

Faith and voluntary action

an overview of current evidence and debates



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Preface

In recent years, events at the global and national scales have led to greater interest in the presence and role of faith communities and in turn faith-based organisations in our society. The debate addresses a range of perspectives: from the personal experiences of citizens to the broader public policy concerns of policy-makers about the role of faith communities and faith-based organisations in building the social capital associated with safer, cohesive communities. These debates are not necessarily specific to the faith sector; it is also clear they have a resonance for a wider body of civil society organisations.

Understanding the relationships, commonalities and differences between faith-based organisations and what is sometimes termed 'the mainstream sector' is the starting point for this publication, the latest in a series that has explored the interplay between civil society, citizen engagement and the voluntary and community sector. It is being published in parallel with a second report (*Faith in the community: the contribution of faith-based organisations to rural voluntary action*), based on primary research, which looks at the challenges and opportunities for faith-based and secular organisations in rural areas.

It aims to explore questions and concerns identified in the consultation process that led to the development of NCVO's *Vision for the Future*. In doing so, it aims to clarify what we believe is confusion over terminology and outline the terms of some key debates, including those around public service delivery and distinctiveness.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations, for government, infrastructure bodies and frontline organisations. We recognise that not all will agree with the content and findings of the report. However, this should not preclude collective actions that should address some of the challenges faced by faith-based and other organisations working on the ground. NCVO aims to give voice and support to the voluntary and community sector, and we hope this report provides a basis for helping both faith-based and secular organisations to work together as part of a strong, cohesive civil society.

Stuart Etherington
Chief Executive, National Council for Voluntary Organisations
June 2007

Introduction

Faith and faith-based organisations have always played a significant role in the development of the voluntary and community sector and indeed wider voluntary and philanthropic action. The evidence for this important role is both historic and contemporary: the Elizabethan statutes of 1601 that have been the basis of charity law for over 400 years highlighted the repair of churches, while in 1891 the advancement of religion was identified as one of four charitable purposes. Today, the importance and influence of faith in contemporary times is manifested by the large number of charities with origins in the major faiths and the continued importance of charitable giving to religious causes. So, one might ask, why the seemingly sudden interest in faith communities and faith-based organisations? And what are the implications of this increased role for faith-based organisations, in particular in the public realm?

For both 'mainstream' and faith-based voluntary and community organisations, these and other more practical questions are of interest and, in some cases, concern. Anecdotal evidence suggests that mainstream organisations are increasingly being required to demonstrate their relationship with faith communities; conversely, faith-based organisations are sometimes, perhaps unhelpfully, perceived as being uniquely distinctive in terms of their reach or ability to address public policy problems, or as the gatekeepers to untapped resources. Away from the front line, it also remains unclear whether infrastructure services adequately support faith-based organisations, or whether parallel support mechanisms are in place. Again, this is perhaps nothing new. Debates over distinctiveness or separateness often run through the voluntary and community sector, yet faith-based organisa-

tions appear to have been attributed a relatively discrete position, to the extent that some areas of the UK (such as Lancashire) now refer to the 'Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors'.

These questions and issues may not matter. In probably countless cases, faith-based organisations are delivering services or undertaking broader community-based activities, often in partnership with secular organisations. Nevertheless, it remains the case that this changing landscape requires exploration and, at the very least, greater clarity. Discussions with NCVO's member bodies suggest that many mainstream organisations are confused by the terminology (not to mention emphasis) now evident in public policy debates, which generate questions such as 'what is meant by "faith communities"?'. Similarly, are faith-based organisations the same thing as religious charities? And are religious charities really that important in terms of their number and the resources at their disposal? In an effort to address some of these questions, this publication aims to address some of the more commonly used concepts associated with faith and faith-based organisations, and to review current evidence regarding their scope, coverage and activities. The objective is to enable organisations to more effectively take part in public policy and engage with faith communities.

If it is the case that the increased role and visibility of faith-based organisations and voluntary action does have implications for public policy, and that the questions asked above do matter, then it follows that an analysis of current policies and trends is worthwhile, particularly in the current context.

That context has a number of different dimensions, but its more visible aspects include ongoing tensions regarding the role of faith-based organisations in the delivery of public services (exemplified by high-profile debates over adoption services) and concerns over the relationship between some manifestations of organised religion and cohesion, extremism and security, whether at the local or the global level.

An overview of the New Labour government's policies and initiatives highlights both motivations and contradictions; it also highlights the diversity of views regarding the involvement of faith-based organisations across the public realm. In order to capture some of these, the second section of the report is based on the contributions of external authors. Two of the five essays in this section are on the role of faith-based organisations in service delivery and governance and they explore the dimensions of these current debates. Others cover similarly topical issues, including whether faith is a distinctive motive underpinning voluntary action, the relationship between faith and social cohesion, and the place of faith-based organisations in civil society. These essays present both academic and practitioner viewpoints, and therefore provide a range of voices and evidence.

The final section reviews the cross-cutting themes that arise from both these essays and the earlier review of evidence and concepts. This aims more to sum up than conclude; the arguments particularly around distinctiveness are in some cases difficult to reconcile, in other cases difficult to evidence. It is hoped that readers will feel more able to engage in the terms of the debate as result of this final synthesis.

Finally, we would like to express thanks for the comments and advice received from a wide group of advisers drawn from a cross-section of organisations. We have, where possible, taken their advice; however, the views expressed in this report are those of the editors or the respective authors.

Véronique Jochum
Belinda Pratten
Karl Wilding

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Finally, we would like to thank colleagues at NCVO, in particular Greg Piper who helped with the pages on charitable giving and registered charities, and Ann Blackmore and Liz Atkins for comments on earlier drafts.

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Section one

Setting the scene

What do we mean by faith? And how is faith different from religion? Are religious charities (or should that be faith-based organisations?) an important part of the landscape? This first section of the publication aims to clarify these and other questions by:

- exploring and clarifying the key concepts relating to this debate;
- reviewing existing faith-related statistics and briefly summarising the key messages they convey;
- providing an analysis of current government policy on faith communities and faith-based organisations; and
- identifying what tensions and challenges might be associated with this policy agenda.

It is based on desk research – a review of current public policy documents, plus analysis of publicly available data – and provides a background to the later section written by external contributors.

1. Exploring key concepts

Meanings and definitions are frequently the object of discussions and debates, even more so when people feel strongly about an issue. Faith and many of the other terms used in public debates are inevitably contested. Our starting point is therefore an exploration of terminology, clarifying key concepts and their different dimensions, and identifying potential

links between them. In the context of this publication, we have chosen to focus on three general concepts: faith, faith communities and faith-based organisations.

Faith

Increasingly used as a synonym for ‘religion’, the concept of ‘faith’ adds an interesting dimension by focusing on the individual and the relationship between individuals and religious and spiritual belief systems. Despite the decline in religious membership and practice in Western societies,¹ religious belief remains relatively widespread and new forms of personalised spirituality have developed.² This is reflected by the growing number of people who are defining their own sense of faith rather than conforming to a specific religious tradition,³ a trend which Grace Davie⁴ called ‘believing without belonging’ in her seminal book on religion in Britain.

The recent shift in vocabulary from ‘religion’ to ‘faith’ is probably a reflection of these changes, themselves driven by wider changes in society, particularly individualism and reduced deference. These changes in attitudes and values are argued to have distanced individuals from formal institutional settings, including religious ones.

Religious and spiritual belief remains a motivating force for many, even if they do not worship in a traditional religious environment, and such beliefs can still shape individual actions. The role of belief and values in shaping the decisions and actions of individuals is not, of course, exclusive to religious faith. This is equally the case for other belief systems and values that are not

¹ This trend is far from uniform, and concerns above all mainstream Christian churches.

² Heelas, P. et al. (2004) *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*, Blackwell Publishing.

³ Chambre, S. ‘The Changing Nature of “Faith” in Faith-Based Organizations: Secularization and Ecumenicism in Four AIDS Organizations in New York City’, *Social Service Review*, 75, 3, September 2001, pp. 435-455.

⁴ Davie, G. (1994) *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Blackwell Publishing.

related to faith, such as those linked to political ideologies or humanism. What distinguishes religious faith is a belief in the existence of spiritual or supernatural forces which transcend everyday reality. Further differences are also evident, including the importance of ritualised practices, and the use of a particular set of traditions as a reference point.

Faith, at the individual level, may reflect a personal choice and commitment to a set of religious beliefs and values. However, because it is so embedded in history, culture and society, it undoubtedly has a strong social dimension, as the next two concepts clearly illustrate.

Faith communities

Shared beliefs, values and practices bind people together, giving them a sense of common identity and a sense of belonging – both key features of communities. Beyond religious beliefs and values, people of the same faith have in common cultural references and experiences that scriptures, congregational teachings, ceremonies and rituals all contribute to producing and strengthening. Much of the transmission of faith and religious identity is linked to formal religious settings and institutions, but families also play an important role. Affiliation and identification with a faith community may reflect a deep personal conviction, but it may be simply ‘inherited’: the faith community to which an individual feels they belong to is often, although not always, the same as their family’s. For some people this sense of identity and belonging to a community may be stronger than their actual beliefs. In contrast to the earlier expression ‘believing without belonging’, this has sometimes been referred to as ‘belonging without believing’.

The term ‘faith communities’ is used with increased frequency, especially by policy-makers, but is widely contested for two main reasons. The first reason is that ‘faith communities’ is thought to be one of those all-encompassing and homogenising terms which fails to capture the diversity between different faiths and also, importantly, within faiths. There are of course common grounds between faiths, but using the term ‘faith communities’ in a generic way tends to put people of faith in one large category.

But even the reference to specific faith communities often fails to acknowledge how greatly people of a particular faith can differ – for instance, demographically, socially and theologically.

This leads to the second reason. In public policy the term ‘faith communities’ is commonly used as shorthand for ‘black and ethnic minorities’ and is often used to refer specifically to the Muslim community. Similarly, in the press ‘Muslim’ is frequently used interchangeably with ‘Asian’, which excludes Asian Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. There is little doubt that the events of 9/11 and the continued threat of Al Qaeda-related terrorism have played a significant role in this conflation. Despite there being some correlation between ethnic and religious identity, the two categories are nevertheless distinct. Rather than amalgamating the two, it is much more useful to look at faith and ethnicity among other markers of identity, need and social organisation, such as age and gender.

Faith-based organisations

The final term worth exploring is perhaps the most recent in terms of widespread usage. Previously the term most commonly used tended to be ‘religious organisations’, then ‘faith organisations’ appeared, whereas more recently ‘faith-based organisations’ seems to have gained wider currency. There is a clear rationale for this evolution: While ‘faith organisations’ was used to include organisations that were not mainstream or organised religious institutions, ‘faith-based organisations’ allowed the inclusion of organisations that are shaped by faith but that do not necessarily involve any activities that are explicitly religious. The generic heading ‘faith-based organisations’ therefore includes religious congregations as well as organisations that are to some extent grounded in a faith tradition.⁵ However, it is not uncommon for the term ‘faith-based organisations’ to be used more restrictively and to exclude religious congregations, which are then referred to as faith institutions.

⁵ Harris, M., Halfpenny, P. and Rochester, C. (2003) ‘A Social Policy Role for Faith-based Organisations? Lessons from the UK Jewish Voluntary Sector’, *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 32, pp. 93-112.

This plurality of structures has led researchers and practitioners to consider how different faith-based organisations could be classified. Most classifications reflect the extent to which organisations incorporate religious identity and practice. The majority come from the USA and are not completely transferable to the UK context. However, we found the methodology that Ronald Sider and Heidi Unruh used to define their classification⁶ particularly helpful because it identifies the features that need to be considered in determining the extent to which the culture, structure and activity of an organisation is influenced by faith. The following list is an adaptation of their framework.

Table 1: Examining the characteristics of faith-based organisations

Mission	The place of faith in the organisation's identity and purpose
Founding	The connection of the organisation with a faith heritage and the continuing relevance of this heritage
Affiliation	Whether the organisation is affiliated with a faith entity
Governance	The role of faith identity in the selection of board members
Management and staff	The role of faith identity in the selection of staff and the commitment to faith as a requirement of employment
Support	Financial and non-financial support from faith sources
Beneficiaries and users	Whether the activities of the organisation or programme are aimed, exclusively or not, at people of a particular faith
Practices	The integration of faith practices within the organisation
Environment	Whether the activities of the programme take place in a building whose main function is for religious purpose; whether objects with religious meaning are present
Programme content	Whether the content is explicitly religious
Expected connection between religious content and desired outcome	The extent to which religious/spiritual experience is considered significant for the programme's desired social outcomes.

Not all faith-based organisations will display all of these characteristics. For instance, while congregations usually operate from a religious building, many faith-based organisations do not. What is clear from this framework is that faith will often shape more than mission and that faith can manifest itself in different ways across organisations. Greg Smith suggests that we examine these various characteristics in different types of faith-based organisations (including congregations, local social activity groups, specialist social service organisations, and umbrella networks), thereby producing a useful two-dimensional grid that would both reflect the diversity of organisational structure and function within the faith sector and assess the saliency of faith within organisations.⁷

Conclusion

Rather than focusing on definitions, which will always be the subject of debates, we have looked at the usage of key concepts and how this may have changed over time. Placing these concepts in context shows how closely they are linked to and influenced by wider social changes and institutional factors.

However, the changing debates and their sometimes confusing use of language remains a barrier to more effective collaboration between the different organisations and associations that constitute civil society. An additional, related problem is a lack of clarity regarding the resources and coverage of faith-based organisations, or the extent to which the UK population actively practise. The following chapter therefore turns to existing statistical sources in an attempt to establish the relevance and importance of faith, faith communities and faith-based organisations in today's society.

⁷ Smith, G. (2003) *Faith in the Voluntary Sector: A common or distinctive experience of religious organisations?*, Working Papers in Applied Social Research, Department of Sociology, University of Manchester.

2. What the statistics tell us

A number of sources provide quantitative evidence on faith, faith communities and faith-based organisations. Below is a brief summary of the data available in the sources we have identified, and of the key messages that they convey. This information is included here principally to provide perspective and context for the analysis in later chapters. However, these statistics should be interpreted with care, particularly because the terminology and definitions vary substantially from one source to another. To avoid misinterpretation and confusion, we have kept the terms used by the authors of the different sources quoted.

People and faith

Before looking at faith-based voluntary action or giving, we examine data on the breadth and depth of faith among individuals.

Great Britain has a predominantly Christian background

In the last Census, almost three-quarters of the population said they were Christians (72%). However, the question relating to religion in the 2001 Census was ambiguously phrased. It simply asked respondents 'what is your religion?', which does not allow us to conclude anything about religious practice. The result suggests that respondents, in one way or another, feel connected to the Christian religion – be it through membership of a congregation, belief or education. It does not indicate what that connection is, nor how strong or weak it is (and this is equally the case for all other religions).

Many do not hold religious beliefs

People with no religion formed the second-largest group (15%). This included people who ticked 'None' at the religion question plus those who wrote Agnostic, Atheist, Heathen, Jedi Knight (following a much publicised Internet campaign), and those who ticked 'Other' but did not specify any religion. This, however, may include people who felt they did not belong to a particular religion but who wanted to highlight the fact that they had religious and spiritual beliefs.

Religious diversity is a feature of British society

People belonging to a non-Christian religious tradition accounted for 5% of the population in 2001. A wide range of faiths were represented. Muslims were the largest non-Christian religious group followed by Hindus, Sikhs, Jewish people and Buddhists, as shown in the table below. Almost 160,000 people belonged to religious groups that did not fall into any of the main religions. These included Spiritualists (32,000), Pagans (31,000), Jains (15,000), Wiccans (7,000), Rastafarians (5,000), Bahá'ís (5,000) and Zoroastrians (4,000).

Table 2: Population of Great Britain: by religion, April 2001

	Total population	Non-Christian religious population	
	Numbers	%	%
Christian	41,014,811	71.82	n/a
Muslim	1,588,890	2.78	51.94
Hindu	558,342	0.98	18.25
Sikh	336,179	0.59	10.99
Jewish	267,373	0.47	8.74
Buddhist	149,157	0.26	4.88
Any other religion	159,167	0.28	5.20
No religion	8,596,488	15.05	n/a
Religion not stated	4,433,520	7.76	n/a
All non-Christian religious population	3,059,108	5.36	100
All population	57,103,927		100

Source: *Focus on Religion*, Office of National Statistics, 2004

Diversity is also reflected in ethnicity

Diversity was also present in terms of ethnicity. Buddhists were the most ethnically diverse group, followed by Muslims. Almost three-quarters of Muslims (74%) were from an Asian ethnic background, predominantly Pakistani (43%). One in ten Muslims (11%) were from a White ethnic group (mostly of Turkish or Balkan origin) and a further 6% were of black African origin. Nine out of ten Sikhs (91%) were from an Indian ethnic background. The vast majority of Hindus were also Indian (84%). Most Christians and Jewish people were White (97% for both), as were those who stated no religion (95%). Among most minority ethnic groups, those born in the UK were less likely to be religious than first-generation immigrants. Only 2% Indians and of black Africans and less than 1% of Pakistanis and of Bangladeshis said they had no religion.

The age profile varies according to religion

The Jewish and Christian groups had the oldest age profile, with 22% and 19% aged 65 years or over, and Muslims had the youngest age profile. Around one-third of Muslims (34%) were under 16 years old, followed by Sikhs (25%) and Hindus (21%). In general, younger people were more likely than older people not to belong to any religion: among people aged between 16 and 34, almost a quarter (23%) said that they had no religion compared with less than 5% for those aged 65 or over. This was true for all ethnic groups. However, the variation with age was far less marked among South Asians.

