

DPRN REPORT No. 29

Regional expert meeting

South Asia 3

Final report



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Report of the DPRN–IREWOC/ASiA/IIAS Regional expert meeting 2007 for South Asia

Compiled by	: Kristoffel Lieten (IREWOC) and Heidi Timmerman
Date	: 9 November 2007
Responsible organisation	: The Amsterdam Foundation for International Research on Working Children (IREWOC), Asian Studies in Amsterdam (ASiA) and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS)
Venue	: Posthumuszaal, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam

Introduction

In line with the objectives of the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN), the purpose of the third South Asia regional expert meeting was threefold:

- To bring together scientists, policymakers and development practitioners from the Netherlands and Belgium who specifically work on culture, religion and development in the South Asian region;
- To facilitate and stimulate an exchange of information and experiences specifically among experts who work on these issues in South Asia with a view to achieving greater synergy between each other's activities in the region;
- To generate a discussion on, and provide an insight into, the challenges which development policy and practice offer to research and *vice versa*, with a particular focus on the relevance of culture and religion for developments in the region and the extent to which this corresponds to the agenda, expectations and plans of researchers and policymakers.

A total of 48 people registered for the meeting, of whom 31 people were actually present (for varying periods of time). Of those present, 51.6% were researchers, 9.7% were policymakers and embassy staff, 22.6% were development practitioners (consultants or staff of non-governmental (development) organisations) and 16.1% belonged to other groups (media etc.). See Appendix 1 for a list of participants.

Programme

After an exploratory first meeting in 2005, the second South Asia meeting focussed on education targets related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and this third meeting concentrated on Culture, Religion and Development.

In order to offer the participants an opportunity to meet informally and to exchange information, the meeting started with a lunch. In the plenary session that followed, Professor Lieten started with an introduction on the central theme on which he also formulated a series of statements (which you can find in Appendix 2).

- Several people reacted to these statements based on their different backgrounds in the form of presentations lasting about 10 to 15 minutes. These people included:
- Drs Ward Berenschot, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research
- Mr Melle Brinkman, Lower Sindh Rural Development Association and Blackboardfoundation
- Ms Floortje Klijn, Oxfam NOVIB
- Ms Ute Seela, Hivos

Their introductions were followed by an interactive discussion during which all the participants were able to engage in a debate with each other on the statements and presentations. See Appendix 3 for the programme and time schedule of the meeting.

Introductory presentations

Mr **Sikko Visscher**, University of Amsterdam and ASiA, welcomed the participants and explained that the aim of the DPRN is to bridge the gap between scientists, policymakers and practitioners.

Professor Dr **Kristoffel Lieten**, University of Amsterdam and IREWOC, continued:

A fundamental shift has occurred in how the relationship between culture, religion and development is viewed. Earlier, it was assumed that development could not take place in South Asia because the people in the region were steeped in archaic values. It was argued by Talcott Parsons and other theoreticians of the modernisation theory that people in South Asia had other values which distanced them from development. It was assumed that development could only be achieved once modernisation had taken place and that this involved replacing traditional culture variables with 'modern' culture variables like universalism, secularism, achievement orientation and rationalism.

After the modernisation debate, a move to the left occurred in the 1970s. During that period it was argued that economic development was hampered by various national and international structural inequalities and that this kept peoples and countries in poverty. This led to a reinforcement of traditional values, rather than the other way round. Development was oriented towards the provision of basic needs and a new economic order. In the 1980s a turn to the right took place. In the new epoch of neo-liberalism it was assumed that the economic theory of market-driven growth was the vehicle to be used to progress and that, since practically all countries had switched to the new economic thinking, progress under the regime of globalisation was just around the corner. Economic liberalisation and the dynamism of the markets would bring about development. That was not exactly what happened. The Washington Consensus did not seem to be a successful policy. Something was missing. In the 1990s, Samuel Huntington came up with a new explanation for retarded growth. In his book on 'the Clash of Civilisations' he argued that the Christian countries have a religion and a culture which enables them to make progress. Other civilisations are dominated by religions, such as Hinduism and Islam, which inhibit growth. At the same time, after the demise of Soviet Communism, there was a trend towards portraying Islam as the new danger.

A search for a 'missing link' thus started and was found in culture and religion. Culture and religion had to be included in development. The *Adviesraad voor Internationale Vraagstukken* (The Advisory Council for Foreign Affairs), stated that the people had a need for *zingevingsschema's* (structures of meaning) and that these structures of meaning had to be incorporated. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in its dealing with developing countries, should incorporate religions not only in its analysis but also in its strategy of development and should, in general, 'have a better understanding of the importance of culture and religion'.

However, it was also suggested that the dialogue with other cultures was discriminatory. Progress is limited when partners do not conform to western values and preconditions. The 'others' are expected to agree to certain western values. That obviously results in a dilemma, namely that of taking cultures on board but not when we think that the culture contradicts 'western universal' values.

