

The more faith-based, the more unique

Presentation research report of Femke Timmermans

Mensen met een Missie

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Femke Timmermans investigated Faith Based Development Organisations in 2011 in Kenya, where she visited five Faith Based partner-organisations of Mensen met een Missie.

The research in general

Background of the research:

- Faith is important in development work
- However: Faith can have a positive and a negative side
- Central question: Are FBDO's unique?
- Mensen met een Missie added: (Why) is it relevant to support FBDO's?

Research questions:

1. What is the specific character of development organisations that are faith-based?
2. In what way can this specific character be recognized in practice within FBDO's, in terms of Target group, Working method, Organisation and Vision on development?

Research Purposes:

1. To specify the unique character of FBDO's.
2. Mensen met een Missie partner organisations in Kenya become aware of the specific and unique character of their organisation.

Definition Faith based Development Organisation

An FBDO is a development organisation with a specific religious background, and one or more of the following characteristics:

- 1) affiliation with a religious body
- 2) a mission statement with explicit reference to religious values
- 3) financial support from religious sources
- 4) a governance structure where selection of board members or staff is based on religious beliefs or affiliation and / or decision-making processes are based on religious values

Methodology:

- Literature study in the Netherlands
- 6 months fieldwork in Kenya
- 5 (Faith Based) partner organisations of Mensen met een Missie
- 3 weeks per organisation + 1 week afterwards
- Observations, interviews, files
- Respondents inside / outside the organisation

The five Faith Based organisations in Kenya are:

- St.Martin, Nyahururu: Faith–permeated FBDO
- Diocese of Marsabit: Faith–permeated FBDO
- TUSA, Nairobi: Faith–centred FBDO
- RISE Trust, Migori: Faith–background FBDO
- Desece, Misikhu: Faith-background FBDO

1. Target Group

Femke's expectations:

1. FBDO's are able to reach their target group through churches and the mediation of volunteers.
2. People in communities expect FBDO's to be trustworthy, to deliver quality and to convert beneficiaries to their own belief.

Quotes:

*'NGO's [in the region] are linked to one tribe, we are for everyone'
'When you are a faith-based organisation, (...) they trust you.
When something goes wrong, it takes time to earn that trust again. Other NGO's have to fight before people trust them'
'When you don't pay any attention to religion, people won't understand you. They won't like that approach'*



Results:

- Grass roots level
- People: vulnerable, from different tribes, religions and denominations, except Muslims
 - Reaching beneficiaries through churches: Marsabit, St.Martin
 - Reaching beneficiaries through volunteers: St.Martin, Desece
- Target group views:
 - FBDO's are more trustworthy
 - Deliver good quality
 - They work on charity instead of empowerment
 - Proselytism, promotion of the Gospel

2. Working Method

Femke's expectations:

1. FBDO's use methods influenced by faith, like praying, addressing people's values and stimulating social cohesion.
2. FBDO's have a long-term and strong relationship with the poor, but their work is not focused on the wishes of beneficiaries.



Quotes:

'Without faith nothing is possible'

'The gap between the ground and Board is too big (...)'

'The church is poor in marketing its work. But this falls under the humble working nature of the Church'

Results:

- The influence of religion on the working method depends on the faith-based character of the organisation
- The program is influenced by religious teachings
- Network: inside church yes or no
- There is a long term commitment
- Variety in influence of beneficiaries
- The opinion of beneficiaries about their FBDO

3. Organisation

Femke's expectations:

1. *An FBDO has a formal and an informal relationship with a religious institution.*
2. *Staff members working for an FBDO are quite motivated but rather unprofessional.*



Quotes:

'(...) The priest is afraid to lose control'

'They are fanatics'

'A better job would be a better paid job. Most people working here only stay for a few years'

Results:

- Formal and informal relationship with church leadership
- Interfaith character
- Hierarchical leadership
- Staff members are mostly professionals
- Staff members: difference between lay people and religious persons

4. Vision on Development

Femke's expectations:

An FBDO uses a welfare oriented approach to development and takes a broad view on poverty.

Quotes:

Evangelization is not only spiritual; it also includes other forms of development. (...) For example, if in the hospital one part of the body may be operated, by a specialized doctor who doesn't know about other parts of the body, you may still feel ill afterwards'

'We believe they take that spirit of solidarity with them and will make



Results:

- Three organisations work from a Holistic view
- They all show that richness involves more than money
- There is empowerment in group work
- The organisations are not aimed at converting people

Conclusions

- FBDO's reach their beneficiaries through volunteers or churches, but this is not necessarily so. FBDO's are not unique in this respect.
- The more religious FBDO's are more trusted, but people fear to be converted.
- The more religiously oriented the organisation is, the more faith is being involved in its working method, and the more unique it is.
- All 5 FBDO's have a long-term commitment and good relationships with the poor. However, the beneficiaries of the more religious FBDO's are not aware/interested in their long-term objectives.
- The more religious FBDO's have an informal as well as a formal link with a religious body, and they tend to be more hierarchical. This makes them more unique.
- This is not unique: staff members are professionals, but not primarily motivated by their personal faith convictions.
- All five FBDO's have a wide view on poverty.
- The more religious FBDO's believe in holistic development, whereas the religious-background FBDO's focus mainly on economic empowerment.
- It seems to be a western viewpoint to make a differentiation between faith-based and non-faith-based.

Recommendations

It is important for FBDO's to recognize / investigate:

- How religion influences the organisation
- How the organisation is presented (as religious or not)
- The motivation of staff members to work at a Faith Based organisation

This research should be repeated in a another context, involving non-FBDO's and organisations with a different religious background.

Reactions can be sent to the [Knowledge Centre](#) or to [Femke Timmermans](#).