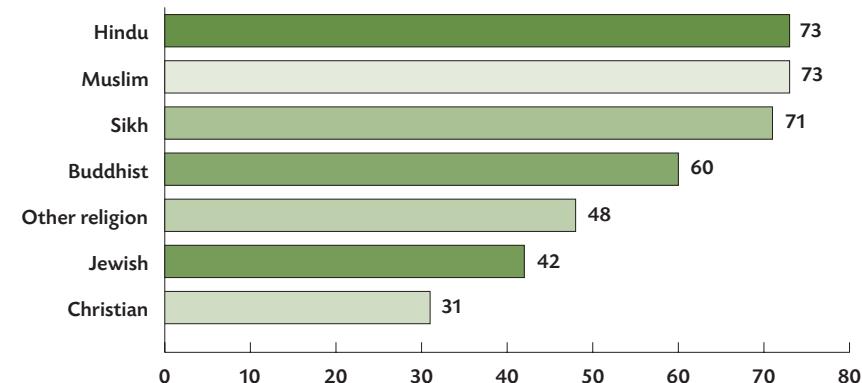
Religious practice is much weaker than religious affiliation

According to the latest figures released by the organisation Christian Research,⁸ 6.3% of the population in England attend church on an average Sunday, compared with 7.5% in 1998. The 2005 English Church Census carried out by Christian Research shows that the rate of decline in membership and attendance has started to slow down, partly owing to some churches growing (especially the Pentecostal churches) and a significant rise in ethnic minority churchgoers (especially among black people).

Data from the Citizenship Survey indicate that religious practice is highest among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, although it should be noted that there

are differing cultural norms about what 'practising' a religion actually means. It may involve attending a place of worship, but it also involves following a number of cultural practices (e.g. practices linked to the preparation and consumption of food).

Figure 1: People who actively practise a religion, by religious affiliation (%)



Source: 2005 Citizenship Survey, Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

Faith, participation and giving

People will express their faith in other ways than through religious practice. Their religious beliefs and the precepts associated to their faith may encourage and motivate them, for instance, to get involved in their local community or to support those who are disadvantaged by giving to charity.

The relationship between faith and volunteering or civic participation is far from straightforward. The main source of statistical information on this is the Citizenship Survey. However, analysing the survey data and identifying clear and consistent messages are made difficult because some of the questions have been formulated slightly differently in each edition. The data

⁸ Christian Research publishes every year the publication *Religious Trends*. See www.christian-research.org.uk for more information.

should therefore be read in conjunction with the article by Michael Locke in section two, which explores in more depth this complex issue (page 29).

Religious affiliation makes little difference in terms of volunteering

The 2001 Citizenship Survey finds that the proportion of people who volunteered and had a religious affiliation is similar to the proportion of people who had no religious affiliation, and this is true of both informal and formal volunteering.

Table 3: Participating in informal and formal volunteering at least once a year (%)

2001	Informal volunteering	Formal volunteering
No religious affiliation	68	39
All faith communities	67	39
Christian	68	39
Muslim	54	30
Hindu	60	39
Sikh	60	35
Buddhist	74	39
Jewish	76	58

Source: *Religion in England and Wales: Findings from the Home Office 2001 Citizenship Survey*, Home Office Research Study 274

More respondents affiliated to the Jewish, Buddhist and Christian faiths than those of other faiths said they volunteered informally, and the lowest proportion of participation in informal volunteering was found among Muslims. It is worth noting here that the definition of informal volunteering used in the survey excludes unpaid assistance provided to family members,

and therefore fails to capture the contribution of family networks in providing support and mutual aid.

Where formal volunteering is concerned, further analysis of the 2001 results shows that religion and ethnicity are strongly associated with formal volunteering only in the case of certain groups. These are primarily respondents who are black or of mixed-race ethnicity and affiliated to a Christian faith and, to a lesser extent, those who are white and affiliated to a Christian faith. When all personal characteristics are taken into account, occupation, education and age are more closely associated with formal volunteering than religious affiliation is.

Nevertheless, the scale of volunteering related to faith is indicated by the Citizenship Survey's finding that religion is the fourth most important field for formal volunteering (23% of all respondents),⁹ and that for black and Asian people it represents by far the largest field of interest for formal volunteering.

Religious practice impacts on volunteering more than affiliation

As for the influence of religious practice on volunteering, later editions of the Citizenship Survey conclude that, overall, people who actively practise a religion are more likely than others to volunteer, even though the definition of religious practice is contested, as we have previously highlighted. The findings on religious practice are not broken down by religion, though the reports do provide a breakdown by ethnicity. The difference between those practising a religion and those who do not is not significant for Asians, but further investigation indicates that, within the Asian group, it is only those of Pakistani origin for whom there is no association between religious practice and formal volunteering.

⁹ After sports/exercise (34%), children's education/schools (30%) and hobbies/recreation/arts/social clubs (25%); Home Office (2003) *2001 Citizenship Survey*.

Table 4: Formal volunteering in 12 months before interview, by whether respondent currently practises a religion within ethnic group (%)

	2003	2005
White		
<i>Practises a religion</i>	61	58
<i>Others</i>	38	41
Asian		
<i>Practises a religion</i>	38	36
<i>Others</i>	33	34
Black		
<i>Practises a religion</i>	48	51
<i>Others</i>	29	34

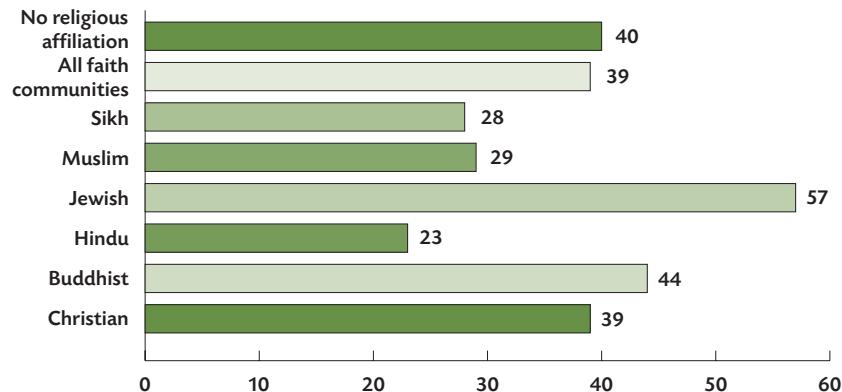
Source: 2003 and 2005 Citizenship Surveys, Home Office and DCLG

Further analysis by Greg Smith of the Citizenship Survey 2003 dataset indicates that social class-related factors such as education and housing tenure have an equal or bigger impact on formal volunteering than actively practising a religion and that this is true for all religions.¹⁰

Participation in civic activities follows the same trends as volunteering

The findings are very similar concerning participation in civic activities. There is very little difference between the levels of participation in civic activities for respondents with and without a religious affiliation (39% compared with 40%). The results show that, across faith communities, the level of participation is highest for respondents who identified themselves as Jewish and lowest for those who described themselves as Hindus. As with formal volunteering, the multivariate analysis of the 2001 results suggests that the impact of religious affiliation on participation is not as significant as other personal characteristics. More than gender, ethnicity or religious affiliation, it is educational achievement, particularly having a degree or A-level qualification, that increases the respondent's likelihood of participating in some form of civic activity.

Figure 2: Level of civic participation



Source: Religion in England and Wales: Findings from the Home Office 2001 Citizenship Survey, Home Office Research Study 274

Overall, people who practise a religion are more likely to participate in civic activities than those who do not, as was the case with formal volunteering. And again, there are differences according to the type of activity and ethnicity, as Table 5 illustrates.

Table 5: Participation in civic activities, by whether respondent practises a religion within ethnic group (%)

	Civic activism	Civic consultation	Civic participation
White			
<i>Practises a religion</i>	13	25	45
<i>Others</i>	8	19	37
Asian			
<i>Practises a religion</i>	8	16	27
<i>Others</i>	8	18	29
Black			
<i>Practises a religion</i>	13	22	29
<i>Others</i>	9	18	29

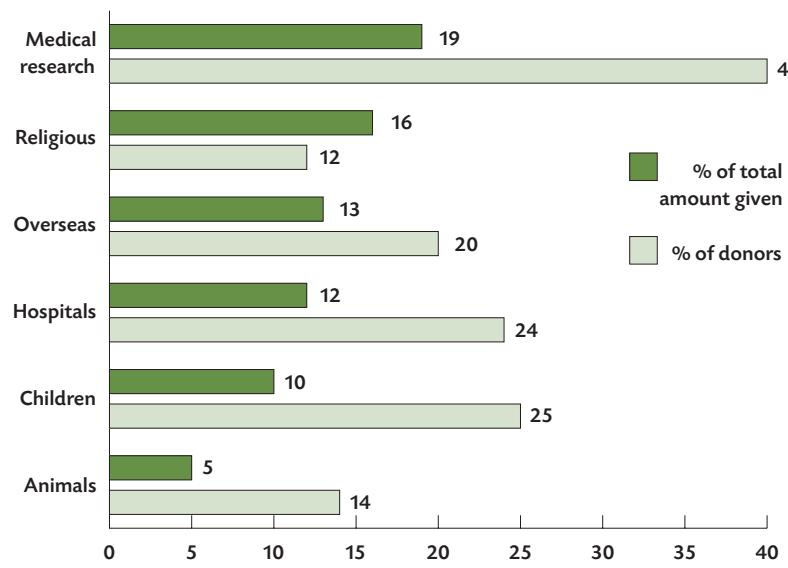
Source: 2005 Citizenship Survey, DCLG

¹⁰ Smith, G. (2005) *Faith, Volunteering and Social Capital... What the Surveys Say*, Conference Paper for NCVO/VSSN Research Conference 2005.

Charitable giving is a major element in the guidance of all the major religions

According to the CAF/NCVO UK Giving Report, religious organisations received 16% of the total amount of charitable donations in 2005/06, compared with 13% the previous year. These organisations saw a different profile of giving, with the average total amount per donor substantially higher than for other organisations (£35 per donor against the overall average of £27 per donor).

Figure 3: Proportions of donors and total amount given by organisation type



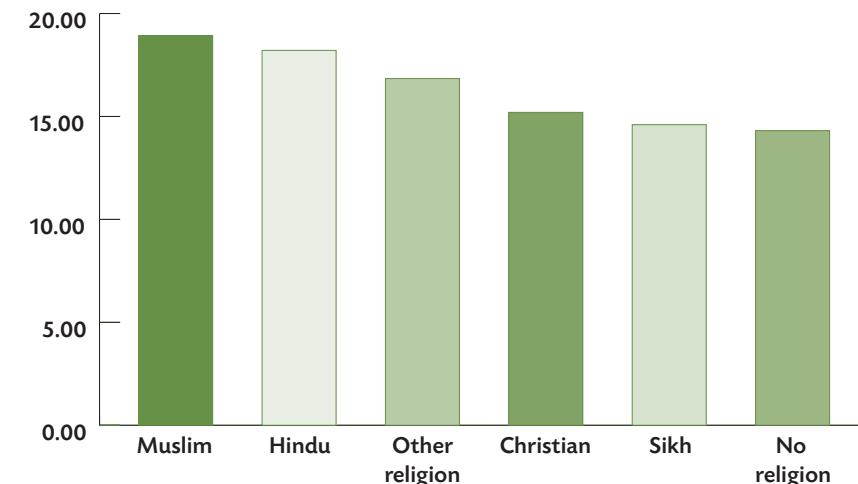
Source: UK Giving Report 2005/06, CAF/NCVO

High-level donors (those giving more than £100 in a month) show a different pattern of giving behaviour from that of other donors, with a disproportionate share of high-level donors giving to religious causes. Only

12% of donors gave to religious causes, whereas 39% of high-level donors did so. This may reflect a high level of commitment and should not be taken to mean that religious causes are simply drawing on a wealthier donor base.

The 2005 edition of the Citizenship Survey finds that those describing themselves as Christian were the most likely to have given to charity in the last four weeks (80%) and that Muslims give more on average per head than people of any other faith. The report also highlights the fact that "people who actively practised a religion were more likely to have given to charity and gave more on average to charity than those who did not". So, while religious affiliation is seen to have a positive impact on giving, a more substantial difference is seen in those actively practising a religion.

Figure 4: Mean amount given to charity in preceding 4 weeks, by religion (£)



Source: 2005 Citizenship Survey, DCLG

Faith institutions and faith-based charities

People may express their faith in a formalised setting, places of worship being the most obvious example. It is difficult to know the exact number of these, but Christian Research in its annual publication *Religious Trends* estimates that in the UK in 2005 there were 47,635 Christian churches, 3,194 non-trinitarian churches, 635 registered mosques, 365 synagogues, and 208 Sikh temples or gurdwaras. It also provides an estimated number of congregations/groups for several other religions including Hinduism (350), Buddhism (310) and Baha'i (190). The total number of places of worship, congregations and groups for the year 2005 is thought to be 54,099.

At least one registered charity in seven is engaged in religious activity

The faith sector is also composed of organisations that are shaped by faith but that do not necessarily involve any religious activities. As the concept of charity is a core teaching in all the major religions, it is not surprising that faith-based organisations are a strong force in the charitable sector. These are remarkably diverse. Many organisations in the sector are very small, but some rank among the largest charities. Their beneficiaries are varied and their major activities include giving support to other organisations as well as direct service provision.

As of August 2006, a total of 23,832 had specified on their annual return to the Charity Commission that they engaged in religious activity. However, this figure under-estimates the total number of faith-based registered charities, as many organisations will choose not to classify themselves as religious, despite having religious values as a core guiding principle. For example, Barnardo's states on its website that it "derives its inspiration and values from the Christian faith". The number is also clearly an under-estimate of the total number of faith-based organisations, as many smaller organisations will not be registered charities.

Reflecting the UK demographic context, Christian charities outnumber by far charities based on other religious traditions. Nevertheless, all of the major faiths have inspired charitable organisations, as shown in Table 5.

Table 6: Registered charities, by faith

Faith	Number of registered charities
Christian	15,098
Jewish	1,160
Islamic	893
Hindu	254
Buddhist	205
Sikh	150
Interfaith or Multi-faith	125
Baha'i	79
Jain	21
Zoroastrian	8
Unspecified	5,839
Total	23,832

Source: Charity Commission

More than half of faith-based registered charities are involved in grant-making

The most important area of activity is grant-making to organisations as well as individuals (56%), followed by service provision (35%). Over half of faith-based charities aim to serve the general public and two-fifths place a particular focus on children or young people. Their geographical distribution largely reflects that of the mainstream voluntary sector.

Table 7: Number, mean income and total income of faith-based registered charities, by region

	Population in thousands	Number of faith-based charities	Mean income (£ thousand)	Total income (£ million)
East Midlands	3,484	1,508	134	201.9
East of England	4,463	2,308	184	424.9
London	6,068	5,196	365	1,894.4
North East	2,083	612	192	117.7
North West	5,508	2,140	185	395.0
South East	6,584	3,642	179	651.1
South West	4,141	2,393	110	262.2
West Midlands	4,298	1,909	164	312.8
Yorkshire and The Humber	4,079	1,383	143	195.9

Source: GuideStar UK/NCVO

The total income of faith-based registered charities is estimated at £4.6 billion

This income appears to be spread very unevenly among organisations: those with an income of less than £200,000 account for 90% of organisations but generate only 11% of the total income. The concentration of resources in a relatively small number of larger organisations is one of the key features of the voluntary and community sector as a whole, as shown in the latest edition of NCVO's UK Voluntary Sector Almanac¹¹.

An important presence is also evident among the largest fundraising charities. The vast majority of faith-based organisations in the top 500 fundraising charities are Christian, with The Salvation Army¹² (at number 7 in the ranking) and

Christian Aid (at 14) being two of the largest. Muslim organisations are also represented, the largest three being Islamic Relief (at 49), Muslim Aid (at 239) and Muslim Hands (at 346). Jewish organisations also have a strong presence in the top 500, including Jewish Care (at 64), the United Jewish Israel Appeal (at 74) and The United Synagogue (at 123).

Conclusion

This brief review of some of the more widely available evidence suggests that the institutional manifestations of faith are embedded in society, and in particular in the fabric of the voluntary and community sector. Although further research is needed, it suggests that faith practice may influence voluntary action and charitable giving. When the demographic profile of those who practise is further considered, it is hardly surprising that policy-makers are interested in faith communities and faith-based organisations, as they are seen to bring a range of capital sources (social, spiritual and the not-unnoticed financial capital). However, it is clear from this review that resources are not evenly distributed, which is likely to have implications for any expectations placed upon faith communities and faith-based organisations. This leads to the next chapter on the current policy environment.

¹¹ Wilding, K et al (2006) *The UK Voluntary Sector Almanac 2006*, NCVO

¹² It should be noted here that The Salvation Army is a denomination as well as a service-providing charity.

3. Analysing the policy context

Over the last ten years, the government has recognised the contribution of the voluntary and community sector to meeting key policy goals. Within this agenda there has been a growing emphasis on the distinctive contribution of faith communities and faith-based organisations to society, and as a consequence on the need to engage with and support these organisations specifically. From the early days of the New Labour government in 1997, faith has been a key strand within policies and programmes designed to promote neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion. This has given rise to a number of initiatives that have sought to strengthen the relationship between government and the major faith communities.

One aim has been to give faith communities a stronger voice in relation to these issues. For example, in 1997 the Inner Cities Religious Council was relaunched as an advisory forum, with a particular remit to advise government on urban policy and regeneration and to strengthen the relationship between government and the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Jewish communities. It undertook this role until April 2006, when it was replaced by the Faith Communities Consultative Council, a non-statutory body chiefly concerned with issues of cohesion, integration and sustainable communities. The Council aims to provide a link between government and faith communities, as well as to disseminate good practice to support work at a local level.