Culture and religion were considered to be the 'missing link' – but could they also be the wrong link? 'Culture' can be explained in various ways, for example as a determining concept, but what exactly does it mean? Often 'culture' is used when one really means 'society' – the whole of society and the way it is organised. In addition, culture is used as a factor to explain slow development in society, this actually being a circular argument.

The term culture is general, vague, suggestive and ambiguous. 'Culture' also tends to freeze the 'Others' and homogenise them. It assumes that societies are homogeneous and bind all their members in similar ways and that those members are not subject to contradictory value and interest systems and instead adhere to the traditional and incorporate the modern. In that way society also fails to distinguish between norms and values. People's values can be quite similar all over the world. However, the norms may differ. Usually this distinction is not made and different people are then portrayed as more different in their world view than they actually are.

In addition, people have multiple identities and thus multiple 'cultures'. Multiple identities are not addressed fully by what are referred to as 'culture policies'. On the contrary, people are often internally separated by appeals to them by leaders who focus on only one aspect of their identity. Such appeals are dangerous in a multi-religious, multicultural society.

Usually the focus is on the religious identity of the people and this also assumes that South Asians are religious and in any case are more religious than we are. Those assumptions have not been empirically proven. Studies have, for example, indicated that a majority of lower class and lower caste people disagree with the involvement of religion in politics. They do not associate much with religion and certainly not with religious leaders.

Religions are not homogenous entities either. In fact, religious leaders may not properly represent all the (religious) followers for whom they claim to speak. However, these leaders are the ones who then define culture. Inviting religious leaders in development projects thus means strengthening their hold over that religious group and its specific religious doctrine.

We watched selected segments from a documentary by the *Nederlandse Moslim Omroep* (Dutch Muslim Broadcasting) about Muslims in India. Among other things it showed their

disadvantaged position, even with regard to basic services/facilities. It also highlighted their struggle with their multiple identities, in which national identity seemed to take precedence over religious identity. In relation to this there was a desire to combine one's identity with a modern life and modern values, which were identified as 'do good' values. The documentary also revealed the reciprocal influence which the different peoples and cultures in South Asia had had during the past 500 years.

Drs Ward Berenschot, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research

Mr Berenschot's research and experiences focus mainly on the Hindu pogrom which took place in 2002 in Gujarat, India. There, Hindu nationalists, in collaboration with the police and others, murdered thousands of Muslims. Certain organisations in Europe and the US have linked up with organisations in India in order to finance such violence. The picture of the people and organisations involved is therefore very complex.

Religion is characterised by duplicity and one should not lose sight of its dangerous nature when examining what it contributes. Religion is or can be a source of inspiration for societal change versus a legitimisation of existing social hierarchies. It can be a guidance in daily life versus a source of narcissism or an instrument to create awareness versus a political instrument. It can also support and strengthen social cohesion and it can serve as a basis for patronage, in order to acquire resources (and exclude others). Religion can give meaning to daily life but can also be limiting due to it imposing norms.

To make religion more applicable we need to distinguish between its different dimensions. There are five important aspects, namely:

- Religion as a system of ethics;
- Religion as a set of mythologies and symbols;
- Religion as a doctrine of what the world is and how it works;
- Religion as a basis for organisation; and
- Religion as a basis of social identity.

The question is how religion or these aspects of religion should be incorporated into development practices. When you look at religion as a system of ethics, you should not just define what is good and what is not. For example, there is now a set idea on what Hinduism is, despite it always having been extremely diverse. This idea can thus be questioned and undermined – using different interpretations. Complexity could be an instrument to further goals and values.

It can be handy to work with religion as a basis for organisation as this allows you, for example, to use existing networks. However, it can also be problematic. Organisations regularly portray themselves as acting in the interests of Hindus or Muslims, but this may simply be a way for them to generate support and then acquire state resources.

Mr Melle Brinkman, Lower Sindh Rural Development Association and Blackboard Foundation

Mr Brinkman researched the effect of microfinance on the poorest of the poor. He worked with the Lower Sindh Rural Development Association (LSRDA) in Pakistan, a secular organisation with Christian founders. The organisation had 100 staff members of whom 50% were Christian, 40% Muslim, 9% Hindu and 1% non-religious (the latter being Brinkman himself). The LSRDA is closely affiliated with the diocese in Hyderabad. When a new village was set up, a church and an adjacent house for the reverend were built. The link with the diocese was a risky one for the LSRDA, as the diocese was willing to convert people. Brinkman's host in the field was a Christian – which made him too suspicious. Brinkman sometimes felt like a development practitioner driven into Christianity. On one occasion he therefore opted for Hindu songs rather than biblical ones in order to make a statement to his colleagues that they had nothing to 'fear' from him.

