

## Development programmes: A Need to integrate cultures and religions

A Bernardins' seminar recommendations  
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“Development” – as understood with reference to countries in the South and the specific meaning we shall use in this paper – concerns all dimensions of human life: material, economic, social, spiritual, cultural and religious. However, most programmes supported by public and private international aid focus on standardised rationales, with little concern (with a few exceptions, particularly for faith-based aid) for the cultural and religious contexts of the populations who are supposed to benefit from it.

Cultural specificities can be observed everywhere, but their effects are difficult to grasp. Contrary to what one might think, religion is far from disappearing and is showing a certain consistency, or even new impetus. These attachments influence the perception that the people concerned have of development. Furthermore, the revival of religion is combined with an increasing will of religious institutions to put forward proposals in international debates. These observations advocate for cultural and religious dynamics to be taken into account in the definition and implementation of development policies.

This paper is the result of work conducted during a seminar held for two years at the Collège des Bernardins, on the topic of *“Development put to the test of cultures and religions”*. It constitutes a call from our working group for more effective account to be taken of the *social dimensions of development policies, in particular via various cultural and religious aspects*.

We shall first begin by specifying what is actually meant by the three key notions of this reflection (“development”, “culture”, and “religion”). A second section will highlight some of

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the issues related to social and cultural aspects being insufficiently taken into account. Finally, in a third section, we shall make seven concrete recommendations, which aim to ensure a better match between what “development” actors offer with demand.

## 1. Definitions and human issues

The three main notions used here – “development”, “culture” and “religion” – are subject to complex debates, from the academic point of view, as well as from the practical or political perspective. We shall begin by specifying the meaning we give to them, by seeking to situate ourselves at a sufficiently broad level in order to avoid dogmatic quarrels, and yet sufficiently precise to provide practical insight into the issues.

### “Development”: a human-centred issue

The term “development”, which was formalised during one of the first United Nations conferences (Havana, 1947) to describe the path of “underdeveloped” countries, meant that the latter were required to achieve economic progress in order to catch up with prosperous countries, thanks to a sort of mimicry of capitalism. The notion was thus rapidly at the centre of the ideological competition of the Cold War. Each field (liberal capitalism or Soviet Marxism) sought to diversely extend their influence towards “Third World” countries, but they all more or less agreed on a principle of “catching up”. This orientation, which is continuing today under other names (convergence, modernisation, etc.), has endorsed the idea of the partial projection of a “Western model” in all countries, with the main objectives of i) building the State as the central actor, ii) establishing formal democracies, and iii) economic growth.

This meaning of the word “development”, in the context of the current global economy, appears to be quite removed from its original meaning from other disciplines, which refers to *transformations of living organisms* – plants, animals, human beings – with each of these worlds being able to grow, while remaining themselves, and acquiring new capacities and characteristics. In terms of economic and social action, despite increasingly elaborate procedures, the conception of “development” often remains inoperative in the field. The profusion of standardised jargon and concepts in international fora demonstrates the awkwardness of the discourse faced with realities. Today, “development” is often only one of the figures of economic globalization and falls quite short of its founding ambitions.

The authors of this paper are absolutely convinced that we *must* and *can* enhance mechanisms relating to this “development” sphere.

By this term, we are referring here to the increase in the capacities of countries, communities and people, not only to survive threats – famines, diseases, conflicts, etc. –, but also the increase in their capacity to determine their future and see themselves in it. It applies to each human group, rooted in a history and a specific intellectual and spiritual production, organised as a society situated within a global context and geopolitical relations. Concerning human life and the way we live together, freedom – with its effective various components of speech, rights, criticism, etc. – plays an essential role. *“Development, in the broad sense, means the widespread improvement in the standard of living, well-being and freedom of the population”* (Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, Revue Projet n° 338, 2014).

In practical terms, these broad principles apply in various essential fields, such as access to education for all, health, energy, mobility and all public services. They are also related to global changes, including demographic transitions, the ecological and energy transition, urbanisation, cultural mixing, epidemiological emergences, the spread of “civilisation diseases”, respect for the environment, etc. In this respect, human development is strongly related to the development of the social and natural environment.