At the same time there has been an emphasis on providing practical advice to government bodies about engaging with faith communities, touching on both why and how this should be done. For example:

- In 1997, the government updated guidance on community involvement in regeneration to highlight the “potentially significant” contribution of faith communities to neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion, as well as some basic principles on how to engage with them in an effective and culturally appropriate way.¹³

- In 2002, the Local Government Association followed suit with a guide to good practice on developing relationships between local authorities and faith communities.¹⁴
- In 2002 the newly formed Faith Communities Unit reviewed the extent to which government departments were engaging with the faith sector at that time. The subsequent report, *Working Together: co-operation between government and faith communities* (2004), made a number of specific recommendations as to how this relationship could be strengthened. Departments were required to identify progress against these recommendations one year later.¹⁵

An aim of these initiatives has been to ensure that good practice is shared and that front-line staff have the information they need, for example about culture and faith, both to engage communities effectively and to ensure that services are provided appropriately. However, it is not clear how effectively this has been translated into action on the ground.

Why involve faith communities?

A commonly asked question has been ‘why is government so keen to engage with faith communities?’. A review of public policy documents suggest a number of reasons, which are explored below.

Values

One of the main reasons given by the government for giving a greater role to faith communities is that they are seen as being repositories and transmitters of social values. These values are seen to be a vital motivation for social action and community involvement by faith-based organisations and institutions, as well as by people of faith. From this perspective, faith is seen as engendering a concern for others and a sense of social responsibility that can be particularly valuable in disadvantaged neighbourhoods: “... faith communities can bring values, commitment, neighbourliness and a rich religious and cultural heritage to the unpopular areas which no amount of security and management systems can compete with”.¹⁶ Faith is therefore seen to be a stimulus for active citizenship and as contributing to the goal of civil renewal.

¹³ Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (1997) *Involving practitioners in urban and rural regeneration: a guide for practitioners*, 2nd edition.

¹⁴ Local Government Association (2002) *Faith and Community*.

¹⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government (2005) *Working together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities: Progress Report*.

¹⁶ Policy Action Team 7: Unpopular Housing in Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2004) *References to Faith Communities in Government Documents*.

At the same time, and for similar reasons, government policy has sought to create new opportunities to enable faith communities to play a greater role in delivering public services, alongside other voluntary and community organisations. This was most clearly articulated by the Prime Minister in a 2005 speech to Faithworks where he outlined his vision for a new welfare settlement, one in which “the voluntary sector, including the churches and faith communities, have a critical role to play in meeting community and individual needs”. He also said that he would like to see the faith sector play a bigger role in future, given its past record in making a positive difference to society through what he described as “faith in action in the service of others”.¹⁷

Black and minority ethnic communities

A further reason for engaging with faith communities is that they can be a main point of access to, and a means of engaging, people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Guidance to support neighbourhood renewal programmes, for example, has emphasised this role, describing faith groups as being among the strongest community-based organisations.¹⁸ It called on public agencies to look “beyond the ‘faith’ label” to take account of the significant role that faith communities play “in identifying and responding to unmet needs in black and minority ethnic communities”, as well as the relatively high level of support that they can often command from within those communities.

Central to this perspective is an understanding of the relationship between faith and identity, particularly among BME communities, and the significance of this in relation to community engagement and cohesion. This is reflected in the Compact code of practice for BME communities, which calls on government to “recognise the potential of faith communities to contribute to social inclusion and that this is distinct from the promotion of religion”.¹⁹

Resources

Another reason for involving faith communities, particularly in the early years, was the belief that they could command and contribute both human and material resources, including, for example: links with communities; paid staff

(“priests, imams, pastors, rabbis”); premises; and “the ability to access funds unavailable to other organisations, including special trusts and members’ goodwill offerings”. In addition to this, faith communities are also perceived to be “gateways to access the tremendous reserves of energy and commitment of their members, which can be of great importance to the development of civil society”.²⁰ For these reasons public bodies engaged in urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal have been encouraged to actively involve faith groups in their work. However, this has raised concerns that the government has an instrumentalist approach to faith-based organisations, using it as a cheap resource; a concern that is shared by many in the voluntary and community sector as a whole.

There has also been a growing recognition that not every faith community will have the resources, capacity, skills or initial interest to become ‘active partners’. Some, particularly those in BME communities, may need additional support to enable them to fulfil their potential role in neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion.²¹ Allied to this is a concern that faith-based organisations, as well as rural, refugee and BME groups more generally, have not had the same access to voluntary sector infrastructure support as other voluntary and community organisations. Therefore, a principle aim of the government’s ChangeUp programme has been to increase the support available to these communities.²² However, there is an ongoing debate as to how this support can best be delivered, whether through specialist or generic infrastructure organisations.

Community cohesion and integration

As well as support for faith-based organisations to meet the needs of BME, and particularly Muslim, communities, there is also growing interest in the role that they can play in promoting community cohesion and integration. Following the riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001 and even more the London bombings in July 2005, this agenda has become increasingly important, with a greater focus on faith, rather than race, as a source of conflict between communities. A particular concern has been the level of segregation between communities and the extent to which people lead separate lives.²³

¹⁷ Tony Blair, keynote speech to Faithworks, 22 March 2005.

¹⁸ Report of Policy Action Team 9: Community Self-Help in Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2004) *References to Faith Communities in Government Documents*.

¹⁹ NCVO (2001) COMPACT: *Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations, A Code of Good Practice*, NCVO.

²⁰ Faith Communities Unit (2004) *Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities*, Home Office.

²¹ Report of Policy Action Team 9: Community Self-Help in Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2004) *References to Faith Communities in Government Documents*.

²² Home Office (2004) *ChangeUp – Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector*, Home Office.

²³ Cantle, T. (2001) *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, HMSO.

However, the need to build bridges and promote inclusion while at the same time tackling extremism, both from the far right and Al Qaeda-related, has given rise to new challenges and contradictions. For example, there is some evidence to suggest that Muslim communities feel unfairly targeted by government approaches to anti-terrorism, leading to greater alienation and disaffection. This is exacerbated by the juxtaposition of Islam with terrorism by politicians and the media, serving to undermine attempts to promote integration.²⁴

The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, identifies the need to improve community cohesion and tackle extremism by supporting and spreading good practice. It sees this as being an integral part of the local government reform agenda. A particular focus is the need to tackle extremism within Muslim communities. To support this the government has set up a new £5 million Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund as part of its counter-terrorism strategy.

In addition, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion has been established to identify existing good practice at the local level and identify what more might be done to bring people together. It is expected to report its findings and recommendations in June 2007.

Charity law

The Charities Act 2006 removes the presumption of public benefit previously given to charities established for the advancement of religion or education, as well as those that seek to relieve poverty. There has been some controversy about what this will mean for faith-based organisations. However, many will have been set up with wider charitable purposes and therefore this change will have limited impact. The aim of the public benefit requirement is to ensure that the public has a good understanding of what charity is for and why charities deserve the benefits they receive, in terms of both public support and certain tax reliefs. While it may require some organisations to examine what they do and how they benefit the public, it is in the long-term interest of the sector as a whole to maintain public trust and confidence in charity in this way.

In April 2007 the Department of Communities and Local Government announced that it was funding a new Faith and Social Cohesion Unit within the Charity Commission. The Unit will enable the Commission to play a bigger role in supporting faith-based charities as a means of building community cohesion and tackling extremism. For this reason the Unit will initially work primarily with Muslim communities with the aim of strengthening the governance and accountability of faith-based organisations. However, whether this is an appropriate role for the regulator is debatable.

Tensions and contradictions

The greater visibility of faith communities within the policy arena has also highlighted how faith is seen as both a source of tension between communities and as part of the solution. On the one hand, there has been an emphasis on the extent to which different faiths share common values, around which communities can unite. The Prime Minister, for example, has said: "Our major faith traditions ... play a fundamental role in supporting and propagating values which bind us together as a nation."²⁵ On the other hand, evidence from the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme has shown that segregation, a lack of understanding of different faiths, and entrenched negative faith-based stereotypes (anti-Semitism, Islamophobia) contribute to poor community relations to a significant extent.

These tensions have been most explicit in relation to Muslim communities and community organisations, where the focus of concern has been primarily the need to prevent terrorism. More positive goals such as community cohesion and integration are seen as a means to this end, rather than being valuable in their own right. It is important that the emphasis on tackling extremism within Muslim communities is matched by an equal concern with addressing Islamophobia and other negative stereotypes within all communities.

Public services

There has also been considerable debate about the appropriate role of faith-based organisations in public service delivery. This is part of a wider agenda aimed at encouraging third sector organisations to take on a greater role, for

²⁴ Briggs, R. et al. (2006) *Bringing it Home: Community-based approaches to anti-terrorism*, Demos; Quigley, N. and Pratten, B. (2007) *Security and Civil Society*, NCVO.

²⁵ Tony Blair, 'Faith in Politics', speech to the Christian Socialist Movement, 29 March 2001.

example in supporting unemployed people to gain skills and find work, or playing a greater role in the delivery of health and social care. This has been particularly apparent, and controversial, in relation to education, as well as in relation to anti-discrimination legislation, and the commitment to universal service provision.

The long tradition of Christian denomination schools in the UK, and their perceived success, both normatively and educationally, has led to a commitment to enable all faith communities to play a greater role in managing schools. The 2005 White Paper from the Department for Education and Skills, *Schools for All: More choice for parents and pupils*, for example, has sought to introduce new providers of schools in order to meet parental demands for choice. These new providers, including faith groups, educational charities and other not-for-profit organisations, would support new self-governing school trusts and would be able to appoint a majority of governors to the school board. At the same time, parents would be given the right to ask for a new primary or secondary school if, for example, there was a lack of faith provision in the area.

The debate as to whether faith schools should be required to ensure that a specific proportion of their intake includes children of a different faith, or no faith at all, has again drawn attention to a strong tension within government policy: strong faith communities are seen as being a force for good in society, promoting its moral and spiritual health, but this is set against a concern that single-faith schools, or schools with a particular strong faith orientation, will lead to further segregation of different communities.

Anti-discrimination and equalities

More recently there has been considerable controversy concerning the provision of adoption services to gay and lesbian couples. These tensions have come to the fore over the implementation of the Equalities Act 2006 and specifically the provisions prohibiting discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services on grounds of sexual orientation. Some faith-based organisations have (unsuccessfully) sought exemptions from these

provisions because they perceive them to conflict with their religious beliefs and therefore their freedom of expression.

Interestingly, concerns about freedom of expression were also raised in relation to the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006, which made it an offence to stir up hatred against persons on religious grounds. Indeed, it was passed on the third attempt and only after amendments were made in the House of Lords to address these concerns. However, legislation to prevent discrimination on grounds of religion or belief has been less controversial.²⁶ Nevertheless this highlights tensions not only between government and faith communities, but also between secular and religious beliefs.

Links with secular communities

While there has been an emphasis on interfaith work to promote greater understanding and respect *between* faith communities, there has been relatively little focus on building links with secular communities and organisations (or indeed, between different groups within the same faith or denomination).

Organisations such as the British Humanist Association have argued strongly that the emphasis on faith within government policies excludes those who have a non-religious belief. Others see it as potentially deepening divisions within society, as in the case of education, discussed above. At the same time, some Christian organisations have protested at the growing secularisation of UK society and the emphasis on multiculturalism, which they believe has undermined Christian values and traditions in the UK. This view gained widespread publicity in December 2006 when a number of organisations expressed concern at the secularisation of Christmas. It is likely that this will be a key issue in future.

²⁶ For example, the Employment Equality (religion or belief) Regulations 2003 make it unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly against someone because of their religion or belief, or to subject someone to harassment or victimisation.

Conclusion

The focus of government policy in this area has been to maximise the contribution of faith communities to public life, both nationally and locally. While faith-based organisations are seen as part of the voluntary and community sector, policy and guidance has emphasised their distinctiveness. However, it is important that this is not overstated. It may be more useful to identify common issues, and how these might be addressed, while at the same time recognising the distinctiveness of the different parts of the sector and the strengths that each brings.

For example, faith institutions (the church or mosque) may provide a more permanent presence or locus for community activity in some areas than many community organisations, and this may be part of their distinctive value. Yet concerns about the capacity of faith representatives on local public partnerships to adequately reflect the needs of, and be accountable to, the communities they serve,²⁷ for example, are shared by many non-faith-based organisations. Similarly it has been suggested that the government's interest in faith communities has been an instrumental one, emphasising what they can contribute in terms of people and buildings, but with little interest in, and some suspicion of, faith itself.²⁸ Again the question of instrumentalism is one that has been raised across the sector as a whole. These issues will be discussed in more detail in section two.

²⁷ Berkeley, N., Barnes, S., Dann, B., Stockley, N. and Finneron, D. (2006) *Faithful representation: faith representatives on local public partnerships*, Faith-based Regeneration Network, Church Urban Fund and Coventry University.

²⁸ See, for example, HM Treasury/Cabinet Office (2006) *The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration: interim report*, p. 13.

4. A review of key themes

From this review of the literature a number of themes emerged which are presented and summarised below. Associated with these themes are a set of questions that highlight the potential tensions and challenges within the current policy agenda on faith communities and the role of faith-based organisations.

Conclusion

Faith is clearly a key issue within the government's agenda. It is a significant strand in relation to policies aimed at strengthening civil society and civil renewal, particularly at a local level, where it overlaps with voluntary and community sector engagement more broadly. The issues and challenges, which the questions above refer to, often mirror those encountered by secular organisations. The following section addresses these questions and examines how faith-based organisations are both distinctive and similar to secular organisations.

Themes	Questions
<p>Civil society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith-based organisations are part of civil society and have many roles in common with secular organisations. Faith-based organisations are very diverse in terms of their contribution to society and their engagement with the wider community. They are likewise very diverse in terms of their structure and size. Some are small, rather informal groups that rely heavily on local voluntary action, others are very large charities that meet social needs on a far bigger scale. The faith dimension of faith-based organisations can be expressed in many ways. Not all faith-based organisations have activities that are explicitly religious in content – far from it; however, it is faith and the associated beliefs and values that shape the work they do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Do faith-based organisations foster the habits and practices of a democratic culture among citizens?</i> <i>Do they provide opportunities for participation, empowerment and debate?</i> <i>How do we deal with faith-based organisations who are extreme in their views and do not act in the interest of the public good?</i> <i>What common characteristics do faith-based organisations have and what distinguishes them from secular organisations?</i> <i>What are their strengths and weaknesses?</i> <i>How can faith-based organisations work with other organisations within civil society?</i>
<p>Voluntary action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitudes towards faith have changed. A growing number of people are defining their own sense of faith rather than conforming to a specific faith tradition and becoming more distanced from formal institutional settings. Despite the overall fall in membership and attendance, faith is still a key influence in many people's lives. Beyond religious practices such as worshipping in a formal setting, there are also a number of cultural practices that are linked to faith and that have an impact on everyday life. In many ways, faith has a strong social and cultural dimension. As is the case with faith-based organisations and their activities, faith contributes to shaping the actions of individuals including those related to volunteering, civic participation and giving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>How does faith motivate people to get involved and influence the type of voluntary action they choose to participate in?</i> <i>Is the voluntary action of people who practise a religion purely down to their faith?</i> <i>To what extent does faith-motivated voluntary action take place within faith-based organisations?</i> <i>Is there an overall positive disposition among faiths towards voluntary action?</i> <i>Do people of different faiths volunteer and participate in different ways?</i> <i>Can individual motivation for voluntary action be influenced by policy?</i>

Themes	Questions
<p>Social capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The concept of faith communities is not very helpful, because it fails to acknowledge the diversity between and within different communities. However, people of different faith traditions share a faith heritage, which is one of the markers of identity and need among others (e.g. gender and age). Faith-based organisations have a role in supporting communities that have a common faith heritage and in responding to their specific needs. They also contribute to strengthening the ties that bind these communities together. Faith communities foster social capital; however, they can be exclusive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do faith-based organisations and their members move 'beyond bonding', which can exclude, to building bridges and forging links with others? What are the initiatives and activities of faith-based organisations that generate bridging and linking social capital? What is the role of faith-based organisations in building greater community cohesion? What are the limitations of faith-based organisations as positive contributors to social capital and social cohesion? Are current policies relating to faith communities having a positive impact or are they potentially divisive?
<p>Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government has placed a growing emphasis on engaging with faith communities and faith-based organisations and involving them in policy development and local decision-making structures. Faith-based organisations are increasingly considered potential partners in governance and are seen as being a main access point to faith communities, especially communities that are hard-to-reach and belong to minority ethnic groups. Consequently, faith-based organisations often act as community representatives on a number of governance structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the diversity of faith communities and faith-based organisations fully recognised and represented? Do differences in capacity among faith-based organisations lead to inequalities in terms of representations? What obstacles to participation in governance do faith-based organisations encounter? Are these any different from those encountered by secular organisations? How accountable, legitimate and transparent are faith representatives? Which faith representatives is government talking to?
<p>Service provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith-based organisations provide and are involved in a wide range of services. A distinction can be made between the provision of services that focus on social activities and those related to social welfare, although the boundaries between the two are at times quite blurred. Some of the services provided by faith-based organisations are aimed specifically at people of a particular faith, others are targeted at the wider community. In recent years, government has been interested in giving faith communities and faith-based organisations a greater role in the provision of public services, alongside other voluntary and community organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What type of service do faith-based organisations provide and who are these services aimed at? Can faith-based organisations maintain a balance between delivering 'member' and 'public' benefits? What is the added value of faith-based organisations in service provision? Can faith-based organisations keep faith separate from the social and community work they do? Are differences in values between a religious and a secular agenda compatible with faith-based organisations delivering public services? What is the impact of delivering more public services on faith-based organisations? Does public service delivery lead to greater equality or does it erode the diversity of provision?