Ms Floortje Klijn, Oxfam NOVIB

Ms Klijn performed a two-year study of informal credit practices in rural Afghanistan. Even before the war Afghanistan had no formal finance system. However, all Afghans take and give credit. Klijn carried out research in three village communities. One was in the highlands and was poor, isolated, at the peril of draught and the Taliban. Another was close to the border with Iran and was affluent. The third was on the Kabul provincial border and was neither poor nor affluent.

Ms Klijn found that a lot of reciprocal relationships in those communities were based on taking and giving credit. Giving credit gives you status and, in particular, religious status. Being able to access credit was based on an entitlement, although it might create dependency as well. Credit appeared to be a means to stabilise livelihood.

Ms Ute Seela, Hivos

Encounters with fundamentalism are on the rise and this has been the driving force behind the Hivos knowledge programme 'Promoting Pluralism'. It is important to remember that fundamentalism is not exclusively linked to religion (it can, for example, also be nationalist or related to the market). In the Dutch debate the term 'fundamentalism' led to people becoming interested in the programme although it put people off in the South. Hivos therefore decided to change the name of the programme to reflect a more positive approach. Pluralism is central to this decision, that is accepting the right to be different, although this is a very broad concept. It is difficult to establish a common set of values for the pluralist movement. For example, how should religion be related to? What do we want to achieve and how do we get there?

The aim of the programme is not to generate knowledge but to make it fit a certain context, to make it accessible to society. The focus will be on India, Indonesia and East Africa. The idea is to come up with strategies/practices for civil society to apply and then share and exchange relevant ideas.

Questions which could be focused on in the discussion were:

- Is the decreasing space for pluralism a concern in South Asia?

- What impact does fundamentalism or the decreasing space for pluralism have on civil society organisations?
- Should development organisations engage or disregard religion?
- Are there any best practices known which are relevant to promoting pluralism?

See also the summaries of the speakers' presentations in Appendix 4.

Plenary discussion

The discussion was intended to evolve on the basis of the statements you can find in Appendix 2 and the presentations of the speakers as summarised above. All the remarks made during the discussion can more or less be categorised according to the following five topics:

- General concepts of culture and religion;
- Fundamentalism & pluralism;
- (Religious) leaders;
- (Religious) identity and
- Cooperation with religious organisations.

On general concepts of culture and religion:

A lot of questions were raised. The most important ones were perhaps: how do you define culture, and how do you define religion? To which someone else added that religion is something unimaginable and is in urgent need of redefinition. Religion, so was stated, comes from the Latin *reli gare* – 'something you are tied to'. However, as was also commented, the term or concept as we use it is often based on a notion of Christianity, which itself is based on a book and a central authority. Religion is, as a container term, not appropriate in development cooperation contexts. The term suggests a unity that might not exist. It was also suggested that the terms religion and culture should no longer be used in development interventions because they are becoming politicised. Instead, one should talk about religious or cultural phenomena.

Vagueness persists and a lot of people are unsure what should be attributed to religion and what should be attributed to culture. If culture or religion is seen as the 'missing link' in the development debate, what is this link then all about, or what exactly is being linked? It was also suggested that culture and religion have become intertwined and that it is very dangerous to use culture and religion as factors in the development debate as it might increase exclusionary tendencies. Awareness of cultural patterns is needed, but one should be careful not to be even more divisive. Yet another doubt was whether one should use religious thinking in development?

On fundamentalism & pluralism:

Fundamentalism is not limited to the Muslim population since there are Christian fundamentalists as well. Fundamentalists are mostly exclusionists and it therefore does not seem to be possible for fundamentalism to promote pluralism. Space for pluralism in the region seems to be decreasing in several aspects. The whole debate about religious

diversity, social harmony etc. is now also being influenced by the global debate, for example with regard to fundamentalism. Opposing positions are taken no longer only adopted in political discussions, but also at very basic levels.

But what is fundamentalism? Olivier Roy wrote about the Migration of Islam to the West. It is not a process of returning to the roots. Fundamentalism is a completely modern phenomenon, not a return to the old world or to how it used to be or something similar. Another point made was that fundamentalism should not solely be viewed in a negative way, nor should it be only associated with 'the others'. It should be regarded as a change in religious practices, a change in ideas of what a religious person should be. The fight in Afghanistan, for example, becomes more symbolic by being between the Taliban, related groups and people on the one hand and 'the West', including all kinds of NGOs on the other. This enables us to see the political processes in a different light. While 'we' impose our development concepts on others, 'they' impose their religious concepts in a political battle which has a different agenda and a different development perspective. Since we see the opposition only as religious, cultural opposition and impose our view of development, 'we' are, in that regard, also fundamentalists.

On (religious) leaders:

It was emphasised that the roles that, for example, imams play should not be overestimated. In certain regions they do not matter much. However, in other regions their role should not be underestimated since they do influence many aspects of life. Some participants were of the opinion that if (religious) opinion makers play a key role in a village or society, one can not really avoid them or work without them. It was added, however, that one should be very sensitive when dealing with those religious leaders and how they themselves relate to other people and to society. Others also recommended sensitivity and someone suggested working with the religious leaders without giving them any credit for development projects they hardly had any influence on. Their intervention may be useful for certain aspects of development cooperation, but not for others.