This idea of development, by taking into account the notions of well-being and freedom, refers to the specific cultural and religious aspects of each society. It particularly involves the recognition of a subsidiarity, *i.e.* the freedom for each society to devise its practical modalities of application, with reference to its own values and beliefs.

#### [Culture, central to the way of life and the meaning given to it](#)

“Culture” appears through *a series of specific features which affect as much social representations as the customs* of each human group. While these specific features are clearly visible, taking them into account is far from straightforward and indeed appears to be complex. This difficulty can partly explain the fact that they are practically not taken into account at all (the culture of “beneficiary” groups is rarely identified, except to call for a “change of culture”).

There is no simple and generally accepted definition of “culture”. It has been subject to a great deal of anthropological research (Durkheim, Weber, Mead, Evans-Pritchard, Dumont,

Douglas, Gertz, Swidler, Appadurai, Olivier de Sardan, Iribarne, etc.), who agree and sometimes have differing views on its definition. In the absence of a consensus, we retain a rather broad definition, which gives insight into the influence that cultural aspects have on development issues and the social integration of “projects”, and shows the importance of understanding them.

Generally speaking, “culture” refers to a variety of areas, which are partly interrelated, such as: artistic and intellectual creation (cultural heritage); representations of life and the world; culinary practices (food culture); representations of the body (health, sexuality); the level of training and education (human capital); the conception of the relation between the individual and the group (political culture). These three latter levels (representations of the body, education and political culture) are more systematically concerned in development programmes.

All cultures question the essential aspects of life and social organisation (kinship and parentage, gender relations, reproduction, the stages of life and death, inequalities, relations with the outside world, the reasons for violence). They do so on the basis of a *series of manners of interpreting social situations and resolving problems facing individual and collective life*. They combine a series of representations, images, narrative systems, customs and logics *which implicitly give a meaning* to relations between peers, hierarchical logics, and the way in which to put “values” into practice, or to reduce contradictions.

We must be careful over the fact that a widespread approach to culture, seen as a “specific series of values and behaviour”, leads to confusion and over-generalisation. It carries risks of a generalisation of rapidly presupposed and essentialised “social traits”, which is the source of frequent stigmatisation (colonial situations particularly used a denigrating image of “the other”). Fundamental values are widely universal, while behaviours considered to be specific cannot be verified. Culture also cannot be reduced to a question of identity, which often carries instrumental purposes.

Furthermore, a culture is never static. Rather than constituting an immutable tradition, it provides resources to build acceptable projects and futures. Far from being homogeneous, it has multiple facets of expression. It only has a weak predictive power over behaviour. It is divided into several levels, which are interlinked – regions, countries, social classes, age groups, local communities, professional groups, etc. –, whose elements may vary at different

time scales. In short, it is a flexible framework organising the constant dialogues between often conflictual local dynamics and the global level. In this respect, cultures borrow and recycle, just as much as they preserve certain deeper logics.

All projects comprise seeds for cultural change, and sometimes expressly call for it. It is, of course, trite to say, but how can one innovate if it is not on the basis of oneself, one's choices and one's history? Certain cultural changes are rapid and massive and can give rise to considerable tension. Others, on the contrary, come up against obstacles, which are apparently irremovable for the foreseeable future. These "cultural obstacles" are not those of populations to whom it would be necessary to explain their interests, but are often between the implicit choices governing the actors of the development arena.

All steps towards change require understanding the structural aspects and systems of meaning which are at the heart of social links, and which may be useful resources for change. It is important not to ignore them and to establish respectful and useful dialogues between societies which all now coexist. It is a question of gaining a better understanding of the representations on the basis of which the members of each society give meaning to what they experience.

Development actors (agencies, donors, NGOs, etc.) themselves carry their own culture, which subconsciously guides their own vision of development and their political choices.

Religions, as normative systems of meanings and values, also play an important role of guidance. It is sufficient to point out differences over social and health issues, such as contraception, abortion or the use of condoms.

#### *Resurgence of religions and their increasing recognition*

A religion "links" believers together (from the Latin *religare*), as well as to a representation of transcendence and the universe, involving responses on the origin of man and life, on death and finitude. Each religion carries a series of beliefs, philosophical conceptions, and lessons of wisdom and ethics.

