‘If You Need Us, Allow Us!’
The Role of Faith-Based Organisations in Enhancing Civic Space
Examples from Kenya, Ethiopia and Indonesia

A Field and Desk Study
Commissioned by the Civic Engagement Alliance

Annette Jansen, 13 August 2018

The title of the report ‘If you need us, allow us’, is derived from an interview with a Development Commissioner of the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church, held on 29 May 2018 in Addis Ababa. During this interview, the Commissioner repeated what he had told a government representative: ‘We know that you need us, as a church, for every aspect [of society], for example for conflict [mitigation], health issues ... If you need us, allow us! And make us independent so that we can play our roles.’
Acknowledgements

This report is the product of many. Of the many farmers, women, church leaders, Muslim representatives, teachers and youth activists who so patiently awaited my arrival and shared their stories in the villages of Western Kenya and North Central Java. Of the many staff members of national and international FBOs and academic experts who granted me an interview in Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Salatiga, Utrecht, Amsterdam and Jakarta. And of the many staff members of ICCO, Kerk in Actie, Prisma, Tear, Light for the World, Wilde Ganzen, Woord en Daad, CNV International, Red een Kind and Leprazending who so kindly advised me on partners and projects to visit. I cannot name you all, but I want to thank you warmly for the time you took to answer and reflect on my questions and for sending me all those valuable documents.

I wish to express my special gratitude to a number of individuals who went to great lengths to enable this research. John Oduor from KAACR in Kenya, Jan Apperloo and Desta Heyi from ICCO in Ethiopia, Deborah Suparni from Yayasan Sion in Indonesia, Fintria Hermawati and Grace Nugroho from Yabima Indonesia, Winny Malo from PGI Jakarta and Matthijs van Pijkeren and Fennelien Stal from Tear. thank you and all of your colleagues for all the efforts you made to facilitate the field research, for the many FGDs and visits that you organised, and the tremendous hospitality, warmth and assistance that you offered. You have been invaluable to this research.

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# Acronyms

Note: Where the country of origin does not appear in the name of a national institute on below list, this has been added after the name.

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>African Divine Church - Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADLI</td>
<td>Agricultural Development Led Industrialization - Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADS</td>
<td>Anglican Development Services - Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AICs</td>
<td>African instituted or independent churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANDM</td>
<td>Amhara National Democratic Movement - Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CaR</td>
<td>Children at Risk Coalition - Western Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-based organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCM</td>
<td>Church and Community Mobilisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDF</td>
<td>Constituency Development Fund - Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIPK</td>
<td>Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CKRC</td>
<td>Constitution of Kenya Review Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLA</td>
<td>Cluster level association - Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Mission Society - Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DGI</td>
<td>Dewan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia, Board of Churches in Indonesia</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAK</td>
<td>Evangelical Alliance of Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>EECMY</td>
<td>Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus</td>
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<tr>
<td>EECMY-DASSC</td>
<td>Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus - Development and Social Services Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>EKHC</td>
<td>Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOTC</td>
<td>Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo ('Unity') Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOTC-DICAC</td>
<td>Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo ('Unity') Church - Development and Inter-church Aid Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPRDF</td>
<td>Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front</td>
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<td>FBO</td>
<td>Faith-based organisation</td>
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<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus group discussion</td>
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<td>FPI</td>
<td>Islamic Defenders Front - Indonesia</td>
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<tr>
<td>GKJTU</td>
<td>Gereja Kristen Jawa Tengah Utara, Christian Church of North Central Java</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GKSBS</td>
<td>Gereja Kristen Sumatera Bagian Selatan, Christian Church of Southern Sumatra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKBP</td>
<td>Huria Kristen Batak Protestant, Protestant Christian Church of Batak</td>
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<tr>
<td>HTI</td>
<td>Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia</td>
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<tr>
<td>IATF-FBO</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with FBOs for Development [UN]</td>
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<td>ICCO</td>
<td>Interkerkelijk Coördinatie Commissie Ontwikkelingshulp, Interchurch Coordination Committee Development Aid</td>
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<td>IJABI</td>
<td>Ikatan Jama'ah Ahlul Bayt Indonesia, All Indonesian Assembly of Athulbayt Associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International non-governmental organisation</td>
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<td>IRC</td>
<td>Inter-Religious Council - Indonesia</td>
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<tr>
<td>KAACR</td>
<td>Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children</td>
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<td>Kerk in Actie</td>
<td>Programme for missionary and diaconal work of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and of 10 smaller churches and ecumenical organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCDF</td>
<td>Kenya Community Development Foundation</td>
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<td>KTP</td>
<td>Karta Tanda Penduduk, Resident Identity Card - Indonesia</td>
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<td>KWI</td>
<td>Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, Bishops' Conference of Indonesia</td>
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LAZ  Lembaga Amil Zakat, Private Zakat Management - Indonesia
LCLCs  Local child labour committees, Kenya
LGBTI  Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex
MKH  Majelis Pekerja-Harian, Daily Management Committee - Indonesia
MUI  Majlis Ulama Indonesia, Indonesian Ulema Council
NAMLEF  National Muslim Leaders Forum - Kenya
NCA  Norwegian Church Aid
NCCK  National Council of Churches of Kenya
NGO  Non-governmental organisation
NU  Nahdlatul Ulama - Indonesia
OAIC  Organisation of African Instituted Churches
OPDO  Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization - Ethiopia
PBO Act  Public Benefit Organisations Act - Kenya
PGI  Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia, Communion of Churches in Indonesia
PGLI  Persekutuan Gereja-gereja dan Lembaga-lembaga Injili, Indonesian Communion of Evangelical Churches
PGPI  Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Pentakosta Indonesia, Indonesian Pentecostal Churches Communion
PKPU  Pos Keadilan Peduli Ummat, PKPU Human Initiative Foundation - Indonesia
PKN  Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, Protestant Church in the Netherlands
RAPADO  Rural AIDS Prevention and Development Organization - Kenya
SDA  Seventh-Day Adventists
SEPDM  Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
SHGs  Self-help groups
SIM  Sudan Interior Mission
SUPKEM  Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims
TPLF  Tigray People's Liberation Front - Ethiopia
WCC  World Council of Churches
WKHC  Wolayta Kale Heywot Church - Ethiopia
WKHC-TDA  Wolayta Kale Heywot Church - Terepeza Development Association - Ethiopia
Executive Summary

Context

This study found that FBOs can play an important role in enhancing space for civil society at large. Whether or not they take up that role, however, in what way and at what level of influence (local, regional, national), depends on the historical-political context.

The historical-political context in which FBOs operate is shaped by three key factors. First, the space for FBOs to act as an advocate for civic space depends on the social-political position that they have acquired over time: on their historical legacy as a force of (people's) power and moral authority. Such legacies can last beyond periods of actual political power. Although religious leaders in Ethiopia lost their position in government in the 1970s, several interviewees commented that today, many Ethiopian people have more trust in the religious leaders than in their government and that 'the church is more influential [on the household level] than politics in Ethiopia'.

A second factor determining the space for FBOs to act as an advocate of civic space, is the intertwinement of religion and politics in a given time and place. Kenya and Indonesia are both experiencing a recurrence of ethnic and religious identity politics that severely reduces FBOs' freedom to act as trusted, impartial actors and peoples' advocates. A third factor shaping the context is that of the quality and strength of interfaith relations and, related to that, public support for religious pluralism and freedom. As the case study on Indonesia suggests, governments and societies that actively promote and invest in religious pluralism seem to be more resilient to violent attacks by religious extremists.

The three country studies that informed this research show how the historical-political context impacts on the opportunities for FBOs to enhance civic space. They also reveal how the tides of history alter the roles of FBOs from being vocal advocates of civic space at one time, to passive bystanders or spoilers at another.

Kenya

Today's religious landscape in Kenya was largely shaped during the British colonial era. This explains the continuing dominance of Christianity in the country. Islam was the first foreign religion to set foot in Kenya, around 700 AD. For a long time, however, Muslims were amongst the most marginalised people, living in the relatively less developed and poor areas of Eastern Kenya. This began to change in the 1990s when Muslims became more active in politics following the establishment of a multi-party system.

African indigenous beliefs and practices continue to play an important role in the worldviews and beliefs of Kenyan Christians and Muslims. African Christianity, for example, is blended with a strong belief in the (S)pirit and spiritual power.

The Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church are the largest and most influential faith-based organisations in Kenya. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) and the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) follow as strong seconds.

The strict hierarchic structures of the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church and the well-organised [advocacy] work of church and mosque coordination bodies ensure that religious institutions and religious leaders in Kenya have a strong voice in a variety of matters relating to governance and sustainable development - and they do not refrain from using that voice. To name some examples: religious leaders and institutions from various faith communities in Kenya advocated a multi-party democracy in the mid-1980s and developed a draft Constitution that was approved by referendum in August 2010.

While conducting the research, however, many interviewees expressed disappointment at what they regard as a loss of such progressive, critical religious leadership. The trust in Kenya's religious leadership received a severe blow during the post-election violence of 2007 and 2008. Religious leaders failed to adequately respond to the communal and ethnic violence because they were regarded as partisan. Today - possibly as a backlash effect - religious leaders seem to fall back on not taking a stance at all during elections.

Despite the importance of religion, in Kenya, ethnicity remains the strongest force that binds people together. During colonial times, the regime often made use of tribal antagonisms to apply well-known 'divide-and-rule' strategies. After independence, political leaders continued to play the ethnic card to

1) Interview with Commissioner of EOTC-DICAC, 30 May 2018.
attain positions of power. Today, ethnicity trumps religion as a marker of identity and this comes to the fore especially during election times.

**Ethiopia**

Ethiopia breathes ancient religious history. The country harbours eight UNESCO world heritage sites, amongst which the famous medieval monolithic cave churches and the ancient town of Aksum, where the Ark of the Covenant is believed to be held. And until recently, the country was ruled by a monarchy reputedly descended from the biblical King Solomon. Today, Ethiopia has a population of an estimated 105 million people of whom 96.7% have a stated religious affiliation. Christians make up the majority, comprising 62.8% of the population, Muslims second with 34.6% and 2.6% practise traditional beliefs.

Even though Christianity still plays a key role in Ethiopia’s identity and society today, most churches and faith-based organisations refrain from taking an active role in public and political debates. The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Ethiopian Monarchy jointly reigned over the country from the 4th century AD until the 1970s. When Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by the socialist Derg regime in 1974, decades of severe religious oppression and persecution followed. Violent religious persecution ended when the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took over in 1991, but freedom of speech has remained limited, especially since the 2009 Proclamation that prohibited faith-based and civil society organisations from engaging in lobbying and advocacy activities.

Rather than having a vocal role in public debates, the faith-based organisations’ influence resides in their rootedness in Ethiopia’s community structures: in the extended networks of churches, congregations, priests and pastors that reach millions of Ethiopians throughout the country. Another influential factor is the trust that people have in their religious leaders and institutions, as a respondent explains: ‘In Ethiopia, each household has one confessor. The church has in fact a deep-rooted connection with the households. It has a big influence in the life of the household – in married life or social and cultural life. The church is more influential [on the household level] than politics in Ethiopia.’

At the same time, the continuing influence of religion on civic space in Ethiopia is evidenced by Prime Minister Abiy’s extensive use of religious narratives. In an attempt to reunite his country and gain support for his substantial democratic reform plans, Abiy invokes religious metaphors and values that speak of hope and mercy, and that spark the imagination of many.

**Indonesia**

Indonesia has the largest population of Muslims of all of the world’s nations. In 2017, out of a total population of over 263 million people, about 87% were registered as Muslim, 9.9% as Christian [Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal], 1.7% as Hindu, 0.7% as Buddhist and 0.2% as Confucian or another religion by the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics.

Religion has been key to Indonesian citizenship ever since the country became independent and introduced the state ideology of Pancasila. The Pancasila, which was introduced by Sukarno in 1945, seeks to promote religious pluralism through ‘five pillars’ that support the value of ‘unity in diversity’.

Since the fall of Suharto in 1998, the renowned Indonesian values of religious pluralism and tolerance have been challenged. Under the Suharto dictatorship, the leaders of the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia – were accommodated by the regime to secure their support and to ensure that Indonesian Muslims adhered to moderate forms of Islam and did not develop political ambitions of their own. During the transition to democracy, the new government loosened its control over religion. This increased the space for the establishment of new, often more fundamentalist, Islamic organisations – such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Hidayatullah, and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI).

Within this overall context, religious organisations have both enhanced space for civil society – advocating democracy, human rights and religious tolerance – and committed or instigated acts of intimidation and terror that reduced this space. Both Christian and Muslim fundamentalists have committed acts of intimidation and violence. At the same time, mainstream religious organisations continue to promote religious freedom and tolerance through various interfaith initiatives. In the run-up to the presidential elections in 2019 for example, the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) and the Islamic NU started a joint social media campaign to increase people’s awareness of the political instrumentalisation of religion. Strong continued support for religious pluralism can also be found within Indonesian society. This is evidenced for exam-

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2) Interview with Dr. Agedew Redie, Commissioner of EOC-DICAC, Addis Ababa, 30 May 2018.
people by the large number of families in Indonesia with mixed religious backgrounds. It is also visible in the joint celebration of Islamic, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist holidays in families, communities and at schools.

Overall, the space for faith-based organisations to advocate improvement of the social-economic situation of marginalised groups is large and probably much larger than that available to secular NGOs. The NU, Muhammadiyah, the Protestant PGI and the Catholic KWI are the four most influential faith-based organisations in terms of influencing governmental policies in Indonesia. If these four FBOs issue a joint statement, the government will certainly listen because of the vast numbers of constituents that they represent. Although secular NGOs do a lot of good (advocacy) research, they are far less influential because they lack such large constituencies. FBOs can considerably increase secular NGOs’ space by backing their campaigns - as shown in a case study of a campaign for the rights of indigenous people that was implemented through a partnership between PGI and a local NGO.

**Religious Resources**

**Presence**

FBOs are on the ground and there to stay. They have built ties with government and communities that reach far back into the past and they will be there to support communities for many years to come. Because of their long-term presence, FBOs can contribute to processes of change that require more time than the average 3-year project intervention, such as social-economic empowerment of women and peace building. Thus, Esther Mombo and her colleagues worked for twenty years to get women ordained as priests in the Anglican church in Kenya. Although it was not their core task, both the Sion and Yabima Foundation in Indonesia were able to play an important role in settling a conflict and improving Christian-Muslim relations because they had gained the trust of the people.

**Affecting the Deep Structures**

Religion and faith belong to what the Indian social activist Srilatha Batliwala calls the deep structures of society: ‘the hidden sites and processes of power and influence, the implicit culture, the informal values and systems of reward and recognition, all of which have enormous impact on how people and the organization actually function’ (Batliwala 2011: 43). Advocacy can only lead to structural social change if it addresses this level of hidden (or invisible) power, in addition to the visible (laws, policies, formal decision-makers), agenda-setting power. Or, as sociologist Kees Schuyt argues, the most effective level to realise sustainable change, is the level of hope, beliefs, norms and values. FBOs are ideally situated to address these deep structures, even if these concern conservative beliefs and prejudices. For example, by extensively referring to biblical stories and teachings, members of the Church of Peace in Western Kenya successfully convinced parents that children with disabilities and teenage mothers were not cursed, polluted or lost, but could continue their education and build a future for themselves.

**Holistic Approach**

Faith-sensitive approaches to development differ from conventional approaches as they ‘incorporate the social, environmental, spiritual and ethical in one complete package’ (Moyer et al 2012: 962). FBOs attend to the whole person: to material, social and spiritual well-being. The Self-Help Groups in Ethiopia, the Umoja Groups in Indonesia and the Change the Game Project in Kenya have not merely improved the social-economic situation of the members and wider community. The projects have also increased participants’ self-confidence, sense of belonging, meaning and purpose. This holistic approach changed participants from passive recipients of aid into people who employ their talents to build better prospects for their family, community and environment.

**Religious literacy**

‘Policy talk is difficult to internalise,’ explained a child rights advocacy officer in Western Kenya. ‘But when people hear from the Bishop “this is what the Bible says”, they understand it much faster: people can relate to that.’ Religious narratives are powerful tools for community mobilisation because many people know and understand them and can pass them on to others. Most FBO staff members have

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3) In an unpublished paper, Jochemsen (forthcoming) refers to the following definition of religious literacy by the Harvard Divinity School: ‘Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts [where applicable], beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world’s religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.’ Source: Religious literacy project. Harvard Divinity School, [https://rtp.hds.harvard.edu/definition-religious-literacy](https://rtp.hds.harvard.edu/definition-religious-literacy) (accessed 20 March 2018).
They have basic knowledge of their religion’s history, teaching and texts and, more importantly, the ability to make these texts mean something in the everyday struggle against poverty and exclusion. Religious literacy refers to the ability to adapt age-old stories and metaphors to real life situations in the here-and-now. The story of the two fish and five loaves was used by FBO staff members in all three countries to explain the importance of sharing and to realise the establishment of community cooperatives and self-help groups. Of course, religious narratives can also be used to spread hatred and support exclusion – as shown by the instrumentalisation of religion by politicians in Kenya and Indonesia. The new Ethiopian prime minister Abiy, on the other hand, is a good example of a leader who rises above such divisions and uses religious narratives as a binding force to unite the different ethnic and religious groups in the country.

**Spiritual Capital and Empowerment**

Social change and struggles against exclusion typically require stamina and long-term commitment. Acts of individual and communal prayer, religious services and celebrations can be a great source of emotional and mental support when the going gets tough. ‘How do you cope with all those hardships,’ was a question put to the members of the Obunga Local Child Labour Committee in Kenya who spoke about the many setbacks they faced when seeking to get children out of mining or prostitution. ‘Oh, we pray a lot,’ they responded in chorus. Acts of spiritual empowerment – that include meditation, religious study, individual devotion and so forth – also enhance the sense of purpose and team spirit amongst social activists. The term ‘social capital’, invented by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to connections between individuals, to social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Tomalin 2007: 13). Building on this, spiritual capital may be about seeing yourself in a web of relations not only with [all] other human beings, but also in relation to other living human systems on earth and the beyond, that is, in relation to a transcendent or invisible power. Social-political change processes can by nature be long and winding, difficult and painful, with many setbacks and even violent crush downs. Faith-inspired social activists can experience ‘a profound and cohesive sense of purpose’ that render them stamina and endurance and greatly increase their resilience to set-backs (Moyer 2015: 62).

**Constituency**

Faith-based organisations have the power of numbers. They can easily reach many people and mobilise ‘critical mass’. That is why, in Indonesia, the government listens to joint statements issued by the largest Islamic and Christian organisations. Even in Ethiopia, where FBOs have had to refrain from openly lobbying the government, the trust they have amongst communities make them a powerful influencer at the local level. The ‘power of numbers’ is not only about the ability to mobilise the voices of faith communities to pressure the government. It is also about the vast human resources available through such communities. The Local Child Labour Committees in Kenya, the Umoja Mentas Group in Indonesia and the Self-Help Groups in Ethiopia all consisted of members who committed some of their time on voluntary base. They enhanced civic space for marginalised groups through local dialogues with local authorities, but, moreover, by becoming change agents themselves.

**Physical and Material assets**

The financial resources collected through alms-giving are substantial. This was seen, for example, in the various private collection agencies, called Lembaga Amil Zakat (LAZs), that were established in Indonesia to implement poverty alleviation programs based on the Islamic custom of alms-giving, zakat. Many schools and hospitals in the three countries of study were built with the help of such donations, and with the land that religious institutions own and have amassed during history. As long as there are religious adherents, such resources will continue to flow. Consequently, many FBOs are less dependent on external donors. This considerably enhances their operational space.

**Networked Societies**

FBOs are part of wide networks that operate at multiple levels. They often work through hierarchical structures of decision-making. Such structures can sometimes hamper progress but can also increase the outreach of advocacy campaigns as they reach all levels of that hierarchy – from national religious leaders, to local imams and congregation members. By bringing the issue of women’s ordination to the Anglican Synod, Esther Mombo ensured that all dioceses in Kenya had to discuss it – whether they liked it or not. Although not all members of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) were pleased with the pastoral letter instructing them to advocate the rights of LGBTI people, by sending that letter PGI ensured that the issue was discussed in various remote communities.

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4) FGD with LCLC in Obunga, Western Kenya, 24 May 2018.
congregations and churches of the Indonesian peninsular. As such, FBOs function as members of networked societies that are connected across local and national borders through shared values and goals. Because of these local-to-global networks, FBOs are well situated to link local to national and global advocacy campaigns.

Roles
FBOs can play a variety of roles to enhance civic space. Because of their long-term presence at local to national level, they have the unique ability to alternate between those roles and shift gear in response to the changing tides of history. In times of oppression, FBOs may choose to keep a low profile where it concerns voicing critique in national public debates, while increasing their efforts to support people at the community level – as was the case with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Ethiopia. Or they may instead decide to speak out and use their moral leadership to protest government repression when civil society activists are silenced – as for example happened in Kenya where Anglican church leaders protested the oppression of opposition activists and advocated a multi-party democracy.

Within the projects studied, the following roles of FBOs in enhancing space for civil society at large were identified. As each of these roles mobilises one or more of the religious resources listed above, the reader may notice overlap between sections.

- **Moral Leadership**
  FBOs can act as moral leaders within their faith communities and the wider society. Religion can help to remove or change cultural customs and values that may be cherished within the (faith) community, yet are detrimental to just and sustainable development. In Ethiopia, Norwegian Church Aid started a nationwide campaign to end child marriage in partnership with national religious institutions across a variety of faith traditions. Individual leaders, like prime minister Abiy in Ethiopia, exercise moral leadership through the invocation of universal religious values that promote unity, peace and democracy.

- **Localisation 2.0**
  The Umoja Mentas project in Indonesia, the Change the Game! Project in Kenya and the Self-Help Groups in Ethiopia all used methods that put the community members centre stage. The FBOs provided training and facilitation, but the community groups developed a vision and project plan, acted as the ‘daily management’ and put together seed money to finance their first activities. As these approaches are embedded in local faith teachings, beliefs and values they provide authentic sources of localisation. As funding was raised within the community, from the local government and private sector, they established ‘back-donor support’ and legitimacy within the immediate community.

- **Advocating Equal Rights and Inclusion**
  Many religions regard the struggle for justice and peace as their core business. As part of their current five-year strategy (2014-2019), the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) for example aims ‘to develop a community that struggles for justice, peace, social welfare and the integrity of creation’. To PGI, justice means advocating equal rights for all, which is why they advocated the rights and freedom of religion of other believers, in this case indigenous peoples in Indonesia. In Kenya, FBOs played important roles in reducing the stigmatisation of people with disabilities and HIV-AIDS, thus advocating their inclusion.

- **Building (Trans)national Solidarity Networks**
  All main religions repeatedly remind their members of their duty to attend to ‘the other in need’. Members are reminded through regular collective prayer meetings, aims giving and various invitations to work as volunteers in relief and social change projects. Acting in solidarity with others is also expressed through collective action and protest. In response to a suicide attack on a church in Surabaya, members across faith communities in Salatiga organised a joint wake in the city centre to denounce the violence and express support for the victims. Although this study did not concentrate on transnational solidarity networks, examples – such as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians – surfaced. Whereas many solidarity actions – such as Occupy and the Women’s March – suffer from fatigue after a while, faith-based solidarity networks can build on existing transnational networks of faith communities that are there to stay. Besides, feelings of solidarity are easily evoked because members of transnational faith communities already perceive each other as ‘brothers and sisters’.

- **Linking Local to National Advocacy**
  Most FBOs that were visited for this study have specialised advocacy departments. Advocacy officers of the Anglican Development Services (ADS) in Kenya and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) assist in the implementation of multi-annual advocacy strategies that have been decided upon by the general Synod. Such strategies are informed by extensive consultations with local churches and dioceses. As such, FBOs are well situated to link local to national advo-
cacy and vice versa, to include local communities in policy issues of national and international importance. Examples are the advocacy campaign for customary land rights of indigenous people in Indonesia conducted by PGI, and a knowledge raising and awareness building campaign on the Sustainable Development Goals conducted by ADS in Kenya.

**Advocating Sustainable Economic Growth and Environmental Protection**

Stewardship, protecting the integrity of creation, is a key value in Christianity. FBOs in Indonesia and Ethiopia all use biblical stories and metaphors to convey that value to small farmers and community members. They realise that a change of attitude and behaviour is needed to stop environmental pollution and support sustainable development by working on the ‘deep structures’. In Indonesia, farmers stopped using pesticides and shifted to organic farming, even though this did not immediately pay off in an economic sense. In Ethiopia, farmers made a similar change by learning to ‘farm God’s way’. In Salatiga, Indonesia, church members initiated a successful waste recycling program that gradually spread to the neighbouring villages.
Introduction

Research Rationale and Objectives
Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) are a specific branch of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that play an important but often too invisible role in policy influencing and in voicing the interests of marginalised groups – especially those of women, youth, small farmers, people living with disabilities and indigenous peoples. They are rooted at community level, and religious leaders have power and profile to bring people together and to address political leaders. FBOs are often part of networks with local, national and even international branches. These characteristics can be both an asset and a burden, depending on the context and the behaviour of FBOs and religious leaders. This study, commissioned by the Civic Engagement Alliance, aims to generate knowledge on the role of faith-based organisations in lobby and advocacy for civic space in three different countries: Kenya, Ethiopia and Indonesia.

The idea for this study emerged from the nexus of two issues of concern to the Civic Engagement Alliance: shrinking space for civil society and a growing interest in the role of faith-based organisations in international development cooperation.

