with the religious traditions themselves to re-examine their practices in the light of their own authoritative texts.

The United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund have also established their own sets of working guidelines for partnering with faith communities (UNDP, 2014, UNFPA, 2009). All these guidelines mirror one another and emphasize the importance of partnering with faith communities and focusing on common ground in order to make poverty reduction more effective. The World Bank has not yet published similar guidelines but has convened several events over the last two decades, starting with the World Faiths Development Dialogue in 1998 and continuing to date with organizing, in July 2015, a global conference on Religion and Sustainable Development.[2] Since 2014, 5he World Bank Group has had its own in-house 'Faith-Initiative Team'.[3]

In line with DFID's approach, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (GTZ) has been the latest to come on board by convening, in February 2016, an international conference on 'Partners for

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Change—Religions and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (GTZ, 2016). The initiative is based on the assumption 'that there can be no global paradigm shift toward sustainable development without the involvement of religious faiths' (GTZ, 2016, p. 26). Like other partnership initiatives, GTZ holds the view that partnerships are most successful when based on agreements between secular and religious actors, case-by-case according to local needs and contextual factors, which therefore means including all members of faith communities, and not only their representative leaders. Another key aspect of GTZ partnerships is holding faith communities accountable to their members in order to prevent (ab) uses of religion that may be detrimental to people's lives.

Despite the proliferation of partnership guidelines within the realm of international development and donor organizations, and despite the rapid expansion of academic literature on religion and development since the turn of the millennium (see, among others, Carbonnier, 2013; Clarke, 2013; Clarke et al., 2007; Deneulin & Bano 2009; Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011; Fountain, 2013; Jones & Petersen, 2011; Levy, 2013; Lunn, 2009; Marshall, 2013; Marshall & Van Saanen, 2007; Olivier 2016; Rakodi, 2012; Smith, 2017; Tomalin, 2013; Tomalin, 2015; Tyndale, 2006), the subject of the methodology for engaging development policy and practice alongside religion remains little explored.[4]

International development organizations have a practical methodological approach for engaging with religion, particularly through establishing certain principles (e.g., mutual respect) and finding commonalities (e.g., human dignity). Nonetheless, this methodology and the partnership model it fosters, remains mainly instrumental. In most cases, the underlying rationale for partnering with faith communities is motivated by the search for more effective ways to reach vulnerable populations and to achieve pre-determined development goals more quickly and efficiently (Jones & Petersen, 2011). The argument often made is that faith communities are necessary partners in poverty reduction initiatives because they are often the only institutions functioning in fragile contexts, and because faith leaders are often more trusted than the state (Marshall & Van Saanen, 2007; Narayan et al., 2000).

Moreover, these partnerships tend to function on the premise that there are 'secular' development organizations on the one hand, and 'faith' communities on the other, as if they were separate entities, with the latter to be used for the former's ends. This division between 'secular' and 'religious' has been questioned in the literature (see Ager & Ager, 2011; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, & VanAntwerpen, 2011; Deneulin & Bano, 2009; Hovland, 2007; Leurs, 2012; Linden, 2007; Olivier 2016; Smith, 2017).[5] Given the entanglement between religion and development, the issue is not so much how the secular and religious worlds can be compared to each other, or if 'faith-based' organizations have a comparative advantage over 'secular' organizations because, for instance, their partnerships lead to better development outcomes. Rather, following Smith (2017, p. 69), the question is: How do development actors, religious *and* secular, apply their beliefs and values to development programs, and how does the local context influence the application of these beliefs and values? Smith (2017) proposes a framework, in the form of a number of questions, to explore the links between the beliefs and practices of the various development actors, whether 'secular', 'faith-based' or 'missionary', as all have beliefs that influence their development practices. However, he does not propose a methodology for different actors to cooperate on the basis of their respective beliefs and practices.

The aim of this paper is to address this, and to examine how all actors, whether motivated by a faith or none, can cooperate to bring about sustainable and holistic development. As the methodology to underpin such cooperation remains underexplored, we propose a specific methodology for engaging development goals with the founding ideas, beliefs, and practices of faith communities. We do so by analyzing an engagement exercise between development and religion based on Pope Francis's (2015) encyclical-letter *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*, combined with Amartya Sen's capability approach. The paper is divided as follows: it starts with discussing some examples of engagement between development and religion, highlighting methodological challenges. It then analyzes Pope Francis's methodology of engaging development and religious traditions, as expressed in his social encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The encyclical has been selected because it engages religion and development in an integral way, i.e., it is not limited to a particular development area and it integrates the current social and the ecological state of affairs. The paper then critically examines the encyclical's methodology through how it has been applied in a global dialogue exercise initiated by the UK Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) between October 2015 and September 2016 in Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Kenya, Colombia, Bangladesh, and the UK. Addressing some of the limits of the exercise's methodology, the paper argues that Amartya Sen's capability approach to development could provide an effective complement to facilitate the engagement between development and religion. The paper concludes by outlining the transformative potential of such an engagement for both development and religious practice.

2. SOME METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF ENGAGEMENT

As highlighted in the introductory section, partnerships between development organizations and faith communities have spread over the last decade.[6] In this section we select four examples, relevant for both development and religion, which contain both positive and negative instances of engagement and bring out critical methodological questions.

A first example of the multiple partnerships initiatives was the Ebola outbreak in 2014–15 in West Africa. Despite the international rhetoric about the importance of involving faith communities in development efforts, national governments and international actors were slow in recognizing the significance of religious actors in addressing the outbreak (CAFOD, Christian Aid, & Tearfund & Islamic Relief Worldwide, 2015; Marshall & Smith, 2015). The way funerals were conducted, the practices surrounding physical contact between people, the centrality of religious institutions in people's daily lives—all these were realities on the ground that required government actors and faith communities to engage with one another in joint actions against Ebola. For instance, training pastors to help people deal safely with dead bodies such as the washing of bodies in preparation for burial, or addressing Sunday congregations on health issues, proved effective in changing public health practices.

A second example is an initiative of a non-governmental organization in Nigeria to involve Islamic leaders in eradicating the practice of child marriage (Walker, 2015; Wodon, 2015). At first, the leaders were reluctant to engage with the external development intervention because they viewed ending the practice as a 'secular' agenda. However, when informed