Religions do not form a homogeneous group, and it is important to differentiate between them depending on their content, their organisation and their social and political customs. Some claim to have been born out of a "revelation", *i.e.* a divine intervention in human history. Others stem from a sort of harmonious relationship with human worlds. However,

all the main religions, at least in their definition, pay particular attention to poverty, the equitable sharing of goods, and respect for nature. *“Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism”* (Laudato Si’, 2015).

All over the world and at all times, whatever the beliefs, relations between the religious and the political have been complex and often sources of conflict. Religions are “in the world”, and are consequently regularly exploited in violent conflicts, which are most often rooted in domination inflicted on social, ethnic or religious groups. The universalist vision of Christianity has taken it beyond the frontiers of its cultures of origin. Its sometimes violent encounter with other societies and cultures has led it to develop a doctrinal approach to development which is mainly to be found in the Encyclical Letters of Popes addressed to the *“faithful of the whole world and to all men of good will”* (Pacem in Terris, 1963).

Societies tend to confuse the cultural and religious origin of a “tradition”. In reality, religions and cultures influence each other over the long term. On the one hand, religions, as they spread, adopt the forms of culture they encounter – the “main religions” (Christianity, Islam or Buddhism) take different forms depending on their host cultures. Conversely, religions influence the cultures in which they establish themselves, by bringing about changes in their representations. This influence involves more the way in which certain figures inspire and work on popular representations over the long term than the formal application of their doctrine. Consequently, religions integrate local cultural particularities, while at the same time modifying their logics in the long term.

What is important in terms of development is more what groups of actors do or express in the name of their religious affiliation than the doctrinal content. In other words, religion is also a way for actors to give meaning to and legitimize their choices. Three levels of involvement of religions can be identified: i) the resurgence of the identification of populations with a religious affiliation and the associated collective practices; ii) the active role of faith-based NGOs in development programs or as actors for essential solidarity services (health, education, etc.); iii) the participation of religious authorities in debates in international fora.

## 2. Context and issues of international aid

The “development” and “aid” world is multifaceted, combining an extremely wide variety of actors: international institutions, donors, solidarity organisations – public or private – local administrations and, in addition, various actors who make up “civil society”.

Any change in approach which, in particular, would aim to take into account the cultural and religious contexts also concerns them, as much as the populations in question and their representatives.

### *Segmented and decontextualised “actions”*

Aid actors, which are increasingly segmented and specialized, are far from being outside the world and motivated exclusively by compassionate actions. Their action, which is not devoid of interest, is subject to increasingly tough competition, whether to obtain grants or increase their power of influence on thematic areas (health, emergencies, disability, agriculture, water) or territories (Africa, countries, cities, etc.).

Their actions are implemented in a broad spectrum, ranging from twinning “on a human scale” – accommodating a child or supporting a school involving nearby residents – to thematic actions linking up similar structures in the North and South (farms, professional associations, hospitals), to substantial budget support from State to State, or international lobbying actions. However, on very diverse scales, they are more or less established on asymmetrical relations, between “donors” and “beneficiaries”.

“Aid” always means more than it does in itself, and the operational choices are often not devoid of more or less immediate interests, underpinned by strong competition between countries or organisations. This competition is not always beneficial, as it is often a source of inconsistencies or gaps between projects, which comprise contradictory models. This competition is inevitably combined with methods which have a strong impact on the aid market. They have the effect of giving a prominent place to management slogans – sorts of abridged versions of what is “real” and “efficient” – which fall far short of taking into account the human complexities specific to each context.

Our objective is not to make an assessment of aid – with the positive balancing out the negative –, or to make a systematic analysis of it, but to call attention to structural difficulties. There continue to be many failures in development programmes designed

outside the country, and implemented in ignorance of the cultural and religious realities of the societies concerned. For example, we only have to mention the difficulties in using mosquito nets in certain regions, the strong socio-political tensions which for a while hampered the management of the Ebola epidemic, or the programmes which aimed to protect young people (in the name of their “childhood”), who local societies consider as “producers”.

Appeals are regularly made to consider the cultural and religious aspects, sometimes at high level, but in vain. In late 2015, the President of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, gave a reminder that the cultural aspects had been ignored in the Ebola crisis in Africa, repeating a longstanding error, with serious consequences.