The starting point for the research is an observed shrinking of space for civil society, a development that, among other things, is caused by:

- **Counter-terror measures and domestic security strategies**: the increased scrutiny of civil society organizations (CSOs) as part of national and international counter-terror measures;
- **Increasing power of multinationals and the private sector**: the growing power and influence of transnational corporations and neo-liberal market ideology that contribute to increased violations of the rights to land, food and sustainable livelihoods of marginalised peasants, youth, women and indigenous peoples;
- **Reduction of aid and development budgets**: a substantial downsizing of CSO funding, especially by Northern donors;
- **Co-optation of CSOs**: increased pressure on CSOs to align their work with government policies for domestic development and foreign affairs, especially where this concerns social-economic service delivery (ICCO 2014);
- **A state-led ‘autocratic hostility’ towards CSOs**: in countries that are witnessing a resurgence of nationalism and a related growth of self-esteem informed by steep economic growth rates, an increased tendency to reject international human rights norms can be perceived, as these are often framed as Foreign Western and imposed values. Related to this, one can observe a growing hostility of domestic governments in the global South towards CSOs funded by ‘the West’ (Wood 2016).

Second, the study was motivated by an increased interest among development actors in the role of FBOs. This interest is partly informed by a fear of the growth of violent religious extremism, yet there is also increased recognition of the constructive power and influence of FBOs in peacebuilding, crisis response (e.g. during the Ebola crisis) and behavioural change (e.g. stigmatisation of survivors of SGBV) (Tearfund 2017b). In addition, interest in faith-based approaches to development has grown in response to criticism of the overtly technical and ‘secular reductionist’ approaches that have dominated international development cooperation over the last decades – approaches that only dealt with the material aspects whilst neglecting the religious and spiritual dimensions of survival and growth (Nordstokken 2013: 227).

Although various studies have been published on the role of FBOs in the provision of health and in humanitarian assistance, relatively few focus on the role of FBOs in enhancing and safeguarding space for civic action and civil society. This study was commissioned to generate knowledge on the roles and positions of FBOs in lobby and advocacy for civic space in Kenya, Ethiopia and Indonesia. It has the following three specific objectives:

1. Describe the specific position of faith-based organisations within civil society at large in the selected countries.
2. Investigate whether faith-based organisations play a specific role in creating space for civil society at large in the selected countries.

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5) The increased power of the private sector may also open up new avenues for policy influencing, such as through multi-stakeholder platforms in which multinationals and CSOs agree on guidelines for corporate social responsibility.
3. Investigate whether faith-based organisations play a specific role in achieving lobby and advocacy goals for the focus areas of the Civic Engagement Alliance: food and nutrition security, inclusive value chains, human rights and/or responsible business.

Clarifying the Key Concepts

Four key concepts shaped the research design in important ways: civil society and civic space, faith-based organisations, religious assets or resources, and religion and development. This section clarifies the understandings and uses of these concepts in the context of this study.

Civil Society and Civic Space

Citizens and organisations established by citizens play a vital role in society. Together they form what is referred to as civil society, which occupies its own position between the private domain, the state and the market. Civil society comprises non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, trade unions, think tanks, churches, faith-based organisations, religious and social movements. These civil society organisations (CSOs) shape and voice the interests and values of different groups in society on the micro, meso and macro level (ICCO 2014: 6). Civil society is not an automatic unity, but consists of a plethora of actors and organisations each with their own particular goals and interest groups that may conflict and collide. CSOs can form alliances with other CSOs but also, at times, with state or private actors pursuing similar goals.

Following CIVICUS6, we tentatively define civil society as ‘the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests’. Thus, civil society is understood in terms of the activities that are undertaken for ‘the common good’ by groups or individuals, in the space between the family, the state and the market (ICCO 2015: 2).

Civic space, or the space for civil society to operate as an independent watchdog of the state and the market, depends on political and organisational aspects. The regime type, governance model and political climate in a country have an impact on opportunities for civil society actors and organisations to exercise their civil and political rights [such as the freedom of speech and association]. The organisational structure and financing of a CSO on the other hand also impact on their legitimacy and influencing capacities. Together, these factors determine the operational space for CSOs: the political space to act and the capacity to improve local finance and constituency-based legitimacy (ICCO 2015: 1).

In recent years, many civil society organisations and Western donors have begun to talk about an observed ‘shrinking of space’ for civil society. The authors of a recent paper argue that the term ‘shrinking space’ plays down deep political-ideological divisions that caused this shrinkage in the first place (Hayes et al. 2017). The debate on ‘civic space’ tends to be presented in technical terms, talking about restrictive laws, measures and a fallback in donor funding. Such frameworks disguise the fact that ‘shrinking space’ is about ‘a new wave of methods to repress political struggle’ and about ‘problems of exclusion and repression that many social, political and civil rights movements have long faced’ (Hayes et al. 2017: 6). Put differently, the term ‘shrinking space’ may be convenient for those who wish to downplay issues of hegemony, repression and ideology that inform this new wave of repression, such as (neo-liberal) attempts to ‘marketize the state, hollow-out democracy and reduce opposition’ (Hayes et al. 2017: 7).

It is important to spotlight on the political-ideological battle informing the discourse on ‘shrinking space’ as faith-based organisations are amongst the hardest hit organisations. FBOs are not only scrutinised as part of counter-terror campaigns but also because they represent other visions on ‘how the world may be transformed’ than those of the reigning governments. Consequently, many of the counter-terror measures and domestic laws regulating civil society aim to ‘draw a line between bona fide and thus legitimate organizations on the one hand, and those whose activities may be called into question and thus restricted on the other’ (Hayes et al. 2017: 8). Likewise, the growing interest of donors in FBOs may be a sign of growing recognition of the importance and value of religion in development. However, it may also be informed by an increased need to control civil society by co-opting ‘like-minded’ FBOs as partners while excluding or even criminalising others.

Faith-Based Organisations

Faith-based organisations are a specific kind of CSO that can tentatively be defined as ‘formal organizations whose identity and mission are self-consciously derived from the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions and which operate on a non-profit, independent, voluntary basis to promote and realize collectively articulated ideas about the public good’

6) CIVICUS is a global alliance of 4000 CSOs across 174 countries dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society. See: www.civicus.org
Other than the concept suggests, FBOs greatly vary in form (e.g. church, mosque, council, social ministry, movement, non-profit organisation), in the kind of activities that they implement, and in the extent to which faith teachings inform their work and articulate their organisational profile. The understanding of the term also depends on the context in which it is used. In Europe, the term is mostly used to refer to religious agencies involved in international aid; in the United States, it mostly refers to Christian organisations involved in health and social work (Nordstokken 2013: 232).

This study focuses primarily on FBOs that are inspired by Christian faith traditions and that are involved in national or international social-economic development cooperation. Bearing in mind the diversity of FBOs included in this research, we build on the FBO typology below.

FBO typology developed by Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh (2004: 119-20)

- Faith-permeated organizations: the connection with religion and faith is evident at all levels of mission, staffing, governance and support.
- Faith-centered organizations: founded for a religious purpose, remain strongly connected with the religious community through funding sources and affiliation and require most staff to share the organization’s faith commitments.
- Faith-background organizations: tend to look and act secular, although they may have a historical tie to a faith tradition.
- Faith-secular partnerships: present a special case in which a secular (or faith-background) entity joins with one or more congregations or other explicitly religious organizations.
- Secular organizations: have no reference to religion in their mission or founding history.

Adapted from Nordstokken 2013: 233

Although the study concentrates on the roles of Christian FBOs in lobby and advocacy for civic space, it also examines how these Christian NGOs engage and seek alliances with FBOs from other faith traditions, in particular with Islamic FBOs.

Throughout the report, ‘FBOs’ will be used as a general term referring to all faith-inspired organisations, irrespective of their form or type. However, quite some churches have established separate development wings. In such cases, the report speaks of ‘religious institutions’ to refer to the church and formal church leadership, and ‘faith-based organisation’ to refer to the development wing of that church.

Religious Assets or Resources

The term ‘religious assets’ draws attention to the constructive potential of faith-based action at a time in which religion is often associated with destruction and violence. It builds on a proposal for an ‘assets-based approach’ to explore the specific contributions of diaconal agencies to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Another ‘advantage’ of the terms ‘religious assets’ and ‘religious resources’ is that they open up a wider understanding of what religion can be about. Western notions tend to reduce religion to a set of ‘beliefs’ or ‘values’ and neglect the experiential, ritual and aesthetic dimensions of lived religion (Asad 2009). Likewise, terms like [religious] leadership, institutions and movements tend to emphasise the public and political aspects of religion whilst ignoring the religiosity and spirituality that inform people’s identity, worldview and behaviour.

This study seeks in particular to uncover the religious and spiritual resources that FBOs can mobilise to enhance civic space. These include prayer, preaching, sacrifice and meditation; a sense of oneness, devotion or inner peace; narratives and myths of origins and creation that shape people’s interpretation of the universe and their place in it; religious teachings, texts, images and symbols that provide moral-ethical guidance and inspiration; the joy and power emanating from religious communion, rituals and celebrations, and the sense of belonging to a community.

The assets listed in the box below were used during the study as a tentative ‘lists of indicators’ to help identify spiritual and religious resources.

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7) This approach was presented at the Ecumenical Strategic Forum on Diakonia and Sustainable Development in October 2017. The working group on ‘diakonia and development’ that presented this approach consisted of representatives of the WCC, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and ACT Alliance, and was presided by Rev. Dr. Kjell Nordstokke. See: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/ecumenical-diaconia-sharing-gods-gifts-at-all-tables (accessed 7 March 2018).
If You Need Us, Allow Us!  

Introduction

Gary Gardner distinguishes five religious assets that can bring to the effort to build a sustainable world (Gardner 2002: 11). They can be summarised as follows:

**Five Religious Assets by Gary Gardner**

In Invoking the Spirit: Religion and Spirituality in the Quest for a Sustainable World, Gary Gardner distinguishes five religious assets that religious leaders and institutions can bring to the effort to build a sustainable world. These are:

**The capacity to provide meaning by shaping one’s worldview/cosmology.** This is an important quality supporting community resilience. It helps people to develop a sense of self and world orientation, in particular in times of crisis and endurance.

**A moral political narrative oriented towards ‘compassion’ and the ‘common good’.** Religious narratives and teachings have influence over ethics, which in turn have influence over behaviours of the public and decision-makers.

**Moral authority and transformative leadership.** Religious leaders can inspire social change, and can exercise moral authority that transcends political differences and Machiavellian power play, by using models of power ‘with and for’ instead of ‘over’ the people.

**The capacity to generate social capital: bonds of trust, communication and cooperation and information dissemination that create strong communities.**

**Physical and financial resources: religious organisations have substantial material assets [e.g. in many countries they hold an average of 7% of the land area] and have ‘the power of numbers’, that is, a broad base of religious adherents that are receptive to proposals from FBOs.**

Adapted from Gardner 2002: 11-20

**Four Religious Resources by Gerrie ter Haar**

Gerrie ter Haar discerns four categories of religious resources that can inform faith-based development work. These are:

**Religious ideas** refers to the psychic attitudes that religion can induce, particularly in individuals, such as the subjective experience of inner change or transformation, which believers themselves often describe in terms of a vision or vocation or both. (Ter Haar 2011)

**Religious practices** refers to the content of belief, what people actually believe and why.

**Religious organisation** refers to the community aspect of religion, or how people organise themselves on the basis of their beliefs.

**Religious experience** refers to the community aspect of religion, or how people organise themselves on the basis of their beliefs.

Adapted from Gardner 2002: 11-20

**Religion and Development**

Development actors have traditionally regarded ‘religion’ as a special issue somewhat outside their efforts to bring well-being and economic growth to the world’s poor. Ter Haar convincingly shows that, in fact, religion and development are not that far apart by presenting them both as ‘a vision on how the world may be transformed’ (Ter Haar 2011). Religious and secular world-views – such as humanism, nationalism, Marxism, socialism – provide people with a story and perspective on ‘the good life, on what they hold sacred and wish to attain’ (Van der Wel 2011: 356). It provides them with practical directions – for example on land use, family life, property and finance – and with spiritual guidance in their ‘struggle for well-being, particularly under unstable and uncertain conditions’ (Jackson 2013: 25). As visions on how the world may be transformed, religion and development bear many similarities. In fact, it might be argued that ‘development’ evolved as an alternative secular-ideological project for a makeover of the world and humanity in the post-WWII-era.

Since the establishment of the United Nations and especially since the fall of the Berlin wall and the rise of the neo-liberal market model, development has increasingly been framed as a project for economic growth. Poverty is regarded as a main source of human suffering – of malnutrition, disease, maternal death and vulnerability to natural disaster and armed conflict – and consequently, economic growth is presented as the key solution to ending that suffering. Put differently, development may be regarded as an alternative programme for human salvation; as a project that seeks to eliminate human suffering by increasing people’s material assets.

Conventional development as promoted by the UN and Western DAC donors excels through a technical approach that measures human well-being in terms of objectives and indicators for economic growth, and criteria of cost-effectiveness. It builds on a strong belief in human progress: in the ability to create a better world and humanity through human endeavour. Rather than being based on faith in divine intervention, it builds on ‘faith in the honesty and competence of human actors, in the accuracy of information, the wisdom of one’s own investment decisions, and the efficacy of the legal and technological systems underpinning market exchange’ (Calhoun 2011: 37).

Paying attention to the origins of development is important as it helps to reveal two recurring misunderstandings related to religion and development:

**Other than is often assumed, secular development programmes are not simply ‘neutral’ or ‘technical’ interventions but are normative too. They build on particular views**
of human life, poverty, suffering, progress and well-being, and particular programmes for ‘human salvation’ such as economic growth and the ‘rights-based approach’.

Religious and secular approaches to development do not necessarily conflict. On the contrary, many secular development organisations and projects evolved from (Christian) religious traditions of charity, missionary and diaconal work. Likewise, faith-based and rights-based approaches to development are not necessarily incommensurable, for ‘it belongs to the distinct nature of the church to be committed by faith to struggle for justice’ (Nordstokke 2013: 242).

Research Methodology, Focus and Limitations

Methodology

The research consisted of several phases, each of which was closely accompanied by a project team of three Civic Engagement Alliance staff members: Gonda de Haan and Piet Posthuma from ICCO/Kerk in Actie and Joanne van der Schee from Prisma. First, a research or inception plan was developed based on the Terms of Reference (ToR). Then, a desk study was conducted based on a quick review of relevant literature and a series of interviews with resource persons in the Netherlands. Based on these interviews and consultations with ICCO/Kerk in Actie field staff, countries and case studies were selected. Finally, short field studies were conducted in Kenya (5 days), Ethiopia (3 days) and Indonesia (6 days) that consisted of a mix of interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and project visits. In total, 49 individuals were consulted or interviewed as part of this research, and an additional 13 FGDs were held in Kenya and Indonesia. A full list of resource persons and interviewees is provided in the Annex.

The research built on the theoretical framework that was developed as part of the desk study. The key concepts of this framework were presented above. Based on the research questions provided in the ToR and the inception plan, semi-structured interviews were designed to guide the data collection in the field. In addition, techniques from the Most Significant Change (MSC) method were used during the FGDs. Frameworks for analysis – to determine FBO contributions to enhancing civic space, on FBO typology, and on religious assets in development work – were developed as part of the inception plan and desk study. Context and actor analyses were used to describe the position of different faith-based actors within civil society at large in selected countries (objective 1).

Additional Thematic Focus

The research examined the role of FBOs in enhancing space for civil society at large. In addition, it investigated the role of FBOs in advocating issues related to food and nutrition security, small-scale sustainable farming and responsible entrepreneurship. This additional thematic focus was initially motivated by a practical, internal reason. As these issues constitute the three pathways of change of the Civic Engagement Alliance program – in addition to pathway I that focuses on space for civil society – these were the areas of knowledge and experience of the Civic Engagement Alliance members from which this research could draw.

There are other reasons too for taking a broader thematic focus. One of the developments that has contributed to the shrinking space for civil society is the growing influence of transnational corporations and the neo-liberal market ideology. Consequently, CSOs that work on human rights, labour rights and access to land and or natural resources may find they are hampered in their work or are the target of hostilities, because their work may threaten the interests of powerful economic actors (ICCO Consortium 2015: 16).

Moreover, Christian faith traditions and social-justice movements have historically distinguished themselves by acting in solidarity with the (poorest of the) poor and marginalised. Related to this, Christianity has a tradition of critique of capitalism and neo-liberal market ideologies. In the 1970s and 80s, liberation theologians – like Paulo Freire who worked as a consultant for the World Council of Churches (WCC) – strongly denounced ‘capitalism, consumerism and economic competition’ (Leopando 2017: 172).


10) The MSC Technique, developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart (2005), involves the collection of significant change stories from the field. Storytelling helps us to share our knowledge with context and emotion. This is important as the research wishes to engage and motivate [non-religious] donors, government representatives and CSOs as well as internal staff members of the Civic Engagement Alliance. MSC also helps to identify critical moments or tipping points in the change process.
Today, the WCC continues to issue similar fundamental critiques through international fora that propose alternatives to unequal economic growth and globalisation – for example through the AGAPE process [Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth, 1998-2008], the Poverty, Wealth and Ecology project (2007-2013) and the statement on ‘Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All’ [2012] (Mshana and Peralta 2015). Such Christian social ethics may find new resonance and use in contemporary social movements that protest against economic globalisation, and the growing disparities between the rich and poor in the world.

Limitations
The research encountered several limitations in terms of time, selected countries, partner organisations and informants. The selection of countries and partners was influenced by practicalities, such as the availability and willingness of country offices to cooperate and considerations about travel time and distance to project locations. The initial plan was to conduct research on three different continents, including Central or South America. Because of limited time, however, it was decided to study two countries in Africa and one in Asia instead. Another criterion was to select countries with differing political contexts and related challenges to civic space. Thus, Kenya represents a country with a strong civil society, that is nonetheless struggling with the aftermath of the 2007 post-election violence and a loss of trust in religious leaders as a result of that violence. Indonesia represents a country in which space for new religious movements has rapidly expanded over the past decade, sparking both incidents of religious violence and calls for a return to the state ideal of religious pluralism. Ethiopia represents what until recently was called a closed society - with an authoritarian regime that severely limited civic action and political opposition – but is currently experiencing a rapid transition to an open, democratic society.

Partners and projects that participated in the field research were selected from amongst the local partners of the seven organisations making up the Civic Engagement Alliance. As such, the research is limited by a focus on Christian faith-based organisations and perhaps even hampered by an ‘in-crowd’ perspective. To address these limitations, in each country, projects were selected from different types of FBOs: faith-permeated, faith-centred, faith-background and secular organisations. In addition, representatives of other faith communities were interviewed in each of the three country studies.

Structure
The report opens with an executive summary that draws from the three country studies. The summary begins by highlighting the specific historical-political context of each country within which the studied FBOs operate. It then lists and describes a series of religious resources that FBOs can mobilise to enhance civic space, and the different roles that FBOs can take to enhance civic space for civil society at large. The executive summary does not include details on the background of the research and on the methodology, as these are described in the Introduction.

The three separate country studies constitute the body of this research report: chapter one presents the findings for Kenya, chapter two those for Ethiopia and chapter three describes the findings for Indonesia. Each of these chapters follow more or less the same structure. The first sections provide a brief background on religion and spirituality in the respective country. The second identify religious institutions and FBOs that seem particularly influential in advocating the interests of marginalised peoples. The third sections present the state of affairs of civic space in the given country. Sections four and five of each chapter present case studies on national and local influencing activities respectively of the FBOs that were visited as part of the field research.

The report closes with some reflections on the development of a faith-sensitive approach to development, and with a series of recommendations for donors, secular and faith-based development actors.
1. Kenya

1.1 Religion and Spirituality

Penye mengi, pana mungu, ‘Where there are many people, there is God’ reads a Swahili proverb. Religion and spirituality are foundational to Kenya’s society and identity: over 96% of the population has a religious affiliation. According to the 2009 census, over 80% of Kenyans are Christian (47.7% Protestant; 23.4% Catholic; 11.2% other Christian belief), 11.2% are Muslims, 1.7% practise a traditional or indigenous religion and less than 1% of the Kenyan population is Hindu.11 Atheists and agnostics comprise a very small number of Kenya’s population.

God, faith and spirituality shape the everyday lives and experiences of the majority of Kenyan people. Places of worship can be found everywhere around the country – from the booming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>9,010,684</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>18,307,466</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>4,559,584</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>4,304,798</td>
<td>11.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalist</td>
<td>635,352</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>557,450</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion</td>
<td>922,128</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>61,233</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38,412,088</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


capital of Nairobi to the remote settlements of Turkana. Many schools and hospitals continue to be run by Christian churches and missionary organisations. Churches and mosques provide technical assistance, education and land to small farmers. Local pastors, imams and traditional healers are often the first people that Kenyans turn to when facing family problems, poverty or illness. A survey amongst Muslims and Christians in 2008 found that 95% of Muslims and 86% of Christians regarded religion as ‘very important’ in their lives; 81% of all respondents said they attended religious services at least once a week [Marshall 2017: 30]. Although people’s trust in religious leaders received a considerable blow following the 2007 post-election violence, a 2016 survey conducted amongst Kenyan youth by the Aga Khan University found that 86% of the respondents still reported religious institutions as those most trusted after family [Marshall 2017: 31].

The current religious landscape in Kenya was largely shaped during the British colonial era. This explains the continuing dominance of Christianity in the country. When Kenya became a colony of Britain in 1920, the administration began to ‘allocate’ areas to different missions of the Church Mission Society (CMS), allowing them to conduct their missionary and development activities in support of the British colonial mission. However, Islam was the first foreign religion to set foot in Kenya. Around 700 AD, two local chiefs who refused to submit to the Caliph in Damascus fled to the coast and established a first Ibad (school of Islam) state on the island of Pate. A second wave of Muslim traders from the Middle East arrived in the tenth century. Eventually, the area came under control of various Sultanes, one of which was the Zanzibar Sultanate, established in 1856. When the British administration took control of the area in 1895, they renewed an agreement with the Sultan of Zanzibar that ensured Muslims living on the coast of the protectorate could continue to practise their religion and observe sharia law.

Indigenous beliefs and practices continue to play an important role in the worldviews and beliefs of Kenyan Christians and Muslims. Traditional faith systems were present in Kenyan society long before Islam and Christianity entered the area and still inform people’s relations with the environment and other people today [Marshall 2017: 33-34]. People who seek healing often attend multiple worship services in different places, including those of traditional healers [Marshall 2017: 31]. African Christianity has blended with a strong belief in the Spirit and spiritual power; with a belief in an invisible world, that is distinct but not separate from the visible one, and that is home to spiritual beings or entities that are deemed to have effective powers over the material world [Ter Haar 2011: 11].

Although Hindus comprise less than one percent of the religious population in Kenya, they have a strong presence and are well integrated into Kenyan society. In between 1898 and 1901, about 32,000 laborers were recruited from British India to work on the Uganda railway and were later joined by their families [Marshall 2017: 40]. Today, about 70% of all Indian diaspora in Africa are Hindu. In Kenya, the Hindu community is represented by the Hindu Council of Kenya, which has about 50 member institutions. The council promotes and serve the needs of the Hindu community and plays an important role in interfaith initiatives [Marshall 2017: 56].

Despite the importance of religion, ethnicity remains the strongest binding force in Kenya. The country is home to 42 different ethnic groups of which the largest are the Kikuyu (20% of the total population), the Luhyas (14%), the Kalenjin (13%), and the Luo (10%) [Marshall 2017: 29]. Historically, the various tribes or ethnic groups had their own language, cultural practices and belief systems that shaped their livelihood system and cosmology. The Borana, Gabra, Rendille and Samburu ethnic communities, for example share four common traits: nomadic (or semi-nomadic) lifestyle, economy based on raising livestock, a culture closely aware of the passage of time, and a religion closely connected to natural phenomena [Marshall 2017: 34].

Colonial powers often used tribal antagonisms to apply divide-and-rule strategies. Post-independence leaders continued to play the ethnic card to attain positions of power [Gumo et al. 2012: 36]. Today, ethnicity trumps religion as marker of identity and this comes to the fore especially during election times, as will be further explained below.

1.2 Influential Religious Institutions and Faith-Based Organisations

"Faith-based organisations act from conviction that [development and humanitarian response] is their mandate – their God-given mandate...".

- Wasye Musioni, 21 May 2018

The landscape of institutionalised religion in Kenya is patterned by a wide array of different denominations. The rapidly growing Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK, Protestant) for example has 308 denominations [Marshall 2017: 29]. Yet, at the same time, the strict hierarchic structures of the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church and the well-organised [advocacy] work of church and mosque coordination bodies ensure that religious
institutions and religious leaders in Kenya have a strong voice in a variety of matters relating to governance and sustainable development – and they do not refrain from using that voice. To name a few examples: religious leaders and institutions in Kenya advocated a multi-party democracy in the mid-1980s, developed a draft Constitution that was approved by referendum in August 2010, provide support to local communities to ensure they have a say in the development plans of the newly established county administrations, and organised election monitoring to ensure fair and peaceful parliamentary and presidential elections in 2017.

Although the majority of these advocacy campaigns were implemented through inter-faith cooperation, it is useful to zoom in on Christian and Muslim faith-based organisations that seem particularly influential in lobbying issues of governance and sustainable development. The Anglican Church and the Catholic Church are the largest and most influential faith-based organisations in Kenya. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) and the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) follow as strong seconds.

Islamic FB0s

‘Of late we have seen flexing of muscles by the Muslim-based organisations, claiming space in the social and development environment. Particularly with the rise of violent extremism and the role of religion therein.’
- Wasye Musioni, Program Manager Norwegian Church Aid, 22 May 2018

The majority of Muslims in Kenya are Sunni, but there are also Shi’a and Ahmadi Muslims [Marshall 2017: 29]. Although Muslim associations were divided during the colonial era – often along ethnic or racial (African/Asian) lines – much more coordination has taken place since the establishment of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) in 1973. SUPKEM is the umbrella body of the majority of Muslim organisations, societies and groups in Kenya [Ndzovu 2014: 80]. It actively participates in national debates on a variety of issues such as peace, security, governance and health and implements a wide diversity of social-community services in health and education [Marshall 2017: 43].