On (religious) identity:

There is supposed to be a lack of freedom with regard to (religious) identity since one is born with a certain religion. However, one of the participants emphasised that this does not necessarily limit freedom. In his book 'Identity and Violence' Amartya Sen distinguished between a forced identity and an identity by choice. This is a very useful distinction and people can make choices within religion too. If one's religious identity is regarded as important, it does not automatically mean that it becomes fundamentalist and exclusionary. In other areas, however, religion is much more fundamentalist and in the process individuals become oppressed. Religious identity has two faces.

It was also pointed out that there is a huge variety among the countries in the region. The assumption is that people in South Asia are much more religious than people here, but is that true? Moreover, although there are plenty of differences between Muslims and Hindus, there are also similarities. In that sense they have often shown that they are quite tolerant of each other's beliefs and that they can be believers in an ecumenical sense.

On cooperation with religious organisations:

There are certain boundaries of tolerance and universal standards on the basis of which joint actions could be possible, especially if the work is related to respect for human rights and the provision of basic livelihood requirements. Educational organisations have often been set up by religious organisations (Christian, Hindu, Muslim). A number of NGOs have worked on successful development projects in cooperation with religious organisations. Projects in some areas –Afghanistan was mentioned– frequently do not take off if religious organisations are excluded. Religion is or can be an important aspect of social identity, especially in a context of vulnerability. Access to schooling, water, electricity etc., is often arranged via religious middlemen or patrons. Such patronage need not be limited to one's own followers. The point was made that as long as you deliver goods and do not actively convert, people do not care whether the providing institution is Christian, Hindu or Muslim. They should not be excluded from delivering the goods because they have a religious background as long as the developmental work is not serving the religious organisation.

A distinction could be made between different development aspects to be focused on and whether, in relation to those particular aspects, one should take religion into account. While it can be left out in some aspects/contexts, its role in others one cannot be dismissed. For example, in family planning programmes, an alliance with religious leaders may be advantageous; in the distribution of emergency goods, it may not be warranted.

Dr **Jan Donner**, president of the Royal Tropical Institute and Chair of the DPRN Task Force, thanked all the participants and reflected on the thought-provoking views which had been aired during the discussion. He used some anecdotes to stress the importance of understanding the norms and habits of people in different countries and illustrated how this can improve the level of cooperation. He also reported on the policy change which DPRN is going to use to embark on a new phase with the focus being on thematic issues rather than on regional meetings, although these may occasionally overlap.

Approach used to stimulate dialogue between the sectors

The organisers opted for a half-day meeting which started with a lunch, so that the participants could meet informally and exchange information and opinions. Furthermore, a good balance was sought between participant representative of the various sectors (policymakers, development practitioners and scientists). An open interactive debate was opted for and plenty of time was allowed for in-depth debate and exchanges of experiences.

Evaluation

Some 48 people registered for the regional expert meeting, 31 of whom actually participated. An evaluation form was distributed among the participants during the meeting and afterwards by e-mail. Of these, twelve were filled out and returned to the organisers. These 'tips' and 'tops' included useful, critical comments and interesting suggestions for future meetings. The main outcomes of this evaluation were:

Aspects appreciated by the participants ('tops'):

- The general presence of policymakers/researchers/development practitioners;
- The opportunities for informal exchange;
- The interesting and relevant topic (for current development thinking);
- The regional focus;
- The substantial introduction;
- The presentation of good case material in a theoretical framework.

Suggestions made for improvement ('tips'):

- Ensure there is a certain coherence between the different speakers;
- Include an 'inside' view, at this meeting a respondent from a faith-based NGO for example;
- Include speakers/experts from the region itself as well, for example people at the ISS;
- Provide more background material for people to read beforehand – this could take the form of an overview of topics of the day/afternoon and a reading list with web links;
- Keep the introduction short and do not allow the speakers to take up too much time;
- Create an opportunity to ask questions immediately after each presentation;
- Make the meeting more inter-disciplinary;
- Formulate a shared goal and work towards it;
- Invite the same audience for all three meetings (instead of them being open to all) in order to achieve something substantial (also in the field of policy).

Ideas to effectively stimulate cooperation between policymakers, practitioners and scientists:

- Do not organise a meeting on a specific region or topic, but bring people together and select a 'sensible' topic;
- Address **actual** policy questions and debates in the meeting as well;
- Form smaller discussion groups on a specific topic or question with each being participated in by policymaker(s), scientist(s) and development practitioner(s);
- Involve all stakeholders in peer review teams of research being performed by scientists;
- Invite development practitioners to identify research subjects;
- Create more time and space for information exchanges;
- Extend the meeting to cover a whole day;
- Include the actual Dutch policy;
- Discuss topical issues in Dutch politics relating to diplomatic ties with South-Asian countries.