Cultural and religious aspects continue to be left out in program design, which is more concerned with following directives that we imagine are universal. Culture is also history and memory. But who shows any concern for the humble memories of populations? Yet, due to the diversity of actors, of scales of intervention, of motivations and methods, “development actions” contribute to an unstable social functioning. For example, in the field of health, we have moved from an objective of “health for all”, to “cost recovery” policies, to “payment exemptions at contact points”, to achieving the MDGs, then the SDGs. In terms of education, we have moved from supporting national languages, to double shifts, then to community schools, and now “environmental” schools. Programmes generally leave out old local institutions and they follow on from each other, amnesic and cumulative, with each one hardly bothering about the structures established by the previous one (the same people become alternately “community health workers”, “veterinarians”, “literacy workers”, etc.). Concurrent programmes may be based on contradictory rationales (cost recovery and free healthcare can go hand-in-hand). The lack of information can cause confusion (the proximity of an immunization campaign and anti-malaria programme leads populations to believe that they are immunised against malaria). These actions are segmented around juxtaposed vertical objectives, reproducing the idea of a social world consisting of an addition of behaviours (wearing a condom, using a mosquito net, exclusive breastfeeding, etc.), without its dimensions related to the meaning (for example, making the connection between fertility, sexuality, family and religious norms, conduct of public policies, etc.).

Technical systems themselves implicitly carry social logics. Mentioning children's rights, even when "rightly so", means transforming certain conceptions of family hierarchies and defining a different age policy. Mentioning "female producers" amounts to giving women a different role. Under the name of development, different conceptions are in dialogue and sometimes clash.

#### *Lack of understanding of the specific logics of each society*

Development models are most often based on quite crude concepts, which claim to bring reality into naïve predetermined logics (logical framework, modelling, incentive systems, awareness-raising campaigns devised from outside, etc.), and are far removed from the complexity of social conduct. The logics attributed to local cultures are often based on stereotypes, which reflect the perspective of external parties rather than the specific logics of the societies in question. Renowned economists refute the value of "random controlled trials", particularly because they are not based on any local interpretive foundation.

In practice, the sociology used by programmes is more akin to astrology than astronomy. Due to the lack of scientific studies, social changes remain unpredictable: a number of programmes do not survive at "project completion" and after the departure of the consultants. Conversely, the watchwords of aid and also the globalisation of markets cause massive changes in behaviour, for which neither individuals nor societies are prepared. Examples include: the rapid changes in diet fostered by markets lead to a spread of consumption diseases; in certain countries, the biomedicalisation of childbirth has led to a critical increase in the caesarean section rate for sexual motives; or urbanisation and schooling lead to a new periodisation of ages of life – adolescence, old age – for which families and societies are not prepared.

An effort of contextualisation would be necessary, consisting of understanding situations within the interpretation that the actors themselves have of them. It involves understanding the social logics on the basis of which societies – necessarily plural – build their choices and their responses.

In-depth studies and monitoring are replaced by a proliferation of normative objectives with no unifying principle. Development programmes continue to be mainly designed on an implicit universalism, by which models applied in one context would be transposable to

others: they are “without borders”. The “principles of aid effectiveness” and “guides to good practices” are the basis for an increasing jargon, which captures the attention and energy of institutions and actors, to the detriment of an understanding of reality.

This accepted ignorance of the culture of other people is due to both the anticipated difficulty of having access to this knowledge of societies, which is admittedly fuzzy – in practice, of the time required to understand it – and to the prevailing and rarely questioned belief that there is a convergence of social models.

### *Resurgence of religious references*

In the religious field, unlike what a secularised vision of societies had anticipated, there is a resurgence in religious affiliations, particularly among the young age groups. In a recent survey (Gallup, 2015), 84% of the world’s population stated that they had a religious affiliation, and 63% described themselves as “religious people” (*i.e.* with a regular practice). The three predominant currents concern Christianity (32%), Islam (23%) and Hinduism (15%). The highest affiliation rates are especially to be found in developing countries (Africa and the Middle East), while the highest rate of indifference is seen in Western Europe. Disaffection with religion would firstly appear to be correlated with the rise in the level of consumption, rather than with the level of education.