Many of the informants interviewed for this study stated that they have observed an increase in self-confidence amongst Muslim leaders and organisations. ‘Since the 1990s, things have changed from Muslims protesting against perceived discrimination by the government to Muslims seeking to shape the direction of Kenya’s politics’ [Ndzovu 2014: 79]. When the multi-party system was established in Kenya in 1992, Muslims initially all joined the same political party but changed strategy when they realised this meant they remained stuck in opposition. They began to advocate inclusion and became members of the various political parties. During the same period, after decades of marginalisation, Muslims started to receive better education. According to one informant, ‘we have more Muslims in key government positions than before. In the army, in the police. The former head of Foreign Affairs was a Muslim’.12 Yet perspectives on the marginalisation of Muslims differ strongly per region. Along the coast, where they form the majority, Muslims tend to experience less political discrimination than in Kisumu where two Muslim representatives who ran as candidates in the county assembly elections experienced structural exclusion.13

The activities of the extremist group Al-Shabaab and the terrorist attacks on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi [2013] and Garissa University [2015] have also drawn attention to the position of Muslims in Kenya [Marshall 2017: 40]. In some cases, the attacks have increased tensions between Muslims and Christians. Some mosques have had to increase security measures, fearing retaliations, whilst suspicion against Somali Muslims in particular has increased. In other cases, the attacks have strengthened interfaith cooperation and contributed to a mushrooming of joint anti-radicalisation programmes and interfaith dialogues.

Other important coordinating bodies of Islamic leaders and their organisations in Kenya are the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK), established in 1987, and the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF), founded in 2003. These two organisations are not members of SUPKEM and have played an important role in providing more critical social-political leadership than SUPKEM, which has been criticised by some as being too accommodating towards the Government of Kenya [Ndzovu 2014: 100]. CIPK plays an important role in dialogue to reduce tensions and promote cooperation and unity amongst Kenyans [Marshall 2014: 20].

12) Interview with Tim Ekesa, director of Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (KAACR), Nairobi, 21 May 2018
13) Interview with Farida Ahmed Salim, coordinator of Kisumu Women Muslim Network and Hanif Rana, social worker and Muslim representative in Kisumu, 23 May 2018, Kisumu.
The organisation aims to promote social justice, human and basic rights, good governance, and equitable socio-economic growth and development for all Kenyans (Ndlovu 2014: 100).

**Good Read**

Katherine Marshall, a pioneer in the study of religion and development, recently published an extensive mapping and study on the roles and activities of faith-based organisations in Kenya’s development. Although this research report builds on Marshall, it can only provide some of her analysis. Those who wish to learn more are advised to consult Marshall’s publication, which is freely available on the internet.


**Christian FBOs**

Of the various Christian FBOs, the Catholic Church is most influential because it is the largest in terms of members (estimated at more than 23% of the population), has substantial resources [schools, hospitals, educated personnel], and continues to have a great impact on the country’s development. Some of the most prominent people in Kenya, including President Uhuru Kenyatta, were educated at Catholic schools (Marshall 2017: 36). Besides, the Catholic Church occupies a special place in parliament, as Dr Agnes Abuom, Kenyan expert on religion and President of the World Council of Churches explained: ‘When you talk about strategic organisations, you cannot miss the Episcopal Conference of Bishops. It is a bit quiet but it has methodologies that are different. For example, the Episcopal Conference has a presence in the parliament, it monitors discussions in parliament. As such, it no longer just relies on pastoral letters but has other ways of lobbying’. Despite its strict position on for example the use of condoms, the Catholic Church in Kenya plays a significant role in discussing sensitive issues related to gender-based violence, sexual reproductive health and HIV-Aids with its congregation members.

The Anglican Church is second in terms of numbers: it has an estimated 4.5 million members, which equals about 10% of the country’s population. The Anglican Church in Kenya was established by two German Protestant missionaries in 1844 and evolved from the Church Mission Society (CMS), the official church of the colonial administration (Marshall 2017: 36). It was influential because of its close ties with the colonial powers but also because of its strong educational system. As the Anglicans concentrated their work in the Central Highlands of Kenya, this especially benefited the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group living in this area (ibid.).

**Statements Delivered by the Anglican Church in Response to the Upheaval Following the 2017 Presidential Elections**

On 27 September 2017, the Anglican Church of Kenya delivered the following statements as part of a Press Statement that was issued in response to the upheaval and violent protests following the nullification of the outcome of the presidential elections by the Supreme Court earlier that month. Such press statements, as well as the statements in the pastoral letters that reach hundreds of Anglican parishes weekly, are prepared after close consultation between the Church’s Development department (ADS) and the Anglican Archbishop.

**National Dialogue Conference**

‘Given that our Nation is on the brink of disaster, unless our political leaders change course and begin embracing dialogue to solve our immediate challenges, we call for an urgent national dialogue conference to discuss the current state of the Nation and agree on ways of resolving the current political and social crisis… We can better address issues of concern through dialogue other than running battles in the streets. We, the Anglican Church are willing to lead this effort in collaboration with other religious leaders.’

**Proposed Constitution Amendments**

‘We note with deep concern the proposal to amend the constitution as a way of responding to independent decisions made by certain arms of the government and institutions. This is an unacceptable path since it will lead to mutilation of the constitution and weakening of those institutions.’

14) Interview with Agnes Abuom, Nairobi, 22 May 2018.
The Anglican Church is renowned for its political activism. “They were the rebels in the late 1980s, protesting against the one-party state.” They also protested against the Mau Mau Rebellion in the 1950s, a nationalist uprising that started amongst the Kikuyu and used spiritual rituals and oaths to mobilise warriors [Marshall 2017: 33]. Although several of the respondents that were interviewed for this study expressed disappointment at what they regard as the loss of this independent, critical voice of the Anglican Church, they also commented that some individual Anglican church leaders continue to issue outspoken and critical statements in response to government policies and actions.

Like the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church has been actively engaged in development through various health, education and agricultural development projects since its early beginnings. In 1983, it established a special department for development called the Anglican Development Services (ADS). ‘As a church, we make sure that the communities of faith are living fulfilled lives. We talk of holistic ministry. A human being must be spiritually nourished… [but] we are also sensitive to the physical needs of the people… About education, health, food security… about a dignified way of living.’ In 2016, ADS had 595 staff members in its 33 dioceses across the country working on various activities related to community development, advocacy, climate change adaptation and capacity development.

Organisational Structure of the Anglican Church of Kenya

The Anglican Church of Kenya is led by an archbishop, and it forms part of the global Anglican Communion. A system of geographical parishes is organised into 33 dioceses, each headed by a bishop. The synod is the governing council of the church. In 1954, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists jointly established St Paul’s United Theological College in Limuru. Today, St Paul’s is a Christian chartered university offering a broad theological education, with its main campus in Limuru and other campuses in Nairobi, Nakuru, and Machakos.


The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) was founded in 1913 during a United Missionary Conference near Nairobi. Today, its members include 27 churches and 17 Christian organisations. The NCCK was established from a desire to work ‘towards a united church that would impact the lives of the people’ and aims to ‘transform lives through ecumenism, capacity building, advocacy and service delivery’. Most of its 27 members belong to the mainline Protestant churches and identify themselves as evangelical [Marshall 2017: 38]. The Catholic Church is not a member of the NCCK.

The NCCK has especially been strong in grassroots mobilisation through its conscious use of a bottom-up approach. The NCCK has 9 regional offices that organise regional conferences in which the various county commissions present issues of concern. These regional agendas are then brought to the annual General Assembly that sets out the directions for the NCCK agenda based on the regional input. The consultative process goes up to the smallest constituency, which is usually the parish.

Another influential body of churches are the African Instituted or Independent Churches (AICs), homegrown churches that were established during the colonial period and combine indigenous and Christian forms of worship. They are one of the fastest growing churches in Africa. In Kenya alone, 58 different churches are registered as members of the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), and other estimates suggest that 700 of these churches in Kenya represent an estimated 25% of Kenyan Christians [Marshall 2017: 38].

15) Interview with advocacy programme coordinator of the Kenya Development Cooperation Fund (KDCF), 22 May 2018.
16) Interview with Mr Bwibo Adieri, Secretary to the ADS Board, Nairobi, 21 May 2018.
19) Interview with Wasye Musioni, Programme Manager Norwegian Church Aid - Kenya and former staff member of the NCCK, Nairobi, 22 May 2018.
AICs were founded without outside financial support, or by breaking away from missionary churches ‘often inspired by a charismatic individual or in reaction against Western or colonial norms’ (Ibid.). According to Esther Mombo, Professor of Theology at St Paul’s University, Limuru, AICs regard themselves as different from the mainline churches as they are particularly well-rooted in the poor and marginalised communities and can act on a relatively independent basis, both financially and in terms of decision-making:

“You have mainline churches and the African Instituted Churches. The African Instituted Churches are basically on the margins. If you go to the city, they are in the slums, they are not in the centre. They are marginalised as a church… They begin from a position of poverty. When they work on food security they think of how the community feeds each other – even if it is about one meal on a Sunday, that is the way they live…Their understanding of sustainable development and food security is one that should be investigated more.

Mainline churches are so influenced by Western capitalism. Even if we [Anglican church] are doing aid, it is really along the capitalist mode – thinking of self-reliance and provision. The AIC think more in terms of church and community. They help each other especially within the poverty-stricken context… They take on the realities of the communities that they live with… They take the needs of their members there and then, much more than the bigger churches where people do not know each other. Where issues of class come in and position’.

Esther Mombo, 21 May 2018

The activities of two such AICs, notably the Church of Peace and the African Divine Church, are described in the case study below on the Children at Risk Coalition in Western Kenya. Before coming to that, however, we will discuss the role of FBOs in enhancing civic space through lobby and advocacy at the national level.

1.3 Civic Space
Space for civil society has been shrinking over recent years in Kenya; this is due to at least three developments. The Government of Kenya introduced measures and legislation that have reduced the operational space of CSOs, particularly for those engaged in human rights advocacy. Second, funding flows from Western DAC donors have been reduced and many [Western] INGOs have changed their role from donors to implementers. And third, Kenyan CSOs’ self-regulation has been weak, which has contributed to a loss of trust and legitimacy amongst the Kenyan population.

According to several civil society observers in Kenya and abroad, Kenyan CSOs and Western INGOs have indirectly contributed to what is now experienced as a governmental crackdown on CSOs. Kenyan CSOs had enjoyed substantial political power in the recent past through the key role they played in drafting the new Constitution that was adopted in 2010. In addition, supported and financed by Western DAC donors and international NGOs, Kenyan CSOs and FBOs have been main actors in the country’s development and service delivery – in health, education, agriculture and other livelihood schemes. An unintended side-effect of this was that they took over some roles previously carried out by the government and this contributed to a decrease in trust in the capacity of government administration. ‘For long, Western donors have had a preference to fund CSOs and starve the Government of Kenya of resources,’ commented Wasye Musioni, NCA Program Manager. ‘They thereby killed people’s trust and hope in the government that should [actually] deliver development. The government feels cornered. The only way they can reclaim power is by limiting the space of CSOs. So of course, the government has clamped down on CSOs, especially on those working on governance and human rights.’

CSO influence initially increased when, after the adoption of the new Constitution in 2010, they gained more political space. Kenyan civil society was vibrant and comprised an estimated 8,000 registered NGOs and over 300,000 registered Community Based Organisations (CBOs). To improve the regulation, transparency and accountability of CSOs, CSO representatives began to draft a new law that would regulate civil society, called the
Public Benefit Organisations (PBO) Act. The PBO Act proposed, amongst others, that the various NGO coordination boards would be merged into one single organisation that would act as the main counterpart to allocate government funding to NGOs, and as the main spokesperson for Kenyan CSOs. ‘We wanted a government act that would help coordinate resources, that would help monitor the utilisation of resources and provide coherence and accountability to the community,’ recalled Agnes Aborum. Yet by the time the PBO Act was adopted by parliament in 2013, the Government of Kenya had experienced sharp protests about and criticism of its governmental reform plans. When the incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta then won the 2013 elections by a very small margin (he won 50.07% of the vote), the government may have perceived this as another sign of a civil society that had grown too powerful. ‘The impact of CSOs scared the government,’ said Tim Ekésa, director of the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children (KAACR). The PBO Act was never implemented. Instead, amendments were made that proposed that 85% of all CSO funding had to be drawn from domestic donors and other measures were introduced that hit those working on human rights and advocacy particularly hard. ‘These proposals were actually hybrids of those implemented in Uganda and Ethiopia,’ said Wasye Musioni. These neighbouring countries had already introduced stricter NGO regulations. ‘The government saw that Western diplomats and donors no longer protested such restrictions on NGOs, so concluded they could follow suit without any real repercussion,’ observed Musioni.

Musioni’s observation is supported by an article that analyses patterns of shrinking space for CSOs in Kenya by Jacqueline Wood (2016). Wood observes that many of the anti-CSO narratives spread by the Government of Kenya are intertwined with narratives displaying anti-Western sentiment (Wood 2016: 534). CSOs are often accused of ‘speaking the voice of foreign masters’ and this is, to some extent, true. Historically, Kenyan CSOs often aligned with Western donors, for example when opposing government reform plans, when supporting moves by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute members of the Kenyan government, and when contesting the outcomes of the 2013 elections (Wood 2016: 535-536). Lately, however, Western donors have reduced their support for these Kenyan CSOs, as they prioritise their relations with the government as an ally in their counter-terror campaign (Wood 2016: 537).

Indeed, funding patterns of Western DAC donors and INGOs have been changing recently and this is the second factor contributing to shrinking space. It is not only their joint interest in countering international terrorism that makes Western DAC donors and diplomats less critical of the Kenyan government’s measures to limit space for civil society. Because of major cuts in the budgets for development cooperation in Western donor countries, many international NGOs have changed from being donors to southern civil society organisations to becoming implementers of development programmes themselves. ‘We are facing a lot of funding problems because of international NGOs,’ said Tim Ekésa, KAACR director. ‘First they supported CSOs, but because of the funding problems they face, they have now all established national branches that are displacing local CSOs. Before we got money from Save the Children, but now they have started implementing programmes themselves. They go in to a community for three years and then leave again because the funding is finished, leaving the community behind.’ Tim has the impression that faith-based organisations tend to retain their role as donors more than secular INGOs do. In that sense, their funding strategies seem to be more conducive to space for national and local civil society.

Last but not least, Kenyan CSOs themselves have contributed to the shrinking of space for civil society. In a critical self-analysis, ICCO-Cooperation Kenya mentions the weak institutional capacity of civil society to engage in effective policy influencing, the unclear strategic direction of the CSO sector that threatens its relevance and legitimacy, and the lack of coordination, which leads to overlap of service delivery and duplication (ICCO Consortium 2016b: 13).

As faith-based organisations have a somewhat different position in Kenya, the next section will discuss some examples of how faith-based organisations have managed to enhance space for civil society at large, employing moral religious leadership in various ways.

1.4 National Influencing

a. Enhancing Space for Civil Society at Large

Under British colonial rule and during the first years of Kenya’s independence (1963), the church was very close to the government. Many government development projects were implemented by the Church - initially by the Anglican Church and, later by the Catholic Church as well. Relations between church and government remained cordial under President Jomo Kenyatta. This began to change when President Moi, who took office in 1978, started to repress political opponents.
Following an alleged coup, President Moi amended the Constitution to officially turn Kenya into a one-party state. In 1986, he replaced the secret ballot by a ‘queuing system’ that required each voter to queue behind a candidate thereby allowing Moi to detect party loyalists and expel those perceived as dissidents (Ndzovu 2014: 56). Many political opponents were imprisoned and suffered mistreatment and torture. In addition, Moi replaced many leaders in his administration that were of Kikuyu descent with people from his own Kalenjin background (Marshall 2017: 45).

These developments worried the Anglican Church, which had a large Kikuyu membership and was critical of the oppression of political opposition. When political and civil society activists became too afraid to speak up, fearing prosecution and imprisonment, the Anglican Bishops Henry Okullu, Alexander Muge, and David Gitari, as well as Presbyterian Timothy Njoya became vocal opponents of governmental oppression (Marshall 2017: 45). With support from the NCCK, the religious leaders ‘pressed for the repeal of the 1982 clause mandating a one-party state, as well as wider constitutional reform’ (Marshall 2017: 46). ‘They were radical leaders… the rebels from the Church who tried to protect civic space,’ commented David Barissa, director of the NGO Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF). Lawyers and politicians from the opposition joined the church-led protests that eventually led to the first multi-party elections in Kenya in 1992.

This success was followed by a second hallmark in Kenya’s faith-led pro-democracy movement. In 1999, President Moi announced a long-awaited review of the Constitution. In response, the NCCK organised a shadow process of the constitutional reform with representatives from all different faith-communities and civil society: the Ufungamano Initiative. The Ufungamano Initiative

Religious leaders […] established their own [constitutional] review process called the Ufungamano Initiative, named after a building jointly owned by NCCK and the Kenya Episcopal Conference where the group met. Ufungamano ultimately came to encompass 54 different human rights organizations, religious groups, women’s rights organizations, youth groups, and opposition parties that represented various conflicting interests. The movement sought to create a wider base of consultation with civil society, stressing openness, transparency, inclusivity, accessibility, and accountability as key principles of the constitutional review process. In June 2000 the Ufungamano Initiative announced the formation of the People’s Commission, which would draw up its own proposals for a constitution. This pressured the government to pass the Constitution of Kenya Amendment Bill in July. By June 2001, ten members of the People’s Commission had been added to the official Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC). Source: Marshall 2017: 48.

The trust in Kenya’s religious leadership received a severe blow during the post-election violence of 2007 and 2008. Religious leaders failed to adequately respond to the communal and ethnic violence because they were regarded as partisan and ‘lacked the credibility and cohesion to act as moral leaders and independent mediators’ (Marshall 2017: 23). In acknowledgement of that negative role, the NCCK organised a visit to Rwanda for religious leaders from different ethnic backgrounds after the post-election violence had ended. According to observers, this convinced participants to stay far from any form of identity politics.21

Today, however, religious leaders seem to fall back on not taking a stance at all during elections. During the recent 2017 elections, for example, only a few individual religious leaders denounced the violence committed by governmental security forces (police) against political opposition groups and even children in Kisumu, Western Kenya. And even then, you do not know if they do so because of their role as moral leaders, or because the violence affected their [ethnic] people,” commented Wasye.22

b. Advocating Women’s Faith-Inspired Leadership in the Church and Beyond

When prompted, most interviewees mentioned [poor] women, youth and people with disabilities as the most marginalised groups in contemporary Kenyan society. Women not only find it hard to gain positions in political and governmental decision-making. Within the church, they also experience similar resistance when struggling for gender equality.

21) Interview with Wasye Musioni and Agnes Abuom, 22 May 2018.
22) Interview with Wasye Musioni, 22 May 2018, Nairobi.
Religious institutions are renowned advocates of poor and marginalised peoples, but can also act as conservative power blocks that sustain the structural exclusion of women. ‘The Anglican Church is all about hierarchy and power,’ one informant commented. At the same time, the hierarchic structures and the strictly regulated decision-making processes of the Anglican Church can also be used for influencing from within.

Esther Mombo, a long-time partner of Civic Engagement Alliance member Kerk in Actie, cleverly used these inside channels to advocate the ordination of women in the Anglican church. In the mid-1980s, Esther and two other women who had received basic theological training as so-called Church Army sisters, decided to speak up about women’s ordination at an Anglican synod:

*We did not know the protocol or the procedure. One man said, ‘you can bring a motion to the synod from the floor’. Somebody helped us to craft it and all hell broke loose. We read out the motion and people shouted… They were really abusive, shouting. But it had now entered into the minutes. So the following year, they had to discuss it.*

*Esther Mombo, 21 May 2018*

After her initial advocacy in the 1980s, Mombo went to Edinburgh to study for a PhD in Theology. When she returned to Kenya in 1997, ‘things had begun to change’. The issue of women’s ordination was now on the agenda of every Anglican diocese in Kenya. Moreover, Dr Mombo noticed that her PhD title opened many more doors within the Church as it increased her status and leverage. ‘I could now speak and name things that maybe I did not have the language to speak of [before]… [Now] they had to listen.’

At the same time, Mombo began to advocate reforms within St Paul’s University – the main body for theological higher education established by Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists in 1954. In 1999, she was appointed academic dean of St Pauls. Much to her dismay, she noticed that of the 100 students studying theology, 85 were men. She realised that improving access for female students would be another way to support the eventual ordination of women. ‘It was very hard for them [women] to study theology, because theology was linked to ordination… If theology is linked to ordination, women will never come to study… So ordination is one story and theological education another. Let’s empower women theologically.’

Mombo and her colleagues convinced the University Council to open up theological study for all interested parties, not only for those seeking ordination. When the Council agreed, the number of women increased somewhat but remained relatively small. Mombo realised that many women struggled to raise the funds to study. She then began to engage in national and international fundraising for female students, amongst others from Kerk in Actie. In addition, she changed the learning environment and increased the scope and inclusivity of the curriculum: ‘we introduced classes around women, HIV and Islam’. As a result, ‘The numbers [of women studying at St Pauls] increased from 10, when I started here in 1999, to over 100 when I served [as a Dean]. Upon completion, most of the churches welcomed these women and gave them positions of leadership.’

This experience taught Esther that ‘things can happen. It takes long, but it can happen.’

Advocating women’s equality within the Church caused many hard times and setbacks. Yet through that struggle, Esther Mombo has developed strong skills as a female religious leader, some of which are listed in the text box below.

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**Qualities of transformative religious leadership:**

Knowing yourself: knowing your strengths and weaknesses.

Knowing the context that you chose to work in.

Understanding the dynamics of that context, for ‘people say one thing but do another’.

Focus and not losing that focus. Study must be done that empowers women. They must grow.

A network of people of the same mind.

Dare to be ‘nasty’. Engaging in debates, political advocacy and networking: for that is part of the game.

Support, from friends and other like-minded activist-religious leaders.

Supportive men who know that what you are standing for is true. Because ‘women’s ordination would not be in place if you had no men to support that’.

*Esther Mombo, 21 May 2018*
Esther Mombo continues to find personal inspiration for her struggle in her faith:

I grew up in the church… My conviction was that God has a place in creation, [including] in my own life. I am not here by mistake. Jesus has played a part in bringing liberation and this liberation is not just in the heart: it has to be seen within society… My belief in God is a source of my motivation to seek, to deal with barriers that marginalise both men and women.

Esther Mombo, 21 May 2018

Building a strong support network of faith-inspired women was very important to Esther, ‘for it can be very lonely’. Esther found much of this support in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, that was founded in 1989 in Ghana, under the leadership of Professor Mercy Amba Oduyoye. ‘That Circle gave even more impact, because it was not just something that I was doing, there were other women in the continent doing it. The spirit was to lead and encourage women to do theology, to take positions in the church, to do research and write. So that also was an impetus.’ In turn, Esther continues to provide support to former female students from St Pauls. ‘Even today, I have [contact with] many women who study in different places around the world… so that I just see that it is going well.’

The importance of women’s networks across borders again comes to the fore in the story of Farida Ahmed Salim, a very talented and dedicated woman from Kisumu who has worked actively with Muslim women since 2012 and served as a women’s representative in the first County Assembly of Kisumu. She tried to win a seat in two subsequent elections. Much to her frustration, she did not succeed because of the various stumbling blocks she encountered as a Muslim woman with political ambitions in Kisumu. Kisumu politics is dominated by men and by the Luo people who have a Christian background. Farida received multiple threats when running as a candidate.

Recently, Farida and other women activists established the Kisumu Women of Faith Network. Together, these women want to roll out a strategy to ensure that in the next elections, many more women of various faith backgrounds will get elected:

We are coming from different religious coordinating bodies: from NCCK, women from SDA [Seventh-Day Adventists], Catholics, Muslim women, Hindu women. We decided to come together from different faiths because our problems are the same… When it comes to representation in the government, it has been a challenge across the board. The few of us who were already lucky to be there need to join hands with women out here who need to be represented in matters of health, education, security, child rights, youth empowerment. We need to have a common bargaining voice to champion women in governance.

Farida Ahmed Salim, 23 May 2018

The Kisumu Women of Faith Network will officially be launched in June 2018. From that time onwards, it will roll out a lobby and advocacy campaign to ensure that during the next elections, in 2022, many more women will be elected to government. ‘Men have been on top of everything and women of faith have been sidelined. We want to be in the arena where we can raise our voice on certain issues and it is heard and addressed. We want to play a role.’

1.5 Local Influencing

a. The Children at Risk Coalition Western Kenya

Context and Background
Despite the growth of the number of children attending school in the ages of 5-17 years, child labour remains a substantial problem in Kenya, especially in the rural areas. A survey by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and ILO conducted in the school year 2005/2006 found that 1,012,184 children (52.9% boys, 47.1% girls) were working.25 47.8% of these children were in the age group 15-17, 36.4% in the age group 10-14 and 15.8% in the age group 5-9. About 89.8% of these children live in rural areas.26

In 2012, the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children (KAACR), the Rural AIDS Prevention and Development Organization (RAPADD) and the African Divine Church (ADC) decided to jointly establish a child protection programme in Western Kenya, named the Children at Risk (CaR) programme. The programme was implemented in the Vihiga, Kisumu

25) Out of a total population of children aged 5-7 was 12.8 million in 2005/2006, comprising about 35 percent of Kenya’s total population.
The Capacitating Civil Society to Combat Child Labour programme, launched in May 2016, aims to eliminate and remediate all forms of child labour and to ensure the right to education for all children. By using the methodology of child labour free zones, the CaR-coalition capacitates and empowers caregivers and community structures to employ a variety of rights-based interventions to ensure that children involved in child labour can return to school, and to prevent children from poor families from dropping out of school. This area-based approach excels in what could be called a whole-of-community approach in which children, parents, youth, teachers, local elders and religious leaders are jointly capacitated to combat child labour through local fundraising, by lobbying the local [county] government, and through the development of alternative sustainable livelihoods.