Suggestions for the next phase of DPRN:

- Do not broaden the field of discussion too much; it obstructs solid/useful conclusions;
- Invite an expert/key note expert on the particular topic plus respondents;
- Invite a good moderator/facilitator for the discussion/plenary session;
- Include the private sector;
- Organise a session on the programmatic/sector approach, on good governance and global warming;
- Invite high level speakers with well-prepared presentations for the introduction;

- Workshops with moderators for the participants;
- Discuss a real target/achievable outcome;
- Maintain the regional focus;
- Include more politicians, policymakers;
- Invite representatives from large Dutch firms that do business with South Asia.

Appendix 1 – List of participants

Name	E-mail	Geographical expertise	Thematic expertise	Organisation
Berenschot, Drs W. (Ward)	w.j.berenschot@uva.nl			Amsterdam School for Social Science Research (ASSR)
Bijlert, Dr V. (Victor) van	victorvan.bijlert@gmail.com	South Asia; India; Bangladesh	Buddhism; sociology; Hinduism	
Boele van Hensbroek, Dr P. (Pieter)	p.boele@rug.nl			Centre for Development Studies, University of Groningen
Bosma, ir R.H. (Roel)	roel.bosma@wur.nl			Wageningen University
Brinkman, Drs M. (Melle)	melle.brinkman@gmail.com	Pakistan		Lower Sindh Rural Development Association, Blackboard foundation
Donner, Dr J. (Jan)	j.donner@kit.nl			Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), DPRN Task Force
Frans, Dr D. (Dirk)	dirk.r.frans@xs4all.nl	Afghanistan; Kyrgyzstan; Western Europe; Uzbekistan; India; South Asia; Tajikistan; Denmark; Europe; European Union; Rwanda; Romania; Netherlands; Nepal; North Africa; Norway; Pakistan; Central Asia; Bangladesh; Morocco; Australia; Asia; Maldives; Liberia; United Kingdom; Kazakhstan; Japan		
Gales, Drs F. (Fred)	srgales@xs4all.nl	Lao Pdr; Thailand; Myanmar; Mekong Basin; Mongolia; China	Culture	Buddhist Broadcast Foundation
Gommans, Dr J.J.L.	j.j.l.gommans@let.leidenuniv.nl			Leiden University
Groeneweg, Mr T. (Ton)	t.groeneweg@cmc.nu	India		CMC Mensen met een Missie
Groot, Drs A.M. (Afke) de	afke@irewoc.nl	India; Pakistan; Nepal; South Asia	Child labour; access to education; education	Institute for Research on Working Children (IREWOC)
Hart, Ir D. (Dirk)	hart_dirk@yahoo.com	Bangladesh; Libya; Kenya; India	Integrated development; institution building	

Hoorweg, Drs L.H. (Liana)	lh@educans.nl	India	Education; marginalism; non-formal education	Edukans
Iittersum, Mr MSc A. (Albert) van	a.van.iittersum@planet.nl	Costa Rica; Suriname	Agriculture	
Jonge, Drs J. (Jakob) de	jakob-de.jonge@minbuza.nl			Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Kaaij, Ms S. (Sanne) van der	s.vanderkaaij@uva.nl	India; Pakistan	Education; politics; history; cultural identity; cultural integration; cultural policy	Amsterdam institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDSt)
Kiers, Ms J. (Judith)	jpakiers@xs4all.nl			
Klijn, Drs F. (Floortje)	floortje.klijn@oxfamnovib.nl	Afghanistan; Pakistan	Sustainable development	Oxfam NOVIB
Kruijtzter, Mr G.	g.c.kruijtzter@let.leidenuniv.nl			Leiden University
Lieten, Prof G.K. (Kristoffel)	g.c.m.lieten@uva.nl	India; Nepal; Pakistan		University of Amsterdam, Institute for Research on Working Children (IREWOC)
Maaker, Dr E. (Erik) de	emaaker@gmail.com	India; Bangladesh	Religion; ethnicity	Leiden University, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology
Martens, Mr J. (Jeroen-Louis)	jeroen-louis.martens@minbuza.nl			Ministry of Foreign Affairs, afdeling Internationaal Cultuurbeleid
Menghistu, Mr F.T. (Fisseha-Tsion)	fisseha@planet.nl			Development Services International (DSI), University of Mekelle, Faculty of Law, Ethiopia
Murshid, Dr T.M. (Tazeen)	tmurshid@hotmail.com	World; India; Indonesia; United Kingdom; Sri Lanka; Bangladesh; Afghanistan; Asia; Pakistan; South Asia; Nepal	Political conflicts; political ideologies; political integration; political reform; nationalism; ethnic conflicts; ethnic minorities; governance; institution building; refugees; elections;	Free University of Brussels