Overall, the mobilisation capacity of religions applies to the promotion of sustainable development, which is both founded on human dignity and environmentally friendly. At the level of the individual, religious affiliation mainly has an impact on reproductive practices and the choices of education systems.

Interactions between religious actors and international and national development organisations remain complex. There is a diverse organisation and representation of religions. Their vision of development is not homogeneous. They also speak with diverging voices regarding the international discourse (see “The Declaration of Human Rights in Islam”, OIC, Cairo, August 1990, as well as the “Common Declaration of the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar”, Accra, June 2015). Furthermore, the use of a religious discourse by certain actors to promote a political, or terrorist, agenda blurs the image of religions. Through fear of being instrumentalised or due to diverging values, the representatives of religions sometimes hesitate to engage in a dialogue with international institutions.

For their part, most international organisations and certain States, such as France, lack knowledge of religions and cultures and are often reluctant to address them, to the extent of questioning the legitimacy of religious institutions in engaging in world debates. The controversial issues concern demography, reproductive health, gender relations, as well as the vision of the purpose and modalities of economic growth, as they involve societal choices. The same applies to the capacity to bring about a plural humanity, able to accept contradictions.

Finally, faith-based solidarity organisations play an active role in development programmes and sometimes substitute for public administrations. The ethics related to their religious inspiration often compensates for the lack of ethics of States. They provide a social model, a place of coherence, sometimes also areas of proselytism, and take responsibility for essential basic services, mainly for health and education, often in remote and poor areas. Even though they are involved in public development programmes, their faith-based character still has very little recognition. Studies still need to be conducted on the role of technical structures based on religious precepts.

#### *Training for individual and collective development*

Training (along with health) is central to development issues. It is in itself an objective, as it aims to increase the capacities of actors to choose and their capacity to produce their well-being. At the same time, education and training can only be conceived within their cultural context, because they reflect the way in which each society represents social ties.

In Sub-Saharan African, more than on the other continents, the modernisation of training remains a critical issue. Today, 30 million inhabitants in Sub-Saharan Africa are not in school. Over the next two decades, Sub-Saharan Africa will have 500,000 additional young 15 year-olds a year (World Bank). Current progress comes up against the difficulty of developing both public and aid policies. The objective is to establish a public-private dialogue in order to build training systems in each country simultaneously, in line with their society and the needs of their economy.

The digital economy heralds major economic upheavals, most of which are still to come, and will also have an impact on training. Due to these very principles, digital technology will tend

to bring about solutions which combine effectiveness, massification, and the possibility of access to lifelong learning for all.

The design of training systems has already considerably developed in recent years, with a tendency towards individualisation. It meets the requirement of employees to train at their own pace and according to their needs. It is a first stage, which modifies the form of future training systems and the role of public authorities. Education systems will need to continue their transformation in terms of teaching methods and prices, in order to take into account changes in increasingly connected African societies. Knowledge is exchanged on a global scale, even in the “village”, and will henceforth be digitised in order to be accessible to the greatest possible number of people. It is necessary to facilitate learner autonomy, promote collaborative work, innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit, while strengthening the interactions between each learner and the trainer, while fostering their empowerment through the acquisition and validation of knowledge and skills.

While digital technology appears to be an opportunity in line with the education and training needs of young Africans, it may also pose a risk if it is synonymous with a new dominant/dominated relationship.

### 3. Proposals for better human-centred development, taking cultures and religions into account

*Development, in the sense recalled here, concerns human beings in their entirety, with their material, spiritual, cultural, economic and social dimensions.*

International institutions, donors, solidarity organisations, private and public actors, and local administrations must ensure that they have a better understanding of and qualify the contexts of the societies in which they work. At the same time, religion is playing an increasingly important role and it has become essential to take it into account in order to achieve the international development objectives. The socio-political aspects of religions and cultures must become an essential part of international analyses.