Partnering with a church in this programme was new for the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children (KAACR), a secular NGO that wants to distance itself from identifying with any religion because they believe in the right to education for all children, irrespective of their religious background. As Tim Ekesa, the KAACR director said, ‘We say, put down your religion and let’s talk about children.’ Partnering with a secular NGO was equally new for the African Divine Church and other local churches that got involved in the CaR programme, such as the Church of Peace. ‘KAC [KAACR] opened our eyes,’ said a pastor of the African Divine Church. Before entering into this coalition, ADC had a quite inward orientation, focusing on its own faith community, providing spiritual guidance and charity aid. Engaging in advocacy and working with other civil society organisations and government opened up a whole new world to them. ‘It comes down to partnership… KAC has moulded [enriched] us…’; said a pastor of the African Divine Church. ‘[Our partnership] is making us grow. As a church, we are growing. Then as we grow, other people are also growing in the County of Kisumu.’

Likewise, KAACR needed the churches for their sheer strength in terms of community outreach and mobilisation. ‘I have watched ADC for long,’ said John Uduoro from KAACR. One serious difference they have with us is the power to mobilise. They have meetings with over a 100 people. When we have a meeting, we have one room with maybe 20 people. So that is a powerful thing. KAC has trained all pastors [on child rights advocacy]. So when these pastors go back to the grassroot level, all of them have a work plan. So that training has really been integrated in the community.’ Besides, whereas the bishops and pastors learnt to speak the language of rights, lobby and advocacy, NGO-staff members from KAC learnt about the power of religious sermons and prayers.

b. The African Divine Church and Change the Game!

The African Divine Church (ADC) is an African Instituted Church that was established in 1948 by Reverend Saul Chabuga Chamwama. It also has branches in Uganda and Tanzania. The Church derived its name from the biblical verse John 15:1-17 that begins with the phrase ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener’. ADC compares itself to the vine tree that grows and bears fruits. The overall goal of ADC is to contribute to the spiritual and economic empowerment of members of its faith community to realise a dignified life. ADC clergy can be recognised by their typical three-coloured cloths: white representing the light of Christ, red, the blood of Jesus, and green, the world in which we live.28

Initially the church concentrated on spiritual matters but about ten years ago they started to be more involved in social work within the community. Through the Bishop Chabuga Community Fund, the church started to support children from poor families who had dropped out of school to ensure

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they could continue and complete secondary education. The programme was successful yet was largely based on a charity-approach in which poor families and children received school uniforms and stipends. Yet after engaging with KAACR and especially after having participated in the Change the Game! Training, there was a change. We [began to] work with other stakeholders to empower children. We were able to help ourselves and other people.

The Change the Game! Training and methodology was developed by the Dutch FBO Wilde Ganzen Foundation in response to the shrinking space for CSOs funded by international donors. In Kenya, as in other countries, (political) space for civil society organisations is increasingly limited by governmental restrictions, in which foreign donors are reducing their funding for development cooperation and in which more developing countries are growing towards middle income status. The Change the Game! methodology trains grassroots organisations in local fundraising and lobby and advocacy. As such, they aim to increase the ability of grass-roots organisations to raise funds locally and to hold governments and duty bearers to account. This approach greatly helps to build a local support base for development projects, and it increases local ownership, accountability and sustainability. Besides, it strengthens the voice of grass roots organisations and communities in government decision-making on sustainable development.

Change the Game! has been implemented in various middle-income countries, including Kenya where local partner Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) implements the programme. KCDF is a public foundation that was established in 1997 and aims to build on indigenous knowledge and experiences with community mobilisation.

The Change the Game! methodology introduced a change of mindset to many faith-based organisations that had thus far concentrated on service delivery. ‘What has really made us proud,’ said an ADC pastor, ‘is the Change the Game training that we received from KCDF. Because we were waiting for donors to bring the money. But we did not know that we have money in the community. So we have empowered the community, the parents in local fundraising.’

The ADC pastors who participated in the training began to organise fundraising activities with members of the local church. They spoke of the biblical parable about Jesus multiplying two fish and five breads to motivate people to make small donations to a community fund. People began to bring in some money, clothes and shoes. ‘We raised three million Kenyan Shillings through local fundraising. Now there are five children who were able to complete secondary school and can now go to university,’ said the pastor. In addition, by lobbying the local county government, in cooperation with the members of the Local Child Labour Committees (LCLCs) comprising parents, teachers, youth ambassadors, religious leaders and local elders, ADC managed to access the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), a governmental fund that was established in 2003 to combat poverty at grassroots level. ‘Our partnership with KAC taught us that we can access [government] funds through the CDF… We now know where to go.’ In addition, the Local Child Labour Committees began to raise funds from the private sector. ‘We have some traders, Indians, who are now in our county. We approached them and they contributed,’ said the pastor.

While the church learnt to speak the language of rights and advocacy, KAACR learnt about the power of religious language in motivating community members to jointly combat child labour:

For us it is ‘this policy talks about this’. But then, people find it difficult to internalise. [They understand it] not so fast as when they hear from the Bishop ‘that is what the Bible says…’ That helped us to relate [child rights] not to a policy issue, but to the word of God. People relate to that.

- KAACR programme manager in Western Kenya

‘When a pastor speaks, that is the voice of God. So when he speaks people pay attention to that voice,’ confirmed an ADC pastor. ‘People feel more challenged when you talk about the word of God,’ said another pastor of the Church of Peace.

Thus the secular NGO KAACR and the FBO ADC both gained by building on each other’s specific qualities and strengths. KAACR had ample experience with lobby and advocacy but lacked the access and networks to mobilise the community in a more substantial and sustainable way, the combination of the numbers that the church had and the spiritual guidance it offers meant that a real change of mindset could be realised.

29) Change the Game Academy Flyer, developed by the Wilde Ganzen Foundation.
30) See below section on the Church of Peace for more details on LCLCs.
Conversely, ADC had no knowledge about advocacy, about the duty bearers that they could access and about transforming their focus on charity and service delivery to empowering faith communities to orchestrate their own change and futures. ‘What religious churches require is more awareness about advocacy,’ explained KAACR director Time Ekesa. Because they do a very good job. But they don’t know how to do it [advocacy]… The ADC Archbishop is a passionate guy. He talks about children better than me [laughs]. We trained him on advocacy for children’s rights. All his pastors were trained on child rights. Then they realised they can actually do their ministry by advocating for children’s rights!’

The Church of Peace

Inventiveness, Inclusivity and Talking Sensitive Issues

The Church of Peace is an Instituted African Church that was founded by Reverend Samuel Apondo in 1973. The church aims to fulfil the mission of Jesus Christ as stated in Matthew 28: 18-20 (‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’). The church has 10 pastorates and 18 local churches with a total population of 8,000 members, spread over 11 counties.

The Church of Peace is one of the parties involved in the Obwolo Child Labour Free Zone. In cooperation with the KAACR field coordinator, the Church mobilised community members and representatives to become members of the Local Child Labour Committees (LCLCs). LCLCs include different stakeholders and representatives of local community structures, such as teachers, local elders, youth ambassadors, parents, members of the faith community, religious leaders, government representatives, CSOs, local administrators and, in some cases, employers. They are responsible for the coordination of all activities that are implemented as part of the Children at Risk programme. These include the identification of children engaged in labour or children at risk of becoming school dropouts, reporting and referring cases of child abuse, helping to reintegrate former child laborers in their schools, family and community, and raising awareness about child labour and child rights amongst community members. Every member of the LCLC is responsible for monitoring child labour in a selected number of nearby households.

The LCLC in the Obwolo Zone consists of 20 members [11 men and 9 women]. The Church of Peace has been especially active in sensitising the community about child labour and child rights. Every Friday, the church organises a pastoral programme in close cooperation with the LCLCs members. They provide guidance and counselling to children, teaching them about child rights by referring to the Bible but also by using verses from the Quran. They organise monthly rallies and music festivals for children and youth, and annual youth camps.

Involving the Church of Peace set in motion a process of spiritual transformation and empowerment that could not have emerged without them. A school had been established in cooperation with the Church of Peace, but the teacher noticed that children with disabilities, or ‘special needs’ as she called them, did not go to school. Parents neglected these children and there were even stories of abuse. Of special needs children that were locked up in the house or even chained. Many parents were ashamed of these children, because local beliefs taught that these children had been cursed. Members of the church and the LCLC began to engage with these parents. They explained that the Bible taught that God ‘loves you for who you are. He does not look at your physique but at your inside. We are all created in the image and light of God.’ They talked about John, the blind man, of whom the bible says that the ‘glory of God is upon him’. They explained that their children had not become disabled because of a curse, but because of an accident – referring to the biblical parable about the lame man, who was called and shown respect by King David. At the same time, the teacher and other LCLC members noticed that the school

environment was not designed to support the needs of children with disabilities. They developed a special classroom with low tables and wheelchairs in a quiet environment. They convinced a few parents to bring their special needs children to school and then the change began. 'Seeing is believing,' said one of the LCLC members. When parents and the wider community saw that special needs children were not useless, stupid or cursed but could actually learn skills and develop their own talents, more parents began to bring children with disabilities to school. Now, out of the 97 pupils, the school has 19 children with special needs.

The trust that people have in the church and its spiritual guidance also allowed Rosa, a woman who volunteered in the church, to address the sensitive issue of teenage pregnancy. Most teenage mothers drop out of school. ‘We told girls who got pregnant, “this is not the end of the world, your life does not stop here”. We showed them and their parents that they could still go to school and take rest when the baby had to be fed.’ Rosa and members of the LCLC organised support groups in church and at school. Now, a handful of teenage mothers have completed their education and can build a future for themselves and their children.

Another LCLC member noticed that girls from poor families began to skip lessons at school. She found out that these girls were ashamed to come to school when they were having their period, because they could not afford sanitary towels. She then designed a reusable cloth sanitary pad and showed girls how to make and use them. Likewise, she observed that pupils from poor families stopped doing homework as soon as it became dark, because switching the light on would attract mosquitos. So she developed a mosquito repellent based on natural ingredients. Now, pupils make their own sanitary pads and mosquito repellent and even sell some of these products to earn some pocket money.

Conclusion
This case study is a story about the success of unlikely partnerships between secular NGOs and local churches. It is a story about the spillover effects of engaging the whole of the community in a battle to end child labour and to build better futures for the community as a whole. Returning one child to school can transform the lives of an entire family: from a situation of poverty to sustainable livelihood and growth. It is a story of the remarkable inventiveness of congregation members in finding small solutions that make all the difference to the lives of children; from ‘a life wasted through child labour’, as Reverend Simon said, ‘to a life lived’. And, a story of inclusion: of finding ways to ensure that teenage mothers finish schools, and that disabled children are no longer viewed as cursed by the community, but as children with talents and prospects.

33 FGD with Church of Peace and LCLC members in Obwolo, 24 May 2018.
2. Ethiopia

2.1 Religion and Spirituality
Ethiopia breathes ancient religious history. The country harbours eight UNESCO world heritage sites, including the famous medieval monolithic cave churches and the ancient town of Aksum where the Ark of the Covenant is believed to be held. Until recently, the country was ruled by a monarchy reputedly descended from the biblical King Solomon. These legends spark the imagination of many.

Today, Ethiopia has a population of an estimated 105 million people of whom 96.7% are religiously affiliated. Christians make up the majority, comprising 62.8% of the population, Muslims second with 34.6%, and 2.6% practise traditional beliefs. Because this religious legacy is important to understanding the meaning of religion for contemporary Ethiopians, this section provides a brief history of the country’s main religions – Christianity and Islam. It closes with an impression of the role of religion in everyday, social life.

Biblical history and Orthodox Christianity
Orthodox Christianity has been key to Ethiopia’s narrative of origin. Christianity already came to the northern highlands in the fourth century and has been the official religion of the Abyssinian Empire since that time (Freeman 2012: 162). According to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo (’Unity’) Church (EOTC), the history even goes back to 34 AD. In that year, an Ethiopian envoy who had been on a mission to Jerusalem, was baptised by Saint Philip the Evangelist on his journey back to

34) Norwegian Church Aid. 2015. Faith-Based Organizations’ Response for the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and other Harmful Practices in Ethiopia: p. 1.
Ethiopia (Old Testament, Acts 6 and 8). Another biblical tale that sets apart Ethiopia’s Orthodox Church as one of the oldest Christian institutions according to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church itself, is that of the story of the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba. The Queen of Sheba converted to early Christianity ‘and through her, the nation accepted faith in the one true God’. In addition, the above-mentioned claim by the Ethiopian monarchy to Solomonic descent makes Ethiopians the ‘new chosen people, heir to the Jews’ [Karbo 2013: 44].

The intertwining of biblical and historical-political narratives in Ethiopia is important as it legitimated the power of the ‘Solomonic’ monarchies that ruled Ethiopia from the 4th century AD until 1974. When the Ethiopian state was established in the late 19th century, Orthodox Christianity officially became the state religion. In 1974, the Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by the socialist Derg regime, which separated religion and state. In 1991, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which still rules Ethiopia today, defeated the Derg regime but reaffirmed the separation of state and religion. Yet even now that church and state are officially separated, religious narratives continue to lard political discourses on national identity – as will be illustrated in the case study ‘The power of religious language’.

Islam
The history of Islam in Ethiopia is embedded in a similar biblical narrative. In the 7th century AD, followers of prophet Mohammad who fled persecution were granted asylum by the Christian King Najashi Ashama of al Habasha [Ethiopia]. This marked the onset of the arrival and settlement of the first Muslims in Ethiopia. Although Christians and Muslims coexisted peacefully in Ethiopia, Muslims were excluded from access to state power under the Orthodox Christian monarchy and ‘had great problems in maintaining their educational system’ [Karbo 2013: 46]. This changed to some extent when the socialist Derg regime proclaimed all religions equal, ended the special status of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as the state religion, and declared some Muslim holidays national public holidays [Karbo 2013: 46]. Yet at the same time, both Christian and Muslim religious institutions suffered from oppression under the Marxist regime and many religious leaders were imprisoned or even killed.

In 1991, the Marxist Derg regime was defeated and replaced by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that still reigns today. The new government implemented a series of economic liberalisation and reform measures and ‘guaranteed the establishment of independent associations in the constitution [Bulti Smordal 2012: 6]. These reforms marked a revival of religious activism’ [Karbo 2013: 48].

Partly due to the federalist system that granted more autonomy to the different regions, Islam became a more active and integral part of Ethiopian identity [Karbo 2013: 48; Abbink 1998: 120].

Ethiopian Muslims are represented by the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council [Majlis] that was established by the government in 1976 as the one body representing all Ethiopian Muslims. In 2012, protests broke out amongst Muslims who demanded the replacement of these government-appointed members of the Majlis by elected members. Although the government did not honour this demand, saying that they did not want to accommodate the politicisation of Islam in Ethiopia, these protests illustrate the emancipation of Muslims in Ethiopia.

Today 34.6% of the Ethiopian population are Muslim. Unfortunately, due to time limitations, this study only looked at development efforts implemented by Christian faith-based organisations in Ethiopia.

Everyday Religion
At the social level, religion shapes the everyday life and experiences of Ethiopians. A first example of that is the presence of religion in everyday language. ‘We Ethiopians are religious,’ explained Berhanu Yismaw, representative of the Church of Sweden in Ethiopia. 2000 years of Orthodox Christianity have marked everyday social interaction in the country: ‘If I say “Hi, how are you”, the response will be, “Fine, praise the Lord”. “How is your family?” “Praise the Lord they are fine”. If you travel, “May the Lord be with you”. You do not need to be [a religious] fanatic. The language itself is part of the religion. This is very difficult for Europeans to understand. There is no greeting where the Lord is not [mentioned], both in Oromo, Amhara – whatever language [is spoken].’

Berhanu Yismaw, 29 May 2018

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[36] The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Overview: p. 3. Booklet produced by the EOTC.
Religion also informs Ethiopians’ perspective on and experience of time. The Ethiopian Calendar begins with the birth of Christ: this year, 2018, is 2010 for Ethiopians. Fasting is another marker of time. During fasting seasons such as Lent, members of the Orthodox Church abstain from eating meat and animal products. During those times, even people from other faith communities have a hard time finding meat because most of the butchers are closed on Wednesdays and Fridays during Orthodox fasting seasons.

Religious leaders are the first and the great majority of Ethiopian people turn to for help and support. Likewise, most members of faith communities will follow the instructions and guidance of their religious leaders. ‘If the pastor or priest says, “Do this”, people do it. That is the difference compared to Western culture,’ explained Kidist Belayneh, Programme Manager of Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)-Ethiopia. ‘In most cases, people respond. I have seen in my own congregation that leaders mobilised doctors and nurses to serve the community, to organise a check-up once in a month’.

The Orthodox Church even has a system of personal counselling in which every priest acts as a confidential personal adviser for a selected number of households:

As an Orthodox believer, you have a personal confessor. On average, one priest may be a Father Confessor for ten to fifteen households. He [visits] when someone is sick or a mother delivers. So there is a saying, you don’t hide anything from a Father Confessor… So if you come to the Orthodox Church, their influence is at the individual household level. 

Kidist Belayneh, 30 May 2018

2.2 Influential Religious Institutions and Faith-Based Organisations

The above accounts underscore the view of Ethiopia as a nation that prides itself as one of the world’s oldest civilisations with biblical roots. It may therefore come as a surprise that, even though Christianity still is key to Ethiopia’s identity and society today, most churches and faith-based organisations refrain from taking an active role in public and political debates.

Even though the Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Ethiopian Monarchy ruled the country jointly until 1974, decades of severe religious oppression and persecution followed under the Marxist Derg regime. To help spread communist ideologies amongst the Ethiopian people ‘religious education and church-run private schools were abolished by a decree in September 1975 [Eshete 2010: 15]. ‘In addition to violent suppression, the government conducted denunciation meetings (Yemagalet Zemecha) where Christians were verbally condemned and forced to deny their faith’ [Eshete 2010: 16].

Violent religious persecution ended when the EPRDF took over in 1991, but freedom of speech remained limited, especially after the 2009 Proclamation that prohibited faith-based and civil society organisations to engage in lobby and advocacy (see section ‘Civic space’). Rather than by taking up a vocal role in public debates, the influencing power of faith-based organisations in Ethiopia resides in their rootedness in Ethiopia’s community structures: in the extended networks of churches, congregations, priests and pastors that reach millions of Ethiopians all over the country. And in the trust that people have in their religious leaders and institutions, as a respondent explains:

During communist time, people much more trusted faith-based organisations. And the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus… you find them all over! In the border areas [of] Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti. In very, very remote areas – where it is very hot, a harsh climate – they have their congregations. So the network is so advanced, you find them everywhere. And they are very close to the people, and people are close to the church.38

In 2010, an estimated 43.1% of the 62.8% of Christians in Ethiopia were Orthodox Christian, 19% were Protestant, less than 1% was Catholic and less than 1% practised another form of Christianity, such as Pentecostalism.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) remains the most influential faith-based organisation in Ethiopia. It is the largest Christian denomination in terms of membership and it continues to occupy a key position in the country because of its intertwinement with Ethiopia’s national history. In addition, it has long-term experience with development through the Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC) that was established in 1972.

The most influential Protestant churches in Ethiopia are the Kale Heywet Church, which established a development wing about 40 years ago and the Terepeza Development Association (TDA) in 1987, and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane...
Yesus, who established a development wing in 2000. Although Pentecostal churches, such as the Mulu Wengel church, are increasingly popular in Ethiopia (Freeman 2012: 163), they do not have a formal role in development cooperation. This section therefore concentrates on describing the influence of the Orthodox and the two Protestant-Evangelical churches on sustainable development in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo (‘Unity’) Church – Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOTC-DICAC)

When the Marxist Derg regime drastically changed the position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), summarily executed its Patriarch Abuna Tewophilos and began a campaign to spread communist ideologies amongst Ethiopian people, the Church decided to call together a commission to discuss its future role within this new repressive context. As the Church also wished to respond to the evolving refugee crisis and social problems of that time, they called in the help of the World Council of Churches (WCC).39 The commission came together and then jointly decided to establish a Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC). Thus, the EOTC-DICAC, as it was called, was established in 1972 (Ethiopian Calendar) and thereby became the first faith-based organisation in Ethiopia.

Over the past decades, the Orthodox Church’s development wing EOTC-DICAC has implemented programs related to environmental rehabilitation, agricultural development, water supply and sanitation, social service development (primary and vocational education) and community empowerment (prevention of HIV AIDS and female genital mutilation).40 It has also been a key actor in humanitarian assistance, responding to repetitive droughts and floods and providing relief to the 900,000 refugees currently residing in the country.

EOTC-DIDAC has powerful ambassadors in politics and the private sector. The Board is led by the EOTC Archbishop and the President of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, who acts as the deputy-chair of the Board. Another Board member is a member of the Ministry of Finance. In addition, 34 academics are affiliated to DICAC and conduct commissioned assignments.41 Despite these powerful ties, EOTC-DICAC refrains from public involvement in the country’s political affairs, because of its history of repression and the prohibition on FBO and CSO engagement in advocacy (See ‘Civic Space in Ethiopia’). Yet, DICAC has great influence on social-economic development at local level because it can channel its programmes through the vast networks of the Orthodox Church.

Today, an estimated 40 million Ethiopians are members of the Orthodox Church. The Church has a wide network of institutions that reach every corner of Ethiopian society. It has more than 86,000 parish churches, 6,000 monasteries,42 and over 250,000 priests. Besides, the Church also reaches many Ethiopians through its education system. An estimated 6.7 million youth are enrolled in Sunday school and the Church runs three theological colleges and 28 clergy centres.43 Until the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, the Church was a major provider of education, working directly under the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (Bulti Smordall 2015: 10).

According to a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, members of the EOTC are amongst the most devoted Orthodox Christians in the world. The majority of Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia say they attend church weekly (78%) and pray daily (65%), and nearly all (98%) say religion is “very important” in their lives.44 Together, the trust and devotion of its members and the wide community networks render a substantial contribution to the influence of the Orthodox Church in the everyday lives of members of its faith community. In Ethiopia, each household has one confessor. The church has in fact a deep-rooted connection with the households. It has a big influence in the life of the household – in married life or social and cultural life. The church is more influential (on the household level) than politics in Ethiopia.45

40) Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission. 2015. Annual Report.
41) Interview with Dr Agedew Redie, Commissioner of EOC-DICAC, Addis Ababa, 30 May 2018.
42) Interview with Dr Agedew Redie, Commissioner of EOC-DICAC, Addis Ababa, 30 May 2018.
43) From: Norwegian Church Aid. 2015. Faith-Based Organizations’ Response for the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and other Harmful Practices in Ethiopia: p.10.
45) Interview with Dr Agedew Redie, Commissioner of EOC-DICAC, Addis Ababa, 30 May 2018.
The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus - Development and Social Services Commission

The history of institutionalised Protestantism in Ethiopia differs from most other African countries. Because Ethiopia escaped colonialism, it was never subject to the ‘civili-

lising missions’ of colonial powers (Freeman 2012: 163). Although foreign Protestant missionaries began to work in Ethiopia in the 1930s, the Ethiopian regime critically followed and restricted their activities. This began to change in the 1960s, when Emperor Haile Selassie ‘encouraged missionary outreach to the Oromo people’ in an attempt to assimilate the nation’s largest ethnic group in a larger Ethiopian culture (LaPlante 2011: 19).

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) has its origins in the Lutheran Swedish Evangelical Mission. It was officially established as a national church in 1959. At the time of its establishment, the church had five regional synods and about 18,000 members. Today, the EECMY has grown to an estimated 8.3 million members, 8,564 congregations and 3,976 pastors. This growing popularity of evangelism in Ethiopia may well be related to the fact that, other than the Orthodox Church, church members are allowed and even encouraged to read and study the bible – something that especially seems to attract new generations of Ethiopians (LaPlante 2011). The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is also well represented in the community through a wide educational system that includes 10 seminaries, one College, one School of Nursing, two Vocational Training Colleges, over 50 bible schools, 26 distance theology centres and 110 Theological Education by Extension Centres. The EECMY is amongst others member of the Lutheran World Federation and the ACT Alliance.

The official development wing of EECMY, called the Development and Social Services Commission (DASSC), was established in 2000. It builds on a vision of ‘holistic ministry’: on a vision of human well-being that includes physical, psycho-social and spiritual well-being. Thus, EECMY implements its development activities under the well-phrased slogan ‘Serving the Whole Person’.

EECMY-DASSC has 26 branch offices across the country that implement a wide range of integrated rural development and community development programmes. Recent examples of such programmes are interventions in the area of: food security, emergency relief, natural resource management, water, sanitation and hygiene, health services including HIV/AIDS prevention, education, child and youth development, gender, and development and capacity building.

The Ethiopian Kale Heywet (‘Word of Life’) Church and its development branches

The Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC) emerged from the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) that began its missionary work in Ethiopia in the 1920s. It initially established a stronghold among the Wolayta people who live in the region that is currently known as the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples (SNNP) Region. In 1936, during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, the government drove many foreign missionaries out of the country, yet that did not stop the growth of evangelism in Ethiopia. The mission churches were taken over by home-grown Ethiopian evangelists and were transformed into locally run Ethiopian churches (Freeman 2012: 163). In the 1940s, ‘the Kale Heywet Church had flourished with about 20,000 new members that had been baptised during the war years’ (LaPlante 2011: 19). Today, the EKHC is one of the largest Evangelical churches in Ethiopia with an estimated 10 million members and around 10,000 local churches all over the country.