Section two

Further exploration and reflection

The second section of this publication aims to explore in greater depth the key themes and issues identified and touched upon in the first section. These are:

- faith-based organisations within civil society;
- faith as a motivation for voluntary action;
- faith, social capital and social cohesion;
- local governance, representation and faith-based organisations;
- faith-based organisations as service providers.

This section is written by a number of external contributors who were chosen for their expertise and experience. Some of the authors are academics who have carried out research on faith-related subjects, others are practitioners who work with and/or within faith-based organisations. The articles provide for each of the above themes a summary of current thinking and a discussion on key issues, trends and challenges.

1. Faith-based organisations within civil society

Catherine Howarth, London Citizens

This article will begin by examining the current interest among policy-makers and social scientists in civil society, and in particular the shift that has taken place in perceptions of the role of religion and faith-based organisations within civil society around the world. It will offer some basic

definitions, and then look at the characteristics that faith-based organisations demonstrate compared with other types of civil society organisation.

Turning specifically to the UK, it will offer a brief survey of the varied functions which congregations and other faith-based organisations play within civil society, before looking at two examples where such organisations in UK have taken a particularly proactive and independent role in issues of community governance and international economic justice.

In recent years the health of civil society has increasingly been recognised as critically important to the effective functioning of society and democracy. In the case of the former Soviet republics the weakness of independent civil society institutions has been cited to explain the explosion of inequality after 1989 in those societies, and the problems that some former Soviet states experienced in making multi-party democracy workable. This in turn generated a new appreciation and greater understanding of the role that civil society, including faith-based organisations, plays in shaping and sustaining the democratic and economic culture of Western societies, including British society.

Looking specifically at the role of faith-based organisations in civil society, there has been a shift in the view taken of them. The concept of civil society was first developed by early modern writers including Ferguson, Hobbes and Locke. For them, religion was intrinsically embedded in an old hierarchical world view, to be contrasted with the then emerging elements of a liberal democratic world view. The view of religion as broadly antithetical to liberal democracy remained highly influential during the 19th and 20th centuries. Recently, however, political scientists and policy-makers at national and

international levels have recognised that in practice, faith-based organisations are often very effective at fostering the habits and practices of a democratic culture among citizens. The fact is that religious organisations have played, and continue to play, a key role in challenging oppressive state institutions in a broad range of modern societies, from African dictatorships to Soviet state socialism.

Religion is now widely acknowledged as a force within civil society which can and does effectively resist the dominating influence of political power and economic wealth. In many settings, national and local, local congregations in fact do this more effectively than other civil society bodies which, for a variety of reasons, are more fragile and less strongly embedded in the grassroots of communities.

The influence of religion in social and political affairs was broadly predicted to wither in the 21st century, but this has certainly not turned out to be the case. Most obviously, the challenge of Islamism has become the major preoccupation of Western states and their security services. This in turn has raised the profile of other world religions, including Christianity, in the public life of nations and global regions.

It is important to be very clear that while faith-based organisations can and have acted to promote good governance, human rights and human development, in many settings they have been highly pernicious in their influence, siding with elites against the interests of the poor and marginalised, stirring ethnic and religious divisions, and maintaining patriarchal social structures which oppress women and homosexuals. Equally, while religious institutions may, in some settings, contribute to the flourishing of a healthy democratic culture in the wider society to which they belong, they are rarely noted for their own democratic structures or cultures. These tensions and problems are all found in contemporary British faith organisations, and are frequently often exacerbated by political situations in other parts of the world.

Defining civil society

Civil society can be defined as the totality of voluntary civic and social organisations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society. The Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics has a working definition, as follows:

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power.

Some scholars take a narrower view of civil society as simply comprising those institutions that play an active role in holding accountable, and challenging, powerful institutions of state and market.²⁹ Whether a narrow or broad view of civil society is taken, faith-based organisations are clearly key players but ones with a distinctive history and characteristics.

Religious institutions are in fact the very oldest forms of civil society that exist. They long pre-date the relatively modern concept of civil society itself. Indeed faith institutions pre-date government and state institutions as we understand and experience them today, and also market institutions. Historically the line between civil and religious authorities in many societies, including here in Britain, was very thin, and at times non-existent. Even in a relatively secular country such as contemporary Britain, our commonly held social traditions and values almost all originate from a Christian world-view and ethical perspective. In the UK, the mainstream Christian denominations have suffered a very significant decline in church attendance over the last 50 years, but more recently there appears to have been some resurgence of confidence. A two-year study by the Commission on Urban Life and Faith, published in 2006, found that "faith is now a more dynamic and significant factor in our cities than it was 20 years ago. Not only has the Church Urban

²⁹ Chandhoke, N. (2003) 'A Critique of the Notion of Civil Society as the Third Sphere', in Rajesh Tandon and Ranjita Mohanty (eds) *Does Civil Society Matter?: Governance in Contemporary India*, Sage.

Fund catalysed Christian engagement in urban centres, but now there is a broader contribution, for instance of Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities, than previously.”

Some writers dispute that faith-based organisations are simply another category of civil society group. Noting that many other organisations in civil society are single-issue based, representing, for example, a residential interest, worker interest, or educational interest, Patrick Riordan states that there is a danger that religious organisations, by association, can appear to represent particular and special interests. He believes this undermines the ability of religious bodies to proclaim their message as “universal and not restricted to any race, class, culture or aspect of human existence”.³⁰ While it is certainly true that, at their best, faith-based organisations are not sectarian, in practice many have been and are guilty of taking a less than universal view of the human family. Whether or not people of faith concur on categorising faith-based organisations as just another part of civil society, in practice that is increasingly how they are perceived by governments, market institutions, and indeed other civil society groups.

Heterogeneity of faith-based organisations

The influence of faith and faith-based organisations on British society is varied and complex, reflecting differences not only between the major faiths (and the cultures of people living in Britain who belong to different faiths) but between the major Christian denominations. Perhaps the most obvious example is Northern Irish society which has been riven for centuries by the political divisions between Catholic and Protestant communities (a division which spilt over into Scottish society and to a lesser degree into the North West of England). Here, denomination determines not only style of worship and theological positions, but political and educational preferences, which have fundamentally shaped the nature of society in the province. But even in parts of the UK that seem less fundamentally divided on religious lines than Northern Ireland, the influence of contemporary faith-based organisations can be profound. Leicester is one of the best-known multi-faith cities in the UK. A study carried out in 2004 by the

Diocese of Leicester, the Leicester Council of Faiths and Voluntary Action Leicester identified 250 faith groups operating nearly 450 projects. Organised religion affects almost every aspect of contemporary social, community and political life in the city of Leicester. This contribution has been termed ‘faithful capital’.³¹

Since 11 September 2001, public debate about whether faith is becoming a more divisive force in societies around the world has mushroomed. The growth, not only within Islam but also in Christianity and Hinduism, of what has been termed ‘furious religion’ is indeed a deeply worrying trend.³² Malise Ruthven has pointed out that an increasing number of people are drawn to a “religious way of being that manifests itself in a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group in the face of modernity and secularisation”. This presents a major challenge to those people of faith who wish to promote faith, and the moral response encouraged and inspired by religious faith, as part of the solution to society’s divisions and injustices.

Common traits

Despite the enormous diversity of local congregations in Britain, there are in fact a number of common characteristics. Some of these can be seen as strengths and others as weaknesses.

Starting with the strengths, most congregations and faith institutions are financially independent, raising their required income through weekly collections from members and (among Christian churches) through historic assets, particularly land and property.³³ In comparison with many other voluntary sector organisations, this provides local congregations with stability and security.

Secondly, on account of gathering on a regular basis (typically weekly), faith congregations are often exceptionally strong and well-connected networks, with an impressive ability to mobilise and communicate within their membership.

³⁰ Riordan, S.J. (2005) *Civil Society: A Theoretical Seduction?*, Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life.

³¹ Commission on Urban Life and Faith (2006) *Faithful cities: a call for celebration, vision and justice*, Church House Publishing/Methodist Publishing House.

³² Forrester, D. (2005) *Apocalypse Now?: Reflections on Faith in a time of Terror*, Ashgate.

³³ It should be noted that church property has sometimes been seen as a liability as much as an asset for those congregations charged with its upkeep and maintenance.

Thirdly, religious faith can lead to strong conviction and commitment on the part of practising believers. This of course can be both a strength and weakness, depending on how and where that conviction is deployed.

Fourthly, most faith institutions – Christian institutions in particular – have complex structures and hierarchies which link local congregations across the country and connect them internationally also. These structures may appear somewhat bureaucratic, even authoritarian in some denominations, but they undoubtedly contribute to the robustness of faith-based organisations within UK civil society.

Fifthly, mainstream Christian denominations (most particularly the Anglicans) have a physical presence (buildings) and a dedicated minister living in almost every community in the UK. In many cases, this gives the church, its minister and local leaders great credibility within the community, especially in poor communities where other professionals who work in the area very often live outside it.³⁴

Turning to the weaknesses and problems arising from the characteristics of faith-based organisations, there is no question that some have a tendency to sectarianism and exclusivity. Moreover, with notable exceptions, faith institutions and their members are often oriented to supporting and maintaining the status quo, adopting a conservative outlook on many questions in the social and political arena. Finally, Christian congregations that have suffered a serious decline in regular members over the last decades have often lost the confidence to be outwardly oriented towards the wider community.

What do faith-based organisations do in civil society?

Religious organisations and their members undertake a wide range of activities and functions, including: worship services; religious education; voluntary action in the community; campaigning on local, national and international issues; and developing social capital by providing a hub through which local relationships and networks are fostered.

It may be helpful here to distinguish between congregations (by which we mean communities of practising believers who gather for worship, usually on a weekly basis) and other faith-based organisations (by which we mean institutions whose inspiration and origins may be religious but whose activities are primarily focused on the provision of services, information or advocacy). In practice there is much overlap, particularly as members of local congregations frequently organise themselves to undertake the functions of faith-based organisations in their neighbourhoods and beyond.

For good and understandable reasons, public funds are generally only provided for those activities of faith-based organisations that have least to do with faith per se. Evangelism (by any faith tradition) is not in principle resourced by the state, although in practice it proves very difficult to neatly extract faith from the services provided, often highly effectively, by faith-based organisations. As a result of growing interest by central and local government in a mixed economy of public service providers, the profile of faith-based organisations has risen in the last few years. Nevertheless, when faith-based organisations as a whole are viewed through the lens of civil society it is actually local congregations that are arguably more significant because of their much greater numbers and geographical spread. Local congregations are ‘true’ voluntary associations rather than, as in the case of many other faith-based organisations, being made up of a small professional and/or voluntary staff.

The strengths that faith congregations exhibit as civil society organisations are well demonstrated in the concluding two examples of faith-based activity in the public realm. First, community organising, as practised by London Citizens and Birmingham Citizens, offers one noted model of local congregations taking a proactive role in the public life of their communities. A broad-based mix of local civil society organisations, which includes congregations of different faiths and denominations, schools, trade union branches and other voluntary associations, forms a non-partisan political alliance in order to take action for change in their community. The alliance helps to train and develop local people to have the skills and confidence to parti-

³⁴ Commission on Urban Life and Faith (2006) *Faithful cities: a call for celebration, vision and justice*, Church House Publishing/Methodist Publishing House.

pate effectively in local decision-making processes, bringing the perspective and interests of those who are often excluded from such processes into the mix. Faith congregations have played a major role through community organising in winning a living wage for migrant workers, in securing ethical guarantees for local people in connection with the 2012 Olympics, and many other smaller but significant victories.³⁵

The Jubilee 2000 campaign was another strong example of a highly effective mobilisation orchestrated and supported by UK faith-based organisations, particularly the churches. The historic effort to pressure G8 governments to cancel the debts of heavily indebted poor countries at the turn of the Millennium was an international campaign involving and engaging a broad range of global civil society players. Nevertheless, UK churches provided a highly effective network of committed and well-resourced members who made a major and strategic contribution to the campaign.

Conclusion

It looks likely that in the next ten years the contribution of faith congregations, and other faith-based organisations, to life in Britain will be dynamic, if not uncontroversial. For many who do not belong to any faith community, the jury is certainly out regarding the overall beneficial impact of faith in this country. It will be for those who belong to faith communities in all their diversity, to demonstrate that faith can and will continue to make a significant and positive contribution to human development and justice in the UK.

2. Faith as a motivation for voluntary action

Michael Locke, Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London

The relationship between people's faith and their volunteering looks quite obvious but is complex and raises subtle issues for policy and research. This article reviews research-based knowledge on:

- the ways in which people's faith is related to their voluntary action;
- the kinds of voluntary action in which people of faith engage.

It suggests lines of inquiry where further research is needed as a basis for improving policy and practice by governments and organisations, as well as for greater understanding. I would like this article to be read more as a stimulus to thought and inquiry than as an authoritative text; the research-based knowledge about the relationships of faith and volunteering is far from conclusive.

Faith as a reason for volunteering

From a review of the literature, Priya Lukka and I concluded that the balance of research findings "tends to support a 'commonsense' position of a positive relationship between faith and voluntary action".³⁶ We came to this conclusion from a range of research studies,³⁷ including evidence such as that of a relationship between frequency of prayer and time spent volunteering³⁸ and between church attendance and social responsibility.³⁹

However, we noted the relationship was not unequivocal,⁴⁰ and some studies had found no relationship between religious practice and volunteering. We recalled how in an earlier research project a volunteer who was a person of faith denied religious motivation, commenting tellingly:

I wouldn't say I was a holier than thou person ... I feel it's important that you support what is actually around you, that was the motivation.⁴¹

³⁶ Lukka, P. and Locke, M. (2000) 'Faith, voluntary action and social policy: A review of the research', *Voluntary Action*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 25-41, p. 28.

³⁷ For example: Jackson, E., Bachmeier, M., Wood, J. and Craft, E. (1995) 'Volunteering and charitable giving: Do religious and associational ties promote helping behaviour?', *NonProfit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 59-78; Moynagh, M. and Worsley, R. (2000) *Tomorrow: Using the future to understand the present*, The Tomorrow Project; Powell, W. and Clemens, E. (1998) *Private action and the public good*, Yale University Press.

³⁸ Uslaner, E. (1997) *Faith, hope and charity: Social capital, trust and collective action*, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland.

³⁹ Wuthnow, R. (1997) *The Crisis in the Churches*, Oxford University Press.

⁴⁰ Lukka, P. and Locke, M. (2000) op. cit., p. 28.

⁴¹ Locke, M., Sampson, A. and Shepherd, J. (2000) 'A lot of friends, a lot of appreciation and a phone that never stops ringing': *Voluntary action and social exclusion in East London*, CIS Commentary 96, London: Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London, p. 20.

Understanding how someone comes to volunteer is complex.^{42,43} Our literature review found a tension between the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ factors and asked:

[H]ow can we analyse the interplay between (a) the individual’s ‘inner’ conviction or motivation, (b) the transmission of values through religious institutions and organisations (notably through religious leaders), and (c) the wider environmental factors and social learning that shape individual actions?⁴⁴

We thought then that “these complex relationships are not necessarily ultimately separable, and it may not be fruitful to attempt to measure the significance of the different factors”.⁴⁵

Predisposition and situation

However, the ways in which faith-based voluntary action is explained in terms of ‘inner’ or ‘external’ factors would have implications for policy and organisation. Would it be more useful practically to focus, on the one hand, on the individual’s conscience and their conversation with their god or, on the other hand, on the social and institutional setting and their role in a faith-based community, whether as follower or leader?

Reflecting further on these issues has led to developing a framework for understanding reasons for volunteering which distinguishes between the largely ‘internal’ factors (people’s predisposition to volunteer) and the largely ‘external’ factors that triggered the volunteering.⁴⁶ Thus, we would separate the lines of inquiry for research into:

- faith as a predisposition, together with psychological and attitudinal factors, and also formative influences of upbringing, social background, ideas of community, etc., which shaped pro-social views and a preparedness to volunteer;
- situational factors, comprising the conditions or the event that prompted or led to the particular act of volunteering.

Part of the thinking in making this distinction is that the situational factors look more susceptible to changes in policy and organisation than do people’s predispositions. But research is needed to identify how factors such as policies and programmes, organisational processes and structures set up situations that encourage or discourage people in their decisions to volunteer.

Community as framework

Analyses of ‘inner’ and ‘external’ factors or between ‘predisposition’ and ‘situation’ are complicated by how faith-based voluntary action is located in communities and how those communities create ‘webs of affiliation’.⁴⁷ The ways people associate with each other in faith communities are shaped by their faith and its culture.

To understand better how people associate in faith communities, it would be helpful to test out ideas from recent research about ‘social connectedness’⁴⁸ and about obligation, reciprocity and ‘horizontal philanthropy’⁴⁹, as well as the conventional wisdom about the ‘gift of time’.

⁴² Ellis Paine, A., Locke, M. and Jochum, V. (2006) ‘Volunteering, active citizenship and community cohesion: From theory to practice’, paper presented to the international conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research, Bangkok, July 2006.

⁴³ Yeung collected 767 motivational elements from 18 faith-based volunteers, and synthesised these into four axes: getting – giving; continuity – newness; distance – proximity; thought – action. Under the last axis, she noted motivation through values which “often expressed personal religiosity” and religious role models (Yeung, A. (2004) ‘The octagon model of volunteer motivation: Results of a phenomenological analysis’, *Voluntas*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 21-46, p. 36).

⁴⁴ Lukka, P. and Locke, M. (2000) op. cit., p. 33.