			electoral systems; gender analysis; gender roles; gender equality; human rights; pluralism	
Ramsoekh, Drs W. (Wierish)	wksc.ramsoekh@minbuza.nl	Netherlands; Suriname; Zambia; India		Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Head South Asia Division, Asia Oceania Department DAO/ZZ
Roschanski, Ms H. (Heike)	heike@irewoc.nl	Ethiopia; East Timor; Africa; India; Indonesia; South Asia; Middle East	Child labour; education	Institute for Research on Working Children (IREWOC)
Seela, Ms U. (Ute)	u.seela@hivos.nl			Hivos
Timmerman, Ms H. (Heidi)	heidi@irewoc.nl			
Visscher, Mr S. (Sikko)	s.visscher@uva.nl			University of Amsterdam (UvA), Asian Studies in Amsterdam (ASiA)
Westendorp, Mrs MSc A.M.B. (Annemarie)	annemarie.westendorp@wur.nl	Nepal; India; Papua New Guinea; Thailand; Ethiopia; Bulgaria	Rural communities; gender roles; education; irrigation; organisational change; conflicts; HIV; AIDS	Van Hall Larenstein Foundation
Wieren, Ms R. (Ruth) van	ruth@irewoc.nl			Institute for Research on Working Children (IREWOC)

Appendix 2 – The statements

1. Culture in South Asia is multicultural, as well as multi-religious. This requires extra care when addressing groups of people on the basis of their religious identity.
2. The secular state is part of the development effort. Religion should therefore not be a means for development, especially not in a multi-religious society. The inclusion of religious groups and their leaders is politically wiser than exclusion, but political goals should remain clear.
3. In the 1950s and 1960s, religion and culture were seen as obstacles standing in the way of development. Nowadays, international economic policy and globalisation are thought to have created all the necessary conditions for development. The missing link is sought in culture and religion. The situation will vastly improve if development policies pay sufficient attention to these issues! This and the 'Muslim threat' also explain why religion is again playing a greater role in debates on development cooperation.
4. Religion is only one of the aspects that determine an identity. In a multi-religious country addressing religion leads to more dissonance than in a mono-religious country. Some political powers do like to use religion in a way that creates dissonance and it is this dissonance that they thrive on. As far as development processes are concerned, playing on/with religious identities is akin to playing with fire.
5. In these cases religion and culture are misused on behalf of specific and mostly conservative agendas. However, religion continues to be an emotive issue and politicians could try to mobilise people for secular causes on the basis of their religion.
6. Development programmes mostly cooperate with dominant groups in a society. These groups have their own subculture and by embedding development projects into that subculture the view of the other, less dominant and marginalised groups tends to be lost. A culture policy implies that the interests of those groups are, in particular, much more directly involved in policy planning and implementation.
7. Projects are supposed to be locally embedded which means, among other things, that a careful analysis has to be made of the ways people and things are dealt with, of the institutions present, and also of power relations, social networks, inclusions and exclusions. Apparently, not much attention is paid to the stakeholder approach anymore, and this is a shame.
8. In many parts of South Asia cultural and cognitive development have advanced so much and life is dominated so much by the market economy that religion and development can and should exist separately.

9. The vast majority of people in the lower echelons of society are atheist and/or secular. That definitely applies to India and to Pakistan as well. The people there do not want their social life to suffer any interference from religion. Most of civil society is nonreligious too and, as a result, there are enough locally embedded secular organisations to work with and these are also interwoven with the local culture.
10. In order to deal with the target groups which the policies are aimed at, a proper knowledge of local customs and views is needed. In colonial times a lot of research was carried out into these topics. Nowadays it seems as if the available knowledge is more superficial.

Appendix 3 – Programme



DPRN–IREWOC/ASiA/IIAS Regional Meetings 2007 Regional meeting for South Asia

Culture, religion and development

Date Friday 9 November 2007

Venue: Posthumuszaal, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam

Programme

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 12.00 – 13.00 | Arrival of the participants, registration and lunch |
| 13.00 – 13.45 | Opening and introduction
Welcome address and introduction by Professor Kristoffel Lieten, University of Amsterdam, IREWOC, illustrated with extracts from documentaries. |
| 13.45 – 14.45 | Statements on the relations between culture, religion and development, followed by presentations by
– Drs Ward Berenschot, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research
– Mr Melle Brinkman, Lower Sindh Rural Development Association, Blackboard Foundation
– Ms Floortje Klijn, Oxfam NOVIB
– Ms Ute Seela, Hivos |
| 14.45 – 15.00 | Break |
| 15:00 – 17:00 | Interactive discussion on the statements and presentations |
| 17:00 – 17:15 | Closing words
By Dr Jan Donner, president of the Royal Tropical Institute and Chair of the DPRN Task Force |
| 17.15 – 18.00 | Drinks |

Appendix 4 – Summaries of the speakers' presentations

Drs Ward Berenschot, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research

The current more positive view on the role of religion in development can be very useful in order to sensitise and contextualise development policies and projects. This attention for religion should not, however, lead to an overly naïve attitude towards religious organisations and religious doctrines. It is important to disaggregate what we mean by 'religion' in order to adopt a more nuanced and precise approach to religion in development work.