EKHC began its first development work around 1937, introducing literacy trainings in the less developed villages of Southern Ethiopia. Like the other Ethiopian churches, the EKHC has its own Development Commission that implements a range of rural and community development projects.

In 1984, the southern branch of the EKHC, the Wolayta Kale Heywot Church (WKHC) started spontaneous humanitarian relief actions in response to the famine in Eritrea of 1984-85. As the situation improved, these activities evolved into rehabilitation activities, such as ‘planting trees and [natural] resource management’. In 1987, the Wolayta Kale Heywot Church

[47] From: Norwegian Church Aid. 2015. Faith-Based Organizations’ Response for the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutiltation (FGM) and other Harmful Practices in Ethiopia. p.22.
[51] Interview with Bereket Tassew, Executive Director of WKHC-TDA, 29 May 2018, Addis Ababa.
decided to organise these activities under the newly founded Terepeza Development Association (WKHC-TDA).

WKHC-TDA has about 200 staff members and thousands of volunteers who implement development activities in the Southern region of the country. Because of its strong focus on community development and empowerment, TDA always works through local churches. TDA implements activities in the areas of economic empowerment, conservation agriculture training, natural resource management, community development and children's programmes, and church leadership development.\(^{52}\)

It excels in natural resource management and is an active ambassador of the so-called Self-Help Movement: a community empowerment and mobilisation approach that centres around the establishment of local Self-Help Groups (SHGs) [see case study Enhancing space for women and local influencing through Self-Help Groups, section 2.5.b].

### 2.3 Civic Space


When the EPRDF overthrew the Marxist regime in 1991 and allowed for the establishment of independent associations, this caused a real boom in the NGO sector. Before the 1990s, NGO presence in Ethiopia had been limited to about 50-60, mostly international NGOs that were ‘mainly carrying out relief and humanitarian work after the famines of 1973 and 1984’ [Freeman 2012: 161]. By 2000, 368 NGOs were registered [Freeman 2012: 161] and in 2012, the number of officially registered NGOs had gone up to 1,119, of which 141 were international NGOs [Bultu Smordall 2012: 6].

The CSO sector also received an impetus because of the new liberties and rights extended to Ethiopian civilians. Already in 1991, the EPRDF issued a transitional Charter that for the first time recognised all rights and freedoms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ‘including the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly’ [AHRE 2018: 17]. These civil rights and liberties were reaffirmed in Ethiopia's new 1995 Constitution. As a consequence, ‘both local and international human rights affiliated organisations began to flourish’ [Ibid.].

The situation began to change mid-2005, when the regime began to view CSOs as co-instigators of the protests that emerged in the run-up to and aftermath of the controversial 2005 elections. The pre-election period saw intense debates, rallies, and zealous campaigns by different political parties.

Civil society played an active role engaging with the public and encouraging participation’ [AHRE 2018: 17]. Following the elections, both the EPRDF and the opposition party Coalition for Unity and Democracy claimed victory. When the EPRDF rejected the claims of the opposition, protests broke out in Addis Ababa that were violently oppressed by governmental security forces, ‘killing at least 36 unarmed civilians and wounding more than 100’ [Ibid.]. Another round of protests followed in November 2005 and again, the EPRDF regime responded with violent oppression (killing another 42 civilians) and by imprisoning members of the opposition party and journalists, who were accused of complicity.

Civil repression reached another stage when in 2009, the government adopted Proclamation 621/2009 that severely limited operational and political space for CSOs. This new law that aims to regulate the work of all secular and faith-based charity and civil society organisations in Ethiopia, stipulates that civil society organisations that work on human rights issues, including faith-based organisations, are not allowed to receive more than 10% of their budget from foreign sources. The law also prohibits CSO engagement in human rights and advocacy activities. Another rule of Proclamation 2009 regulation is the so-called 70-30 regulation which dictates that 70% of the annual budget of FBOs and CSOs should be spent on costs directly linked to the beneficiaries, whereas a maximum of 30% can be used for administrative costs. Although this sounds reasonable, in practice the government Charities and Societies Agency has frequently labelled capacity building activities for local CSOs and beneficiaries as ‘administrative’, thereby further limiting operational space for CSOs. Noncompliance with the 2009 regulations can result in a withdrawal of the licence to operate in Ethiopia [ICCO Consortium 2016c: 8-9].

Civic space in Ethiopia is further limited because the government regards CSO and FBO projects as an integral part of second Growth and Transformation Plan. This government development plan builds on the so-called Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) approach – an approach that concentrated on ‘commercialisation of agriculture, strengthening the private sector and achieving rapid growth in market exports’ [Freeman 2012: 161-2].

**Mounting Civil Protests: 2015-2018**

Behind the civil protests that broke out in 2016 lie decades of economic and political marginalisation of various ethnicities. Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic country of which the Oromo (34.4%), Amhara (27%), Somali (6.2%) and Tigray (6.1%) form the most
numerous ethnicities.33 The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which has ruled the country practically as an authoritarian one-party state since 1991, is actually a coalition of four political parties that each seek to represent the four largest ethnicities. These parties are the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). In practice, however, after the EPRDF came to power, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which represents only 6% of Ethiopia's population, controlled virtually all key levels of economic and political power.32

Although protests against this dominant position of the Tigray emerged during the past decennia of EPRDF rule, they remained local and were effectively suppressed by interventions of Ethiopian security forces. In 2015, however, something began to change. The protests became much bigger, spreading across different regions and ethnicities in Ethiopia. ‘It has been cooking, building, especially the last two years,’ explained Birhanu Yismaw from the Church of Sweden. ‘I think people are fed up.’

Protests began in the Oromia region in November 2015, after the government announced a plan to integrate part of Oromia in construction plans for the city of Addis Ababa, under the Addis Ababa Master Plan Initiative. This triggered concerns about adequate compensation and relocation for evicted farmers. The violent crackdown on these protests by the Ethiopian security forces only fuelled resistance amongst the Oromo people, who make up more than 34% of the country’s population and had long felt economically and politically marginalised. Hundreds of thousands joined the street protests in Oromia calling for an end to decades of systemic exclusion and subordination of the Oromo.

Soon similar protests erupted amongst the Amhara, Ethiopia’s second-largest ethnic group in Ethiopia (about 27% of the total population). To the surprise of many, the Oromo and Amhara protesters, who had always been political competitors, suddenly joined hands. ‘No-one ever expected the Amara and Oromo coming together. it just happened,’ commented Kidist Belayneh from Norwegian Church Aid.

The regime responded with a series of detentions, arrests, killings and torture of protesters by security officials; shut down the internet and announced the State of Emergency in October 2016 that lasted for 10 months, until August 2017. Yet this method of oppression and violent crackdown no longer worked and only seemed to spark the protests.

Youth movements became pivotal in mobilising protests, using various methods of peaceful protest and civil disobedience. Raising their crossed arms above their heads to symbolise their ‘being chained’ by the authoritarian EPRDF regime, they began to add demands for the release of prisoners of conscience and for more political and socio-economic justice. Demonstrators began to attack foreign companies to underline long-held economic grievances and the sense that the government was selling their land to foreign investors. Gradually a wide pro-democracy movement evolved that aligned the country’s two largest ethnic groups, the Oromo and Amhara, in joint demands for more political space, freedom of expression and economic justice.

Finally, after nearly two years of anti-government protests, prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe resigned on 15 February 2018. By that time, hundreds had been killed and thousands arrested. To suppress protests in the vacuum that emerged during the months while the EPRDF searched for a new prime minister, the regime announced another State of Emergency. But this time, the people no longer accepted it. Pro-democracy activists protested by organising a three-day all-out strike that practically stopped all activities in Oromia.

Then, after much internal debate and to the surprise of many, the relatively unknown 42-year-old Abiy Ahmed was elected as prime minister on 2 April 2018, winning an impressive majority vote in the Ethiopian parliament. He was the first Oromo to be appointed prime minister in Ethiopia.

‘Ethiopian Spring’?
During the first months of 2018, Ethiopia was in a deep economic-political crisis. The country had practically stopped functioning and was on the brink of economic disaster, as foreign companies had pulled out following the attacks on their property, civil unrest and the state of emergency. The situation further deteriorated when ethnic violence, which had probably been instigated by security forces in an attempt to divide and rule, broke out between the Oromo and Somali people in Southern Ethiopia and displaced an estimated total of more than a million.

‘We were really in fear,’ Kidist Belayneh from Norwegian Church Aid-Ethiopia recalls. ‘We were so concerned. In my age, I had never seen the country in such a very bad shape of ethnic mentality. We did make jokes [about other ethnicities] but not really that deep to the extent that people categorise themselves.’ In the midst of all this, prime minister Abiy Ahmad began to tour the country speaking of unity and forgiveness. Soon, his words and actions began to spark new hope in the nation.

In barely three months, Abiy toured the country and reached out to all different Ethiopian ethnicities, freed thousands of political prisoners and introduced reforms in politics, the military and the economy. His actions did not remain limited to domestic affairs. He visited seven foreign states in the region and in the Middle East to give a new impetus to diplomatic and economic relations, meanwhile freeing another 7,000 Ethiopian prisoners jailed in those countries. On 5 June 2018, Abiy publicly stated that the government fully accepted the terms of a peace agreement with Eritrea drafted in 2000 to end the war between the two nations over a disputed border. He lifted the State of Emergency two months prior to its expiration and issued a public statement ‘inviting foreign-based opposition parties to return home and an effort to create a national consensus.’

Although observers remain critical about and wary of the pace at which Abiy is introducing reforms – pointing at the possibility of a backlash within the ruling party and rising criminal and violent incidents in some regions – overall, civil society actors in and outside Ethiopia welcome and support Abiy’s steps towards freedom and democracy. According to a recent article by the Associated Press, ‘calls are now being made for controversial anti-terrorism, media and civil society laws to be scrapped, too.’

The following two cases are examples of the role of religion and faith-based organisations in support of this move towards enhanced civic space, democracy and peace in Ethiopia.

2.4 National Influencing

a. Requesting a Special Status for Faith-based Organisations

In the increasingly repressive climate that existed before prime minister Abiy took office, churches of different denominations came together to think of ways to increase the operational and political space for their development wings. In 2017, they had a meeting with former prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe on the issue that we need a separate policy for faith-based organisations, recounted Simon Haile, Commissioner of the development wing of the Evangelical Kale Heywot Church:

We [FBOs] do not fit in the system [for charities and societies] that he designed… We said, ‘We know that you need us, as a church, for every aspect [of society], for example for conflict [mitigation], health issues… If you need us, allow us! And make us independent so that we can play our roles.’

Simon Haile, 29 May 2018

Hailemariam agreed and asked the churches to submit a formal appeal. Thus, the Orthodox and Mekane Yesus Church – both local members of the Act Alliance – and the Mule Wange and Kale Heywot churches jointly submitted a letter to the prime minister, requesting a special status for FBOs that would exempt them from the restrictions imposed by the 2009 Proclamation, especially concerning (international) fundraising and the prohibition of advocacy. For if advocating on behalf of the poor or solving conflicts is not the role of the churches, then ‘who will take that responsibility?’ argued Haile.

In response to the letter, the prime minister assigned a consultant who worked closely with the churches to develop a new system. This proposal was then forwarded to one of the president’s advisers who was tasked with implementing it. ‘But then, unfortunately, he [the prime-minister resigned,’ said Haile with a sigh.

Now that Abiy Ahmed has taken office, the churches have decided to wait a while before continuing their lobby for a special FBO status. ‘It is too early now… we first leave him room, let him settle first,’ explained Haile.

54) Associated Press 5 June 2018, see: https://apnews.com/7d6d141b6784258865e5c3a3277e3b8 (accessed 19 June 2018).
This more passive attitude in times of great political upheaval is perhaps typical of the churches in Ethiopia, which have faced decades of oppression. As the Commissioner of the Orthodox Churches’ development wing, Dr Agedew Redie, commented, ‘We have been suppressed for the last 46 years… we have a position of “wait and see”’. Ephraim Tsegay, Executive Director of Tearfund, offered a similar explanation:

One of the challenges that we have is that sometimes, the churches are a little behind… There is a potential, but I have not really seen the church stepping up into this potential. The civil society forum is really taking up the role in trying to influence the government and trying to think about change of the current Proclamation [2009]. The civil society forum reviewed the practice and implementation of that Proclamation over the last 10 years and tries to give some very specific recommendations to the Charities Board.

Ephraim Tsegay, 29 May 2018

In the new wave of freedom, civil society organisations have taken over the lead from the churches in advocating the review of the 2009 Proclamation. During a meeting with government representatives held late May 2018, civil society organisations were asked to openly share their thoughts on the developments in the country. This was a novelty in government-civil society relations. ‘Normally, we are only just consulted on governmental plans that have practically been finalised,’ says Tsegay. Apparently, the Abiy government has invited some civil society representatives to jointly review the 2009 Proclamation. Some FBOs are taking an important role in this process too. Although the churches have decided to wait for a while before taking any further steps, the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA), an umbrella of over 400 national and local NGOs, actively participates in the [shadow] review of the 2009 Proclamation.

This case shows how the tides of history – the particular political context of the time - impact on the space for FBOs to act as advocates of civil society. FBOs alternate between taking roles as front-runners or fence sitters depending on the context. In addition, because of the different factions that make up their organisation, they can diversify by emphasising their role as religious authorities sometimes and their role as civil society advocate at others. While the church leaders decided to keep a low profile when Abiy took office, CCRDA could accelerate because of the sudden, government recognition of civic-political action.

b. The Power of Religious Language

‘In the 1990s, in the UN decades of development, faith had no space. Development did not transform the hearts of people, it did not transform the minds of people because it did not touch what we call the software, that is, the heart, the culture, the traditions of the people. So we could see the buildings, the infrastructure. But with the infrastructure, there was no foundation, what I have called ‘the soul of the nation’. The very essence of what a (human) being is’.

Dr Agnes Abuom, Kenyan expert on religion and civil society and President of the World Council of Churches, 22 May 2018

Whatever critics may say about the risks that Abiy is taking with his fast-paced reforms, he seems to grasp what Dr Agnes Abuom describes as ‘the soul of the nation’. Rather than talking about economic and political reforms in a technocratic way, Abiy talks about the nation’s economic and spiritual well-being as one-and-the-same. Thus, Tefere Shawl, a political analyst commented in a recent television item on CGTN Africa: ‘As a witness of history, I have served through four regimes in this country. For the first time since the demise of the Emperor, someone is bold enough to speak about his belief in faith, in God. What the majority of the Ethiopian people want to hear has been articulated by this leader. That’s number one. Number two, he has preached love, reconciliation and togetherness in building this nation anew.’

Abiy’s understanding of religion as the ‘heart and soul’ of Ethiopian identity is evident from his sophisticated use of religious language, narratives and values. Several journalists already commented on Abiy’s clever use of the term ‘Ethiopianess’, a term that aims to give new impetus to the idea of Ethiopians as one people, united in diversity through a unique biblical history. This section adds four other examples of such

If You Need Us, Allow Us! 2. Ethiopia

58) See: http://www.africanews.com/2018/06/05/ethiopia-accepts-ethio-eritrea-boundary-findings/

\( \text{world-making} \) as shared by representatives of churches and FBOs in Ethiopia: around mercy, peace, the King, and the power of women.

One of the most tangible proofs of Abiy's move towards openness are the thousands of political prisoners that were released during his first months in office. Rather than calling this mass release 'amnesty', or using other words from the human rights vocabulary, Abiy used religious language, speaking of 'mercy' and 'pardoning'.

'Mercy, to give mercy, is part of the religious way of doing in this country,' explained Berhanu Yismaw from the Church of Sweden. 'So, if someone is released [through an act of mercy], no-one will oppose. So he is using 'mercy', not "amnesty": Abiy does not merely use the word 'mercy' to silence possible opponents. He also talks about mercy to motivate people to rise above past ethnic-political differences. Abiy tells the Ethiopian people that 'we have to forget and forgive', explained Yismaw.

Unless we forgive, we will never succeed. He talks almost like he is preaching, using biblical words. We have to have individual [personal] peace and we need to be free from hatred. 'No-one will benefit from hatred. You never sleep if you are filled with hatred. He who you hate may not know that you hate him and sleep well. But sorry for you, who is filled with hatred'.

Berhanu Yismaw, 29 May 2018

That Abiy's speeches on peace and mercy are not just smooth talk to win over the public also appears from his recent peace offer to Eritrea. The agreement over a border dispute with Eritrea, which was drafted in 2000, was never implemented because the Government of Ethiopia refused to pull back its troops from the town of Badme that had been awarded to Eritrea by an impartial boundary commission. Abiy recently stated that the government of Ethiopia will fully accept the terms of this 2000 peace deal, implying that they are ready to give up claims over Badme. In his explanation, Abiy again spoke of peace, love and unity: 'All we have gained from the status quo between the two countries is more tension. Neither of us has benefited. We want to channel our energies towards peace, love and unity'.

Another story that lifts the figure of Abiy out of the ordinary, is that about his strong conviction as a child that one day, he would be a king. During an address to parliament, prime minister Abiy talked about his childhood and the important role his mother played. Talking about his private life in public was already an act of revolution in itself. Politicians in Ethiopia never talk about private life in public,' said Yismaw. 'This is the first leader in Ethiopia who exposed himself, his private life, the way he was grown up, to the public.' In his address, Abiy told his audience that he came from a poor family; his father was a farmer. When he was seven, his mother told him that one day, he would be a king. She continued to empower him by repeating that story and he consequently started to believe her. When he was fourteen and his friends wanted to photograph him, he refused arguing that one day he would be a king. Later, when he had joined the armed resistance against the communist Mengistu regime, his pals nicknamed him negus, or 'king' in Ethiopian Semitic languages.

Even though the prime minister delivered his speech with an air of self-mockery, it captured his audience's imagination. Soon, priests from the Orthodox Church began to echo this story while endowing it with a biblical narrative. Thus, the word was spread that Abiy was 'Ethiopians' Moses', recounted Yismaw. Moses grew up in the house of the Egyptian king who persecuted his people - the Jews - but became their saviour later, leading them out of the desert to the promised land. 'Now they say that like Moses, this guy [Abiy] also grew up in the house of the [oppressor] EPRDF, the ruling party, but now he becomes a rescuer,' Yismaw explained. Ethiopian artists and musicians further spread this legend by composing a song of praise that compares Abiy with the biblical Moses.

However, Abiy's wide popularity (84% of Ethiopians support him according to a recent poll) not only results from portraying him as a biblical figure. His admirers also praise him for his human sensibilities and his ability to position himself on an equal footing with the Ethiopian people. Freeing thousands of political prisoners shows that Abiy cares about people, that 'the people come first', commented Shawl in the television item quoted above. Besides, no leader before Abiy had toured the country and directed the people the way he did, said Yismaw. 'Wherever he has been travelling in Ethiopia, he was highly welcomed... No leader before was welcomed like Abiy was by the people in the districts... Before, we only knew our leaders from the screen. Now, people welcome him as a king.'

Talking openly about his private life and his mother, greatly contributed to Abiy's image as a people's leader. 'The value that he gives to family, recognising his mother and wife... that is
really human,’ said Kidist Belayneh. Talking about the important role of women can be regarded as outright progressive in a country like Ethiopia, which has a strong patriarchal culture and high incidences of violence against women, explained Yismaw:

_He talked about women. How much his mother meant to him. He said ‘So please go on, women of Ethiopia, to bring an impact on your kids. Your impact is important for the development of this country. To build the nation of this country. Without the women, we cannot do it!’ You cannot imagine, so many women and men were filled with tears [when they heard this]. This makes you very emotional. He lifted the mothers of this nation. No-one had done that._

Berhanu Yismaw, 29 May 2018

Without wanting to characterise and downplay these performances as calculated or orchestrated, it can be said that by incorporating the religious demeanour, language and imagination that is so key to Ethiopian identity and society, Abiy is helping to create space for marginalised groups and civil society at large. By using religious language and values, Abiy invokes what Yismaw calls ‘a fourth language’ that rises above ethnic divisions and above potential religious divisions as well. Abiy abstains from quoting any particular religious canons: ‘He does not quote any text but refers to religious values instead: peace, togetherness’, comments Belayneh. The fact that Abiy comes from a mixed religious background – he has a Christian mother and Muslim father – likely increases the credibility of his words.

### 2.5 Local Influencing

Despite sustained economic growth, chronic food insecurity remains a continuous challenge for a large part of the Ethiopian population. As a result of the drought that affected the country in 2015 for example, 429 out of 683 administrative districts are classified as food-insecure hotspots. This underlines the vulnerability of the Ethiopian food system (ICCO Consortium 2016c: 4).

Limited availability of food is caused by poor infrastructure, population growth, unstable production of food due to climate change and limited access to productive resources for smallholders (ICCO Consortium 2016c: 10). Climate change seriously affects the sustainability of the food system in Ethiopia. Most farming activities are rain fed and erratic rains limit crop growth and the amount of water available for cattle. Besides the recurring droughts, disasters such as flood, human epidemics, livestock diseases, crop pests and bushfires have lately increased in frequency, scale and intensity. Availability of productive resources is especially challenging for women and people with disabilities. Female landholders and people with disabilities are comparatively less educated, own and manage less land and have less access to extension services compared to male landholders (ICCO Consortium 2016c: 10).

Within this overall situation of chronic food insecurity, two cases are presented that illustrate the importance of the involvement of local churches and faith-based organisations in improving the livelihoods of small farmers. The first is a story about the introduction of a new farming technique by the Terepeza Development Association (TDA). The second case describes the growing influence of women self-help groups that offer mutual socio-economic support to their members and the wider community.

#### a. The Role of the Church in Introducing Natural Farming

You do not disturb nature. [If] you use nature, you care for nature. You care for your land and you care for the environment. This is all about farming God’s way. You are not against nature but working towards caring [for] nature, the mother.

Bereket Tassew, Executive Director WKHC-TDA, 29 May 2018

Much of our land was degraded and eroded because of extensive farming, explained Bereket Tassew, executive director of the Terepeza Development Association (TDA), a partner of Civic Engagement Alliance member ICCO Cooperation. When it rained, it would wash the top layer of the land away. Another problem was moisture stress. Rain is very erratic in Ethiopia and there can be long periods of drought. When the rain fails, farmers would have a significant drop in production or even lost their harvest altogether. This significantly reduced the food security of many small farmers. Due to customary inheritance rights and the related division of land amongst relatives of the deceased, many farmers in Ethiopia only own very small plots of land that they manage by hand. The situation is even worse for widows who may only keep half of the land after their husbands pass away. Consequently, many women and small farmers were caught in cycles of poverty, facing serious food insecurity.

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59) This section is a free transcript of the interview conducted with Bereket Tassew, Executive Director of WKHC-TDA, on 29 May 2018 in Addis Ababa.
In the mid-80s, a new farming technique was introduced in South Africa by a Canadian called ‘Farming God’s way’. This technique, which was actually based on the ‘do-nothing’ or ‘natural farming’ method of the Japanese farmer and philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka (1913-2008),60 taught farmers to disturb their land as little as possible, Tassew explained:

“When you do not plough the land, the rain can still reach the soil. Besides, when you do not plough the land, a layer of mulch will cover the soil. If it does not rain for two or three weeks, the soil will then still retain the moisture because of the mulch cover that prevents it from drying out. And when the mulch decomposes, the fertility of the soil improves.”

Bereket Tassew, 29 May 2018

The new farming technique consisted of three simple rules: 1. do not disturb the land – stop ploughing it, 2. cover the land with mulch and 3. engage in good agronomic practices: practices that help to improve soil quality, water usage and the environment. The technique especially meets the needs of poor farmers who cannot afford an ox and plough. It also responds to the needs of women farmers, who are not allowed to plough the land with oxen according to cultural norms.

Although this new farming technique had already proven successful in other countries, Ethiopian farmers did not immediately buy into it when TDA tried to convince them:

“This technique had been successful in South Africa and other African countries. Yet when we began to introduce it to the Ethiopian small farmers in 2012, it was very difficult. People had been used to plough their lands for generations. So when we told them that they should stop doing that, they were laughing at us.”

Bereket Tassew, 29 May 2018

TDA then decided to actively involve the local church, ‘because that was one of our strategies’. The church allowed TDA to use some of their land to start a pilot with the new farming technique.

In the beginning, there were only a few of us. We began to work on a very small plot of land, ten by ten metres only. We invited other farmers and people from the local community to come and have a look at our land. Slowly people started to understand and believe in the new technique. We wanted to scale up and began to train animators and community facilitators. They taught the sustainable farming technique to other farmers, helped them to mark the land and assisted them through the farming season. We began to work with 40 farmers in two districts. Now, five years later, 8,500 small farmers are practising this new sustainable farming technique.

Bereket Tassew, 29 May 2018

The church not only supported the project by providing land. Local pastors would talk to congregation members about the importance of sustainable farming, using biblical stories as a source of inspiration. Besides, the church proved to be the best ‘way in’ to the community, as most farmers were congregation members.

Churches are often more trusted by the people than the government, explained Tassew. Churches are always there; they are permanent institutions in the community. Churches value the spiritual aspects of life, provide faith teachings and moral-spiritual guidance to their congregation members:

“When the pastor comes out and says something, people will listen to him. Also when he introduces new ideas on conservational culture. That is why we always talk to the church leaders first and then engage the church leader to reach out to the community.”