⁴⁵ Lukka, P. and Locke, M. (2000) op. cit., p. 33.

⁴⁶ Ellis Paine, A., Locke, M. and Jochum, V. (2006) op. cit.; Locke, M., Ellis, A. and Davis Smith, J. (2003) ‘Hold on to what you’ve got: The volunteer retention literature’, *Voluntary Action*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 81-99.

⁴⁷ Milofsky, C. (1997) ‘Organisation from Community: A case study of Congregational Renewal’, *NonProfit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 26 Supplement.

⁴⁸ Prochaska, F. (2006) *Christianity and social service in modern Britain: The disinherited spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Uslaner, E. (1997) *Faith, hope and charity: Social capital, trust and collective action*, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland.

⁴⁹ Wilkinson-Maposa, S., Fowler, A., Oliver-Evans, C. and Mulenga, C. (2005) *The poor philanthropist: How and why the poor help each other*, Compress. [however, this book is not specifically about faith communities]

Interconnections between faith and community affiliations are complicated by their relationships to the state or dominant social institutions. For instance, an evaluation of Millennium Volunteers in Northern Ireland showed that there was some tendency for more young people identifying as Catholic to join the programme than those identifying as Protestant.⁵⁰ A project worker explained this as a consequence of the Catholic community's experience of community action as a response to the Protestant domination of state agencies.⁵¹

Additionally, faith affiliation and volunteering are likely to be interconnected with cultural or national affiliations. For instance, in what ways are traditions and practices of volunteering common across a faith community internationally or different according to national affiliations?

Thus, the faith-based community may be seen as establishing a culture within which people volunteer, but public policy needs a better understanding of how cultural factors influence volunteering within communities and between communities.

Individual characteristics and identity

A further set of considerations refers to the interrelationships of faith characteristics with other social and demographics characteristics. As noted in section one, the Citizenship Survey for England and Wales analysed volunteering by people of faith, finding differences between communities but not an overall positive relationship. Moreover, when the socio-economic characteristics were considered, occupational status, educational attainment and age were more closely associated with formal volunteering than religious affiliation.⁵²

Faith affiliation may be associated with ethnicity, and in the USA, where much of the research into this subject originates, most congregations have been found to be composed solely or primarily of one ethnic group.⁵³ The situation

in the UK is complex, however, in terms of both the locational distribution of communities⁵⁴ and relationships between ethnicity and volunteering.⁵⁵

Thus, before reaching conclusions for policy and organisation, future research will need to analyse social and demographic characteristics alongside faith affiliation.

Conviction and commitment

There is a need for caution, too, about what someone's identification as a member of a faith signifies. For instance, as noted in section one, identification in the Census does not provide information about whether the person has a nominal and occasional or a highly committed regular participation. Also, research on levels of commitment suggests no simple relationship between strength of enthusiasm and continuity of volunteering.⁵⁶

Activities and organisation

Having reviewed previous research, Priya Lukka and I undertook a small-scale study to explore the practices of volunteering in different faith communities, their relationships to the teachings of their faiths, and their organisation, interviewing 25 local faith leaders of seven faiths in three urban areas in England.⁵⁷ We took an open view of what constituted volunteering or voluntary action as unpaid help in the community, realising that the terminology of volunteering and voluntary action might not be recognised or helpful in collecting a panorama of accounts from different communities.

⁵⁰ Institute for Volunteering Research (2002) *UK-wide Evaluation of the Millennium Volunteers Programme*, Research Report 357, Department for Education and Skills.

⁵¹ Personal communication.

⁵² Home Office (2004) *Religion in England and Wales: Findings from the Home Office 2001 Citizenship Survey*, Research Study 274, Home Office.

⁵³ Cnaan, R. and Boddie, S. (2000) *Social services of congregations in urban America: Lessons for the social sector*, School of Social Work, University of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁴ See forthcoming report by Greg Smith and colleagues on Joseph Rowntree Foundation project 'Religious diversity, community cohesion and the 2001 census'.

⁵⁵ Home Office (2003) *2001 Citizenship Survey*, Home Office.

⁵⁶ Locke, M., Ellis, A. and Davis Smith, J. (2003) 'Hold on to what you've got: The volunteer retention literature', *Voluntary Action*, Vol. 5, No. 3.

⁵⁷ Lukka, P. and Locke, M. (2003) *Faith and voluntary action: Community, values and resources*, Institute for Volunteering Research.

Expressions of faith

Local faith leaders explained how their faiths encouraged voluntary action, and we interpreted five kinds of reasons for volunteering among the faiths:

- to help others, by giving time and/or money;
- to live according to the spirit of one's religion and the values it proposes;
- to act selflessly;
- to help people in need;
- to be concerned about social injustice and inequality.

Our report quoted how faith leaders explained the relationship of their faith and voluntary action; for example:

It is part of our faith to give to others through doing. Mizvah is to do a good deed without being thanked for it or expecting any thanks – you just do it because you do it and you shouldn't be telling anybody that you are doing it. Jewish people are expected to live [their] lives by carrying out mizvah. That is what you grow up with. It could be money, it could be being a good neighbour. It could be anything. (Jewish faith leader)

Islam is a natural way of living – we have to volunteer ourselves to the Lord in so many fields. Islam is a way of life with no hierarchy. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah says that you should help your family and neighbours. This can be any person that is needy. (Islamic faith leader)

Seva is volunteering and sacrifice to help others. Seva can be done physically or financially. It is built into our religion. The importance of seva is that it shows you are caring. You have to do seva. You won't be caring if you don't do it. Seva is the greatest service that a person can do. (Hindu faith leader)

What it is to be a good neighbour informs people's Christianity. (Christian faith leader)

An issue raised for research and policy is whether what these faith leaders are talking about is simply an overall positive disposition among faiths towards volunteering or whether a deeper inquiry into their theologies, teachings or discourses might suggest that faiths have different approaches to volunteering. For instance, from everyday observations, some faiths or organisations within faiths appear to be more concerned with 'this world' or more with the 'next world', or more concerned with an individual's relationship to their god, or more with the collective or institutional.

It can be noted that statements from the various faiths seem to be more specific about giving money, such as charity or zakat, than about giving time; the connections between faith, money and time could be analysed.

A way of life

However we regard the relationships between faith and voluntary action, faith-based communities are dependent on activities and services carried out voluntarily by members of their communities. There are few paid posts in local faith organisations; they are occupied by, in many cases, the leader of worship such as the Christian minister/priest or Muslim imam, and occasionally by an administrative or domestic assistant. In addition, some local faith communities have specific services such as a youth club or advice centre with paid workers (though these posts are usually externally grant-funded). Our report saw volunteering activities as falling into four categories:⁵⁸

- routine activities, both spontaneous and organised, such as communal meals in the gurdwara, flower arranging in the parish church, laying out deceased people for a Muslim community, transport to hospital, peace prayers, meals on wheels for the faith's dietary requirements, friendly support and informal caring, visiting, shopping, etc., instruction and play for children (e.g. classes on a Sunday for Hindu and Christian), cleaning the premises;
- welfare services, organised formally either within the faith organisation or as a separate entity, such as youth clubs and under-fives clubs, advice centres for refugees, health advice and promotion;

⁵⁸ Lukka, P. and Locke, M. (2003) op. cit., pp. 67-68.

- festivals, creating a heavy demand for voluntary labour, such as in preparing ceremonies and meals, but also focusing members' attention on getting involved;
- disasters and causes; for instance, working with a community affected by an earthquake or raising money for the victims.

The weight of the volunteering activity we found was on the everyday, routine activities within the faith community, many of which were more a spontaneous 'way of life' than an organised service. Also, we could not clarify the blurring of sacred and secular aspects of service: is the person who cleans the premises more a 'volunteer' than a person who takes a role in the ceremony of worship? Future research will need to plan for the problems of recording and analysing informal and spontaneous activities – what people 'just do'.

We intended to explore the ways people volunteered outside their faith communities, but interviews with local faith leaders generated mostly data about local activities. We collected a few specific accounts of welfare services in collaboration with another faith community and also a few stories of individuals volunteering in other countries in disaster relief. Future research should track people's volunteering beyond their local faith communities through individuals; again, a larger research task.

Organising for faith-based voluntary action

The ways in which volunteering within faith communities was organised were largely informal and, again, difficult to record. Much of the organising of volunteering was either 'informal or associational', where people supported each other, or 'individual-centred', where the person moved around communities and got things done – in both cases, without the kind of formal organisation which typifies the voluntary and community sector and which had shaped our inquiry.⁵⁹

Future research will need to free itself from the paradigm of typical voluntary and community organisations and record how people actually organise things in these communities.

⁵⁸ Lukka, P. and Locke, M. (2003) op. cit., p. 59.

Issues for public policy

In terms of public policy, faith-based voluntary action can be regarded as constructive partly because it offers a means of self-fulfilment for the volunteers, partly because it provides services and helping within and beyond the faith-based community, and partly because it helps strengthen those communities, as other sections discuss. Organised religion and the social life of faith communities are dependent on volunteering. Without the voluntary effort, some people would be lonelier or more vulnerable and, hence, public and community services would have more to do and would need more public funding.

Such broad utilitarian policy assumptions have been complicated by the New Labour government's policies for reaching the 'hard-to-reach' communities and for increasing the cohesion within and between communities. The government made some over-simple assumptions, which led it to identify communities of ethnicity, which it was finding hard to reach, with communities of faith, which, in being more institutionalised, seemed to be more reachable.

This review leads to questioning whether the government has secured enough knowledge to act on such instrumental assumptions. It might be harmful if policy-makers were to regard faith-based volunteers like a labour force motivated by inner conviction and prepared to be deployed in directions set by social policy.

Faith does not appear to be a motivating factor in the same way that – simplistically – wages might be regarded as a motivating factor for paid workers. The research evidence suggests complex interconnections between faith as an element in someone's predisposition to volunteer, and their situation in a faith-based community, where their volunteering is triggered. It also suggests that a major aspect of faith-based volunteering is the social connection between volunteer and recipient. It may be useful to regard faith-based volunteers largely as people in committed networks with close – but little understood – connections between the helper, the helped and the act of helping.

The review of research overall points not only to such complexities but also to the many ways in which better understanding is needed as a basis for action. Perhaps it would be wise to conclude from the research that a main aim of public policy with regard to faith-based voluntary action should be to avoid harming it.

3. Faith, social capital and social cohesion

Robert Furbey, Sheffield Hallam University

Religions have always been associated with social order, but they have also played a significant part in many bitter international, national and communal conflicts. 'Faith' presents itself, therefore, as both solution and problem in relation to social cohesion.

Faith and social cohesion

These two faces of faith have been reflected in UK government policy. The earlier years of New Labour were marked by regular references to 'faith communities' as sources of social cohesion. In 2001, for example, the Prime Minister gave this endorsement of the cohesive influence of religion:

Our major faith traditions – all of them more historic and deeply rooted than any political party or ideology – play a fundamental role in supporting and propagating values which bind us together as a nation.⁶⁰

In addition to these 'binding values', in 2002 the Local Government Association (LGA) identified more tangible resources that faith organisations can marshal in the quest for cohesion: networks, leadership, management, buildings and local presence.⁶¹

'Faith' continues to be affirmed as a partner in building social cohesion in key documents such as the White Paper on Local Government in 2006.⁶² But recent years have also seen growing government concern regarding the social impact of religion. The urban disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and

Burnley in 2001 and the subsequent diagnosis by the Cantle Report⁶³ of 'parallel lives', segregated along lines of ethnicity and religion, has prompted renewed and intense debate on faith schools and whether or not they are socially divisive. The London bombings of July 2005 also deepened the post-9/11 association of religion with conflict and terrorism. In this shifting context government has pressed faith communities, and particularly 'faith leaders', to support its efforts to secure social cohesion. Meanwhile, official recognition of cultural and religious diversity has given ground to the language of integration and assimilation, as seen in controversies over religious symbolism, notably the wearing of the veil by Muslim women.

'Faith', therefore, is both courted and questioned because it can be cohesive and divisive. The main stance of the UK government in the last 15 years has been to regard faith communities and organisations quite instrumentally for their potential as 'social glue' which can be 'harnessed' in the cause of social cohesion.

But social cohesion itself can take oppressive as well as positive forms. Thus, the Cantle Report 2001 saw a key distinction between:

- strong cohesion *within* communities, which may produce conflict between communities; and
- cohesion *across* communities, which may be able to promote the shared understandings needed for civic order and a common citizenship.

The idea of 'social capital' may help us to develop a critical exploration of both the place of faith in social life and their relationship to different forms of 'social cohesion'.

Social capital – bonding, bridging and linking

The concept of 'social capital' is nearly as contentious as the social impact of religion! We cannot review the full debate here. But this section presents a working definition of social capital and introduces a widely accepted scheme of its different types.

⁶⁰ Tony Blair, Speech to the Christian Socialist Movement, Methodist Central Hall, 29 March, 2001.

⁶¹ Local Government Association (2002), *Faith and community: a good practice guide for local authorities*, LGA Publications.

⁶² *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, The Local Government White Paper, 2006, The Stationery Office, paragraph 3.15.

⁶³ T. Cantle (2001) *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, HMSO.

The idea of social capital stems from the recognition that we are enriched not only by our physical capital (material possessions acquired through our income and wealth) or by our human capital (our qualifications and skills) but also by our participation in social networks. John Field provides an accessible definition:

Social capital

The theory of social capital is, at heart, most straightforward. Its central thesis can be summed up in two words: relationships matter. By making connections with one another, and keeping them going over time, people are able to work together to achieve things that they either could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty. People connect through a series of networks and they tend to share common values with other members of these networks; to the extent that these networks constitute a resource, they can be seen as forming a kind of capital.⁶⁴

The word ‘trust’ is closely associated with social capital. Trust may be a *cause* of social capital, prompting people to co-operate, or it may arise as a *consequence* of living and working together, often sustaining common values and mutuality.

Among the criticisms of the social concept, three seem to stand out. First, many people resist the application of the instrumental language of ‘capital’ to human social relationships. In particular, people of faith often point to the part that this language can play in sucking faith groups into a pragmatic government agenda, distracting them from their essential beliefs, understandings and mission. Second, the idea of social capital has had a particular association with a conservative political philosophy – moral communitarianism – which often has the whiff of nostalgia for place and community. This would define the social capital of faith groups as consensual social glue rather than as a carrier of radical social challenge. We shall see below that faith networks often reject this assigned role. Third, rather like the idea of ‘community’, social capital is often used as a honeyed word, ignoring the evidence that social networks can be exclusive, aggressive to outsiders,

Type of social capital	Type of participation	Role in civil society
Bonding Relates to common identity (i.e. ties among people who are similar to each other)	Horizontal participation	Shared common purpose
Bridging Relates to diversity (i.e. ties among people who are different from one another)	Horizontal participation	Dialogue between different interests and views in the public sphere
Linking Relates to power (i.e. ties with those in authority)	Vertical participation	Access to power institutions and decision-making processes

oppressive to members and closed to new understandings. Some faith networks have these negative qualities.

In spite of these challenges to dominant definitions of social capital, however, there has been wide acceptance of the usefulness of the following scheme of three types of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking.⁶⁵

What Alison Gilchrist has called “the well-connected community”⁶⁶ requires all three types of social capital. This scheme provides us with criteria by which to assess the kind of social capital found in Britain’s faith communities.

Faith and social ‘connection’

These bonding, bridging and linking types are used in the following sections to identify some broad fields of faith activity which seem to contribute positive (‘connecting’) social capital. The discussion draws on recent research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Field, J. (2003) *Social Capital*, Routledge, p.1 (emphasis added).

⁶⁵ This particular expression of the social capital scheme is that presented in: Jochum, V., Pratten, B. and Wilding, K. (2005) *Civil Renewal and Active Citizenship: A Guide to the Debate*, NCVO.

⁶⁶ Gilchrist, A. (2004) *The Well-Connected Community: A Networking Approach to Community Development*, The Policy Press.

⁶⁷ Furbey, R., Dinham, A., Farnell, R., Finneron, D. and Wilkinson, G. with Howarth, C., Hussain, D. and Palmer, S. (2006) *Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or Dividing?*, The Policy Press.

Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and many other faith traditions have beliefs, spiritual resources and practices that prompt commitment to peace, justice, honesty, service, community, personal responsibility and commitments that underwrite the formation of social capital. Religious beliefs (as opposed to 'values') are usually kept firmly in the background in public policy debate yet, explicitly or implicitly, beliefs or understandings are, for most people of faith, an essential source of motivation and direction.⁶⁸

Faith is usually nurtured through the sharing of a common community life and worship. Indeed, many outsiders would associate faith most obviously with bonding social capital. 'Faith communities' are often seen as introverted, focusing on their own people and maintaining boundaries with the rest of the world – an urgent case of 'too much bonding'. However, the acceptance, support, purpose and identity that are developed through the bonds of a worshipping community can also motivate and equip people to cross boundaries and to develop bridging and linking social capital. Many 'public lives' can be traced to early years in a faith community.

How do faith groups and their members move 'beyond bonding' to build bridges and forge links? Activity is found in four broad fields: the use of faith buildings; the creation of a diversity of 'spaces' that support interfaith and faith-secular association; involvement in governance; and engagement in wider civil society.

Faith buildings – physical capital as social capital

Faith buildings are highly diverse. Some are historic and imposing, while others are small and easily missed by the passer-by. They may be just places of worship or they may be large and adaptable centres, well equipped for a range of uses and available to people beyond the faith community in neighbourhoods where there may be few other meeting places. The physical capital of faith communities can be used to generate social capital as people, both members and outsiders, have opportunities to cross boundaries and engage with people outside their normal circle. Through such

bridge-building and the identification of common concerns, faith buildings may also promote both the development of common causes and the forging of links with power. There are an increasing number of faith 'places' where the 'owning' faith group has relinquished some control over a building or project to share resources with others.