Whether we would view the role of religion as positive or negative depends to a large extent on local contexts. Religion can be a source of inspiration to bring about societal change, but it can also serve to legitimise existing social hierarchies. Religious symbols can be used to mobilise people to protest against injustices, but religion itself can also be an instrument used by political elites to serve their own interests. Religious identity can be a source of meaning and orientation, but a religious identity can also be experienced as oppressive and as an obstacle to human creativity. Religion can be a way of promoting social cohesion, but it can also be an organisational principle for patronage and social exclusion.

In order to analyse the paradoxical role of religion, I propose disaggregating religion into five different 'dimensions': religion as a system of ethics, as a set of mythologies and symbols, as a doctrine, as a basis for organisation, and as a basis of a social identity. With these dimensions in mind I wish to put forward some propositions about the risks and opportunities associated with incorporating religion into developmental policies.

Mr Melle Brinkman, Lower Sindh Rural Development Association, Blackboardfoundation

Melle worked for one and a half years for the Lower Sindh Rural Development Association (LSRDA), a secular organisation with Christian founders in the rural areas of Sindh, in southeast Pakistan. Although in an Islamic country, he mainly worked among Hindu communities. Melle talked about his experience of living and working among people from different religious backgrounds, about the considerable role religion played in villages and how it influenced his work. His private life and his working life were intertwined and it was sometimes difficult to keep them apart.

Although the organisation is secular, the majority of the staff were Christian, although some were Muslim and the support staff were mainly Hindu. Melle Brinkman tried to distance himself from religion as much as possible. Hindus, Muslims and Christians also cooperated in the organisation. However, difficult religious topics, and especially those related to Islam, were avoided.

Melle Brinkman was appointed coordinator for the LSRDA KNH school programme via which 25 schools were run. The schools were performing well but the LSRDA still had to close one occasionally. Often when the staff went to villages to find out if they were interested in running a school for their children in their village, locals were afraid they were going to convert them to Christianity.

The city of Samaro was about an hour's drive from the office. Premsagar, Melle's host families' father, originally came from this neighbourhood. Only Premsagar's nuclear family were converted Christians. Premsagar has worked with the LSRDA for 14 years. He is a well-known social mobiliser and Melle never went to a village (and he visited a lot) where the people did not know him or his name. He is an active member of the local church which is recognised by the bishop. In October 2006 Melle joined in the celebrations during the Hindu Diwali festival in this village and the reverend, who lived very close to the village, joined for dinner.

After dinner the reverend called the villagers together and everyone had to stand in a big circle holding each other's hands. Melle was standing there hand in hand with the villagers and the reverend and Premsagar's children started singing Christian songs. Melle felt very uncomfortable when he understood what he was being drawn into, so he walked away. As the LSRDA was running a school in this village as well, and in nearby Hindu villages, he was afraid that people would think the LSRDA was involved in these activities, that is in singing Christian songs with the reverend and the Hindus. This could seriously damage the reputation of the LSRDA and Melle's carefully built reputation of being unaffiliated to any faith in the context of the work he was doing. What would people say when he came into their village to talk about education? A move like this could have disastrous consequences for him and the LSRDA.

Melle was afraid that the rumour would spread that the LSRDA was singing Christian songs and was secretly converting Hindus. That could affect their work in Hindu villages. In fact this is exactly what happened and the issue was raised. Luckily, however, it did not cause any problems.

Although he tried hard not to be affiliated with any organised religion, he was sometimes drawn into it. When people asked him what his religion was he told them that he did not belong to a religious organisation. He got used to people staring at him in disbelief. "How can you not believe in God?" they would ask. He would answer that that was not what he had said and that he had only said that he was not affiliated to Christianity, Hinduism or the Islam. Depending on his mood and the situation he would tell them about his own thoughts and beliefs, and they would mostly think it was alright, although they did think he was strange. However Melle thinks they would have considered him strange anyway. Especially given that he was working as a fieldworker in a secular organisation in a multi-religious society and one in which religion plays an important role in most aspects of society and in which there are a lot of different co-existing religions, extra care needed to be taken when dealing with religious issues. Questions he asked himself were: Do you want to be affiliated with a certain religion? Does it add to your work? Is it possible not to be affiliated with religion, as I was considered a Christian anyway by being a white person from the West?

Ms Floortje Klijn, Oxfam NOVIB

With regard to statement 3 about the greater role of religion in the development debate: This statement implies that certain cultures and religions are incompatible with economic development – at least the economic development WE envision these countries should undergo. Economic development is not a monogamous process that evolves identically in

each location. We only have to look at the differences between Western countries to realise that culture and religion have had their influence on development in different ways, some for the best, some for the worst, but mostly depending on how you want to look at it.