Bereket Tassew, 29 May 2018

b. Enhancing Space for Women and Local Influencing Through Self-Help Groups

If the democratic reforms introduced by Ethiopia’s new prime minister continue at this pace, political space for CSOs may well have increased by the time this report is published. At the time of writing, however (May 2018), CSOs continue to be restrained by the 2009 Proclamation that prohibits their

60) ‘Farming God’s Way’ is an evangelical revivalist variation of the ‘do-nothing’ or ‘natural farming’ method that was invented by the Japanese farmer and philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka (1913-2008). Natural farming teaches that ploughing of soil, pesticides and fertilizers are unnecessary and that only very little weeding is needed. In March 1997, the Earth Summit+5 forum in Rio de Janeiro awarded Fukuoka the Earth Council Award to honour him for his contributions to sustainable development. Other than the original Japanese version, the ‘Farming God’s Way’ method has been spread by a Christian charismatic revival evangelist in South Africa who uses ample biblical verses to engage and motivate farmers, often in a quite aggressive way, asking them to abstain from traditional indigenous beliefs and practices and convert to his version of Christianity. WKHC-TDA used a much milder version of this method and builds on the local faith system and beliefs of the community instead.
involvement in advocacy. Within this limited space, partners of the Civic Engagement Alliance nonetheless found openings for influencing at the local level.

Ethiopia has a long tradition of informal community-based organisations such as the idir and iqub – self-help associations that operate at the local level and offer mutual socio-economic support to their members. NGOs within the ICCO Consortium have used this culture to form Farmer Marketing Organisations and self-help groups [SHGs] (ICCO Consortium 2016c: 9).

The concept of SHGs was introduced in Ethiopia by the Civic Engagement Alliance partner Tearfund in 2002 (Meehan and Mengistu 2016). SHGs have 15 to 20 members and intentionally target the poorest sectors of the community. Many groups are women-only groups. Members save a small amount of money each week. Saving regularly enables them to build capital for the group. SHG members can take out small low-interest loans from this collective capital to meet education and healthcare costs, urgent consumption needs and, ultimately, to establish or extend micro-enterprises. The groups are self-governing but accompanied by intensive facilitation (Tearfund 2017c: 4).

SHGs do not exclusively focus on material or economic growth, but also enhance the social and political empowerment of their members. The approach builds on the belief that people living in poverty can be agents of change instead of aid recipients. It therefore concentrates on the development of skills related to personal development, relationship-building, collective problem-solving and action, self-reliance and self-learning (Ibid.).

The SHG method has inspired the growth of a ‘self-help group movement’ consisting of a variety of Ethiopian faith-based and community-based organisations. The following story shared by a representative of the Church of Sweden – a member of the Act Alliance, of which ICCO and Kerk in Actie are members too – illustrates how the SHG model helps to empower local women economically, and moreover, transforms them into influential local advocates for their community.

**Demanding a Market Place: A Story of Women’s Political Empowerment**

Below is a free transcription of the interview with Berhanu Yismaw, Country Representative of the Church of Sweden in Ethiopia. He told them that what they have in their hand can lift them out of poverty. We organise women’s associations, each consisting of about twenty women. We teach them collective saving, according to the self-help group method. They receive a training about saving and empowerment, in which we include their husbands so that they will understand and support their wives. After the training, women start to collectively save some money for a period of seven to eight months. If they succeed, we give them some additional seed money to encourage them. Then they can collectively buy some sheep or start a small business.

’We empower women,’ explained Berhanu Yismaw, Country Representative of the Church of Sweden in Ethiopia. ’We tell them that what they have in their hand can lift them out of poverty. We organise women’s associations, each consisting of about twenty women. We teach them collective saving, according to the self-help group method. They receive a training about saving and empowerment, in which we include their husbands so that they will understand and support their wives. After the training, women start to collectively save some money for a period of seven to eight months. If they succeed, we give them some additional seed money to encourage them. Then they can collectively buy some sheep or start a small business.

’What really surprised me, was that these SHGs not only empowered women economically but also in a social-cultural sense. They went against their culture! According to local cultural customs, husbands are supposed to build the house. In that area, they normally use grass roofs. But now, the women began to buy corrugated iron sheets, removed the grass roofs and replaced them houses with these iron sheets. In addition, their social support systems became stronger. They jointly collected money to buy school uniforms for the children of families who could not afford these. They also began to reach out to women across the river, to inform and teach them about the SHG method.

’In Ethiopia, we are not allowed to talk about rights as an NGO, but we can empower women to advocate their own rights. We used to support a women’s HIV group in the North. We started with some charity work but realised that that was not sustainable. We then gave them a business training and some start capital instead.

’When these women graduated, one of the members organised a graduation ceremony and invited a local politician to hand out the diplomas. After the politician had delivered a speech, one woman stood up and said, “Look, this church has been taking care of us when we needed support. They gave us food and soap. But when we became too dependent on them, they gave us a business training so that now we can have a career and can be productive.” “What do you want me to do?” asked the politician. “We want you to give us a plot of land for a market.” “I will go and talk to my superiors,” answered the politician. “No-no,” said the woman, “give us a date when you will deliver.” Within two weeks, the politician had allocated a market place to the women. This meant that the church could now phase out their project as the women had become economically independent and politically empowered.’
Promoting a Legal Status for SHGs

Self-help groups are not only effective because of their contributions to women's economic and social-political empowerment. They are also effective in reaching impressive numbers of poor and marginalised people. The Church of Sweden and its local partners have by now organised about 23,000 women in associations that build on the SHG method. Tearfund and their partners EKHC-DC and WKHC-TDA work with 1,879 SHGs in five different districts, reaching almost 35,000 members, 70% of whom are women.

SHGs do not face the same restrictions in policy influencing as NGOs and FBOs. SHGs and Cluster Level Associations (CLAs) in particular, are very well situated to engage in local influencing of governmental development planning and implementation. CLAs can be established by a group of 8 to 12 SHGs that have reached maturity (after two to three years). They consist of elected representatives of SHGs and are tasked with providing support to existing and new SHGs (Tearfund 2017c: 5). A recent study found that some CLAs in East Africa had built good relationships with government agencies, the police and the judiciary. Through these, they advocated for women's rights and the prevention of harmful traditional practices. Some CLAs had successfully assisted SHGs with specific community advocacy initiatives, and the result was that SHG members were more confident in approaching local authorities (Tearfund 2017c.: 6).

Because of this potential for community-based dialogue, the Civic Engagement Alliance partners in Ethiopia are now exploring ways to promote the legalisation of SHGs. If SHGs are registered, they obtain a legal status that allows them to dialogue with the government on for example the provision of government services or the allocation of land, explained Ephraim Tsegay from Tearfund Ethiopia. The only challenge they encounter in this effort, is the lack of one single legal framework to accommodate SHGs. SHGs combine the methods and approaches of associations with those of businesses cooperatives. At this moment, the Civic Engagement Alliance partners support SHGs and CLAs when they request a legal status based on the profile that stands out most. If they succeed, SHGs can play a substantial role in increasing space for community-based advocacy on sustainable development.

This case shows the value and importance of the wide local-to-regional networks that are a specific quality of FBOs. Because of these networks, FBOs can play an important role in linking local to regional advocacy and beyond. As Ephraim Tsegay argues:

Grassroots-organisations like the SHGs and CLAs engage a lot in local dialogue. Development organisations have to tap into that potential to address micro-level issues, such as the implementation of national policies at local level.

Ephraim Tsegay, 29 May 2018
3. Indonesia

3.1 Religion and Pancasila

The Indonesia archipelago is renowned for its wide ethnic and religious diversity. Today, the islands harbour more than 1,000 linguistic groups (HRW 2013:15). In 2017, out of a total population of over 263 million people, about 87% were registered as Muslim, 9.9% as Christian (Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal), 1.7% as Hindu, 0.7% as Buddhist and 0.2% as Confucian or other by the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics.62 Although religious affiliations run across ethnic divisions, both are also intertwined. The Javanese and Sundanese for example, who form the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, are predominantly Muslim, while the Batak, who form the fifth largest ethnic group, are mostly Christian [HRW 2013: 16].

Islam

Indonesia has the largest population of Muslims of all of the world’s nations. The majority of Indonesian Muslims are Sunni. They comprise a wide diversity of Islamic schools and movements, ranging from ultra-conservative strands influenced by Salafist and Wahhabist traditions from the Middle East to locally grown forms of Islam that have accommodated and incorporated indigenous beliefs and customs – such as adat (traditional law), mysticist and ancestral beliefs (HRW 2013: 17; Swazey 2017: 3).

Sunni Muslims in Indonesia are represented by two Muslim organisations: the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The Muhammadiyah was established in 1912 with the aim...
of purifying Islam by removing indigenous beliefs and Hindu or Buddhist practices. As a reform movement, it established numerous schools and hospitals throughout the country. The NU is the largest Sunni organisation in Indonesia, with an estimated 40-45 million members [HRW 2013: 17-18]. It was established in 1926 and is generally regarded as representing a more moderate form of Islam. The former NU leader and intellectual Gus Dur, who played a prominent role in supporting Indonesia's transition to democracy in the late 1990s, has played a key role in promoting the idea of religious pluralism as a marker of Indonesia's national identity - an idea that has been embraced as a defining principle of the NU today.63

Shia Muslims differ from Sunni in that they regard Ali Ibn Ali Talib, the son-in-law of Prophet Mohammed, as the first imam [worship leader] and as the rightful successor to Mohammed. Sufis are the second Islamic denomination in Indonesia but are much fewer in number, with an estimated 2.5 million followers. Most Shia Muslims in Indonesia are represented by the All Indonesian Assembly of Alhulbayt Associations (Ikatan Jama'ah Ahlul Bayt Indonesia, IJABI), a national Shia organisation that was established in 2000. The majority of Shia Muslims live in East and West Java [HRW 2013: 21].

Christianity

Christians make up the second largest religious denomination in Indonesia, comprising about 22 million adherents, of which an estimated two thirds are Protestant and one third Catholic.64 Protestant evangelism has seen substantial growth in recent years and especially seems to attract young people who move to the city for school and work (ICG 2010: 2). The majority of Protestant churches are represented by the umbrella organisation Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI), or Communion of Churches in Indonesia. PGI has 40 members, 30 of which are registered as ‘ethnic’ churches because they hold religious services in the local language. The Batak Protestant Christian Church [Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, HKBP] is one of the largest of these ‘ethnic’ churches, consisting of around 3.5 million churchgoers in more than 3,000 congregations across the country [HRW 2013: 22]. Apart from PGI, two smaller bodies represent Protestant churches, notably the Persekutuan Gereja-gereja dan Lembaga-lembaga Injili [PGLI], or Indonesian Communion of Evangelical Churches and the Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Pentakosta Indonesia [PGPI], or the Indonesian Pentecostal Churches Communion [HRW 2013: 21]. Catholics in Indonesia are represented by the Bishops’ Conference of Indonesia [Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, KWI].

Although Christian umbrella organisations do not play such a dominant role in national politics as Islamic organisations [see below], they have always been vocal in public debates on various social-political issues and have always been consulted on important policy developments by the government.

Buddhists and Hindus

There are an estimated 3.4 million Hindus in Indonesia most of whom live on the island of Bali, and partly in southern Sumatra and Central Sulawesi because of transmigration programmes that were implemented by the Suharto regime in the 1980s. Although Buddhism has a long history Indonesia, as evidenced by the famous 7th century Buddhist shrine Borobudur, Buddhists are a relatively small faith community of about 1.5 million members. Most Buddhists live in Jakarta, North Sumatra, West Kalimantan, Banten, and on the Bangka and Belitung islands [HRW 2013: 23-24].

Despite their relatively small size, Buddhist communities are quite active in social development work and poverty relief. This may partly be due to the fact that quite a few Indonesian Buddhists belong to the wealthy ethnic Chinese business community. Recently, Buddhist federations began to establish foundations that sought to address social-economic disparities in Indonesia. In 1995, for example, the Walubi, an umbrella organisation of Buddhists in Indonesia, established the Social Concern Foundation whose work includes providing community development programmes and free health services to the poor [Sakai 2012: 383].

As choices had to be made within the limited scope of this study, this chapter concentrates on discussing the influence of Islamic and Christian FBOs in lobby and advocacy for marginalised groups in Indonesia.

Religion and Citizenship in Indonesia: the Pancasila

Religion has been key to Indonesian citizenship ever since the country became independent and introduced the state ideology of Pancasila. The Pancasila was introduced by Sukarno in 1945 and seeks to promote religious pluralism through ‘five pillars’ that support the value of ‘unity in diversity’. These are: [1] belief in the One and Only God; [2] just and civilised humanity, [3]

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63 Interview with Dr Izak Lattu, theology and religious studies scholar at the Satya Wacana Universitas in Salatiga, 27 June 2018.
64 At the time of the 2000 census, 5.8 percent of the entire Indonesian population registered as Protestant and 3 per cent as Catholic [ICG 2010: 2].
Indonesian unity; [4] democracy under the wise guidance of representative consultations, and; [5] social justice for all of the people of Indonesia. The first of the five pillars or principles legitimised several world religions and was implemented making it obligatory for all Indonesian citizens to register as an affiliate of one of the six officially recognised religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Registration became a condition for obtaining access to key government papers and services related to ‘birth, marriage, divorce, death, burial, and access to education’ [Swazey 2017: 8, 3].

Because of this intertwining of religion and citizenship, not having a religious affiliation is inconceivable for the large majority of Indonesians. ‘You are asking me about the role of religion in development,’ commented Henriette Nieuwenhuis who works as a PKN pastor in Lampung. ‘But I would turn that question around. How can you be involved in development cooperation while not taking religion into account? It is everywhere!’65 For most Indonesians, not having a religion is not merely unthinkable because that exposes you to the dangers and hardships of life without the guidance and protection of God or ancestor spirits. It would also mean that you could not access the basic services delivered by the state.

As such, although presented as an ideal of religious pluralism, the Pancasila simultaneously became an instrument to control and unite the ethnically and religiously diverse peoples living on Indonesia’s 17,000 islands – especially those living in the outermost regions such as Aceh, West Papua and East Timor. Besides, through the Pancasila, Indonesians who did not practise one of the world religions, were forced to ‘convert’, or at least register as belonging to one of the six officially recognised religions.66 The discrimination of the rights of these indigenous people will be discussed in the first case study presented in this chapter.

3.2 Religion, Politics and Citizenship

Because of the close intertwining of religion and citizenship, space for civil society in Indonesia strongly depends on the support shown for religious tolerance and pluralism in a particular time and place. Such support, and consequently such space, is co-created through the interplay of government lead- ers, leaders of political (opposition) movements and community members.

This section provides some insights into the historical evolution of that interplay. It concentrates on the shifting power balances between mainstream religious institutions, newly rising Islamic movements and the government since the fall of Suharto. As such, it provides a context that may help to understand the role of secular and faith-based civil society organisations in enhancing, or reducing, civic space in Indonesia.

Religious Tolerance and Intolerance

Religious identity politics played a key role under the New Order of the Suharto regime (1966-1998), as it had done before. To build a political stronghold, the Suharto dictatorship not only sought the support of the military, but also of the largest Islamic organisations. By accommodating the main Islamic leaders and organisations, the Suharto regime not only secured their support but also ensured that Indonesian Muslims adhered to moderate forms of Islam and did not develop political ambitions of their own.

Following the fall of the Suharto dictatorship and transition to democracy in 1998, the new government sought to harmonise its national laws with international human rights law. In 2000, the constitution was amended ‘in ways that in some respects strengthened the principle of religious freedom,’ but that also introduced ‘legal duties that in practice are being used to curb religious freedom, particularly of religious minorities’ [HRW 2013: 27].67 At the same time, the loosening of government control over religion, and Islam in particular, increased the amount of space for the establishment of other, often more fundamentalist, Islamic organisations apart from NU and Muhammadiyah. Space for such fundamentalist branches of Islam further expanded when Indonesia embarked on a rapid process of government decentralisation in 2004. Many regional and local politicians that ran as candidates in the elections for district, regional or provincial administrations began to play the religious card to win votes, promising the introduction of stricter Shariah laws such as bans on alcohol and prostitution.

Religious intolerance in Indonesia spread after Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was elected president in 2004. Violent

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65) Interview 19 June 2018, Utrecht.
66) Sometimes, this evoked an unexpected response. Over 90% of the East Timorese for example, who traditionally practised animist and ancestral beliefs, deliberately chose to registrate as Catholic, to protest against the Indonesian occupation of the Island in 1975.
67) See HRW 2013:17 for more details about these legal duties.
attacks on Ahmadiyah, even Christians, Shia, and other religious minorities increased. In 2013, a Human Rights Watch report noted that ‘more than 430 churches have been attacked since 2004, according to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia’ and that the number of violent attacks against Ahmadiyah ‘rose from three reported incidents in 2006 to 50 in 2010 and 114 in 2011’.48 Rather than preserving the ideal of religious tolerance by firmly acting against such attacks, president Yudhoyono ‘accommodated’ such violence when he ‘capitulated to pressure from hard-line Islamist groups and issued an anti-Ahmadiyah decree in June 2008’ (Ibid.).

Joko Widodo, who was elected president in 2014, seeks to revitalise the Indonesian ideal of religious pluralism and tolerance by promoting a more moderate ‘middle-path’ Islam. At the time of writing, however, Indonesia remains torn between tendencies towards religious fundamentalism and tolerance.

Christian-Muslim Relations

Overall, the various forms of identity politics employed since Indonesia’s independence up to the present have resulted in a rather ambiguous picture concerning religious pluralism and tolerance in Indonesia. In everyday social life, the value of religious pluralism is still strongly supported and visible. This is seen, for example, in the large presence of families with mixed religious backgrounds. This characterised Indonesian family and community life, at least until 1974, when marriage law made inter-religious marriage more complicated (Swazey 2017). It is also visible in the joint celebration of Islamic, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist holidays that takes place in families, communities and at schools. And from the fact that many middle-class Islamic families continue to send their children to Christian schools as these often provide better quality education.

Even though attacks on churches by Islamic extremists continue – such as the suicide attack on the Surabaya church in May 2018 that killed 18 and injured more than 40 people – Christian respondents interviewed for this study in Salatiga said that such attacks had not increased their fear or led to a deterioration in their relations with Muslims. They qualify such attacks as exceptional and as instigated by foreign, international Islamic movements. They point out that Muslims have also been victims of attacks by Muslim extremists. They reiterate that they themselves come from mixed religious families, that they cherish the value of Pancasila, religious pluralism and the Javanese value of nguwongke wong, ‘humanised human’. They show pictures of the Islamic Eid holiday that they celebrated as Christians together with their Muslim relatives, and of the thousands of Muslims who came to the joint prayer on Salatiga square that was organised in response to the attack on the Surabaya church. However, the quality of Christian-Muslim relations strongly differs per area. In West Java, the situation is more ‘hot’ – as Indonesians call it. In Bogor, for example, local authorities refused to issue a permit for building a Catholic church and subsequently prohibited public celebrations of Christmas, quoting the absence of that permit for religious worship as a reason.49

Thus at the political level, especially during elections, political leaders frequently play the religious card to gain votes. Reportedly, the burning of two churches in Aceh Singkil was instigated by a political leader and carried out by members from the Aceh Youth Concerned For Islam that came from outside the community.50 Another oft-quoted example of identity politics is that of the fundamentalist organisations Islamic Defenders Front [FPI], Hidayatullah, and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia [HTI]. Together, these organisations mobilised hundreds of thousands of Muslims to protest against Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, the former governor of Jakarta known as Ahok, accusing him of ‘blasphemy’ in an effort to prevent the re-election of this Chinese Christian governor (Chaplin 2017).

88) Although the Ahmadiyah are Muslims, they are considered heretics by many other Muslims because they acknowledge another “messiah” who came after Mohammad: Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839–1908), who was born in Punjab, India and declared that he had received a divine revelation and was the expected messiah of the latter days. The Ahmadiyah themselves insist that although they follow the teachings of Mirza Ghulam, they do not recognize any other prophet besides Mohammad (HRW 2013: 24).
89) Interview with board and staff members of Yayasan Sion on 26 June 2018, and interview with Izak Lattu, expert on inter-religious relations in Indonesia, on 27 June 2018.
91) Interview with one of the founders of Yayasan Sion who represents Indonesia in the United Evangelical Mission - an international communion of 35 Protestant churches from various traditions in Africa, Asia, and Germany, on 26 June 2018. Also see: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34524817 (accessed 30 June 2016).
Within this overall context of ambiguity, religious organisations have played roles to enhance space for civil society – advocating democracy, human rights and religious tolerance – and committed or instigated acts of intimidation and terror that reduced such space. The best known and most quoted examples are the attacks of various Islamist groups on bars, Ahmadiyah mosques and gatherings of women’s and human rights activists. While such examples of faith-inspired violence easily find their way to the media, the large majority of Muslims, represented by the NU, continue to support a moderate form of Islam. Another example of an Islamic organisation that actively seeks to promote civic and religious liberty is that of the formerly marginalised Islamic movement Asadiyah, a Sufi movement from South Sulawesi that has become an important promoter of ‘middle-path Islam’ ([Islam Wasathiyah] – a strand of Islam that seeks to counter Islamic extremism (Woodward 2018).

Christian fundamentalists have also instigated violence. In 2015 for example, a mosque was destroyed in the Christian-majority province of Papua, in eastern Indonesia, on the Islamic holy day of Eid al-Fitr. In addition, some Christian evangelical missions from the USA have engaged in active proselytisation practices. Examples include The Joshua Project, which aims to bring salvation to various ethnic groups around the world including Indonesia, Lampstand [Beja Kabungahan], an FBO that was established by an American missionary and focuses on evangelism and church planting among the Sundanese people of West Java, and Frontiers, an Arizona-based organisation that has a small operation in West Java that aims to convert Muslims [ICG 2010: 3].

Overall, however, such Christian proselytisation remains marginal. The large majority of Christian churches, FBOs and their international counterparts solely evangelise amongst their own communities. Nevertheless, the activities of these few have added to the rising resistance in Indonesia against ‘Christianisation’ in recent years and have fuelled inter-religious tensions between Muslims and Christians, especially in West Java.

3.3 Enhancing (or Reducing) Civic Space

The role of faith-based organisations in lobby and community mobilisation

The NU, Muhammadiyah, the Protestant PGI and the Catholic KWI are the four most influential faith-based organisations where it concerns influencing governmental policies. If these four FBOs issue a joint statement, the government will certainly listen. The NU, Muhammadiyah, PGI and KWIs have a long tradition of interfaith cooperation, and often operate together, either through the Dewan Antaragama Indonesia, the Inter-Religious Council (IRC), or through bilateral cooperation, as for example when lobbying for the rights of indigenous people or in jointly denouncing violent Islamist attacks.

Yet, even though PGI and KWIs are regularly consulted by the government, the Islamic FBOs are far more influential in lobbying the government, especially the NU, according to a PGI staff member. ‘If there is an issue that we want to advocate as interfaith organisations, but which the NU refuses to support then the whole case is dropped,’ he commented. Because of that, it seems to him that the NU outweights Muhammadiyah in its capacity to exert influence.

This may also be a reason why, during the past years, the Muhammadiyah also started to play a role in identity politics. When hard-line Islamic organisations began their campaign to discredit governor Ahok and called upon all Muslims to join the protests at Monas, the national monument in Jakarta, the Muhammadiyah supported that call. The NU, on the contrary, told its members to stay home and to protest the instrumentalisation of religion by politicians. Despite this appeal, however, thousands of NU members did decide to join the demonstrations at Monas. ‘The problem is that the NU no longer controls its members, like the Catholics for example do,’ explained Henry Lokra, staff member of PGI, ‘or as was the case when Gus Dur was still alive.’ This former leader of the NU who strongly endorsed the value of religious pluralism was not only venerated as an intellectual but was also highly respected within the Islamic communities. ‘If Gus Dur would say something, all santri [conservative Muslims] would follow-up,’ added Beril Huliselan from PGI. The problem today is, that both the leaders of the NU and Muhammadiyah no longer have strong roots in the community. Ahmad Syafii Maarif, a Muhammadiyah leader, has very good views on justice and human rights, but the people do not listen to him,’ said Lokra.

Fundamentalist Islamic movements, on the other hand, have ‘very good networks in the community, and at schools’, said Huliseman. Even though the current President may not be inclined to listen to these organisations – as he wants to promote a moderate, middle-of-the-road Islam and revive the

72] The term santri refers to a group of Javanese Muslims who practise a more conservative form of Islam; the term abangan refers to a group of Javanese who practise a more syncretic form of Islam, one mixed with indigenous beliefs and practices.
ideal of religious pluralism – organisations like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) are very effective in mobilising hundreds of thousands of people. Through such populist campaigns, they have successfully pressured the government to adopt more conservative positions.

In the run-up to the next presidential elections, PGI together with the NU have already started a campaign to increase people’s awareness of the political instrumentalisation of religion. Through voter education and videos spread on social media, they call upon voters not to be manipulated and to ensure that their church or mosque is not misused by politicians to gain votes.

**Faith-Based Organisations and (Secular) NGOs**

Overall, the space for faith-based organisations to conduct advocacy work about the social-economic situation of marginalised groups – on small farmers, women, youth and religious and ethnic minorities – is large and probably much larger than that of secular NGOs. Before 1998, the strongly centralistic Suharto regime controlled and monitored ‘all organised civic activities…except for religious activities’ (Sakai 2012: 376). In addition, the constituency represented by secular NGOs is nowhere near as large as that of the faith-based organisations. ‘Secular NGOs do a lot of good [advocacy related] research, but have no power,’ explained Beril Huliselan, Head of the Research and Communications Department at PGI. ‘The government does not listen to them. They cannot influence [the government] because, even though they are well organised, they have nowhere near as many members as religious organisations do.’ Moreover, besides the influence that faith-based organisations have on vast numbers of constituents through their weekly religious services, they possess considerable wealth because of the religious tradition of alms-giving, such as the obligatory Islamic payment of zakat to the poor.