#### [3.1 There is a need for a better understanding of cultural and religious contexts as it is inherent to all development projects.](#)

External development actors (international institutions, NGOs, donors and local public administrations) can no longer reasonably promote development programmes without

qualifying, to a certain extent, the cultural and religious contexts in which they engage. The current forms of “cultural ignorance” have a human, social and economic cost. A striking example has been given during the Ebola or Chikungunya crises (but also for flu and vaccinations in France), where, despite experience from past epidemics, actors and donors focussed on the technical aspects and ignored the cultural aspects, with aggravating consequences on the crisis. Development actions and programmes far too often boil down to managerial watchwords, which are far from taking into account the complexity of societies and sometimes lead to the opposite of the expected results. We need to go beyond the normative global discourse, which increasingly fails to see the reality, and rebalance the top-down approach which supports “good practices” with a “bottom-up” approach, based on an understanding of local societies. We can no longer manage without practical knowledge of societies and what has meaning in them.

*3.2 There is a need to develop contacts with representatives of religions, both in terms of diplomatic activity and development.*

Religions are an essential human factor. By allowing their members to give meaning to their lives, they guide their existence in the world and are a resource for development. They are both a social and institutional factor, comprising various forms of action. It is essential for both international organisations and national representations to integrate an understanding of religion into their approach and the training of their officers. Considering and knowing religions is in no way synonymous with sharing their beliefs. In France, knowledge of religion should be integrated into the training of diplomats. A round table on issues relating to it should be organised at the annual Conference of Ambassadors. Diplomacy should play an active role in it and develop contacts with representatives of religions. It cannot be totally non-confessional (in the same way as it is not absent from political, economic, artistic aspects, etc.). Religious institutions, for their part, need to maintain a high level of internal mobilisation and commitment on social and environmental issues, by devoting adequate resources to them.

*3.3 Effectively taking cultures and religions into account requires aid agencies and donors to make it a strategic orientation and allocate resources to it.*

A more effective integration of cultural and religious aspects will be a significant change, which requires specific efforts. It will only come about if international actors make it a strategic choice and allocate dedicated resources to it. Otherwise, we can expect the issue to

continue to be neglected. International aid actors operate in a great diversity of societies, contexts and cultures. The nature of their partnerships also depends on the representation that their partners have of this type of relationship. While some of their expectations are universal (financial conditions, content of consultant services, relationships of trust), their expectations may differ significantly depending on the idea that they each have of a “good” partnership. An initial effort could consist of informing the conception which the various partners have of cooperation, depending on their culture. In addition, effectively considering cultural and religious aspects will require a series of concrete actions: training teams in these issues and in their impact on development, specific support for the cultural aspects of certain programmes, and the use of scientific skills.

*3.4 A better understanding of cultural contexts requires providing specific expertise and learning time between partners.*

All development projects bring about social change and are innovative, with the aim of improving well-being. They can only come about by involving the entire human dimension of all partners. It is odd that current project design is based so little on knowledge of local societies and their structural logics. It is true that an interest in cultural contexts has often been hampered by confused conceptions of “culture”, or by complex theoretical debates. In the practical perspective adopted here, we should emphasise that culture should not be reduced either to values (the way in which they are coordinated is difficult to grasp), or behaviours (which are not really predictable), or to questions of identity (which can be modified for political purposes). It is especially a matter of understanding, from inside, a series of representations, customs, institutions and ways of giving meaning, which are resources to support change. Any social change needs to take into account this understanding of representations, by calling on socio-anthropological expertise and practical observation. For foreign experts, it may take time to understand a cultural context (just as it takes time to learn a language). Partners need to add analytical capacities in social anthropology to prepare, design and monitor programmes. International agencies also need to develop local skills for their capacity as “cultural interpreters”, capable of clarifying and informing the specific logics of their context.

*3.5 Cultures are not a landscape before which management rules and institutions would be established. They are the materials with which the latter are built.*

The diversity of cultural situations and contexts can hardly be understood on the basis of a few management principles which can be universally applied. Cultures are what give meaning to a change or an institution. They are one of the materials with which institutions are built and develop over the course of history. One possible avenue would involve studying “good practices” that are specific to their cultural context. It would often be possible to find and document examples of “good governance”, not so much to show that they comply with international standards (by definition, they necessarily respect some of their principles), but to understand the way in which they provide organisational solutions to common difficulties in their cultural context. This approach would also require identifying management difficulties that are specific to a context. This cultural dimension of institutions is particularly ignored in crisis or conflict situations. For fear of supporting identity dynamics (which are, however, very different), priority is given to “universalist” solutions, which struggle to fit in with reality (developments in CAR are an example of this). The often declared principle of “adapting to the field” means, in fact, a pragmatic will to adapt to circumstances, and not a concern for understanding social and cultural logics, which are, however, a key in crisis situations. It would be necessary to inform the links between cultures, organisation and social effectiveness.