Examples of faith buildings that develop social capital⁶⁹

Gujerat Hindu Society Centre, Preston (www.ghspreston.co.uk)

The centre has strongly developed services for local Hindu people that also build bridges with the wider community and make links with mainstream employment and health agencies.

New Testament Church of God, Mile End, East London

The church building has been used to build productive relations between the black community and the police. The church is a founder member of The East London Communities Organisation (TELCO) and has worked with the East London Mosque. It seeks ways to enable non-Christians to 'use our space'.

St Mary's Church and Community Centre, Bramall Lane, Sheffield (www.stmarys-church.co.uk)

The refurbished building accommodates a worshipping congregation and also social enterprise initiatives that are financing the development of long-standing bridges with the local community through a diverse range of services and activities, including an Asian People's Project (managed by an Asian woman) and a robust and ethnically mixed youth club.

'Spaces' of association – building trust and co-operation

The nature of association and religious motivation in many faith organisations has caused them to develop important 'spaces' within which bridging and linking social capital can be developed. Much of this work is longstanding. But

⁶⁸ Smith, G. (2004) 'Implicit religion and faith-based urban regeneration', *Implicit Religion*, Vol. 7, No. 2.

⁶⁹ All web sites last visited on 2 January 2007.

interfaith understanding and co-operation has developed significantly in recent years at national, regional and local levels through the formation of new networks and, more formally, of nearly 200 faith forums since 2001. Other developments include the formation interfaith study centres and also multi-faith centres where encounter is fostered by sharing a worship space. Faith organisations are often trusted as brokers in community affairs and can offer a supporting context for building trusting relationships between local groups, both faith and secular. Much of this activity can issue from formal faith institutions, but faith networks can also be innovative in developing informal networks which include members within and outside faith.

Examples of faith 'spaces'

Interfaith Network for the United Kingdom

(www.interfaith.org.uk)

Founded in 1987, this network includes bodies drawn from all the major faiths in the UK, national and local interfaith organisations and academic and educational institutions. "The Network works with its member bodies to help make the UK a place marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity." The network builds bridges between faiths and has links with government.

London Muslim Centre

(www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/aboutus/services.php?cat=4)

This large and impressive centre in East London is a 'space' that permits outward-looking and community-oriented activity, including close association with the local authority and partnership with the nearby Jewish synagogue. Trustees have highly developed networks both at street level and with decision-makers.

Together for Peace in Leeds

(www.togetherforpeace.co.uk)

T4P is a Leeds-wide movement "committed to tackling peace, justice and conflict issues" in Leeds and beyond. It is more a flexible network than an institution, although it has a council of reference that includes Christian and Muslim leaders, local and national politicians and members from the voluntary sector, business and the media. Bridges and links are built through a major biennial festival and ongoing events involving faith and non-faith groups.

Participation in governance – working with the state

Local governance is a context in which links can be made with official authority and bridges formed with other local organisations. Many faith organisations have become active in urban regeneration, city-wide partnerships and neighbourhood initiatives, prompted variously by their specific beliefs and their frequently long-term identification with their local neighbourhood. In most faith communities the number of external networkers is small, but their impact can be considerable, often sustained by their formation and anchorage in a faith community.⁷⁰

Participation in civil society

Current debates about partnership between 'faith' and government within the civic realm should not obscure the issue of faith in civil society. We have seen that government sees faith as social glue that might help it to achieve a 'fix'. But faith organisations and their members may have an alternative contribution to make as a social lubricant, participating with others as citizens in civil society in more open-ended associational politics. More research is needed here. We have seen that the confidence, skills and qualities required for such participation can stem from membership of a faith community. On closer inspection, many faith organisations are internally diverse, not always homogeneous and straightforwardly 'bonded'. As such they can be places where the demands of deliberation, negotiation, campaigning and democracy can be absorbed.

⁷⁰ Berkeley, N., Barnes, S., Dann, B., Stockley, N., and Finneron, D. (2006) *Faithful representation: faith representatives on local public partnerships*, Faith-based Regeneration Network, Church Urban Fund and Coventry University.

Examples of faith in civil society

One notable expression of linking and bridging social capital in civil society, where faith communities work with each other and with secular groups, is seen in the engagement of *London Citizens* (www.londoncitizens.org.uk) in campaigns on the national minimum wage and on asylum administration.

An explicit attempt to develop the skills and qualities required for deliberation and democratic participation is found in the 'parish development consultations' in the *Diocese of Sheffield*.

However, history confirms that the words 'faith' and 'democracy' can sit uneasily together. This directs us to the final section of this chapter as we recognise a more negative side of faith, the limitations of many faith organisations as positive contributors to social capital, and the obstacles that confront them.

Limitations and obstacles

In the never-ending struggle of human freedom against oppression [religion] has fuelled both the coercion of the oppressor and the resistance of the oppressed.⁷¹

The increasing reference to a 'faith sector' in public policy obscures the enormous complexity and diversity of religious belief and life. The preceding sections have identified positive and critically reflective contributions to social capital and social cohesion by faith organisations and their members. But there are obvious limitations.

First, the rise of fundamentalism places religion in the dock as a destructive response to present global and local insecurities and anxieties. Faith can be interpreted and used to generate negative social capital and fear and hatred of 'the other'. Second, many other faith traditions are based on theologies or

understandings that encourage introversion and private faith rather than social engagement. Third, the decline in membership of many Christian churches in the UK and the ageing of many congregations both raise questions of sustainability. Finally, there are major inequalities between faiths in their resources and capacity to engage in the development of social capital.

These overarching limitations are often at the root of several more specific obstacles that faith organisations encounter in developing social capital.

Disconnected networkers

The work of those who build bonding capital within faith communities and organisations should not be discounted. However, the proportion of external networkers is typically small. Moreover, their work may not be understood or recognised by others so that they may lack support and affirmation. This can lead them to abandon their activity or leave their 'home' community to work in a new setting.

Buildings – conflicts and resources

Although there are numerous examples of social capital stemming from the imaginative use and adaptation of faith buildings, there can be conflict within faith communities over the use of what may be seen as 'sacred' worshipping space. Also, many faith buildings are very old, a drain on resources and inappropriate for present needs. Many faith organisations experience difficulties in obtaining funds to adapt their premises owing to the concerns of secular funding bodies, including government, not to 'fund faith'. The distinction between the social purpose of faith buildings and their religious purpose is often hard to demonstrate.

Restricting 'spaces'

Although faith networks can open up important spaces for the development of social capital, the continuing predominance of male elders in many faith organisations restricts the space and voice of women and young people.

⁷¹ M. Wiles (1999) *Reason to Believe*, SCM, p. 85.

Deflected by governance?

Many faith participants in civic governance question the role that they are asked to play and express concerns regarding pressures to compromise what they see as their essential mission. ‘Faith’ is often an independently minded and ‘troublesome’ partner, not easily reduced to a role as social glue in the regeneration toolkit. Faith organisations may operate on timescales and with working styles that do not accord with those of official partners. The demands of participation on often small numbers of overstretched members are frequently seen as excessive.

Barriers to association

We have seen that some faith organisations nurture and sustain the skills and qualities needed for boundary-crossing associational life in civil society. However, the governance of many faith organisations is not genuinely participative, deliberative or representational and the selection and training of leaders does not give due attention to the qualities required to empower and equip members. Faith communities are founded on varying blends of authority. These will usually include democracy, but scripture, tradition, prophecy and charisma variously shape their life and mission.

Conclusion

Faith communities contribute substantial and distinctive bonding, bridging and linking social capital, but they also face internal and external limitations and obstacles to development. Reviewing the preceding exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of faith organisations in relation to social cohesion and social capital, faith organisations emerge as often distinctive in their motivation and approach in the civic and the civil realms, but also as having much in common with secular voluntary organisations. It is important not to ‘other’ each other.

4. Local governance, representation and faith-based organisations

Doreen Finneron, *Faith Based Regeneration Network UK*

Rationale for faith involvement in governance

The question that springs to mind is why faith-based organisations should be involved in local governance. The simplistic-sounding answer is because they are there, but this does need some unpacking.

In recent years there has been a rapid change in local governance, and the democratic process has been widened to include many new forms. While this may not have quite delivered the aim of “putting local communities in the driving seat”,⁷² it has led to a stream of initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of the community in local decision-making.

Faith-based organisations are part of the local scene. In many areas they are vibrant community-based organisations reaching and caring for groups and individuals, some of which the statutory services and other voluntary groups find hard to reach. They are also increasingly engaging with other groups, forming partnerships and alliances that make a real difference to the wider community.⁷³ It is therefore right that they should play a role in the widening of local governance.

This article will attempt to illustrate the nature of that role and address some of the issues it raises, such as the particular contribution of faith-based organisations, the barriers they face, the effect of differences in capacity and approach among faith-based organisations, and questions concerning accountability, transparency and communication.

The activity of participation in local governance has strong connections with the concepts around social capital, in particular linking social capital – the forming of relationships beyond peer boundaries that cut across status. This useful concept allows the participation in local governance to be seen as inextricably linked to the bonding that goes on within the faith group, forming strong ties that the other forms of social capital depend on.⁷⁴

⁷² National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal 2001.

⁷³ Finneron, D. and Dinham, A. (2002) *Building on Faith: Faith Buildings in Neighbourhood Renewal*, Church Urban Fund.

⁷⁴ Furbey, R., Dinham, A., Farnell, R., Finneron, D. and Wilkinson, G. with Howarth, C., Hussain, D. and Palmer, S. (2006) *Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or Dividing?*, The Policy Press.

The contribution of faith-based organisations to governance includes:

- the potential to widen representation and highlight issues of community well-being and social cohesion;
- the potential to reduce the isolation of some faith communities and counter the trend towards religious extremism that such isolation can foster;
- they are usually strongly rooted and possibly in touch with and trusted by people and groups often suspicious of officialdom; have a good grasp of local issues and priorities; and are networked with a range of formal and informal community groups, many of which may be 'off the radar' of local authority and voluntary sector infrastructure organisations.

Forms of governance

One of the chief mechanisms for the new forms of local governance is public partnerships, such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), Primary Care Trusts and Youth Offending Teams. The only one of these that has really endorsed the concept of faith representatives has been LSPs. The route by which a representative comes on to a partnership has important implications for the way he or she operates and also for accountability. A survey of faith representatives on public partnerships⁷⁵ has found that there are two main routes for faith representatives on to LSPs. The first is to be specially appointed as a faith representative – 70% were in this category. The second is to be part of the wider voluntary and community network – this route accounted for 22% of the representatives. The remaining 8% were in both categories. Taking all categories together just over 40% were elected, most usually by a faith network or a voluntary and community sector network, with the others having been invited on. Some faith representatives are appointed on personal merit, but become de facto faith representatives by being acknowledged as people of faith. The implications for accountability of these routes are discussed later in this article.

In addition to membership of LSPs and the newer public partnerships, faith-based organisations have been active partners in the many regeneration and community schemes that have characterised government policy – City Challenge, Single Regeneration Budget, New Deal for Communities, to name but a few.

Many of the barriers and difficulties to participation encountered by faith-based organisations are similar to those of the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS), but some are particular to the faith sector.

Suspicion of faith involvement in governance

In some areas faith is regarded with a high level of suspicion by those working in local authorities:

We had to argue over quite a long period to even get a place on the LSP and it was agreed only after a discussion with myself, the Chair of the Local Council of Faiths, a local council member (who was opposed to our membership) and the Chair of the LSP and a civil servant dealing with faith issues in the NRU (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit). We should not have to work this hard.
*(Faith representative on an LSP)*⁷⁵

This suspicion seems to be founded on a lack of understanding of faith-based organisations and a fear that they may really only be concerned with proselytising. Faith communities by their nature are committed to assisting people to deepen their spiritual experience, but for many, the tenets of their faith lead them to engage in the world for other reasons, irrespective of whether this increases the numbers of the faithful.

The different faith traditions have very different beliefs and modes of expression, but they do seem to have in common a care for the environment, a passion for social justice and compassion for those who are suffering. The activities that this leads to in terms of social action and engagement in civil society are often remarkably similar, as are the reasons they give for being

⁷⁵ Berkeley, N., Barnes, S., Dann, B., Stockley, N. and Finneron, D. (2006) *Faithful representation: faith representatives on local public partnerships*, Faith Based Regeneration Network, Church Urban Fund and Coventry University.

so involved. These are also the values that drive the motivation for engagement in governance. The Faith Based Regeneration Network UK, in its first newsletter, December 2003, published individual reflections from its nine constituent faiths on the rationale and motivation for involvement in regeneration and wider civil society; this is available on the FbRN website.⁷⁶

It is important to recognise here that other groups and individuals also have values that are very similar, and that faith groups should not claim that a values-driven approach is unique or distinctive to them. What is distinctive is that these values spring from, and are inseparable from, their faith.

Relationships with the VCS

The survey of faith representatives referred to above also found that their relationship with the local VCS variable and that some Councils for Voluntary Service find it hard to acknowledge faith communities as part of the voluntary sector. It is also the case that many faith-based organisations do not see themselves as part of the VCS and do not readily access it for support. There is room for much mutually beneficial development here.

Other barriers to effective engagement in governance that faith-based organisations encounter include a lack of religious literacy among other professionals, and a perception that they are discriminated against in the allocation of funding. When they do get involved, the main blocks to effective participation are similar to those experienced by the wider VCS: a lack of capacity to respond to the torrent of demands and a need to develop the requisite expertise and skills. Representatives themselves point out that this is a resources and not a vision issue. They also report a need to find ways to inspire local faith communities to get involved.

Capacity for participation and differences between faith traditions

The lack of capacity (usually time) in the face of increasingly heavy demands may have similar causes in the faith sector and in the wider VCS, but there are particular implications for faith groups. The demands of participation in local governance mean it is far more likely that faith representatives on part-

nerships are from a faith community that is able to see that involvement as part of a paid position. Over half of the faith representatives surveyed were from the Anglican Church, mainly priests or paid lay staff. Over 30% were from other Christian traditions, 3% were Muslim, while the smallest proportion came from the Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Baha'i traditions.

Though this roughly reflects the numerical pattern of the Census returns, it is not a satisfactory situation if the contribution of faith-based groups is valued for the reasons given at the beginning of this article. The numerically smaller traditions and many of the black-led Christian denominations rarely have paid staff, and even the internal 'priestly' and 'pastoral' functions are conducted by volunteers, many of whom have other jobs. This lack of capacity seriously impedes the ability of faith-based organisations to contribute to governance.

Jargon and broken promises

The lack of capacity can be exacerbated by the way that community representatives can sometimes be de-skilled by the jargon and procedures used in statutory partnerships. Training and building of confidence in negotiating procedures was one of the areas where a need for training was identified by participants in the survey.

The quality of relationships with other professionals has a great impact on the effectiveness of participation in governance. Faith communities, like other communities, have sometimes had their expectations raised, only to be disappointed by what they see as broken promises. There are also experiences of 'over-consultation' with no tangible results. In these circumstances, enthusiasm and commitment are difficult to maintain.

Barriers arising from within faith communities

Barriers to effective participation in governance do not all arise from outside faith communities. Many faith communities have difficulty in engaging women and young people in their own governance structures. There are also issues with regard to ethnicity, and sexual orientation. There is sometimes competi-

⁷⁶ www.fbrn.org.uk

tion and conflict within as well as between faith groups. The apprehension that faith groups might use public funds for proselytisation is sometimes justified.⁷⁷ These are all serious problems and it is imperative that faith-based organisations continue to work on them, and do not shy away from the challenges posed by engagement in wider society. However, as experience in the wider VCS shows, many of these issues are not unique to faith groups, and are not reasons for excluding faith-based groups from governance.

The representation of faith-based organisations in governance also raises questions of accountability, legitimacy and transparency. In some ways these mirror those in the wider VCS, but they do also have distinctive elements. The survey of faith representatives found that there was a high level of concern about these questions and openness to considering ways of addressing them while at the same time not putting engagement on hold until a watertight system has been set up. The important question here is whether one person (or even two people), however well intentioned, can adequately represent all the faith communities. Faith communities are very diverse, and even within the same tradition there are often very divergent views and experiences.

Emerging models

There seem to be two models emerging. One is that a local forum of faiths elects a representative who then uses the forum as a means of communication and accountability; 65% of those in the survey used a local forum of faiths as their principle means of feeding back to the faith communities. The weaknesses of this model are: although the number of interfaith forums has grown rapidly over the last few years, there are still many areas where they are not present; the interfaith forums themselves are often contested spaces; they may not include all the faith groups; their processes may not be democratic. Its strength is that there is a structure that can be worked on and improved, both for the purpose of improving participation in governance and also achieving other desirable community goals. The Interfaith Forum of the UK has many years of experience in this field and has useful guidance on setting up and organising local forums of faiths.⁷⁸

The second model is that faith representatives become part of the wider VCS group; 22% of the faith representatives in the survey sit on the LSP in this capacity. They then carry the faith agenda alongside the community agenda. Faith representatives in this position reported that they felt better supported and had more access to training than those not associated with the wider VCS. This perceived advantage of being tied more closely to the VCS needs to be seen alongside some of the findings from the national evaluation of LSPs: that the sector lacks capacity, there are sometimes tensions between it and the local authority, and VCS representatives feel there is a lack of clarity about their role.⁷⁹

In some LSP areas a person of faith may be chosen on personal merit, and then regarded as the faith representative. This puts a burden on that person without providing them with support and a communications route. It is unfortunately also still the case that in some areas the local authority appoints what could be described as ‘the usual suspects’ to these roles without due consideration of accountability and the need to communicate with the constituency being represented.