According to this Islamic principle, Muslims have to share 2.5% of their assets on an annual base. With an estimated 80 million members of the NU and Muhammadiyah together, zakat funding became so substantial that foundations were established to manage the fund (Sakai 2012: 377-8). Amongst them are the Dompet Dhuafa Foundation, ‘a successful fundraising organisation that accepts zakat from urban-based educated professional Muslims [and] has forged partnerships with companies operating in Indonesia to promote social corporate responsibility’ (Sakai 212: 378). Besides these, various private collection agencies, called Lembaga Amil Zakat (LAZs), were established in the early 1990s which ‘successfully advocated zakat payments for the alleviation of poverty’. Their returns were considerable: ‘in 2004 nine prominent private collection agencies (LAZs) raised USD 7.6 million and by 2008 had increased this amount to USD 25 million’ (Ibid.).

Although Christian faith-based organisations do not have similar numbers of membership in Indonesia, the Christian tradition of tithing, in which one tenth of one’s wealth or income is given to the church, also helps to raise considerable funds for poverty relief and social economic development (Sakai 2012: 381). Besides this, during the colonial period, Christian missionaries established a great number of schools and hospitals that continue to provide quality education and health services today. In the 1980s, many Christian churches began to establish special foundations to concentrate and professionalise their work on poverty alleviation, development and disaster relief.

Today, however, fundraising from foreign donors has become much more problematic for Christian FBOs in Indonesia. This is because Islamic FBOs outnumber them in terms of sheer power and size, and because in recent years, foreign donors have begun to prefer working with Islamic FBOs.

**Almost every time there is a natural disaster, Dompet Dhuafa, PKPU74 and Muhammadiyah will be out there. They are very strong. They are members of the BNPB [Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management]. They are immediately there when there is a natural disaster. They have many, many volunteers. Many foreign donors now begin to work with them instead of with us. Because they want to support multiculturalism.**

-Staff members PGI

Secular NGOs in Indonesia do not have such strong ties and wide networks in the community as FBOs do. There is no tradition of sponsorship between Indonesian NGOs and citizens. Relations that NGOs established with beneficiaries are often

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73) See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgJK0AI0PnQ (accessed 2 July 2018).
terminated at the end of a project. Moreover, secular NGOs have always largely depended on Western donors. Now that DAC donors have substantially reduced their budgets for development cooperation or even stopped funding Indonesian NGOs altogether, it has become increasingly difficult for Indonesian NGOs to survive. In addition, the government of Indonesia recently introduced more stringent regulations that seek to limit the influence of secular and international NGOs on domestic affairs in Indonesia.

The New ‘NGO Law’ and Marginalised Groups in Indonesia

In 2013, the Indonesian parliament adopted Law No. 17 on Societal Organisations (Organisasi Kemasyarakatan). The law imposes a set of obligations and prohibitions on societal organisations, for example they are prohibited from propagating an ideology that conflicts with the Pancasila principle of belief in the one and only God, such as atheism, communism or Marxist-Leninism. It also potentially restricts the right to demonstration through a rather vague rule that prohibits activities that disrupt public order and well-being. In case of violation of Law No. 17, the government can withdraw the licence of the CSO involved. Although the Law does not prohibit local CSOs from engaging in lobby and advocacy, it clearly prohibits foreign foundations and foundations founded by foreign entities from engaging in political activities [ICCO 2016d: 7].

At the same time, marginalised groups such as small farmers, indigenous people and women, find it hard to make their voice heard. Although the Indonesian economy has seen an annual growth rate of about 5% in recent years, the gap between Indonesia’s rich and poor is widening. Millions of Indonesians depend on agriculture for their livelihood, as rice, tea, horticulture and spices remain successful and profitable economic products. Yet, due to a variety of problems such as low quality produce, restricted access to credit, land grabbing, and poor corporate social responsibility performance of companies and plantation owners, small-scale producers in the agricultural sectors are not able to benefit from the potential of the sector in terms of increased income, and as a consequence stay entrapped in poverty and food insecurity [ICCO 2016d: 10].

Within this overall context of the limited role and influence of secular CSOs on both the Indonesian government and Indonesian communities, it becomes all the more important to look at the role of faith-based organisations in advocating space for small producers and other marginalised groups.

To that end, three case studies are provided below: on the national advocacy campaigns conducted by PGI, the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, on Yayasan Sion, which works with and through the local church to empower marginalised small farmer communities in North Central Java, and on the support and advocacy that Yayasan Yabima provides to the multi-religious farmer communities of Lampung, South Sumatra.

3.4 National Influencing

a. Advocating the Rights of Other Believers: the PGI Lobby for Adat Rights

Background

The Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI), or Communion of Churches in Indonesia, was established in May 1950 as forum of Protestant churches from different denominations to jointly address various local and national issues. Before the Second World War, there was already a Missionary Board (zending in Dutch) that supervised and coordinated the different missionary branches of the Protestant churches in Indonesia. This coordinating board was dissolved, however, following Indonesia’s independence in 1949. As a result, in May 1950, three regional church assemblies – notably from Yogyakarta, Medan and Eastern Indonesia – decided to establish a new national coordinating body, the Dewan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (DGI), or Board of Churches in Indonesia. Later on, the name ‘board’ was replaced by ‘communion’ (persekutuan) to emphasise the aim of PGI to support the unity of churches in Indonesia ‘in the midst of the disunity of churches as the body of Christ’. At the time of its establishment, PGI had 30 member churches. In 2018, it has 89 different member churches, representing over 15 million Christians – about 80% of all Christians in Indonesia. PGI is a long-time partner of Civic Engagement Alliance member Kerk in Actie.

PGI not only aims to support the maturation of churches in a spiritual sense, but also in terms of its ability to respond to social issues and needs, such as poverty, radicalism, injustice.

76) See the short video on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmkjAKD2IO4 [accessed 2 July 2018]. PGI is very active on social media and issues regular videos in response to various social-political issues.
77) See: https://pgi.or.id/sejarah-singkat/ [accessed 2 July 2018].
and environmental destruction. As such, the organisation was involved in advocacy from the very beginning.

As part of its current five-year strategy (2014-2019), PGI aims to develop a community that struggles for justice, peace, social welfare and the integrity of creation. PGI’s five-year strategies are prepared by staff members through a series of focus group discussions with local member churches, and consultations with other stakeholders, such as academics. The General Synod subsequently discusses and agrees on the main objectives of this multi-annual strategy. The implementation of the strategy is managed by the daily management committee (Majelis Pekerja-Harian - MKH) that is supported by the staff of the PGI bureau. At present, about 30 staff members work at the PGI Bureau in three different departments: 1. the department for diakonia, or the service of justice and peace, which also conducts PGI’s lobby and advocacy work; 2. the department for oikoumene, or unity and renewal of the church, which is also engaged in research on theological and church development issues and; 3. the department for marturia or witnessing and protecting the integrity of the creation, which conducts activities for environmental protection, interfaith dialogue and awareness building.

Striving towards unity amongst Indonesian churches does not mean that PGI aims to become the supervisor of all its membership churches. True to the spirit of ecumenism, PGI facilitates dialogues and joint efforts on various theological and social issues, while respecting the different backgrounds and traditions of all members. It remains a challenge, however, for PGI to get all members on the same page, especially concerning sensitive issues such as the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) people.

When PGI issued a pastoral letter to advocate the equal rights of LGBTI, this caused a serious row amongst the members. Some churches even demanded that PGI Board members step down, explained staff members of PGI’s research and development team:

*Staff members of the PGI Research and Development Team*

Thus, the staff members of the PGI bureau have to continuously find a balance between implementing the vision and mission agreed upon by the General Synod of PGI, while remaining aware of local sensibilities. Such sensibilities emerge not only because of internal theological disputes, but also because local churches are increasingly subjected to local political power play. This is especially important in the advocacy case described below, about PGI’s lobbying for recognition of the rights of indigenous people in Indonesia, including their adat - customary land rights.

**Lobbying the rights for indigenous people**

There are an estimated 30 million people in Indonesia who do not practise any of the six religions officially recognised by the Indonesian state. They encompass a wide range of cultural and religious beliefs and customs:

*Alternately classified as kebudayaan (culture), adat (tradition or traditional law), kebatinan (mysticism), or aliran kepercayaan (belief groups), these names encompass diverse practices from the Javanese philosophy of kejawen to the specific cosmologies held by ethnic based communities like the Parmalim of North Sumatra, as well as new religious movements emerging from these cosmologies, such as Sapto Dharmo. (Swazey 2017:3)*

Because of the Pancasila and the related Law on Civil Administration, Indonesian citizens are obliged to register their religious affiliation on their national identity cards (Karta Tanda Penduduk, KTP). However, the beliefs and practices of indigenous peoples fall outside the state definition of ‘religion’

78) Pastor Gomar Gultom, Secretary General of PGI in a video published on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmku4K02t/4 [accessed 2 July 2018]
79) The words in italics are Greek phonetics.
80) Interview with PGI staff members, 2 July 2018, Jakarta.
‘agama’). They are described as ‘beliefs [that] have yet’ to embrace a ‘religion’ and are hence more ‘primitive’ or delayed in the ‘civilization process’ (Swazey 2017: 3-4). Put differently, they are discriminated against. Even though in 2006, Indonesian parliament finally adopted a Law on Civil Administration that allows those practising ‘other beliefs’ to leave the religious identity box blank, in practice, this means that ‘problems of discrimination persist, especially in the field of civil administration’ (Swazey 2017: 10). ‘If you want to apply for a job and leave the religion box empty,’ explains Beril Huliselan, ‘employees will suspect you of being an atheist.’ In the Indonesian context, such suspicion may easily disqualify you as a candidate. Indigenous people face similar problems in administering marriage – which can only be performed by an officially recognised religious institution – and in accessing education.

Advocating the rights of indigenous people is not only about advocating their freedom of religion and their equal rights as citizens. It is also about defending their customary land rights.

Many indigenous peoples in Indonesia have their own customary laws and land rights. They almost function like small administrations, with their own leadership, laws and dispute resolution. They regard their land as being protected by the spirits. It cannot be taken away [from them], that destroys their relation with the spirits… The land is their life.

Beril Huliselan, 2 July 2018

Thus, not only does land have material value for indigenous people, it is also of great social and spiritual importance.

Some years ago, PESDAM, a local NGO from West Java that works with indigenous people, visited the four main FBOs in Indonesia, including PGI. ‘They wanted to lobby the government to change the Law on Civil Administration and needed the support from the main religious organisations,’ explained Huliselan. PGI wanted to support PESDAM because PGI strongly believes in equal rights for all.

The other three FBOs – the NU, Muhammadiyah and the KWI – also wished to support the lobby for a change of the Law on Civil Administration. Together, they issued a joint statement. Rather than the current option available to indigenous people, namely to leave the religion box on their identity card [KTP] blank, the four FBOs demanded the entire removal of that box from the KTP. ‘Religion should not play a role,’ explained Henry Lokra. ‘The KTP should show your name, age and address, yes, but not your religion!’

Although the NU and Muhammadiyah leadership signed the joint statement, the Indonesian Ulama Council [MUI] – the highest Muslim clerical body in Indonesia – disagreed. If the ‘religion box’ is removed from the identity cards and thus from civil administration altogether, the MUI no longer has information on the number of adherents. The Indonesian Bureau on National Statistics and Ministry for Internal Affairs share these concerns, arguing that they need these numbers for various other areas of governance, such as health and education.

At present, PGI makes a large contribution to this lobby through its research unit, and recently submitted a report on this matter to the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council. At the same time, they continue to advocate customary land rights at the regional and local level. But as land rights involve political power play, they have to approach this with great care. ‘We have to move slowly and carefully… watch the local political process,’ said a PGI staff member.81

Although the lobby is still ongoing, the involvement of PGI and other FBOs has been of strategic importance. Thanks to the joint statement by the four main FBOs, the government was willing to engage in dialogue on the issue with civil society and is currently discussing ways to review the Law on Civil Administration. The government would never have responded this way if the request had come from NGOs only. Thus, by reaching out and gaining the support of FBOs, the local NGO PESDAM managed to gain access to the government. Vice versa, by supporting this lobby, FBOs enhance the space for civil society and indigenous peoples in Indonesia at large.

3.5 Local Influencing

a. ‘Change Yourself to Change Others’: the Umoja Mentas Groups of Yayasan Sion

The Christian Church of North Central Java and Sion Foundation

The Gereja Kristen Jawa Tengah Utara (Christian Church of North Central Java) has its origins in Dutch colonial times. Around 1848, several missionaries, amongst whom the Dutch Miss Leone, established small village churches in the mountainous area surrounding the town of Salatiga, Central Java.

81) Interview with Beril Hulisan, Head of R&D Department PGI, 2 July 2018, Jakarta.
Java. Although most village churches were established by missionaries from the Dutch and German Reformed Church, there were a great many differences between them. Some pastors introduced very strict Calvinist teachings, others were more tolerant towards Javanese beliefs and customs. In 1889 these churches were united under the name Salatiga Zending ('Salatiga Mission'). In 1937, the church was renamed Pasamunawar Salatiga Zending. In 1949, following Indonesian independence, the church removed the Dutch word zending altogether and named itself Gereja Kristen Jawa Tengah Utara (GKJTU) - or Parepatan Agung (PA) as the church is called in everyday conversation.

The missionary origins of the GKJTU still show from the fact that it adopted the Reformed Christian doctrine as laid down in the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). Yet the church also made an effort to adapt to the local context and needs. When the first missionaries arrived in the late 19th century, the remote villages in North Central Java were mostly inhabited by small farmers who faced serious poverty and health problems. Thus, the Salatiga Zending and the later GKJTU focused their missionary work on poverty alleviation through education, health and rural development projects. Today, the GKJTU is still known as ‘a church by the poor, for the poor’. Although the GKJTU remains relatively small, with about 57 congregations and 20,000 members, it continues to have strong roots in the community.

In 1977, the GKJTU established Yayasan Sion (Sion Foundation) to continue and expand its diaconal work. Yayasan Sion uses an integral approach that seeks to alleviate poverty both in a material and spiritual sense and aims to liberate people from ‘ignorance, oppression and injustice’. In the 1970s, the Foundation began its work in the isolated villages of Sion mountain. Many of the farmer families that lived on this mountain were trapped in a cycle of poverty. Farmers sold their produce to middle men who paid far below the market price. In addition, the farmers and their family received very little education, malnutrition levels were low and maternity death rates were high. Today, the Sion Foundation continues to help to strengthen the sustainable livelihoods of these families and communities in the wider area of North Central Java through projects on education, social-economic development, women’s empowerment and public health.

From the very beginning, the Sion Foundation worked in close cooperation with the community through the establishment of local committees whose members acted as coordinators, coaches or trainers. In 2012, board members of Yayasan Sion were invited by the international faith-based organisation Tearfund to visit a Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) project in Cambodia. Because CCM, or Umoja, strongly matched their community approach, Sion decided to integrate the method in their own community development work.

An adviser came to Salatiga to train Sion staff members in what they renamed the Umoja Mentas project – referring to the Javanese word ‘mentas’, meaning ‘self-reliant’, and to the abbreviation of the Indonesian ‘menuju transformasi’, ‘towards transformation’. In 2018, following six years of implementation, the staff members of Sion felt that Umoja Mentas had revitalised the communities and themselves in ways they had never imagined. The case study below describes and identifies some of the elements that contributed to this success.

Before we started with Umoja, we also worked in cooperation with the community, but not really from within. Of course, the community would be involved in the analysis, but we built on the vision of a few people only. And we remained dominant as an NGO: this is our vision, this is our analysis. In the end, it was NGO staff who actually took the decisions. But with CCM, it really starts with them, the community members. They are the ones doing the analysis, they are the ones developing a vision and taking decisions. We are just facilitating.

-Staff member Yayasan Sion, 25 June 2018

82) Interview with the Head and Secretary General of the GKJTU Synod, 25 June 2018.
84) See: http://yasiga.org/ to learn some more about today’s projects of Yayasan Sion (accessed 28 June 2018).
Umoja in brief: vision and method

The Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) or Umoja method was developed by Tearfund based on more than 20 years of experience of working with churches and communities throughout Africa and Asia.86 At the core of Umoja – referring to the Swahili word ‘togetherness’ – is the view of poverty as (resulting from) a broken relationship on multiple levels. ‘Poverty is holistic: it is not just about economic or material needs but… also about social, environmental and spiritual needs’ (Tearfund 2017d: 4). Consequently, Umoja concentrates on restoring relationships on all these levels: with God, through building a living everyday relation of faith; with oneself, by developing one’s talents and sense of self-worth; within the family and community, by restoring a sense of belonging through mutual love and care; with ‘others’, by investing in relationships with members of other faith or ethnic communities, government officials and business owners and, finally, with the environment, by practising the Christian value of ‘stewardship’ through good environmental and natural resource management (Tearfund 2017d: 4-5).

By restoring these relationships, Umoja aims to ‘change yourself to change others, empower yourself to empower others’87: to lift oneself, one’s family and community out of poverty by building on own resources, rather than by passively waiting for outside help. To that end, Umoja offers a two to three-year awareness building and empowerment programme. This programme encourages the Umoja students to identify, develop and practise their personal talents and skills and those of the church and community as a whole. Self-confidence, responsibility, sharing and cooperation are some of the key values that are taught through the wide variety of exercises and activities described in the Umoja manuals. These activities are designed to stimulate the creativity, inventiveness and imagination of participants, using songs, role plays, stories and biblical metaphors. Together, they guide community members through the different steps of the empowerment process.88

The Umoja manual takes Umoja students through five subsequent phases or stages of community empowerment and transformation: 1. joint bible reading and reflection to internalise some key religious teachings related to community service and self-reliance; 2. joint analysis of the everyday social-economic problems encountered in the family, in church, in the community and environment; 3. joint development of a vision for the community, and of the projects that should be undertaken to realise that vision; 4. joint implementation of community projects; 5.evaluation of all actions and adaptation of plans.

The Umoja approach uses a Training of Trainers model to place members of local churches in the driver’s seat. First, the Umoja approach is presented and explained to church leaders who are requested to support the project. Then, church leaders collect participants for the Umoja facilitators training through a process of selection and election within the church congregation. Then local pastors and selected congregation members receive a joint facilitation training. Once that training is finished, the pastors and facilitators invite congregation members to join the Umoja Mentas groups and participate in the awareness and empowerment training described above. On average, each group consists of about 15-20 members. The training and accompaniment – which takes all participants through the above five phases – may last two to three years. Facilitators are taught not to move to the next stage before the whole group feels ready to do so. The emphasis is on process: on relationship building, and on changing the awareness, attitudes and behaviours of participants.

Examples of personal transformation and change of mindset

‘Of course we always already cared for our families but Umoja made this value of caring for others much stronger.’

‘Before Umoja, many women in the village, including me, were very selfish. Rather than working hard, we preferred to chat and gossip. We would often complain about our situation and beg for financial support from others, in a passive way. Umoja really changed my mindset. I learnt that I was not poor, but actually had talents and resources. These could grow if I shared and cooperated with others and tried my best.’

‘Umoja made me very proud. Before, I would never dare to speak in public. Now, I even became an Umoja facilitator!’

- Various members of the Umoja Mentas group Salatiga, 24 June 2018

87) Interview with members of the Umoja Mentas group Salatiga, 24 June 2018
Thus, members of the Umoja group gradually experience a process of spiritual empowerment in their personal lives, in their church and in the community. This spiritual empowerment supports them to take concrete steps to improve the social-economic situation of their family, community and natural environment. Most Umoja Mentas groups begin with small projects that improve the quality and atmosphere of the church building and surroundings. For example, they redecorate the church, paint the walls in fresh colours or start small vegetable gardens around the church. Then they undertake individual initiatives to improve the living environment in their home and neighbourhood, for example by starting small vegetable gardens, cleaning the nearby streets from waste, or beginning a small fish pond. Once this is finished and the Umoja Mentas group has developed a long-term vision for the community and an implementation plan (stage 3), they begin to implement a project that benefits the social, economic and environmental situation of the larger community outside the church. An example of a community project is provided in the box below.

Trial and error are important ingredients of the Umoja approach: failures or backlashes are regarded as ‘part of the deal’ and opportunities for learning and improvement. Several of the Umoja Mentas groups that were established with the accompaniment of Sion experienced periods of little activity or even stopped functioning altogether. The reasons for this varied – for example because the facilitator passed away, or because community members experienced difficulties in scheduling regular meetings. In those cases, efforts were made to revitalise the group by learning from past experiences.

Faith and Spirituality As a Resource
When prompted about the differences in community empowerment approaches of secular NGOs and faith-based organisations, Sion staff members mentioned a couple of faith-based qualities that were even new to themselves. First, they felt that the Umoja approach was much better for ‘practising what you preach’ where it concerns community-based or localisation approaches. One staff member who previously worked for an NGO felt that although that NGO said it actively involved the community in the project design, it was actually the NGO staff members who took the decisions. ‘Umoja is more practical. When I worked with that NGO, the idea of community development was more theoretical. With Umoja, we really do it: we start from within the community.’ Second, the difference is that spirituality really is not be so important and central. But now, spirituality really is the source for community empowerment. And our [Sion’s staff] spiritual motivation increased together with them.

Improving the economic and environmental conditions of the Ngelo community
The Umoja Mentas group of Ngelo, a village of about 5,000 people in Central Java, established a garbage collection project that has set an example for many other Umoja groups in the region. Inspired by the Christian value of stewardship, members of the group began to notice that many villagers dumped their garbage in the wood or on the side of the road, or burnt their waste in open fires, thus causing air pollution. They then began to offer to buy the villagers’ waste for small sums of money. The collected waste was selected and recycled in various ways. They for example sent it to a nearby recycling factory that cleaned the plastic and then returned it. Once cleaned, the Umoja members designed beautiful handicrafts from the recycled plastics, such as purses, bags and flip-flops. The money they earned by selling these handicrafts could then be used to buy more waste from the villagers.

The Umoja project in Ngelo became so successful that the group decided to expand their business to include neighbouring villages. They lobbied the local government to obtain the necessary permits and support. Now, several villages have been included in this profitable ecological project. Meanwhile, the Umoja Mentas group in Ngelo continued its community mobilisation projects. During the Carnival parade, women of the Umoja group wore beautiful dresses made of recycled plastic to raise environmental awareness within the community. Recently, the group started a second pilot project that involves organic fish farming. The Umoja group in Ngelo thus continues to implement social-economic business projects that benefit the whole of the community. In doing so, they build towards the community vision that they developed of their own accord, which they have called ‘triple E’: a vision inspired by the ‘Evangelie’ (the Gospel) that aims to improve the environment and the Economic situation of the entire community.

Umoja starts to work with and within the local church, aiming to empower it as a source of inspiration for the whole of the community. ‘Before, Sion would often directly begin to work with the community. Of course, we would bring along our spiritual values, but more as an add-on. Our faith and spirituality would not be so important and central. But now, spirituality really is the source for community empowerment. And our [Sion’s staff] spiritual motivation increased together with them.’

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89) Sion staff member, 25 June 2018.
One of the key biblical metaphors inspiring the Umoja members – also printed as an image on their T-shirts – is that of the fish and loaves. This gospel story, in which Jesus multiplied two fish and five loaves of bread to feed thousands of people who had come to listen to him, supports their belief in the power of sharing, both in a material and spiritual sense. ‘I learnt that even if I only have very little to share, for example my spare time, that can already bear fruit if I share it and cooperate with the community,’ said one Umoja student. Personal time, talents or small individual donations – such as a plant, one’s backyard or pond – are examples of material resources that can ‘multiply’ if used to benefit the community.

In addition, the belief in the economic benefits of sharing and cooperation is strengthened by the belief in the spiritual power of giving, as another Umoja student explained: ‘We read the story about the widow in the Bible, who was asked to give the little bread and oil she had to the prophet Elijah, while she and her son were almost starving. But then Elijah said that if she would feed him first, he promised that God would feed her. And then she gave him food first, and the oil and flour multiplied. That taught me that you do not need to think of your own needs first before giving to others: you can give, and it will somehow return to you.’

These ‘returns’ are not only understood in a material sense but also, and more importantly, in a social and spiritual sense. ‘Umoja is not about the result, about the money that members earn through starting small-scale economic projects,’ explained a Sion staff member, ‘it is about the process, about the transformation.’ Umoja students frequently expressed that they did not join Umoja and the community projects first and foremost for economic gains, but because working with and caring for others made them much happier people, provided them with a sense of belonging and greatly strengthened their faith.

In church, I merely listened to the verses from the bible without understanding them, and I was passive. In the Umoja group, it was much more informal. We were taught that our first priority was to feel happy – I had never heard that before! We could chat, sing and do games and express our thoughts freely. That way, I developed a much deeper understanding of the bible and could really internalise [receive] the teachings.

- Facilitator Umoja Mentas group Budosari

One of the major changes I observed after we started Umoja, was the change of dynamics in church. Before, everybody would be passive, shy and keep to oneself. Afterwards, when we would have meetings, all members would be active: one would facilitate, the other would take notes, another would bring cake and coffee… It was such a change in energy, exceptional.

- Female member Umoja Mentas group Salatiga

Spill-Over Effect: Improving Inter-Religious Relations

Using their faith and spirituality as the key source of community empowerment and mobilisation does not mean that Sion, or the Umoja project, seeks to evangelise or convert members of other faith communities. As a minority in a predominantly Muslim country, Christian FBOs in Indonesia have to be careful not to be accused of ‘Christianisation’ and of provoking resistance or even conflicts (see also section 3.2 above on ‘Christian-Muslim relations’). That is why members of the Umoja group stay far from any form of evangelisation when interacting with the community, the majority of whom are Muslim. ‘Of course, we read and discuss the bible during our meetings, that is very important, especially in the first phase. But we will never quote Bible verses to community members outside the church. Of course, we are open and tell them that we are Christian. But our faith is first and foremost an inner source of inspiration that we keep to ourselves.’

The Umoja method builds on the insight that strengthening relations across different religious affiliations is much more effective, as it helps to strengthen community cohesion and reduce intergroup tensions. Such intergroup tensions occur not only between Muslims and Christians, but sometimes also between different Christian congregations.