*3.6 Development issues which cause disputes in terms of religions could be subject to more structured dialogues, while seeking to promote a common commitment to the major issues on the global agenda.*

There is a need to develop dialogue between international organisations, aid partners and faith-based institutions on issues that are subject to disputes between them. Thematic seminars could be organised, ensuring that common ground is identified and promoting the quality of dialogue over the long term. A functional approach could be adopted, based on detailed and specific analyses of the impact that religious norms and values have on societies. Family-related issues could be subject to this type of more thorough consideration. While families are a major area of transmission and therefore an essential vector for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, the family dimension has been ignored in the final text of the 2030 Agenda, following disagreements over the definition of the “family”. There were, in particular, divisions between the proponents of a “Western” conception and those with a

more open vision of the “traditional” dimensions of kinship. Rather than taking an inflexible position over a defined form, we should start with the modalities by which each society deals with the issues of parentage and kinship, in order to consider the best way in which to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In Sub-Saharan Africa, a dialogue with the religious and customary authorities on the issue of education is essential – taking into account the difference between religious instruction and education – in order to firmly root modern education. In this area, public policies should enable an opening up to religious actors and, equally, a consideration of social demand. In areas which appear to be less conflictual, faith-based organisations will continue their investment, for which their contribution and mobilisation capacity are essential, as they did for the climate during COP21. International organisations and aid actors, for their part, will need to scale up cooperation with and the integration of faith-based organisations in the dialogue on their working topics. It will be up to them to propose modes of partnership and a firmly formalised establishment of this partnership.

*3.7 Access to education and its quality are inseparable and, in Africa, require a better match with social demand and the needs of the economy. The digital revolution should contribute to this.*

Education is an essential human development issue, which increases individual and collective capacities to choose one’s future. Beyond the recent progress achieved in terms of access to education, the problems identified in Sub-Saharan Africa in the field of education relate to quality and the match between training and the expectations of society and the employment market. In most African countries, the share of the National Education budget allocated to vocational training – in the region of 5% – is totally inadequate. A large number of young people who have completed their studies, although they have been trained, have a profile which does not match the needs of the labour market. Donors are receiving an increasing number of demands which aim to establish closer links between vocational training and productive sectors. This requires organising relations between vocational training centres and companies, so that the latter can express their needs and anticipate changes. There is a need to develop synergies with, for example, support for the private sector, microfinance, or the agricultural and rural sector. The development of training provision will need to include more flexible and shorter training systems focused on the needs expressed, and benefitting from a positive social image. The digital revolution – whose

effects are yet to come – constitutes both a constraint and an opportunity. It provides new tools and possibilities. Today, most of the technological barriers have been removed. In ten years, there has been a significant increase in the mobile phone penetration rate. Public education policies need to take the digital transition into account, by ensuring a foundation of common values. Incentive measures and regulations within the remit of the State need to be devised in line with their context. These new challenges will require both more active coordination between aid agencies and capacity building for governance in countries.

*Conclusion: An essential debate, but which requires intermediaries*

Over the past fifty years, there have been considerable changes in the vision of development and practices. Actors have become more diversified. However, while the objectives and processes have constantly been formalised, the influence of cultures and religions on development has been largely ignored. Such an oversight does not cease to astound, even if there are many reasons for it. Today, we feel that it is necessary to raise awareness and bring about change.

This paper has three aims a) share a concern and vigilance over these social and human aspects of development, faced with a world of aid whose main preoccupation is its short-term effectiveness; b) give practical insight for cultural and religious aspects to be taken into account in development; c) initiate a debate that needs to be brought to various forums, requiring calling into question rules which are deeply established, but unsatisfactory from the perspective of realities in the field.

Finally, we want authoritative voices to take up these issues and bring this debate to the decision-making bodies of international aid and faith-based institutions.