Conclusion

Faith-based organisations have a great deal to offer to the processes of public policy development and decision-making processes, but face barriers in effectively exercising their role. In this there are marked similarities with the wider VCS, but there are also distinctive contributions and barriers; some of the barriers arise within the faith organisations themselves. Accountability and representation raise issues for faith-based organisations, as they do for the wider VCS. In most cases, the particular nature of the faith sector has led to the development of distinctive structures of accountability. The question of the location of a ‘faith sector’ is open to debate, but the evidence of its existence is all around us.

⁷⁷ Farnell, R. et al. (2003) *Faith in Urban Regeneration? Engaging faith communities in urban regeneration*, The Policy Press.

⁷⁸ The Inter Faith Network of the UK; www.interfaith.org.uk

⁷⁹ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships*.

5. Faith-based organisations as service providers

Colin Rochester, Roehampton University, with Tim Bissett, Church Urban Fund, and Harmander Singh, Sikhs in England

Note: This section is the result of a collaborative exercise. Tim Bissett and Harmander Singh have provided answers to some key questions about the role of faith-based organisations as seen from their individual perspectives and Colin Rochester has incorporated these into a more general discussion of the issues.

The historical role of faith-based organisations in delivering public services

Much of the current debate about the role of religious and faith-based organisations in the delivery of public services tends to ignore the very significant role played by the churches in the development of systematic responses to social need. The development of the popular educational system in Victorian England was led by the churches, which provided the school buildings and trained the new elementary school teachers in colleges, many of which are still part of the higher education sector today.

Other fields in which faith-based organisations continue to make major contributions to social welfare include services for children and young people (including the Anglican Children's Society; the Methodist NCH Action for Children and the Catholic Children's Societies); housing (English Churches Housing Group is one of the largest housing associations in England); and personal social services (such as the Salvation Army, Jewish Care and the Church of England's Wel-Care).

A further – largely neglected – dimension of the contribution made by religious and faith-based organisations to the secular institutions that are responsible for public policy is the provision of chaplaincy to, for example, schools, further education colleges and universities, hospitals and care homes, prisons, workplaces and the armed forces.

Major faith-based organisations have thus maintained a significant role across a range of provision alongside the state provision that was subsequently developed to deliver the universal services which were beyond the scope of voluntary action.

The current agenda

The renewal of interest in the potential contribution of faith-based organisations as providers of public services does not concern itself with those large national or regional institutions whose role in the welfare mix is taken for granted and whose religious origins are forgotten or overlooked. Instead, the contemporary policy current is directed towards small-scale activity which takes place at a local or community level and is undertaken by people from a much wider variety of faiths than the Christian and Jewish congregations which played a prominent role in the 19th and much of the 20th centuries.

As Harmander Singh suggests, the new agenda can be seen as part of the government's concern with community cohesion and civic engagement, while faith-based organisations are also seen as a means of extending services to so-called 'hard-to-reach' groups or black, minority ethnic and refugee communities (although it might be more accurate to describe the services as 'hard to reach' for many of those they are intended to serve). Religious and faith-based groups are also included in the wider policy push towards the privatisation of welfare through transferring responsibility for delivering public services from the state to the voluntary sector.

Under the guise of civic engagement within the Community Cohesion agenda, faith has been seen as a green pasture for exploration – particularly after the disorder in the North West and 9/11. Prior to these incidents, faith was largely ignored if not shunned by the public sector, using the literal interpretation of various legislative tools to justify negative responses to approaches made by the faith sector wishing to deliver services to local people. Now it seems as though using faith-based organisations as service providers allows numerous 'boxes' to be ticked in one go – age, gender and BME in the equalities grouping in addition to the 'local' engagement.

Harmander Singh

The contribution of faith-based organisations to the current agenda

It is easy to see why government finds congregations and other faith-based organisations such attractive prospective partners or instruments for the advancement of these agendas. In the first place, religion continues to occupy a central place in the culture and identity of minority ethnic and refugee communities and provides or shapes the civil society within them – and not just the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh faiths of people from the Indian sub-continent but also the Christian beliefs of those who come from Africa and from Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries. Faith-based organisations are thus seen as key parts of the social infrastructure of black, minority ethnic and refugee communities, and their leaders as representatives of their communities. The importance and value of faith-based organisations are not, however, restricted to minority communities. As Tim Bissett points out, the established churches are responsible for a great many activities that contribute to the social welfare and well-being of their local communities; these, it is suggested, could be ‘scaled up’ or extended in scope and reach. And, finally, faith-based organisations have important physical, financial and human resources.

Faith-based organisations provide a range of services to local communities or vulnerable people. These range from formal service delivery contracts such as daycare for the elderly or childcare provision to ad hoc activities such as youth clubs, coffee mornings, school holiday clubs and bereavement support. The majority of activities, however, are small, have a local focus, are informal, heavily dependent on volunteers and firmly rooted in the community. Most are born from a recognised local need and are delivered ‘by the community for the community’.

Faith-based organisations often focus on services that support the needs of the individual and often combine practical needs and wants with activities to support personal well-being. They appear particularly effective at supporting those at either end of the age spectrum, i.e. the young and the elderly.

Tim Bissett

Apart from ‘house churches’ and new immigrant-led churches, practically all congregations have some form of building, and many of these – such as the almost omnipresent church hall – are suitable for use as community buildings and thus become the centre of much activity, ranging from playgroups for the under-5s to social clubs for older people and including both regular and one-off meetings. Congregations and other faith-based organisations also benefit from the philanthropic inclinations of their members in the form of personal and corporate donations and endowments. Religion not only is a major factor in determining whether someone will give money to good causes and how much they are prepared to contribute but also plays a significant part in the selection of which causes to support. Important as the physical and financial resources of faith-based organisations are, however, it is perhaps their human resources that should be most highly valued. There are three categories of these: their paid staff; their lay leadership; and other volunteers. The roles played by local clergy – the parish priest or their equivalent – can vary greatly and the degree of emphasis placed on the priestly or the pastoral responsibilities may be different according to religious tradition and the personal vocation of the incumbent. Nonetheless, they can act as catalysts of action to meet the needs of their congregations and other members of the community and can provide some support, stability and continuity.

Some of the most disadvantaged local communities lack residents with the requisite ‘professional’ skills to initiate and deliver local services. It is often a faith leader who will begin the process needed to bring a service to a local community. Faith groups often are uniquely positioned to hear the needs of local people and build confidence to enable them to find local solutions. In the context of the Anglican Church, however, this can lead to difficulties where the vicar (a full-time, paid officer) is the prime mover in a local area. Services are often well delivered and effective until the vicar moves on. Activities that are reliant on just one or two individuals are clearly vulnerable and this is particularly evident in disadvantaged communities.

Tim Bissett

Faith-based organisations can also be very successful in filling lay leadership roles with committed, energetic and well-qualified candidates who can ensure that their governance is effective. One study of the Jewish community⁸⁰ found that the members of the governing bodies of Jewish organisations had devoted many hours a week over many years to this form of voluntary work. In more general terms we know that those who practise a religion are more likely to volunteer than those who do not and that faith-based organisations are well placed to engage their members in a variety of voluntary roles.

Religious and faith-based organisations also possess considerable quantities of a less tangible but nonetheless important asset – social capital. They create and maintain the relationships between people which are based on trust and reciprocity and which the government and many others believe are declining in frequency and strength in contemporary society.

Much of the distinctiveness of faith-based organisations comes from their position within the community. Faith projects are usually locally managed and directed by people drawn from the communities they seek to serve. It is this local knowledge, combined with the faith-based motivation of individuals, that leads to effective service provision.

Faith-based organisations are often ‘resource rich but cash poor’. That is, many have a body of people motivated and willing to give time and effort to the delivery of services. In some instances faith groups are unique in that they have buildings that can be offered for public use. Many have wider networks of influence in local communities.

Tim Bissett

Limitations to the contribution of faith-based organisations

There are, however, a number of limitations on the capacity of religious and faith-based organisations to play a significantly expanded role in the delivery of public services. The first of these is the nature of the activities in which they are already successfully engaged. As Tim Bissett has pointed out in his

contribution, these tend to be small-scale, restricted to a very local area, built on the needs expressed by local residents or members of the congregation (a classic ‘bottom-up’ approach); managed with a degree of informality; and dependent on volunteers to supplement the work of paid project staff. Beyond these comparatively structured services, congregations also deliver what Margaret Harris⁸¹ termed “quiet care” – informal support provided to and by their members.

The size and scale of projects are a significant limiting factor in the public service delivery agenda. Locally based initiatives are very effective in tailoring resources to a specific local need but the small-scale localism of these projects will not easily transfer to a wider – say borough – service delivery.

Tim Bissett

A second limitation is the nature of religious and faith-based organisations as membership associations. While many do serve a wider public they also need to make sure they meet the needs of their members and maintain a balance between delivering ‘member’ and ‘public’ benefits.

And they may be ill-adapted to engaging with the complexities and compromises of public funding and the unsympathetic officials who administer it:

Faithful Cities⁸² reports that the ‘toleration’ of religious faith in publicly funded initiatives has increased in recent years, and that this is in part due to successful lobbying by faith-based initiatives and to the changing attitudes of public officials towards faith. Nevertheless, faith groups still report difficulty in securing resources where there are local authority officers who are suspicious of the motive of faith groups or who work to blanket ‘we don’t fund religious organisations’ criteria. And some faith groups can be uncomfortable with the competitive nature of the public contracting process, especially where they feel in competition with other faith groups.

One criticism of the current trend of funding faith-based institutions to deliver public sector objectives is that money is by no means always the most effective guarantor of change. The currency that best enables faith groups to seek and create

⁸⁰ Harris, M. and Rochester, C. (2001) *Governance in the Jewish voluntary sector*, Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

⁸¹ Harris, M. (1998) *Organizing God’s Work: Challenges for Churches and Synagogues*, Macmillan.

⁸² Commission on Urban Life and Faith (2006) *Faithful cities: a call for celebration, vision and justice*, Church House Publishing/Methodist Publishing House.

change in their localities may not be public money, but the development of independent networks of trust and co-operation worked on patiently at the local level by neighbouring institutions.

Tim Bissett

The value of the social capital created and stored by religious and faith-based organisations may be less than it seems on the surface. The distinction is commonly made between the 'bonding' and 'bridging' forms taken by social capital and it is arguable that congregations and other faith-based groups are more likely to create the first kind – which binds together people who are members of the same group – than the second kind – which enables people to build relationships with members of other communities or groups.

Finally, there are important issues of culture and values. Harmander Singh gives us examples of cultural practices which might deter non Sikhs from accessing services based in a Gurdwara and of the difference in values between a religious and a secular agenda on issues such as sexuality, which might be seen as preventing faith-based organisations from delivering a secular agenda. These highlight the real difficulties and discomfort that could be experienced by people of a different faith or none in accessing services delivered by faith-based organisations.

Faith-based organisations have a relationship with their users that is unique in that it is of long standing, it has in-built trust and the terms of engagement are clear to the user. For instance, people entering a Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) to make use of any service – praying, community kitchen (Langar), or even the library are under no illusion that their presence will be accepted only if they follow basic rules such as covering their heads and removing their shoes and that they must not be under the influence of any intoxicating substance – even smoking. To the public or secular sector, this could be seen as a restrictive practice and give rise to apprehension.

Harmander Singh

The impact on faith-based organisations

The other side of the coin is the likely impact on faith-based organisations if they embraced the public service delivery agenda. These might include a major shift in the nature of their activities and the identity of their users: the public service agenda tends to demand more intensive kinds of care – daycare rather than social clubs for older people – and the targeting of the most vulnerable clients – the frail elderly rather than the isolated but mobile younger pensioners. This would be accompanied by pressure to replace volunteers with paid staff (to ensure a more consistent quality of service) and to employ professionally qualified specialists.

Above all, the public service ethos which stresses a universally available service is not readily compatible with activities based on the shared values and belief expressed as membership of a faith-based organisation. It would also contribute to the rising tide of secularisation⁸³ which has eaten away so much of the distinctive ethos and collective behaviour in faith-based organisations and thus diminished the variety of our social institutions and ways of responding to social need.

The division of activities of faith-based organisations' outputs into 'non-faith' or 'faith neutral' and historical/normal day-to-day work has meant a synthetic re-engineering of the faith sector into an add-on facet of the voluntary/community/third sector. The divorcing of the original or core work of the faith sector that has longer-term aims than the time-expired contracts or service-level agreements that serve only short-term political interests will pose a dilemma for the faith sector.

The manner in which faith-based organisations plan and deliver their services is also at odds with the public sector, for the former is based on qualitative measures while the latter is wholly reliant on simplistic number-crunching quantitative methods.

Harmander Singh

⁸³ Torry, M. (2005) *Managing God's Business: Religious and Faith-Based Organizations and their Management*, Ashgate.

Conclusion

The key challenge to faith-based organisations is how to make an impact on social policy that asks questions of the core values that are shared by many faiths while retaining independence and delivering to those who have relied on and will continue to rely on faith organisations in time of need – usually when the state has adopted new priorities.

Harmander Singh

While the nature, scale and scope of many faith-based organisations mean that their potential contribution to the delivery of services is more limited than some politicians and commentators believe, they do, nonetheless, have a role to play in the development of public services in meeting social need.

In the first place, their activities can significantly reduce the need for public provision. Quiet care and comparatively informal activities can address people's needs in ways that make later – more significant – interventions unnecessary. The chance for older people, for example, to meet socially and take part in recreational activities can help to maintain them in good physical and mental health.

Secondly, they are providing activities and services which complement or extend what the state is prepared to make available.

And, perhaps most importantly, they need to preserve the ability to provide alternative visions of social justice and how it can be achieved, against which to assess both the theory and practice of public services.

Section three

Discussion and conclusions

This section draws together some of the themes and issues that cut across the preceding sections. At the end of section one a number of key questions were asked, to which the authors of the articles in section two have provided some thought-provoking answers. This section builds on their answers and suggests key principles for policy-makers and practitioners working in faith-based and secular organisations.

1. Review of cross-cutting themes

Faith-based organisations, like secular organisations within civil society, promote associational life by providing opportunities for people to come together for a variety of purposes or activities. They contribute, along with other organisations, to defining what the 'good society' might look like by challenging policies and practices that are oppressive and they promote greater social justice. As voluntary associations they can also foster the skills and habits of a democratic culture among citizens. However, it cannot be denied that they have, at times, sided with those who oppress and that their organisational structures and cultures have disempowered people.

Likewise the social impact of faith can be both positive and negative, because faith can be both cohesive and divisive. Faith beliefs and practices can bind people together and contribute to building the different types of social capital that individuals, communities and society need. However, most faith-based organisations are more likely to create bonding social capital, and too much bonding social capital can be exclusive and at times even destructive, as the current rise in fundamentalism illustrates too well.

When looking at the role of faith-based organisations in generating social capital, it is clear that faith-based organisations and especially congregations have a privileged link with local communities. As part of the local scene, they can provide a range of activities in response to local need, which are often delivered by people within these communities. This embeddedness in the grassroots of communities is likely to be one of the factors behind the ability of faith-based organisations to mobilise. It partly explains why the government is keen to engage with faith-based organisations. However, many of the activities that exist within and around faith-based organisations remain quite informal and spontaneous – a 'way of life' more than anything else.

In terms of mobilisation, the relationship between faith and voluntary action is far from straightforward. The research evidence suggests that faith can be an element in an individual's predisposition to volunteer, but without an environment that encourages volunteering it is unlikely to be sufficient. While faith and different faith traditions may contribute to the shaping of voluntary action and the definition of patterns of involvement, it is difficult to isolate faith from other key drivers such as education and other socio-economic characteristics. What appears more unequivocally is that faith-based communities and local faith-based organisations are themselves largely dependent on voluntary action.

At the local level and because of their ties, faith-based organisations can act as brokers in community affairs by participating in local governance structures. But the issue of trust between faith-based organisations and the climate of suspicion between faith-based organisations and secular organ-

isations challenge this potential. Barriers to participation are linked to external factors such as the lack of religious literacy among other professionals. However, some barriers arise from within. The governance structures of many faith-based organisations, for instance, fail to be sufficiently inclusive and transparent. On closer examination, many barriers are shared by voluntary and community organisations. They too often lack the capacity to participate, which means that in many cases only the well-resourced organisations will effectively have their say. The bridging and linking social capital required for participation is always more resource-intensive. And like faith-based organisations, they too can be faced with the dilemmas of acting as sole representatives of a sector that is renowned for its diversity. A key issue for policy-makers is finding the most appropriate and effective ways of supporting faith-based organisations and other organisations in these governance roles, in order to maximise their potential.

The government hopes to capitalise on the resources they have (i.e. the values, social networks, know-how and buildings) to promote social cohesion and improve public service delivery. But this strategy, based on instrumental assumptions, has many limitations. With regard to social cohesion, faith-based organisations offer assets and opportunities, but a number of obstacles limit their contribution. This is further complicated by the government's renewed focus on integration, with current policy often failing to recognise and, at times, even obscuring, the diversity and complexity that characterise faith communities and the faith sector. As the Commission on Integration and Cohesion recently highlighted, integration and cohesion are 'everybody's business' and concern minority communities as much as majority communities.⁸⁴ Faith-based organisations certainly have a role to play, along other organisations, in encouraging individuals, communities and groups to come together and interact. However, while some faith-based organisations may engage or want to engage in interfaith structures and build bridges with secular organisations, others will not and, realistically, are unlikely to do so.