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90) See the Old Testament: 1 Kings 17: 7-16
91) See: Old Testament, 1 Kings 17: 8-16.
92) Interview with staff Yayasan Sion, 25 June 2018
93) Interview with Umoja Mentas group Salatiga, 24 June 2018.
In Wonorejo, for example, there was a feud between the leaders of two neighbouring churches because of a land conflict. Implementing Umoja in the name of the church would only have fuelled that conflict. Instead, the members of the local Umoja Mentas group started some small-scale community projects in their own name, as neighbours and community members. They began a small organic vegetable garden and invited members of the other church, as well as other community members, to come and collect its produce for free. Gradually, the relations between the members of both churches improved. They began to attend joint celebrations and the Umoja facilitator observed that the atmosphere and interaction improved during such gatherings. Although the leaders of the two churches have not yet been reconciled, the Umoja facilitator was confident that that would eventually happen. For as the leaders begin to notice the improved relations between all other church members, they may feel ‘pressured’ by the group to follow suit and lay down their arms - figuratively speaking.94

Thus, rather than directly organising a reconciliation process for the local religious leaders, the Umoja approach contributed to conflict resolution through leading by example. When members of the Umoja groups showed forgiveness and kindness by sharing their garden, members of the other congregation softened their attitude in return. In the box below another example is given of this approach to conflict reconciliation: one that ignites a conflict transformation process by beginning to change one’s own attitude towards the other’ - very much in tune with the Christian value of forgiveness and ‘turning the other cheek’.

The Umoja method of ‘leading by example’ also resulted in the spontaneous conversion of quite a number of Muslims. Staff members of Yayasan Sion spoke about that with pride. A cynical comment that may be placed in response to this is that, after all, the Umoja project does aim to evangelise. Yet, when listening to the Umoja members and Sion staff expressing such pride, the overriding impression was that of a group of genuine believers who regard such conversions as a confirmation of their faith: of the belief that God spreads His good works through them.

Inter-Religious Conflict Transformation in the Village of Tawang

‘The village of Tawang did not want to work with us; they were forbidden by their Muslim leader because we were Christian. So then we started to work with the neighbouring village instead, as they had no such objections. Our work in that village paid off, we achieved a lot. Then the women of Tawang became curious and asked the women of the neighbouring village about our projects. When they heard about the good results, they invited us to come to Tawang. When the husbands found out that their wives had ‘secretly’ invited us [Yayasan Sion] to their village, they became angry. One husband watched an Umoja meeting with the Tawang women without being detected, after which he understood that we were actually trying to improve the economic situation of the family. Other husbands remained angry, yet at the same time they were surprised that their wives continued to go to our meetings. They noticed that their house and environment became cleaner and that their wives became more patient. Finally, they responded to our invitation and we then talked about health issues, livelihood and the future of their children. They then understood that we had not come to Christianise them.

‘Then, one of the husbands invited us to use his house to open a local health clinic. By that time, several women of Tawang had been trained to provide first aid. And this man was the local Islamic leader! He then spoke during Friday prayer in the mosque, saying ‘We were wrong not to want to work with these Christians. They are good people.’ He also said, ‘I have gone to the church and prayed there.’ After that, the entire community of Tawang opened up to us. Last year, when we celebrated Christmas, many Muslims in the community attended the church service. They all sang along with Silent Night and some began to cry. We help each other now. The Muslim community wanted to give Yayasan Sion a trophy to thank us for all the community work. It really transformed the relations in the community. This experience strengthened my faith in God and my belief that nothing is impossible.’

-Debora Suparni, Director of Yayasan Sion, 26 June 2018

94) Interview with facilitator of the Umoja group in Wonorejo, 25 June 2018.
cultivated crops. In 1905, Lampung was selected as a migration area by the Dutch colonial administration, who encouraged the establishment of plantations and the migration of Javanese settlers. From 1905 to 1939, numerous coffee, rubber and pepper plantations emerged in Lampung and large numbers of migrants arrived from other parts of the Dutch East Indies. After independence, the Indonesian government basically continued this migration policy. Migration to Lampung intensified again in the 1970s, when president Suharto launched a comprehensive government transmigration programme. Today, Lampung continues to supply a major share of Indonesia’s export market, producing substantial amounts of coffee, palm oil, pepper and other agricultural produce [Safitri 2010: 138].

However, the migration policies not only brought economic profit to the area. The Dutch administration introduced a governance structure that superseded the traditional Lampungese administration of community land, called marga, ‘territory’. These marga consisted of village conglomerations governed on the base of clan and kinship relations [Safitri 2010: 142]. The Dutch and later the Suharto regime neglected these customary laws and confiscated the land of the Lampungese to establish plantations.

The arrival of migrants from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds further fragmented Lampung society. Javanese, Sundanese, Minangs, Chinese and Balinese groups settled in the area, each practising their own respective faiths. The Dutch administration applied a racial policy that benefited certain ethnic groups over others. The Suharto regime made no effort to support the integration of immigrants.

This mix of historical interventions has contributed to substantial intergroup tensions between the various peoples inhabiting Lampung today. Although many of these conflicts originate in past experiences of unjust land distribution, they mostly surface as inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts [Safitri 2010: 153].

Yayasan Yabima

The Yabima Foundation was established in 1989 to manage the diaconal work of the Christian Church of Southern Sumatra [Gereja Kristen Sumatera Bagian Selatan, GKSBS]. Yabima aims to ‘manifest the love of God by supporting communities to become self-reliant, in the spirit of the national Pancasila ideology’. At the moment, Yabima offers support to about 60 farmer groups, 4 grass-roots organisations and 8 farmers cooperatives through a variety of activities related to health, livelihood development and peace building. One of the activities that stands out, and will be described below, is the support and development of organic farming. Through this project, Yabima not only helps to improve the economic situation of farmers and of the environment but also, indirectly, contributes to peace building. Yayasan Yabima is a partner of the Civic Engagement Alliance member Kerk in Actie.

Organic Farming

The Yabima Foundation already began to accompany farmers in Purwokencono village, East Lampung, in 1997. They assisted farmers in improving the health of small cattle, mostly cows. In 2007, Yabima learnt that the Government of Indonesia planned to start a major programme in 2010 to support the development of organic farming. The ambitious programme, announced with the slogan ‘Go Organic 2010’, aimed to establish Indonesia as a major player on the global organic agricultural market. Anticipating this, Yabima suggested that the Purwokencono farmers change from conventional to organic farming. ‘At first, the farmers were confused,’ explained Pino, a farmer who later became a staff member of Yabima. ‘They did not know what organic farming was and did not believe it would improve their situation.’ Yabima nonetheless found some farmers who were interested. They started with an intensive three-month training on the various practical and technical aspects of organic farming. Some pilot projects were started and gradually the farmers became convinced that organic farming benefited them in multiple ways.

First, they recognised the economic benefits. ‘Pesticides and fertiliser are expensive,’ explained a local farmer. ‘Now we learnt to make our own organic fertiliser and pesticides. That was much cheaper.’ The farmers learnt to mix the manure from their cows with the rice bran and used that as fertiliser. They also learnt that the urine of cows could be used as pesticide. In addition, the market price for organic rice was higher than conventional rice. Thus, by reducing the production costs and getting better market prices for their produce, the farmers earned 4,500 Indonesian Rupiah (about €0.26) more per kilo for their organic rice.
And there were other benefits. The heavy use of pesticides had had a negative effect on the farmer's health and their environment. The farmers were consumers of their own produce and as such – indirectly – of the pesticides they used. Although the farmers were taught that organic produce was healthier, they only began to experience this after changing their consumption.

"Before, I would easily catch a cold or get sick during the rainy season," said one farmer. "Now, I feel much stronger." "My wife was ill for sixteen years. When we changed to eating organic rice and vegetables, she became better," said another. People suffering from diabetes especially seem to benefit from organic rice, according to the farmers of Purwokencono.

The farmers also noticed that the quality of the soil improved once they started farming organically. "Before, the soil was poor and bare after the harvest. Now, the longer we practise organic farming, the better the soil becomes." The farmers began to care more about the environment. "In the beginning, they only recognised the economic gains of organic farming," says Fintria, a Yabima staff member. Later, they started to recognise the ecological gains and found them even more important.97 The farmers began to value sustainability. "Even though we produced less rice in the beginning, that did not matter. Because the longer we produced organic rice, the healthier the soil and the environment become."

During meetings organised by Yabima, the farmers reflected on spiritual and religious teachings related to farming and land. "We talked about the origins of the earth," explained an Islamic farmer. "We wanted to get our land back. Now, it was no longer ill."

97) FGd with Yabima staff members, 9 July 2018, Metro Lampung.


During a reflection session organised in December 2017, the farmers were asked to respond to the question, "What inspired you or gave you the spirit to be involved in organic farming?" Small groups were composed with farmers from different religious backgrounds. The Muslim farmers said that the Qur’an taught them to respect each other and to protect life. The Buddhist farmers talked about the pledge to give love and compassion to all living beings. The Hindu farmers cherished a similar value of respecting each other and caring for all creatures. They talked about the Veda which taught that Brahma created the earth, Vishnu protected it and Shiva destroyed it. They should therefore be ready to protect the earth against destruction. Christian farmers recognised the teaching of love. Besides, the Bible told them to be patient and to allow the land rest, so that it could recover.98

Despite the inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions that affect the larger region of Lampung, the Purwokencono farmers found that the different faith teachings all encouraged them to care for the land, the environment and the earth. The organic farming project united them in a joint inter-faith mission: it improved their livelihood prospects, their health and environment. Moreover, it strengthened cross-cultural and cross-religious bonds within the community. "Organic farmers do not kill the environment. In this small village, it is better if we work together with other faith communities. Christians, Buddhists, or Muslims – we all have same values. We all care about the environment. Even though we are a small village, we can help to realise the government's dream," explained a farmer. "We want to support unity in our community," explained another. "The organic farming project helps to solve inter-religious tensions. The spirit of organic farming is healthy for ourselves and for others."

The church cares about the land. We have an advocacy group who defend the agrarian sector. Our land is God’s boon: it is given to us by the Lord. The earth is given to us as a place where all people can live together. It allows us to be human: at one with the world, at one with other people. The church tries to protect that garden, the earth. In our work and advocacy, we think about ways to restore that idea, to get the earth back. That is why all churches agreed to work on ecological justice. All people have the same right to live on this earth."

"If we talk about peace building, people laugh at us, they are not interested. People think about inner peace and regard that as a soft issue. But if you talk about economic projects, then people are interested."

-Pino, staff member organic farming Yabima, 8 July 2018

Thus, while presenting organic farming as a project for social-economic development, Yabima’s approach effectively contributed to reduced inter-religious tensions.
In 2017, seven years after the organic farming project began, the Purwokencono farmers obtained an official certificate recognising their rice as organic. Today, Yabima has introduced organic farming to five villages, each of which includes about 30 farmers. They are now preparing the establishment of more organic farming groups in East Lampung, including one group for women farmers. In addition, Yabima and the farmers are discussing new activities to help raise consumers’ awareness about organic farming.

Meanwhile, Yabima has started a lobby to strengthen government support for organic farmers. Together with PKP-HAM – a human rights organisation from the University of Lampung – Yabima is lobbying the provincial government to adopt a policy supporting organic farming. When implemented, the policy will strengthen the protection of organic farmers, provide subsidies, and establish a regional process for monitoring and certification. If successful, Yabima and the Purwokencono farmers thereby enhance space for other farmers in the region to transfer to organic farming.
The topic of religion and development is not new. For three decades at least, development practitioners, scholars and faith-based organisations have studied the issue and tried to raise awareness of the role of faith-based organisations in development. It has taken a while, however, for mainstream development actors to acknowledge the importance of religion and faith in sustainable development.

‘The 1970s and 80s were really the decades of development within the UN,’ recalled Dr Agnes Abuom, President of the World Council of Churches. At that time, the UN basically followed governments and the business sector in their approach to development, regarding it largely as a technocratic project for economic growth. ‘Faith had no space. Development went on but it did not transform the hearts of people,’ explained Dr Abuom. ‘It did not transform the minds of people, because it did not touch what we call ‘the software’, that is: the heart, the culture, the traditions of the people. We could see major buildings, we could see infrastructure. But… there was no foundation, what I have called ‘the soul of the nation’ - which is really what changes the hearts of people…The essence of what a very human being is.’

Finally, about a decade ago, the topic of faith began to emerge in the UN system. In 2007, the UN Task Force on Religion and Development came together, first in an informal composition. Then, in 2010, the Principals of the various UN development entities, with the endorsement of the Head of the UN Development Group and Administrator of UNDP, approved a UNDG Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with FBOs for Development [IATF-FBOs]. The mission of the IATF-FBOs is to support the work of United Nations staff, towards the shared objective of learned, strategic and sustained engagement with key partners in the faith-based world, to support respective and collective efforts to realize international development goals.

Since the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), various efforts have been made by the Inter-Agency Task Force and other faith-based alliances to integrate faith-sensitive perspectives. The UNFPA, for example, published Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion Gender, Peace, and Security in Agenda 2030 [UNFPA 2015]. In April 2015, forty global religious and faith-based organisations launched the ‘Faith-based Action Framework to End Extreme Poverty and Realize the SDGs’, and in 2016, twenty faith-based organisations from the United Kingdom published God’s Global Goals: a biblical reflection on the 17 sustainable development goals [Micah Global Network 2016]. And, in October 2017, the World Council of Churches organised an Ecumenical Strategic Forum on Diakonia and Sustainable Development. The Forum has developed a religious-assets based approach to the SDGs and a publication is expected soon (WCC 2017).

However praiseworthy these efforts, the focus on the development of faith-sensitive frameworks and indicators for the 17 SDGs also begs the question whether this emerging faith-sensitivity really touches the core of the matter. As Ter Haar suggests, it may ‘not so much [be] new policy instruments that are needed … but rather a new vision of what development means and how it should be implemented’ (Ter Haar 2011: 19).
Today, the majority of people living on this planet have a religious affiliation – only an estimated 16% has no such affiliation according to the Pew Research Center. Yet, despite these stark figures, many of the current development approaches continue to treat religion as ‘additive’ or ‘instrumental’. Such approaches regard religion as an ‘add on’ or a ‘social category’: they add religious leaders to their beneficiaries or stakeholders list, or seek to change people’s attitudes by mixing some relevant faith teachings into human rights trainings. However, to the majority of believers, religion is not just something they chose to do in their private life: it is part of their identity and being-in-the-world. Religious and secular worldviews inform people’s sense of self and world-orientation, the way they think, act and judge in relation to others and their environment. They shape the deep structures of society.

Integral or faith-sensitive approaches to development differ from conventional approaches as they ‘incorporate the social, environmental, spiritual and ethical in one complete package’ (Moyer et al 2012: 962). They integrate the religious and spiritual dimensions of life fully into the development process (Van der Wel 2011).

Faith-sensitive approaches to development should uncover and articulate both the secular and religious faiths and visions underpinning development models: beliefs and assumptions about the causes of human suffering and poverty and roads towards progress and growth. Put differently, a faith-based approach to development should aim to go beyond the secular-religious divide and beyond the ‘West versus other’ divide that is often associated with that (Karam 2016). It should treat ‘faith in markets’ and ‘faith in divinity’ as equally important.

A faith-sensitive approach could build on the view that all human beings – whether they are religious or not – need a sense of self-understanding and world-orientation in order to survive. As human beings, we continuously respond to our surroundings: to events, people and objects. Through this responding, human beings interpret, express and preserve their being. In other words, this responding is an existential act. It helps us to deal with the continuous changes and chaos that reality consists of.

A faith-sensitive approach to development places people’s own experiences and need for orientation centre stage. It seeks to get to the core of what is sacred and of vital importance to people, so they can maintain a sense of self-worth and purpose in the midst of poverty, climate change, repression and other human challenges. Consequently, development actors have to make a real effort to understand others on their own terms. This involves an understanding of the ways in which people tap into their own particular sources of wisdom and knowledge. Because, for too long, development experts have acted like modern missionaries by attempting to change people’s outlook of the world rather than build on it’ (Ter Haar n.d.: 14).
If you need us, allow us.’ Donors and governments seeking to support or partner with faith-based organisations should enhance their autonomy and independence, and not seek to instrumentalise them in their own economic development or anti-radicalisation programmes. Supporting the independence and autonomy of FBOs is the best way to enable a vibrant civil society and to strengthen the localisation of development. This will allow FBOs to capitalise on their religious resources and to play the specific roles they have in enhancing civic space. As the Commissioner of the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church said, ‘make us independent so that we can play our roles’.

To truly enhance civic space, donors and INGOs should develop strategies that ensure continued support for unlike-minded FBOs as well. As theologian Rowan Williams argues, having faith in the public square' means having faith in a vocal, critical and diverse civil society as a crucial condition for a functioning open democracy. Rather than seeking to ‘ban’ religion from the public sphere, secular democratic states should invite religious critique to prevent the rise of materialism and absolutism. Conditions should be shaped to enable open debate and exchange between different visions on how the world should be transformed through international development cooperation. Dutch donors, secular INGOs, NGOs and FBOs could begin by establishing a Working Group on Worldviews and Development in the Netherlands. Such a Working Group should involve an equal number of representatives from FBOs and secular INGOs and NGOs. It could begin by analysing what religious critiques and actors are currently silenced in national and international debate on sustainable development and civic space. Such analysis should include a critical review of partnership criteria and funding instruments.

A second contribution of the Working Group on Worldviews and Development could be the development of a faith-sensitive context analysis framework. Such a framework could help to uncover and articulate secular and religious beliefs and visions underpinning the development models of a given country. It could also facilitate an understanding of the shifting position and roles of FBOs and secular NGOs in the historical-political context of that country. And it could include an actor analysis that [at least] discerns key secular and religious moral leaders in civil society, different types of FBOs, and levels of operation [community-based, local, regional, national etc.].

Secular NGOs and development actors seldom show up at events on faith, religion and development. This underlines the persistent mistaken self-perception of secular development organisations and donors as ‘neutral’ actors. To help overcome this faith-blindness, secular INGOs and NGOs could start by conducting a self-analysis. They could identify and articulate the hidden secular beliefs and worldview that inform their approach to sustainable development and their theories of change. In addition, such analysis should articulate the prejudices and stereotypes they hold about ‘religion’ and religious beliefs that may subconsciously influence their relations with FBOs and religious actors. As many of the paradigms of development and humanitarian assistance have their roots in colonial times, genealogical analysis of such stereotypes [for example of religious people as ‘ignorant and backward’ and secular people as ‘liberated and progressive’) could help to ‘decolonise’ unhelpful attitudes and views.

Secular INGOs, NGOs and FBOs should experiment more with secular NGO-FBO partnerships. The example of Kenya suggests that such partnerships combine the best of two ‘visions on how the world should be transformed’, and the best of the specific and complementary sources of knowledge, experiences and networks that both can bring in.

This study found that the majority of Civic Engagement Alliance partners were Christian FBOs or secular NGOs. To enhance civic space, Civic Engagement Alliance members should engage more actively with FBOs of different faith backgrounds, especially with those suffering exclusion and repression because of international and domestic counter-terrorism measures. Civic Engagement Alliance members could advocate space for marginalised Islamic FBOs by launching a knowledge and awareness campaign to halt rising islamophobia amongst policymakers and CSOs. In addition, Civic Engagement Alliance members could step up their efforts in interfaith work. Instead of keeping to the relative comfort of interfaith dialogues, they could begin to pilot interfaith partnerships with Islamic FBOs to jointly implement development programmes. Such Islamic-Christian FBO partnerships may also help to counter the oft-heard critique of Christian FBOs that they are merely serving their own faith community, and as such involved in ‘Christianisation’.


**Key web resources**

- Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities: [https://jliflc.com/](https://jliflc.com/)
- Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals: [https://religions-and-development.leeds.ac.uk/](https://religions-and-development.leeds.ac.uk/)
- Religions and Development: [https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government-society/departments/international-development/rad/index.aspx](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government-society/departments/international-development/rad/index.aspx)
List of resource persons and interviewees

The Netherlands
- Gerrie ter Haar, Emeritus Professor Religion and Development
- Dr Maaike Matelski, Radboud University Nijmegen

Internal Civic Engagement Alliance staff – Netherlands
- Elly Urban, Program Manager Strategic Partnership for Lobby and Advocacy
- Matthijs van Pijkeren, Project Leader for Church & Community Transformation, Tear Netherlands
- Corrie van der Ven, Program Officer Protestant Church in the Netherlands
- Piet Posthuma, ICCO
- Gonda de Haan, Africa Coordinator Kerk in Actie
- Joanne van der Schee, Coordinator Policy Influencing, Prisma
- Rommy Nauta, Program Manager Missionary and Diaconal Work, Kerk in Actie
- Marinus Verweij, CEO ICCO
- Henriette Nieuwenhuis, PKN pastor in Lampung, Indonesia
- Miriam Nagtegaal, Coordinator Missionary Work, Kerk in Actie
- Klaas Aikjes, Disability Inclusion Adviser, Light for the World
- Esther Meester, Program Officer, Wilde Ganzen
- Caspar Waalewijn, Program and Linking Officer Horn of Africa, Tear Netherlands
- Fennelien Stal, Knowledge-sharing and Learning Officer, Tear Netherlands

Kenya

Interviews
- Alphaxrd Gitau Ndungu, Kenya Program Officer, ICCO
- Professor Esther Mombo, St Pauls University, Limuru
- Bwibo Adieri, Executive Director, Anglican Development Services Kenya [ADS-Kenya]
- Tim Ekesa, Executive Director, Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children [KAACR]
- Dr Agnes Abuom, President of the WCC [World Council of Churches] Central Committee and Executive Director of Kenyan Consultancy TAABCO
- Wasye’ Musyoni, Programme Manager, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)-Kenya
- David Barissa, Team Leader Policy, Research and Advocacy, Kenya Community Development Foundation [KCDF]
- John Oduor, Area Manager, KAACR-Western Kenya
- Farida Ahmed Salim, Muslim Women Representative, Western Kenya
- Hanif, Muslim representative and social worker, Kisumu

FGDs
- Team members Change the Game! Project KCDF
- Bishop and pastors of the African Divine Church (ADC), Western Kenya
- Bishop and pastors of Mennonite Church and Local Child Labour Committee (LCLC) and community members of the Obwolo child labour free zone, Western Kenya
- Teachers and pupils of Kosawo Primary School, Western Kenya
- Bishop and pastors of Church of Peace and related LCLC members, Western Kenya
- Pastors of St Luke and members of Obunga Child Labour Free Zone, Kisumu, Western Kenya
Ethiopia
- Jan Apperloo, Program Officer Convening and Convincing, ICCO
- Desta Heyi, Country Manager, ICCO
- Ephraim Tsegay, Executive Director, Tearfund
- Birhanu Yismaw, Country Representative, Church of Sweden
- Sirmon Haile, Commissioner, Evangelical Kale Heywot Church - Development and Social Services Commission [EKHC-DASSC]
- Dinku Shumi, Self Help Group Project Leader, Evangelical Kale Heywot Church - Development and Social Services Commission [EKHC-DASSC]
- Bereket Tassew, Executive Director, Wolayta Kale Heywot Church - Terepeza Development
- Kidist Belayneh, Program Manager, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)
- Dr Agedew Redie, Commissioner Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church - Development and Inter-church Aid Commission [EOC-DICAC]

Indonesia

Individual interviews or resource persons
- Kiswara Prihandini, Programme Officer Convening & Convincing, ICCO
- Debora Suparni, Executive Director, Yayasan Sion
- Ibu Harti, Community Development Officer, Yayasan Sion
- Pastor Yoyok, Community Development Officer, Yayasan Sion
- Pastor Witono, Community Development Officer, Yayasan Sion
- Pastor Heru Purwanta, Synod Chair of the Gereja Kristen Jawa Tengah Utara, Christian Church of North Central Java [GKJTU]
- Pastor Paini, Synod Secretary of the GKJTU
- Sri Takarini, Board Member, Yayasan Sion
- Agus Widodo, Board Member, Yayasan Sion
- Petrus Sugito, Founder Yayasan Sion and Office Manager United Evangelical Mission [UEM], Medan
- Dr Izak Lattu, scholar in Theology and Religious Studies, Satya Wacana Universitas, Salatiga
- Beril Huliselan, Head Research and Communications Department, Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia, Communion of Churches in Indonesia [PGI]
- Markus P. Saragih, Media Officer, PGI
- Henry Lokra, Research and Communication Department, PGI

FGD participants Yayasan Yabima, 9 July 2018, Lampung
- Staff members Yayasan Yabima
- Titut Sudiono, University Teacher IAIN-Institut Agama Islam Negeri, Lampung
- Pastor Tressia T., peace activist and women's representative, Lampung
- Pastor Karel Barus, peace education practitioner, Lampung
- Pastor Henriette Nieuwenhuis, co-worker Yayasan Yabima, Lampung
- Pastor Alfred Ruben G., peace education practitioner, Lampung
- Tabita Yuni P., youth peace activist, Gereja Kristen Sumatera Bagian Selatan, Christian Church of Southern Sumatra [GKSBS]
- Yoga, youth peace activist

FGDs
- Facilitator and members of the Umoja Mentas group Ngelo, North Central Java
- Facilitator and members of the Umoja Mentas group Salatiga, North Central Java
- Facilitators and members of Umoja Mentas group Wonorejo, North Central Java
- Facilitators and members of Umoja Mentas group Kinasih, North Central Java
- Facilitators and members Umoja Mentas group Budosari, North Central Java
- Staff members of Yayasan Sion, Salatiga, Central Java
- Field Staff Yayasan Yabima and members 'Multi Farmers Group Baliwho' in Purwokencono [with representatives of the Javanese, Balinese, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Islamic community]