With regard to statement 6 about the need to involve less dominant and more marginalised cultural groups in policy planning and implementation rather than the dominant groups: This is a worthy ideal but very difficult to realise in practice as there are so many hidden realities. Both the dominant groups and the marginalised groups have their own subcultures. In small communities they can be two sides of the same coin. As a result, working with marginalised groups without the involvement of the dominant group – depending on the subject of course – has proven to be difficult. It is often best for development programmes to take all groups into account or to work together with all of them, both dominant and marginalised, in order to improve the latter's situation.

With regard to statement 10 about the need for proper knowledge of local customs and views:

The majority of development interventions are still project driven – project designed to tackle an identified problem without really looking at what the problem is, at the causes. "People are poor and therefore we should...". Proper problem analysis should be conducted by both development agencies (national and international) and donors. More in-depth action-oriented research should also be conducted. A greater insight is needed into how people organise their lives, the choices they make and why, their vulnerabilities and how religion and culture play a role in these choices and vulnerabilities – without immediately assuming it to be a negative one.

Ms Ute Seela, Hivos

Ute Seela's presentation is on what Hivos is planning to do with its knowledge programme 'Promoting Pluralism' (and the link with South Asia). She thereby reacts to statements 4, 5, 8 and 10. The presentation addresses the following issues:

Statement 4 about the danger of playing with religious identities in development processes: Understanding identity formation;

Statement 5 about mobilising people on the basis of their religion: Using the language of religion?;

Statement 8 about separating religion and development in South Asia: Engage or refute religion?;

Statement 10 about the need for proper knowledge of local customs and views: Invest more in knowledge.

Hivos' conceptual Framework (still being developed) of the knowledge programme entitled 'Promoting Pluralism' is the following: 'A lot of core themes of conventional wisdom on democracy have been challenged. For instance, democratic values were eroded simultaneously with the rapid expansion and the deepening of markets and commodification processes, which are often perceived as important prerequisites for democracy. However, expanding marketisation processes tend to coexist in perfect harmony with growing intolerances. The consolidation of civic spaces, such as social movements, the voluntary

sector, and other professional and charitable organisations and associations were expected to reduce the existing democratic deficit and help consolidate its sustainability. Instead, what we are frequently witnessing is a situation in which the expansion of civic spaces does not necessarily contribute directly to reducing the democratic deficit. In fact the reverse could even be true. Similarly, an increase in identity politics and consequent associational formations could potentially be empowering (as in the case of sexuality identity associational politics), but could equally have a contributing effect as we are reminded by many important recent works (Mamdani, Guttman, Said, Sen) as regards consolidating intolerances and systematic coercion as in the case of revivalist movements in many parts of the world. It could even result in extreme forms of ‘fundamentalisms’, such as ethno–religious, linguistic, national chauvinist, fundamentalisms. While it may be impossible, at this juncture of history, to categorically diagnose the sources of such transformations, it is nevertheless plausible to suggest that the nature and character of ‘threats’ to democratic futures of many regions has significantly changed, and growing forms of intolerance/fundamentalisms coupled with a demystification of liberal democracy constitute perhaps the most significant threat of all.

In this knowledge programme, dominant conceptions of pluralism are confronted, challenged and complemented by alternative ways of theorisation, in particular those theories that emerge from practices of ‘pluralisms’ at local levels in the South, as they are explored in regional studies in India, Indonesia and East Africa. In the process, we promote ‘bottom–up’ ways of developing concepts of pluralism and stimulate new ways of theorising, based on critical interactions with narratives of the fields. In other words, this knowledge programme builds a critical reflection of key concepts implicated in the notion of pluralism such as: recognition of the other, democracy, diversity, identity and ‘otherness’, and its counterparts: ‘uniformism’ or monolithic belief systems and non democratic practices, provisionally defined as ‘practices of intolerance’. Scholars and activists working in the various regions involved in this study are invited to share their experiences and knowledge so that the programme is able to engage with and understand the complexity and diversity of (in)tolerance, its forms and manifestations in culturally and plural sensitive manners, in order to conceptualise its sources and possible causes and implications of intolerance in varied social–political contexts. It is our expressed goal to create spaces for interactive dialogue, in which we want to be conscious of the limiting and stereotypical connotations of the concept fundamentalism(s).’

General: CERES office, Utrecht University, Faculty of Social Sciences
P.O. Box 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands, E-mail: info@dprn.nl
Websites: <http://www.DPRN.nl> and <http://www.global-connections.nl>

DPRN Coordination Unit: Dr Mirjam A.F. Ros-Tonen, University of Amsterdam
Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130, 1018 VZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel: (+31) 20 525 4179 / 4062, Fax (+31) 20 525 4051, E-mail: mirjam.ros@dprn.nl