The debate around public service delivery has focused not on the larger, well-established faith-based organisations that have been providing welfare services for decades, but rather on local faith-based organisations that deliver services on a much smaller scale. However, because of their size and the very nature of these organisations, they may not be the best suited to meet government expectations and targets. The provision of public services by faith-based organisations presents a number of problems and tensions and these have never been more clearly highlighted than with the recent debates surrounding the new Equalities Act. The law, prohibiting discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services, reinforces the key principles and values of equality and diversity. It is on the latter point where contradictions have appeared. Faith-based organisations have a role to play in the development of services that meet social need and can complement the services delivered by the state on the basis that they contribute to choice and diversity in provision. However, public service ethos, which stresses universality and equity, is not always compatible with the beliefs and principles of faith-based organisations and their members, as the position of Catholic agencies on the adoption of children by gay couples illustrates particularly well. While statutory authorities have a duty to ensure that their services are universally available to people (regardless of age, gender, race or sexual orientation), voluntary and community organisations and faith-based organisations typically focus on a narrower range of purposes.

More generally, at a time when the government is pushing faith-based organisations to deliver more public services, the following questions are raised: should faith-based organisations be publicly funded if their services are not inclusive and should faith-based organisations accept public monies if the services they are required to provide contradict their value base and beliefs and threaten their independence? The government may consider faith-based organisations as attractive partners for the advancement of its policy agendas, but it has failed to consider the full implications of their contribution and particularly the possibility of value conflicts when agendas and priorities clash. As for what this might mean for faith-based organisations, the challenges are similar to those identified by the wider voluntary and community sector – lack

⁸⁴ Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our Interim Statement*.

of independence, threat of co-option and importantly, mission drift which the strong value base and commitment to beliefs of faith-based organisations emphasise. Faith-based organisations, like voluntary and community organisations, will need to decide whether expanding their role in the delivery of public services will help them deliver their mission and whether in providing public services they can remain true to their own values.

While policy has acknowledged the contribution of faith-based organisations, the government has distanced itself from activities in which religious beliefs and practices are made explicit. The fear of proselytisation is found to be particularly strong in local authorities and, at times, faith-based organisations have felt discriminated against in the allocation of public funding. Although many faith-based organisations are quick to point out that this perceived threat is founded on a misconception, they also recognise and affirm that the distinction between the social dimension of an activity and its religious dimension is difficult to establish. As a source of motivation faith contributes to shaping activities, approaches and patterns of involvement. So while faith-based organisations may be involved in activities that are not explicitly religious, these activities are considered by the faith-based organisations themselves as an expression of faith, and therefore inseparable from the faith ethos on which they are based. The boundaries between secular and religious are as a result easily blurred and this may contribute to the existing climate of suspicion and lack of understanding.

Conclusion

What is striking when reading the articles in the previous section is that the contributions of faith-based organisations to civil society are in many ways similar to those of secular voluntary and community organisations. Many of their functions and areas of activity are in effect identical, depending on their structure, size and resources. Some, such as the NCH and the Children's Society, belong, in fact, to the most visible part of the mainstream voluntary and community sector. The policy drivers of change, which faith-based organisations are faced with, mirror to a large extent those encountered by secular organisations. Government policies relating to civil renewal, gover-

nance and public service delivery have generally put larger and better-resourced organisations at an advantage and further increased the gap between organisations with capacity and those dependent on voluntary effort, including groups from minority faiths. The internal and external barriers and obstacles that faith-based organisations face sound very familiar. Even the distinctive features put forward by faith-based organisations when they refer to their work echo those highlighted by secular organisations. As faith-based organisations do, secular organisations also talk about their strong and privileged relationship with communities (particularly local communities and communities that are marginalised), how their approach puts individuals first and how their work is value-driven. Even though they may not share the same beliefs, both types of organisations would certainly seem to share many of the same values.

2. Policy conclusions

The current interest in the role of faith-based organisations reflects the fact that they have become a focus of government policy. This has led to debates about whether they have a distinctive contribution to make; what this might be; and whether potential benefits should be balanced against any possible harm. Underlying these debates, on both sides, are questions about religious belief and the appropriate role of religion in society: this being central to the identity and motivation of faith-based organisations.

The centrality of faith has meant that differences between secular and faith-based organisations tend to be emphasised, whereas, as this report has shown, there are also many similarities. For example, both are adapting to a changing policy environment, one that presents new opportunities and challenges; and many of the barriers that prevent faith-based organisations from taking on a bigger role are also faced by the sector as a whole.

Therefore, instead of starting from the perspective of faith, it might be more useful to consider the impact of government policies on the sector and what can be learned from current debates about the role of voluntary and

community organisations and the scope of voluntary action more generally. Whether or not faith-based organisations see themselves as part of the voluntary and community sector, similar principles apply in terms of their relationship to government and their contribution to key policy goals, such as local regeneration, civil renewal and public service delivery. Focusing on these common concerns, rather than questions of distinctiveness, would enable secular voluntary and community organisations to learn from faith-based organisations and vice versa.

Shared aspirations

In term of furthering these goals, the government and the voluntary and community sector bring different strengths, as well as different forms of legitimacy and accountability. For example, the government has a responsibility to the whole community. It must listen to all voices and then negotiate and mediate between competing interests and claims. It has to meet and where necessary reconcile the needs of an increasingly diverse citizenry. In contrast, voluntary and community organisations are established to further a particular cause or mission; they have specific objectives and a distinctive ethos, as well as different stakeholders and modes of operation from those of either private or public sector bodies.

However, it is often the case that government and sector have shared aspirations and objectives. For example, both may wish to transform the lives of citizens and communities; the services people receive; and the well-being of the areas in which they live and work; or a combination of these. By working together they can achieve these objectives more effectively because they bring different strengths and ways of working. Therefore the key issue is not which sector, or which type of organisation, but how to maximise public benefit.

Government bodies need to be clear about what they want to achieve from working in partnership in order to determine which organisations are best placed to achieve particular goals. Funding mechanisms should support this and should operate in ways that protect an organisation's independence, identity and distinctiveness, the very reasons why they are best placed to

take on the role in the first place. Voluntary and community organisations themselves need to be clear about what benefit they provide and how they make a positive difference, for example their impact on community cohesion or their ability to engage 'hard-to-reach' groups. They should not take on roles that are unconnected to their mission or which compromise their values and identity.

Clearly, faith-based organisations have a particular identity and ethos, deriving from their faith, and this is part of their distinctiveness. However, the principles discussed above hold true for faith-based organisations, as for other voluntary and community organisations. Where statutory funding and/or procurement can help them to achieve their goals and enable them to work in ways that reflect their strengths and values, then they should take up these opportunities. But they should be wary of doing so if these conditions are not met. Similarly, statutory bodies should be willing to commission services or otherwise financially support faith-based organisations where they can help to achieve particular policy outcomes, for example to engage with a particular community.

Capacity-building

Where faith-based organisations want to develop their activities and services in line with government objectives, or take on a more representative role within local partnerships, then they may need additional support to enable them to take on these roles. For example, they may need to strengthen their systems of governance and accountability, or develop skills in relation to financial and project management. It may also require them to take on paid staff for the first time or expand their existing workforce. And they will need support to do this.

The voluntary and community sector includes an enormous variety of organisations with very different, and often competing, aims and objectives. The sector's infrastructure as a whole should be capable of providing support to the full range of organisations and interests within the sector, whether from generic infrastructure organisations, or more specialist

bodies, for example those with a specific faith remit. While there may be a case for targeted support to meet the needs of particular constituencies, it is important to avoid duplication, where different organisations provide the same or similar functions. Many faith-based organisations will have similar needs in terms of capacity-building and/or their relationship with national and local government to those of other voluntary and community organisations. Therefore they could benefit from generic infrastructure support and from opportunities to share information and experiences with other organisations facing similar challenges.

Supporting informal activity

Government policy has tended to focus on the formal roles that faith-based organisations can play, in terms of providing services or representing communities, for example. However, a theme throughout this report is their contribution to informal activity at the grassroots, for example through their congregations. Much voluntary action occurs at this level, often spontaneously, reflecting people's own interests and concerns, motivated perhaps by their faith, their sense of community, or simply a desire to make new friends or learn new skills. Such informal activities can play a significant role in building trust between individuals and groups, generating and mobilising social capital. It is therefore valuable in its own right.

There is a real concern that by encouraging organisations to take on more formal roles, this spontaneity and the benefits it can bring may be squeezed out. Attempts by government to direct such activities, even with the best of intentions, could fundamentally change the way faith-based organisations work and their relationship to their stakeholders. And it could reduce the space for independent voluntary action and participation in community life. There is a need to consider how such work can be supported and encouraged. Again this is an issue for all voluntary and community organisations working at this level. Grant funding is a valuable means of supporting and encouraging informal activities. Unlike contracts, where outcomes are specified in advance, grants can give organisations the flexibility they need to be spontaneous and the ability to respond to people's own agendas.

Bonding or bridging?

A theme of this report is that faith can be both positive and negative; a source of cohesion and of tension, both within and between communities. Policy has sought to encourage faith-based organisations to take on an increasing presence within communities and to contribute to wider policy goals, in partnership with government. This suggests that the emphasis has been on developing bonding and linking social capital. While both are valuable, there is also a need to recognise differences within communities and to consider how to build bridges between communities. This perhaps requires a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between faith, identity and community, recognising the complexity of people's lived experiences. And it requires a greater emphasis on people's relationships with each other (horizontal participation) as well as with government (vertical participation).

3. Points and recommendations for conclusion: the role of faith-based organisations in building a civil society

This report has highlighted a number of issues for both secular and faith-based organisations, third sector infrastructure bodies, and the policy community. Our recommendations are, in some cases, relevant to a particular set of stakeholders, while in other cases they are relevant to all.

The starting point for our recommendations is that faith-based organisations are integral to civil society; that is, they are part of associational life, they are part of the space and place for dialogue within civil society, and they contribute to negotiating collective notions of what the 'good society' might look like. We believe future action needs to recognise that faith-based organisations and other civil society organisations face similar opportunities, risks and challenges. Actions therefore need to focus around building the links between those organisations. Our recommendations are set out below.

Faith-based and secular organisations need greater clarity regarding terminology and its usage

- Policy-makers across the government and its agencies need to be more consistent in their reference to faith-based organisations, and in particular be clear that references to the third sector or civil society cover faith-based organisations.
- Similar transparency and consistency is needed when referring to faith communities. In particular, it is unhelpful at best and damaging at worst to use faith communities as a synonym for ‘Muslim’ or ‘BME’ communities.
- Policy-makers should recognise that the homogenising application of the term faith-based organisations actually disguises significant variation in resources, roles, attitudes and practices both within and between faith communities.
- Infrastructure organisations should jointly produce simple, short guidance for both secular and faith-based organisations on terminology to facilitate greater collaboration.

Policy and practice both require a more substantive evidence base

- Infrastructure organisations should work to develop a better classification of faith-based organisations that in turn could be used to produce a more detailed map of relevant entities and their resources, identifying the extent to which the culture, structure and activity of an organisation is influenced by faith.
- In particular, policy-makers and infrastructure bodies need to develop a better understanding of the complexity of organisations with a faith tradition and of the resources they control. At one end of the continuum are faith-based organisations whose primary purpose is promotion of the faith; at the other, ‘mainstream’ faith-based organisations where faith informs wider social work. All bring resources to bear, yet policy-makers rarely have the full spectrum of organisations in mind when developing policy.

- Specialist and generic infrastructure organisations should jointly examine in more detail the infrastructure needs of faith-based organisations and how these can be best supported to maximise synergies and avoid duplication.
- There is also potential to share learning more collaboratively across a range of similar activities and experiences, such as managing community buildings. Infrastructure bodies should examine the potential for building a bank of case studies accessible to both traditions.
- Statements about the role and value of faith-based organisations (and, indeed, secular organisations) that may well be valid at the sector level require further investigation at the community and organisation levels in order to avoid placing undue expectations on communities or organisations.

A greater focus on collaboration is needed to harness the resources and reach of faith-based and secular organisations

- Our review of the evidence indicates that while faith-based organisations are in control of significant resources (£4.6 billion), these are, as in the mainstream voluntary and community sector, unevenly distributed. Policy-makers need to be realistic when working with faith-based organisations whose resources are limited.
- There are numerous examples of collaboration between faith-based and secular organisations, yet much of the focus on building collaboration is interfaith. Collaboration between faiths and between faith-based organisations and mainstream organisations needs further impetus, particularly if policy-makers see the role of the sector as building community cohesion and (bridging) social capital.
- However, policy-makers need to recognise the independence that is characteristic of associational life – what might be termed the right to be left alone or to oppose – means that collaboration or involvement in public policy is not for all. This applies to both faith-based and secular organisations.

- There needs to be better co-ordination between specialist and secular infrastructure bodies, particularly where they support common needs or activities. While this may lead to minimisation of duplication in terms of service provision, we recognise that the diversity of organisations involved will continue to require different representation functions.

Faith-based organisations and public service delivery

- There remains significant public concern over the role of faith-based organisations delivering public services. While some of these concerns are legitimate, they fail to recognise that many so-called secular organisations delivering services have a strong faith tradition, yet are rarely recognised as such.
- Many organisations across civil society deliver publicly funded services. In doing so, they face remarkably similar challenges, including working with statutory agencies and developing indicators of success. It is incumbent upon organisations from both faith and secular traditions to more clearly share their experiences and solutions.
- Both faith-based and secular organisations remain well placed to deliver public services. In particular, they can connect with otherwise 'hard-to-reach' communities of geography and interest. However, their work with such clearly defined communities may not always be in the interests of the broader community. Therefore, a strong, cohesive civil society that has a role in public service delivery needs a statutory framework that emphasises the universality of service delivery.
- For faith-based and secular organisations alike, the principles of becoming involved in public service delivery are identical: where such activities are on mission and in accordance with their values, they should engage if it helps to further their objectives.

Faith-based organisations and social cohesion

- A broad agenda for social cohesion is needed, which recognises that social cohesion concerns all communities, whether majority or minority, whether faith or secular.
- Policy and practice development should also acknowledge that faith communities have much in common with other communities of interest. Although many features distinguish them, the sense of commonality is strong and worth highlighting. As such, it is important for communities and their organisations not to 'other' each other, as Robert Furbey rightly points out.
- Too much bonding social capital can be exclusive and have a negative impact on social cohesion. Both faith-based organisations and secular organisations need to develop more opportunities for building bridges and encourage initiatives that bring communities together.
- Civil society organisations, including faith-based organisations, provide buildings and spaces, in which people share experiences, interests and aspirations. However, a more joined-up approach to multi-purpose community buildings that is adequately supported is required.

The case for the distinctiveness of (faith-based) organisations is unresolved

- Policy and practice development requires a clearer understanding of what is meant by distinctive. More informed policy requires a better analysis of when and where organisations are distinctive.
- Equally, policy-makers themselves need to define what they mean by 'distinctive' – does its usage imply different, special, unique or separate? – as this in turn has implications for wider expectations. And does distinctiveness relate to process – where faith-based organisations are more likely to be distinctive – or also to outcomes? More clarity is required before arguments regarding distinctiveness can be resolved.

- Treating faith-based organisations as distinctive in terms of outcomes needs further testing. In the meantime, policies may actually be divisive by being seen to highlight faith-based organisations when other communities of interest have competing claims to resources. Worryingly, both secular and faith-based organisations feel, at times, discriminated against when searching for funding.
- Policy-makers should recognise that communities of faith, like other communities of interest or geography, are important, and at the same time recognise that all claim distinctiveness.
- Infrastructure bodies need to make a clearer case, based on evidence gathered at a more fine-grain level, regarding the nature of distinctiveness. This should not be based on a starting premise that distinctiveness is always positive.

Distinctive, not separate?

- Faith-based organisations are perceived as distinctive, and in turn they have often been afforded a separate role in policy development, whether in relation to public service delivery or to community cohesion. We believe this is a problem, with the result that wider civil society and, in fact, faith-based organisations themselves feel alienated and, in some cases, excluded from policy discussions or funding arrangements. This is in turn affecting the capacity and potential for collaboration between faith and secular organisations.
- Our review of the evidence highlights the fact that the perceived distinctiveness of faith-based organisations across a range of domains (particularly values, resources and building social capital) is seen as important by policy-makers, yet there is no compelling evidence that faith-based organisations are different from other organisations. Both faith-based and secular organisations are missing opportunities by not working together more and sharing experience and expertise.

- The relationship between government and faith-based organisations and between government and other civil society organisations should be based on the same principles, such as respect for independence, and informed by the Compact.

In conclusion, the similarities (activities; challenges; opportunities; limitations) between faith-based and secular organisations are striking. All are distinctive to some extent, though distinctiveness is more in relation to statutory or private organisations. However, both traditions and those working with them appear to be stressing separate approaches to development. At a time when civil society organisations are facing pressures in terms of identity and role – whether being squeezed at the margins or threatened by association with ‘uncivil society’ – greater levels of collaboration are likely to be a source of strength. Within civil society, faith-based and secular organisations should build on what makes them distinctive as civil society organisations, but in striving to do so should not lapse into practices and identities of separateness and, ultimately, isolation.

Appendix

Further reading and additional sources

Articles and reports

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Statistics

Focus on Religion

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/religion/>

Citizenship Surveys

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/citizensurvey.html>

Religion in England and Wales: findings from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey, Home Office Research Study 274, March 2004
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hors274.pdf>

Religious Trends

<http://www.christian-research.org.uk/pub.htm>

Weblinks

The Inter Faith Network of the UK

www.interfaith.org.uk

Faith Based Regeneration Network UK

www.fbrn.org.uk

FaithAction

www.faithaction.net

Faithworks

www.faithworks.info

Faith, Cohesion and Faiths Directorate

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1500185>

BBC religions and ethics

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/>



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